



THE
**SEX
LIVES**
OF
**AFRICAN
WOMEN**

SELF-DISCOVERY,
FREEDOM, AND HEALING

NANA DARKOA
SEKYIAMAH



READING GROUP GUIDE

Q & A

1. **How important was your blog *Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women* to the creation of this book? Can you talk about how creating safe spaces like your blog and this book helps remove taboos around sex and leads to more liberated conversations about sexual identity?**

The Sex Lives of African Women wouldn't exist if my best friend Malaka Grant and I had not created *Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women*. For over a decade I have been encouraging African women to share their experiences of sex and sexualities, and in that time I learned just how dynamic, complex, and fascinating our experiences are. I had also seen African women take agency over their sex lives in ways that I didn't see portrayed in the media, and that is why I wanted to write a book that showed the full complexity of our desires, pleasure, and sexual experiences. I hope spaces like our blog, my book, and Adventures Live (a festival on sex and sexualities we have convened annually for the past three years) encourage women to continue to explore paths to sexual freedom and liberation.

2. **There is, globally, an oversexualized portrayal of African and African American women and this stereotype that they are in danger or distress and need to be controlled or "saved." How does your book address these stereotypes and how do the specific stories you share in these pages speak to the need for Black women to have bold, unique sexual identities in a way that does not lead to our exploitation but to our liberation?**

I think one of the things that is very clear from my book is that African, African American and Afro-descendant women are saving ourselves. We're pushing back against the societal norms that try to limit us and we're expanding our understanding of our identities, and actively creating models of freedom that everyone else can learn from. Stories by women like Helen Banda, a Zambian woman now resident in the US, and Alexis Deveaux, a woman of Afro-Caribbean and African American heritage are inspirations for all of us who seek to live radical lives of abundance and pleasure.

Q & A

- 3. The paperback edition of your book is publishing in the US in February 2023. What can you tell us about how it differs from the UK edition? What are you most excited about when you think about the book being published in the US?**

I feel like the North American edition of my book is an entirely new book. Everyone who loved the UK edition should also buy the American edition :) seriously. My incredible editor Alessandra Bastagli pushed me to weave more of my own story in the book and I am so glad I did. Further, the US paperback includes a letter from me to the reader as well as journaling prompts so they can add their stories to the ones in the book. Readers will get insights as to why I chose to interview the women that I spoke to, and learn about what I personally took away from all those conversations. I am also super excited about this book speaking to Africans in the Diaspora, and African Americans and Afro-descendants. I feel like we often hear about the Diaspora wars, and this book shows that we have more in common than what divides us. I consciously claim the global African Diaspora in this book. As a Pan-Africanist I recognize that we are divided by the legacies of slavery, colonization, and migration and so this book is also to say that we are all family.

- 4. Some of the women you interviewed in the book are based in the US. Did you notice patterns in their stories and struggles that are unique to American society? In what ways were they similar to the stories of other women around the world?**

The main difference between the experiences of women in the US versus the majority of the African continent is the civil rights gains that have been made in the US in regards to LGBTQIA+ rights. At the same time, we know that legal rights do not always translate to equitable sociocultural change. Nevertheless, it did feel like folks in the US had more space to navigate openly queer relationships for instance. Overall, there were more similarities than differences, especially in terms of people being raised without much access to comprehensive sex education, struggling to own one's sexuality/taking time to come into one's queer identity because of queerphobia, especially in younger years.

- 5. What are you hoping readers in the US will take from your book? What kind of conversations are you hoping readers here will have when they read your book?**

I wrote this book because I wanted to continue to create space for African women from the continent and the Diaspora to talk about sex. A subject that we are often told is “private” and only to be discussed in closed quarters. On the contrary, we know sex is a deeply political issue—it is why some countries try to legislate who we love or choose to have sexual relationships with. I feel that by having conversations about sex we will also learn to take control over our own bodies and pleasure, and that is a radical act of self-love.

HOW WILL THIS BOOK CHANGE YOU?

*An invitation to join us on a journey of self-discovery,
freedom, and healing*

One of the most interesting questions I have been asked since this book initially came out was, “How has this book changed you?” The answer is, in so many ways. Writing this book has been part of my own journey of self-discovery—a way to process my experiences by reflecting on my own growing understanding of the complexities and dynamic nature of sex and sexualities. Writing this book has also been part of my political work as an African feminist—born out of a desire to contribute to the knowledge created, shared, and conceptualized by so many African feminists who came before me, those who are my contemporaries, and those yet to follow. Writing this book has challenged me, blown apart some of my own misconceptions and limiting beliefs, and encouraged me to stay open to the myriad possibilities that blossom when we allow ourselves to work on our own healing and explore what possibilities exist in the here and now for our collective sexual freedom.

Freedom is not an individual pursuit—it’s a collective process that embraces the least among us. When the most marginalized people are free, we can all be collectively free. When LGBTQIA+ people are free to love, when queer people can walk down the streets around the world with pride, when sex workers can perform labor with dignity, we will all be the better for it.

The work of self- discovery, freedom, and healing is an active, ongoing process. It requires that we question every thing we’ve been told. It requires that we go back into our histories and bring back those aspects that are positive. What my people, the Akan of Ghana, refer to as Sankofa. We must look back, rediscover, and reimagine those aspects of our culture that were positive. For instance, creating space for young girls to learn about their sexuality—and this time making them active agents of their own pleasure, and not vessels for the pleasure of men.

I invite you and your community to deepen your own journeys around self-discovery, freedom, and healing. Over the next few pages, I am providing some prompts that you could either reflect on by yourself, with your partner(s), or in community. Feel free to take notes in the blank pages provided for this purpose, or if you want to share, take a picture and tag [@thesexlivesofafricanwomen](https://www.instagram.com/thesexlivesofafricanwomen) on Instagram or [@SexLivesAfrica](https://twitter.com/SexLivesAfrica) via Twitter.

Enjoy your journeys of self-discovery, freedom, and healing.

Much love,

Nana xoxo

JOURNALING PROMPTS

SELF-DISCOVERY

What were you told about sex as a child, and how has that shaped your experience of sexuality?

In what ways has your culture (and/or other cultures) shaped who you are today as a sexual being?

JOURNALING PROMPTS

SELF-DISCOVERY

Which myths and misconceptions about sex and sexualities have you bought into, and are now ready to shed?

How has your sexuality evolved over time?

PRAISE FOR
The Sex Lives of African Women

“Touching, joyful, defiant—and honest.”

—*The Economist*, a Best Book of the Year

“Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah is changing the way African women talk about sex.”

—*Harper’s Bazaar*

“The stories, as written by Sekyiamah, are mesmerizing. The women shared with her, and by extension with us, with true generosity.”

—*Glamour*

“The honesty and frankness with which these women share their experiences of falling in love, lust, and their traumas, too, is fascinating. . . . It’s the kind of book that inspires you to reconsider your own romantic preconceptions and to imagine new, healthier dynamics.”

—*BuzzFeed News*

“Sekyiamah’s book seeks to provide the roadmap to recovery through a collection of shared experiences. . . . Readers will resonate with the honesty of these stories, and hopefully feel more courageous to live their truth each day.”

—*BUST*

“A book like none you will have read before. . . . With sensitivity, this book has facilitated astonishing breaking of silences. . . . Sekyiamah has delivered an extraordinarily dynamic work, true to her own precept that ‘Freedom is a constant state of being . . . that we need to nurture and protect. Freedom is a safe home that one can return to over and over again.’ ”

—Margaret Busby, *The Guardian*

“Groundbreaking volume. . . . The result is a candid, subversive and empowering read.”

—*Ms. Magazine*

“Dazzling. . . . The tone is hopeful, resilient, and accepting. Marked by the diversity of experiences shared, the wealth of intimate details, and the total lack of sensationalism, this is an astonishing report on the quest for sexual liberation.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

MORE PRAISE FOR The Sex Lives of African Women

“An ambitious, moving account of women controlling their bodies and their destinies.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“These intimate confessions come from pansexual women, polyamorous women, queer women, trans women, and those who identify as heterosexual. Some of their stories are heartbreaking, while others are liberating. Instead of having their stories told for them, they take the reins and find freedom in that, something that every woman deserves.”

—Del Sandeen, *Sisters from AARP*

“Its stories are raw, unencumbered, exhilarating and, at times, enraging.”

—*The Independent*

“Talking about sex is still taboo in most cultures and communities and these personal stories reveal a mind-blowing variety of sexualities, sex lives, and relationships.”

—Bernardine Evaristo, *The Times* (UK)

“Reading these stories is a reminder that the sexuality of African women is far from a monolith. . . . A refreshing and emotional read.”

—*The Continent* (UK)

“Everyone will come away standing a little taller and breathing a little lighter, buoyed by the affirmation that we are all normal and that the marginal is central. *The Sex Lives of African Women* is a safe space: it is pure, unadulterated freedom.”

—Jane Link, *bigblackbooks* (UK)

“Overflowing with candor, vulnerability, and juiciness, this collection of raw, tender stories that Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah has so lovingly gathered will upend all of your assumptions and stereotypes. These mothers, activists, writers, sex workers, and others share painful truths, evolving glories, and journeys toward love and freedom, in their own words. They are trans, queer, heterosexual, kinky, and say, ‘To hell with labels.’ Facing down dangers and double standards, they are healing. *The Sex Lives of African Women* captures the breadth and depth of the Diaspora with the intimacy of looking in a mirror. Marvelous!”

—Deesha Philyaw, author of *The Secret Lives of Church Ladies*

MORE PRAISE FOR
The Sex Lives of African Women

“*The Sex Lives of African Women* is a Pan-African feminist love offering to our ancestors, women living across the Diaspora and future generations to come. Nana Darkoa Sekyiamah delivers this love with honesty, levity, and delicious prose. This book satiates my appetite for stories that take the interior lives of Black, African, and Afro-descendant women seriously. It is simply unparalleled and right on time.”

—Charlene A. Carruthers, author of *Unapologetic: A Black, Queer, and Feminist Mandate for Radical Movements*

“I really haven’t read anything like it, in its treatment of African women’s lives, sex lives, and sexualities. It breaks silences, it challenges stereotypes, it dismisses taboos, it throws social norms out the window, and most importantly, it defends our complexity and it gives us shelter and room for healing.”

—NoViolet Bulawayo, author of *Glory*

“In these emotionally charged and refreshingly honest essays, this collection gives literal shape to women’s sexuality and desires. Nothing less than stunning. Essential read! I couldn’t put it down.”

—Nicole Dennis-Benn, bestselling author of *Patsy*

“This collection affirms what we’ve known all along: African women are reclaiming their bodies and taking ownership of their sexual destinies. Every single story leaves you feeling deliciously empowered.”

—Lola Shoneyin, author of *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*

GLOSSARY

In *The Sex Lives of African Women*, there are terms that may not be familiar to some Western readers. These terms invite conversation and offer a window into different perspectives on sexuality.

El Árbol de Seda: In English *the silk tree*.

épanouie: In English *blooming*.

Frafra: A subset of the Gurunsi people living in Northern Ghana. In local usage the term is often used in a derogatory manner in reference to people from the northern region of Ghana.

Gautrain: A commuter railway system in South Africa.

J'Ouvert: A day celebrated during Carnival to mark enslaved people breaking free of their chains.

kachabali: A sexual act indigenous to parts of East Africa that involves a rhythmic stroking of the clitoris.

machismo: Aggressively masculine.

mumu: A person who is stunned into silence.

na wash but best wash ever: it's a lie, but the best lie ever.

shark: A supersmart person.

sleeping cloth(s): A printed piece of wax cloth used to cover one's self while sleeping.

Tom(s): A slang term used in London in reference to sex workers.

wine: A sexy dance that involves gyrating on one's partner.

zongos: Settlements in West African towns traditionally inhabited by people from the Northern Sahel region.

)w): A Twi word for *snake*.



NANA DARKOA SEKYIAMAH is a feminist activist, writer, and blogger. She is also co-founder of *Adventures from the Bedrooms of African Women*, a website, podcast, and festival that publishes and creates content that tells stories of African women's experiences around sex, sexualities, and pleasure. She lives in Accra, Ghana.

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