

Consent on Campus: A Manifesto

Donna Freitas

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Consent on Campus is an eye-opening analysis. According to the lowest estimates, one in five women who attend college will experience sexual assault while there. As the #MeToo movement upends careers and prompts nationwide discussions of sexual conduct, this manifesto shines a light on the still-hidden side of the controversy.

Donna Freitas, a professor and activist, paints a tableau of the current state of collegiate affairs around sex. It's a troubling picture: only recently have laws forced universities to accommodate victims of assault and educate their students on consent, and those laws might be overturned by the current presidential administration anyway. Scandals in which university athletes commit sexual assault without major consequences (see: Brock Turner) are still prevalent. How, Freitas asks, does this still happen?

Her book argues that consent is not merely a "yes means yes" scenario. Instead, consent exists in a world of nuance, with complicated gender roles, power structures, and circumstances. The text's analyses go beyond college students, addressing rape culture, Title IX, hookup culture, and alcohol for how they relate to the problem. The solutions, it says, are more complicated than can be covered in a one-hour talk during freshman orientation.

Freitas's book is both informative and timely, addressing recent developments and setbacks in the consent movement. It digs for the roots of the problem, examining how colleges got to this place, from where trauma is frequent and inflicted without repercussions. Freitas interrogates mainstream ideas about consent, sex, and gender, forcing the reader to reevaluate their own preconceived notions and biases, with the last third of her book devoted to practical solutions for colleges to implement. The result is a well-researched, accessible book that lays bare the disturbing realities that many students face every day.

MYA ALEXICE (September/October 2018)

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