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Perv: The Sexual Deviant In All Of Us



Synopsis

A groundbreaking argument that perversions are more common than we think, from everyone's favorite provocateur. In his eye-opening new book, *Perv*, the award-winning columnist and psychologist Jesse Bering argues that we are all sexual deviants on one level or another. As Bering takes us into the lives of a woman who falls madly in love with the Eiffel Tower, a young man addicted to seductive sneezes, and a pair of deeply affectionate identical twins, among others, he challenges us to move beyond our judgments and attitudes toward "deviant" sex and consider the alternative: What would happen if we rise above our fears and revulsions and accepted our true natures? With his signature wit and irreverent style, Bering pulls back the curtains on the history of perversions, the biological reasons behind our distaste for unusual sexual proclivities, and the latest research on desire. Armed with reason, science, and an insatiable appetite for knowledge, he humanizes deviants while asking some very provocative questions about the nature of hypocrisy, prejudice, and when sexual desire can lead to harm. A groundbreaking look at our complex relationship with our carnal urges and the ways in which we disguise, deny, and shame the sexual deviant in all of us, *Perv* brings our hidden desires into the light.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Perv: The Sexual Deviant in all of Us" • Written by Jesse

Bering
Review written by Diana Iozzia I had decided to purchase this after listening to a podcast by the Bangin' Book Club, a club of young women in England. I am

very glad I listened to that podcast. "Perv" is a fascinating non-fiction book about sex, sexual deviance, fetishes, paraphilias, and sexuality. This is a very psychological book with mentions of scientific studies, anecdotes, events, and real life examples. The main idea behind "Perv" is the dissection of sexual deviance, the harm or innocence behind it. As I read on, I realized that the author does not excuse negative sexual behavior, but he points out different biological reasons that sexual deviance occurs. Bering has separated his book into many definitive sections: ones on sex in prehistory, in the era where B.C. meets A.D., and throughout the years since. There is a large section that is quite vivid about bestiality, but the origins of bestiality and how the laws have changed over the years. The most interesting part of the book was the chapters that spoke about pedophilia and the different types of pedophilia. Bering talks about the distinctions between each type, the biological reasoning and explanation for pedophilic tendencies, and more. The moral debate he speaks of if pedophilic thoughts harm as well as actions. This book made pedophilia understandable, and it seemed to me that one of his goals was to help people understand, rather than fear. Bering mentions the harm we cause by not fully understanding certain types of people, based on their sexualities, paraphilia (kinks) or fetishes, and their behaviors. This was a really enlightening read about sex education that didn't make me feel uncomfortable. The material is quite dense and a bit hard to understand, but re-reading sentences and paragraphs for extra clarity made me feel I understood the information more. I really recommend this read, even if sex education makes you feel a bit skeeved out. It made me feel much more understanding and sympathetic to people I don't relate to based on viewpoints, feelings, lifestyles or paraphilias. Since this is a bit graphic in certain areas and may be risqué, perhaps I would recommend this to those above the age of eighteen.

"Perv" is an examination of human sexuality outside the norm. As one might expect from the back blurb mention of a woman who was aroused by the Eiffel Tower, the book provides many a revelatory "things-that-make-one-go-HUH?" moment. The author's humor--and willingness to offer cringe-worthy personal confessions--makes the book all the more readable. (e.g. As an example of the author's humor: "As an adolescent male, you're basically an ambulant sperm factory with an incompetent foreman") The book is in the vein of Mary Roach's "Bonk" (something about sexuality triggers the urge to go monosyllabic), but Bering carves out his niche in

deviant territory, while Roach's book provides a more balanced look at the subject (although both books exploit anomalies to make for interesting reading.) There are two ways in which this book wasn't the one I expected, one of which is entirely my fault for reading too much into some words in the book blurb while ignoring others. I think the author and/or publisher must take some responsibility for the other as the subtitle itself leads one to expect a different emphasis in the book beyond the first chapter. First, I expected more insight into why people engage in these behaviors. Are there explanations rooted in our evolution? Does a given act result from some cross-wiring in the brain? There's a cursory mention of science in the book's description which led me to expect it to go much further beyond a cataloguing of anomalous sexual behavior. To be fair, the author does back load an interesting discussion on the role of theory of the mind into the last chapter and there is some of this discussion throughout. However, the book spends much more time on history and semantics than I expected. Semantics sounds boring, but there are some fascinating insights into how words came to be used, and how usages have changed over time. (Also, the reader may be surprised at the huge vocabulary of "philias" [objects of love / attraction] that's not unlike the more well-known one for "phobias" [fears.]) The second way this wasn't the book I expected was that owing to the subtitle "the sexual deviant in all of us" I expected much more discussion of widespread but unconventional sexual proclivities (e.g. exhibitionism, voyeurism, dominance / submission, roleplay.) Instead, Bering spends a lot of time discussing rare fetishes for materials, animals, objects, etc, and also extremely high-profile (but also rare) proclivities such as pedophilia and vovarephilia (cannibalistic arousal.) One can see the appeal from the book selling perspective. Said emphasis provides a lot of WTF and giggle-inducing moments to keep up the reader's interest. However, if you're expecting drilling down into [no double entendre intended] why people engage in these activities, mostly you'll get playful variants on "the heart wants what the heart wants" and not so much insight into whether there are unseen Darwinian mechanisms at work or whether there's some synaptic cross-wiring. I doubt this is a conscious attempt to avoid dealing with the un-PC ramifications of finding some deviant behaviors to be explicable in terms of brains that are operating within expected parameters while others may only be explained in terms of something not working as usual. I doubt this because Bering seems quite willing to take the book in uncomfortable directions. I'm not certain that there's not an unconscious bias

away from considering the “why” questions because it risks putting one in the cross-hairs even if one reports in an objective and non-judgmental way. (Perhaps there’s a lack of scientific findings to report for the same reason.) Still, while I didn’t get the book that I expected, there were some surprising bonuses to weigh into the mix. Bering provides interesting food-for-thought on a few topics. One of these is what he calls the “naturalistic fallacy,” which is the idea that whether an activity can be considered acceptable depends upon whether one sees it elsewhere in nature (i.e. besides humanity.) This has been used over the years to divide acceptable from unacceptable “perversions” often by people who had little to no idea what activities are or aren’t seen across the animal kingdom. (We do, after all, see monkeys literally throwing their poop.) Another challenging area of consideration is whether society’s extreme distaste for pedophilia leads us to write laws that actually exacerbate child abuse and exploitation (e.g. completely CGI [computer generated imagery] pornographic material is illegal, and according to the author there is reason to believe that--were it not exploitation of children would decline.) The book consists of seven chapters. An introductory chapter sets up the idea of sexual deviance and its changing definitions. Chapter 2 is about the many ways in which people manage to overcome their instincts toward disgust in order to engage in sexual activities. Chapter 3 looks at various forms of hypersexuality (e.g. nymphomania) and the changing definitions over time and the biases contained therein (i.e. it was once thought to be a condition only females could experience.) Chapter 4 considers various paraphilias i.e. unconventional sources of arousal. Chapter 5 deals with the subjective experience of many of these sexual behaviors and how that brushes up against societal norms. Chapter 6 delves into the topic of age and attraction discussing pedophilia, hebephilia, ephebophilia, teleiophilia, and gerontophilia. Of these, the vast majority of people are teleiophilic (attracted to full-grown adults) with hebephilic and ephebophilic tendencies not being uncommon (i.e. attraction to pubescent or post-pubescent youths.) Much of the discussion is about pedophilia and the legal entanglement of pedophilia and ephebophilia. Chapter 7 delves into the science and psychology in a way that I wished the rest of the book had. There are no graphics in the book. It does have both chapter end-notes and bibliographic notes (the former being more foot-note like elaborations and the latter being mostly sources.) I found this book interesting. It was more historical and semantic (dealing in the terminology of deviant sexuality and its changing nature over time) and less scientific and psychological than I expected, but it was still loaded with interesting information and insights. I’d recommend this book with the provisos

mentioned, i.e. that it might not be the book you expect and may deal much more in rare proclivities than one expects.

Bering's has written a book that is full of information, paradoxes, and the problems of sexuality research in an easy to read and jokey tone. While it's definitely a layman's book, it does have extensive research information and documentation which is a plus, particularly when diving into some of the more controversial topics which could require further reading. Also the problem with DSM classifications becomes central to parts of the book, and reading some of Jerrold Wakefield's work could more easily help one understand what is at issue in that beyond the sexuality category. As many have already said, do not read this book if you are easily offended or prudish, the book is frank and delves into some deeply controversial waters. The discussion of age-related paraphilias is sure to make everyone uncomfortable particularly when paired with any historical and anthropological knowledge. While there actually isn't a good argument to be made for the "Perv in all of us," there is a strong case to be made for both tolerance and inquiry into much of the grey area in human sexuality, both "normal" and "abnormal."

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