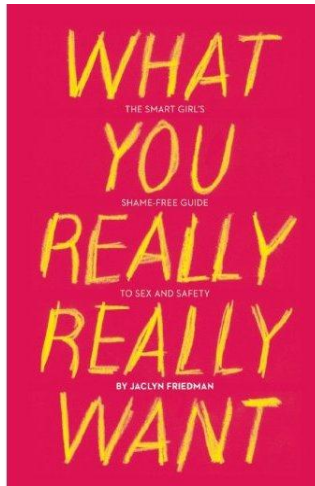




WCSAP
Washington Coalition of
Sexual Assault Programs

THE PREVENTION REVIEW



Friedman, J. (2011). *What You Really Really Want: The Smart Girl's Shame-Free Guide to Sex and Safety*. Berkeley, CA: Seal Press.

What You Really Really Want: The Smart Girl's Shame-Free Guide To Sex and Safety

For some time now we have been attempting to reframe conversations about sexual violence and consent, shifting the focus away from negative things that we see happening and promoting the positive things that we want to happen. One example of this is the change from using a “no means no” approach, which does not fully represent consent, to using a “yes means yes” approach, which promotes enthusiastic and informed consent to sexual experiences. Broadening our understanding of consent is just one aspect of building a culture of healthy sexuality. These efforts to promote norms of healthy sexuality are an important part of changing conditions that allow for sexual violence to occur.

[Jaclyn Friedman](#), author of *What You Really Really Want: The Smart Girl's Shame-Free Guide to Sex and Safety*, attempts to further the concept of healthy sexuality as violence prevention by creating space to truly examine the social construction of sexuality and encourage exploration of sexual identity. This book takes a sex-positive approach to addressing a variety of topics that intersect with sexual violence work and impact the development of sexual identity. Some of the important pieces that Friedman addresses include rape, sexual harassment, homophobia, victim blaming, pregnancy and STDs, sexual orientation, gendered stereotypes, class, gender identity, and sexual trauma. Of course there is a lot of discussion about positive things as well, such as consent, love, sex, boundaries, self-care, and relationships.

This book is much more than casual reading; it is an interactive tool for sexuality exploration. Friedman suggests that each chapter be read and digested slowly, over a week or two for each, so that the reader has time to really think about the concepts and participate in the activities. Additionally, she encourages the reader to consider going on this journey with others that they trust. This approach allows the reader to process the information both on an individual and relationship level.

In true fashion of promoting informed consent, Friedman does not tell you that you *must* read this book because it will be good for you. She does not try to sell us answers to every question we have about sexuality like many popular magazines do. Instead, the book opens with an introduction entitled 'Is This Book For Me?' which contains a 10-question self-assessment quiz to help the reader decide if they want to read this book. There is no right or wrong answer when it comes to the quiz, and this is also true of almost all of the content in the book. Friedman sticks true to the title; there is no shame in the way that we want to explore or express our sexuality as long as it is beneficial to us and anyone else involved.

Throughout the book Friedman has inserted quizzes, writing assignments, exercises, and other activities that help put the content to practice. The first chapter contains a quiz to help the reader gauge where they are in the process of understanding their sexuality and then revisits this quiz in the final chapter so the reader can assess the changes they have made on their journey. In each chapter there are at least half a dozen exercises called *Dive In*. The chapters conclude with a section called *Go Deeper* that addresses all of the concepts from that chapter in greater depth.

Some of the exercises included throughout the book are:

- Writing yourself a thank you note for going through this process
- Creating a list of things that you can do to make your body feel good (and making time to do them)
- Revisiting favorite pieces of media to examine the messages they send about sexuality
- Writing a sexual mission statement
- Thinking about both the positive and negative things you feel about yourself
- Paying attention to when you don't speak up for what you want and when you do

Finally, this book is fun to read. That's not something that we get to say all the time in the sexual violence prevention field. Friedman writes in a way that is friendly, witty, sometimes funny, and all around engaging while discussing serious and personal topics. While being "fun to read" may not seem like the most important quality, I would argue that providing folks with educational and empowering materials that are a pleasure to read is quite a task, and yet this book does that. Additionally, this book can be really great for all of us, the prevention professionals, to read. How often do you make space for self-indulgence, reflection, or care? Friedman's book suggests we take even ten minutes every day to do this. Sometimes we just need a little guidance or encouragement to take that time and space.

Suggested Uses:

- Use the quiz from the Introduction to help participants gauge and perhaps challenge their own assumptions around sexuality. While there are no right answers, this quiz does identify common areas of victim blaming that you can expand upon in a discussion.
- Use the quiz from Chapter One to help participants consider their thoughts about their own sexuality and how they interact with partners.
- Either of the quizzes can be used as a pre and post-test to help participants see how their thoughts about sexuality have changed or not changed over the course of your time together.
- When working with a group around healthy sexuality over a few weeks, the entire book or selected chapters could be assigned for reading and then exercises within the chapters assigned as homework.