

SEXUAL CITIZENS DISCUSSION GUIDE

We're thrilled you've decided to discuss *Sexual Citizens*! Whether it's with young people in your life, or within a book club, or within your organization, this guide will help you deepen your understanding of the book, talk with others about it, and examine how the stories and ideas in the book could be used to make change in yourself, your family or your community.

Discussion Topic 1: The Approach, the Concepts, the Method

One place to start discussing *Sexual Citizens* is by thinking about the approach we as authors take, the concepts we develop, and the methods we deployed. The book suggests that it is a new way of thinking about an old problem. What do you think about this?

1. How did you think about campus sexual assault before you read this book? How has your perspective changed after reading it?
2. *Sexual Citizens* claims to offer a "new approach" to sexual assault -- one grounded in public health. What do you think about this approach?
 - What is a public health approach? You can see it briefly outlined on Pp. xvi-xviii
 - What do you see as some of the advantages of this approach?
 - What do you think this approach misses or doesn't pay enough attention to?
3. The book centers around three main concepts. They are:
 - Sexual Projects, as described on pp. xiv-xvi
 - Sexual Citizenship, as described on pp. xvi-xix
 - Sexual Geography, as described on pp. xix-xxi

Do these concepts help you think about your own life and understanding differently?

Is there something that's important to you that these concepts don't capture?

How might you use these concepts to talk to others about sexual assault?

- How could they inspire a different kind of conversation with young people in your life?
 - How could they inspire a different kind of conversation within your broader communities?
4. What did you like about how the authors did the research? (in case you didn't read it and you're interested in getting deep into the details, there is a 'methodological appendix' that gives a lot of extra information about this, including answering some questions you might have wondered about as you read the book; its on Pp. 275-289)
 - What did the deep dive into student life allow you to see or understand that you didn't before?
 - What did you think was missing or do you wish there was more of?
 - What were some of the strengths and limitations of the approach?

Discussion Topic 2: The Stories

Another place to start is with the stories themselves, which pull back the curtain on life in college. The stories provide an opportunity to start conversations about sex and sexual assault in a different way:

- Draw upon these stories, reading and discussing them with others.
- Talk about how you understand what people did, and why. But also consider how other people in the story acted. And ask how the context -- the actual space people were in, what others were doing in that space, what felt like expected behavior -- influenced what happened.

You can ask yourself and others:

- What did you think about when you read this story? How did you feel when you read it?
- If you were in a similar situation, what do you think you'd do?
- How can you prepare yourself and others for situations like those described in the book? What might you do? Have you practiced that, or encouraged others to do the same?
- In many of the stories, there is some (or a lot) of background about student's lives *before* they ever arrive at college. How do students' pre-college stories help you understand what they do, or don't do, in college, both socially and sexually?

Here are some of the stories you can read together, or talk about

- Charisma (pp. 14-18), who didn't have a "plan B" when her way of saying "no" didn't work. This story raises issues of sexual projects, sexual geographies, and sexual citizenship. What is your plan B or plan C? Have you practiced it?
- Gwen (pp. 28-33), who, like Charisma, eventually discovered her sexual citizenship, but only after a lot of trial and error. What can we learn from Gwen's story? How could we create communities and contexts where her experiences are less likely?
- How it is that students find their place (pp. 47-55) on college campuses, and in life more generally? What does it mean to find a place? What is required? Why is it so valuable? How might you go about finding a place? Or encouraging others to do so in healthy ways? How might you make your own space more welcoming of others?
- Austin (pp. 58-62) is a young man who is presented as a good boyfriend. But he's also someone who committed an assault. How can we make sense of this? What does his response to realizing what he's done convey?
- Fran's story appears on page 24, and then again in bits on 156 and 220-21. What are the elements of family and community that seem to have made her so vulnerable? Of those, which might be changeable?
- The book talks about a "toxic brew of whiteness, masculinity, wealth and power (see, for example, pp. 73-80). Does this ring true to you? If so, what can be done about it? If not, why not?
- Diana's story (pp. 103-107) reflects just how much peers influence sexual experiences. What do you think about this?
- The book tells a lot of stories within the LGBTQIA community, and particularly pays attention to their experiences of consent (pp. 122-127). What can be learned from this (both for those who are LGBTQIA, but also for those who don't identify in this way).
- Men have a lot of fear about false accusations, and we hear about this from Black men in particular (pp. 137-145). What do we think about these fears that men have? What does Carl's story, in particular, tell us about race and sexual assault?
- Eddie clearly committed a sexual assault (pp. 152-157). But he doesn't think of it that way. Why do you think that is? What could be done to help Eddie better understand how he's going about his sexual project?

- Liliana had a boyfriend who was abusive (pp. 232-237). What can we learn from her experience? Why do we think she stayed in the relationship? Why did her boyfriend act in the ways he did?
- The book contains several stories of heterosexual men being assaulted by women. Compare the stories of Maddox and Rick (pages 245-247).
 - Maddox told his parents about his experiences of assault. They didn't understand. Why do you think that is? There are lots of stories of young people telling others about what happened to them. What makes this easier? Or harder? What can we learn from that, and from 246-247's story in particular? How does it compare to Esme's story, and relationship to her parents, who said, "Thank God it's me" (pp. 1-3)?
 - How is Maddox's story different from Rick's? Specifically, how might Maddox's self-described 'asexuality' shape his experience of being assaulted?

Discussion Topic 3: Next Steps

Where do we go from here? We as authors tried to write *Sexual Citizens* from a position of empathy and hope. Do you think this succeeded? Are you hopeful that communities can take some of these ideas and run with them?

1. How will this influence how you're living your own life?
 - a. What are things, big or small, that you want to do now that you've read this book?
 - b. How are you going to achieve those things?
2. What conversations do you think you should have that you're not having?
 - a. How are you going to start those conversations? What will you say?
 - b. What are things that still concern you?
3. What do you think the groups you're a part of could do in light of what you've read?
 - a. How would you start this process?
 - b. What do you think are the obstacles in the way?
4. What do you think we as a society should we do?
 - a. What could we all do, tomorrow, to start making that happen?
 - b. Is there anything you want to do, right now, to start bringing for changes?