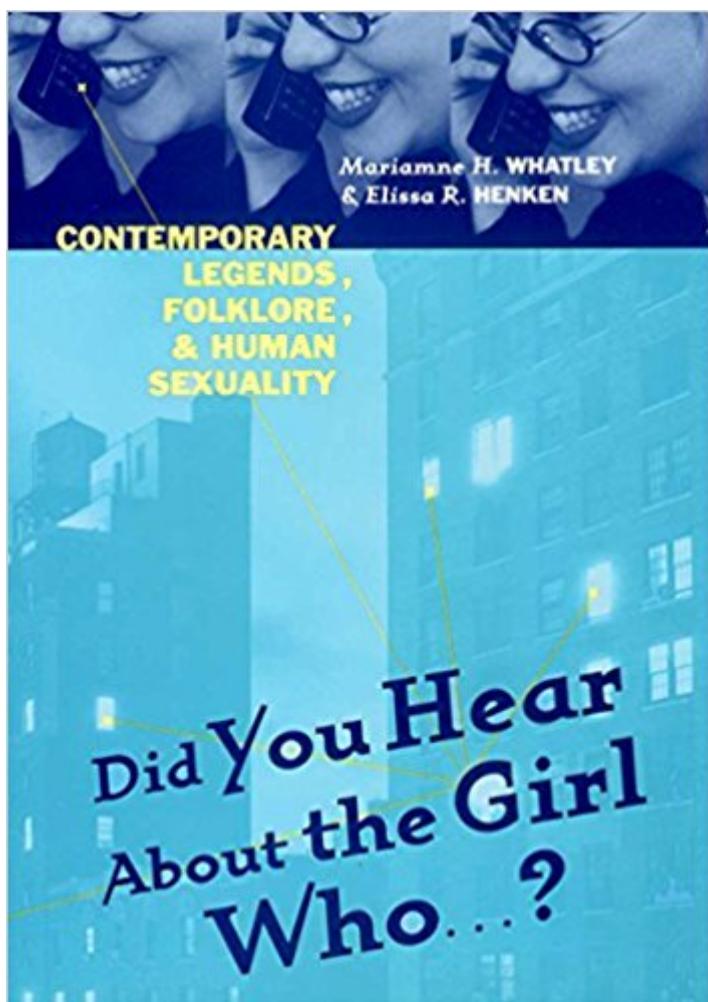


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# Did You Hear About The Girl Who . . . ?: Contemporary Legends, Folklore, And Human Sexuality



## Synopsis

Ever hear the one about the man who wakes up after a chance sexual encounter to discover he's been involuntarily relieved of one of his kidneys? Or the tiny gift-wrapped box from a recently departed lover that reveals a horrible secret? Everyone knows contemporary legends, those barely believable, often lurid, cautionary tales, always told as though they happened to the friend of a friend. Sometimes we pass them on to others unsure of their truthfulness, usually we dismiss them as mere myth. But these far-fetched legends tell us quite a bit about our deepest fears and fantasies. In fact, a large part of what we know about our bodies we have learned informally, from kids on the playground or colleagues at work, from piecing together the information contained in folk beliefs, jokes and legends. Sexual folklore goes beyond classroom lessons of mechanics to answer many questions about what people actually do and how they do it. Mariamne H. Whatley and Elissa R. Henken have collected hundreds of sexually-themed stories and jokes from college students in order to tell us what they reveal about our sexual attitudes and show us how they have changed over time. They confront myths and stereotypes about sexual behavior and use folklore as a tool to educate students about sexual health and gender relations. Whether analyzing popular rumors about celebrity emergency room visits or the latest schoolyard jokes, *Did You Hear About The Girl Who . . . ?* presents these tales in a way that is intriguing and educational.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Whatley and Henkin have written a book that is as intelligent as it is interesting and funny."-Journal of Sex Research"This is a must read for sexuality educators and youth workers concerned about

the power of pedagogy and folklore as they swirl in the minds of youth. Whatley and Henken construct a magnificent argument about listening to the beliefs, the jokes, the sometimes very wrong headed, sometimes brilliant folklore narrated by youth as we accompany them into conversations about sexuality, health, desire, and danger. If adults can be useful at all, it is only with the guidance of Whatley and Henken that we have a chance at engaging with, rather than lecturing to, the fertile minds and bodies of America's youth. This book is fun, clever, engaging and provocative."-Michelle Fine,CUNY Graduate Center, author of *Framing Dropouts: Notes on the Politics of an Urban High School*"An entertaining and useful book which describes the ways in which folklore might be used to enhance sex and relationships education."-*Sex Education Matters*"Books that deal with adolescent sexuality have one of two audiences: adults or teens. Finally a book that bridges what often appears to be an unbridgeable chasm. Henken, a folklorist, explains what young people are "really" saying to each other in their private moments; while Whatley, a biologist and health educator, provides the correctives to these rumors and folk beliefs. The book, written in a lively style, takes the reality of boys and girls seriously, while never flinching from providing the best health information available. While many of the stories presented may be disturbing, each presents how gender and sexuality is interpreted. This is a book that should serve as a standard text for courses on sexuality in high schools, colleges, and for parents who want to know what their children believe."-Gary Alan Fine,Northwestern University, author of *Manufacturing Tales: Sex and Money in Contemporary Legends*"A book with a wonderful interdisciplinary idea-using sexual urban legends as part of high school and college sex education." -*The Women's Review of Books*,Oct. 2001

Mariamne H. Whatley is Associate Dean of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Elissa R. Henken is Associate Professor of English at the University of Georgia.

For people who are interested in either Folklore, Sexuality, or any imaginable combination of the two, this is an excellent book to read.

Did You Hear About the Girl Who...? is an extremely readable book about modern folklore (remember from junior high: the peanut butter joke, the tuna story, the needle in the movie theater) written by two sisters, one a health educator and one a folklorist. This book occasionally skimps on the folklore analysis to provide tips for educators, which is fine, but there's nothing on the jacket of the book to indicate its educational focus. That said, I was interested to learn about the idea of contemporary folklore and its manifestations in popular culture, including the ways that unusual or

"humorous" assaults on men and women are gendered and the progression of "caught in the act" stories progressing historically from an engaged couple to a boyfriend&girlfriend. This book is a quick read and worth it.

This book is a collaboration between two sisters, one of whom is a biologist and health educator, and the other of whom is a folklorist. Together they examine a vast number of urban legends and beliefs about sexuality, particularly in reference to teens and college students, and discuss how these stories can be used in an educational setting, both to glean information about things that need to be taught and to impart accurate information. As they point out, educators and health professionals sometimes make assumptions that are not shared by the young or uneducated people they deal with, and talking about popular beliefs and the stories that young people share among themselves can help clear up misunderstandings that otherwise might never have even been addressed. Discussion of stereotypes promoted by certain urban legends can also enable students to become better informed about stigmatized groups and behavior. Although I am not an educator, I am very interested in urban legends and other modern folklore, and not only did I find this book to be fascinating, but I can imagine how it could be used to great effect in educating our sadly ill-informed young adult population about an often awkward topic.

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