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Culture

Sex in the South: Unbuckling the Bible Belt
Suzi Parker
Justin Charles
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Her own Southern sex scandal prompted the author to investigate the secret sex lives of others in her native Dixie. Through interviews, undercover romps at strip clubs, a sex toy party, a drag pageant, and bondage events, Parker discovered that Southerners are indeed naughty. They just keep their fetishes under wraps. Yet, Parker reveals all in this tantalizing, if sometimes risqué, read.

An Arkansas journalist, Parker penned in 2001 an erotic article about a wild night she had after sampling an aphrodisiac drink. Because of the article, Parker was booted from a public television show where she was a regular commentator. She was also entangled in a lawsuit against the drink's manufacturer.

Friends were surprised that Parker had written so graphically about her sex life, she writes. They expected her to be embarrassed by the whole ordeal, to hide in shame and to repent.

The deal in Dixie is that everybody does it but no one talks about it," she writes. "Because no one talks about it, sex is encased in a plain brown wrapper making everything about it taboo, taciturn, and twisted, with just a smidgen of sin to top it off.

In her debut book, Parker sometimes resorts to stereotypes about Southerners, broadly describing them as guilt-ridden, Bible-thumping, church-going conservatives, though her reporting proves otherwise. Her book busts many sexual stereotypes: in fact, sexual eccentricity is as common as sweet iced tea below the Mason-Dixon line.

The author introduces her readers to The Skirtman of Arkansas, a university computer programmer who likes wearing women's clothing. She takes a piggyback ride from Trigger, a man in Nashville, Tenn., who gets a thrill out of pretending he's a pony.

In Pell City, Alabama, Parker watches a photo shoot for an online pornography site. The site's customers pay big money to have average-looking women enact their fantasies. In Tampa, Florida, she meets the Iron Belles, highly toned women who are paid to flex their muscles, crush

cereal boxes with their thighs and wrestle with their mostly male customers.

These are the tamer escapades that Parker writes about.

Though enlightening, *Sex in the South* isn't for every reader. Parker, perhaps taking her cues from *Cosmopolitan* and *Sex in the City*, writes saucily and vividly about the sexual play she observes. She uses slang terms for body parts and sex acts.

Readers who are uncomfortable with frank, graphic discussions of sex won't like this book. But those who agree with the fetishist mantra "Your kink isn't my kink, but your kink is okay" will find it an eye-opening page-turner.

Amy Joyner