



Honor Code

Kiersi Burkhart

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Sam knows how lucky she is to be part of the elite Edwards Academy. As she dreams of getting into Harvard one day, she's willing to do anything to fit in and excel at the private high school. Even if that means enduring hazing, signing up for a sport she hates, and attending the school dance with an upperclassman she barely knows.

But when she learns the high cost of entry, will Sam be willing to bury the worst night of her life in order to "keep the community sacred"? As the line between truth and justice blurs, Sam must find out for herself what honor really means.

Honor Code Details

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From Reader Review Honor Code for online ebook

Lauren says

You know that part in Silver Linings Playbook where Bradley Cooper yells “What the fuck!?” and throws A Farewell to Arms out the window? I wanted to do that with this book. But it was a library copy. And I was in a moving car. But yeah, my sentiments exactly.

Kate Brauning says

Relentless, twisting, raw, and incredibly human.

Kendra says

Got my hands on an ARC and am extremely grumpy that I have to do things that aren't READ THIS BOOK ALL DAY. SO GOOD.

Amy Giles says

Honor Code explores the harsh reality of victim shaming and how too often the very institutions designed to protect us are the ones to silence those who dare come forward. Tragic, gripping, and very important. *I received an ARC of Honor Code*

Samantha (WLAPP) says

I am always intrigued by books set in boarding schools, and this one deals with the darker side of those institutions. Though multiple issues were touched upon, the one which caught, and kept my interest, revolved around sexual assault and the fallout experience by the women, who are brave enough to speak out.

•Pro: The book was broken into three acts, each with a distinct focus in the story. I liked this division, which kept me very focused, and I also really liked the addition of the second POV, as she served a purpose I was not fully aware of until almost the end.

•Pro: Burkhart showed the good and the bad sides of boarding school. She introduced us to nice and not so nice people at said school, and I appreciated that she didn't paint the school and the people affiliated with the school as all bad.

•Con: Sam was a really complicated character, and I don't think we got to know her as much as I would have like to

•Pro: BUT, I think that was the point. Part of her needed to be kept concealed in order for this story to work.

•Pro: The story definitely ramped up in Acts 2 and 3 as Sam prepared for and actively sought justice. These were my favorite parts of the book, and I loved seeing that side of Sam.

•Pro: There was this very awesome twist, which I only saw coming really close to the reveal. I tip my hat to Burkhardt, because it was a great way to distinguish this story from a field of sexual assault stories.

•Pro: As a woman, I found myself angry and frustrated and nodding my head over and over again. There were so many things that happened in this book, which were appalling, but sadly, quite realistic.

•Pro: The ending had many elements that were not shocking, but I was pleased with the effect seeking justice had on the young women in the story.

"This is the price for speaking up," I write. "This is why we so often stay quite. Who would willingly bring this into their life?"

Overall: An interesting and thought provoking look at rape culture and the repercussions survivors are forced to endure when they speak out, which left me simultaneously sad, frustrated, and angry.

*ARC provided in exchange for an honest review.

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Kathleen Glasgow says

Thought-provoking and intensely imagined. A must-read about rape culture that deserves a wider audience.

Chasia Lloyd says

I'm gonna do a proper review later, but for now, let me say this was a really engrossing book with turns I never could anticipate.

BUT this does deal with the aftermath of rape - maaaaJOR TW for this!!!

Kelly says

Every woman can relate to this book. The permeating fear. The understanding that it can happen to anyone. The subsequent rage.

Superficially, "Honor Code" is a story about an alleged rape on campus. At its truth, it is a story about our society: the way sides are taken, the way events are spun by the media, the entitlement of some men to women's bodies, the slut-shaming and victim-blaming, the enablers, the privilege of the white upper class.

This story was not easy to read. The content was heavy, and the story unfolded in a raw, real way. Sam is someone I could know. In fact, Sam is someone I could be. It was difficult to read her story, relate to her struggles and her pain. It was also inspiring to see her champion her cause and find strength deep inside. But she throws a wrench in her own story, and makes us question what we know. Suddenly the lines are blurred - - black and white becomes grey, and I am confused and angry for new reasons. Because life -- and court cases -- are full of shades of grey. I am a sucker for a good unreliable narrator.

This year, TIME Magazine named their Person of the Year as The Silence Breakers. This book is intensely relevant, and supremely important, and needs to be read -- and felt -- by everyone who has ever thought they were alone in anything.

Kelly says

There is a lot to like here -- it's a story about rape culture, about how men and women both perpetrate it and allow it to grow . And there's a "twist" here that brings the idea of an honor code to a whole different level.

There's also quite a bit that's weak here. I found the writing to be fine, though not especially memorable. Likewise, I didn't find it as intense or raw as other books that have done this. It's also a very white book, and the character who notes this in the book over and over feels like she's playing the role of a critical reader in stating it and...it doesn't feel authentic. I also felt that some of the reaction of students to what was going on to feel a little over the top; today's teens are far more aware of their world than I felt this book gave many of them credit for. And perhaps I'd have let that slide much easier WERE we given a more intense exploration of the school's culture.

Absolutely worth reading, particularly for those who enjoy books about small cultures and private schools and those who want to read more books with various angles toward rape culture.

PinkAmy loves books, cats and naps says

If you love a good boarding school book, and who doesn't, HONOR CODE is a must read.

Edwards Academy is freshman Sam's first stop on the road to Harvard Law School. Her roommate Gracie is everything Sam imagined and the two artsy girls become best friends. Dreams crash into reality on the first night when older dorm mates examine first year girls bodies and post areas that need improvement. When senior It Guy Scully catches the eyes of both Sam and Gracie, neither will be the same. The HONOR CODE all students pledge is to handle problems within the school, even when those "problems" are rape.

Kiersi Burkhart was woven a story about rape, rape culture, class, power, the limits of friendship, girl on girl meanness in a way I've never seen before. I never realized what was coming and I'm still not sure about how I feel about it. Yes, I'm being purposely cryptic. The unfortunately realistic resolution will have me thinking for a while.

Sam is a brave, strong, scared, artful young woman. Reluctant to come forward, too passionate to stay silent she endures a high price for coming forward. I don't know if I would have been strong enough to handle the relentless bullying she received coming forward. I'd like to think I would have disclosed similar treatment

from Scully, but like those who later did, I may have waited. We all want to believe we'd be brave, but being a teen is hard enough without death threats from classmates after being raped.

I will certainly look forward to more of Burkhart's books and recommend HONOR CODE to teens, parents and educators.

Ginny Di says

I'm not usually a realistic fiction reader, but I think stories about sexual violence and its impact are important, particularly to young readers, and this one handles it deftly and thoughtfully. The characters are relatable and feel real and fleshed-out, and the author gives us a window into their experiences that pulls no punches.

Ruth Lehrer says

“Now I know there are others,” – a feminist call to arms. This is no ordinary contemporary young adult novel.

Sam is a first year student at the Edwards Academy. The school has a veneer of old wealth and opportunity, but underneath there is peer pressure, hazing, and a bizarre honor code—“it’s not long but it’s weird”—which gives a cult-like feeling to the entire institution.

School food is like the school itself, you expect better but you get worse; dinner is gray steaks, crusty mashed potatoes and squishy carrots. Even the bread is warm and buttery but tastes like cardboard.

Burkhart weaves a story from three alternating voices, Sam, a student at Edwards Academy, blog entries, and the voice of the local newspaper reporter. The central character is easy to relate to. Even though, as a reader, I knew it was going to go south I bought in to her worries about getting a date for the mixer, and making new friends. I kept hoping that something would work out for her, but knew it wouldn’t. The hard stuff in this book is unbearable; the revenge satisfying. As the character states, it “... should be my dream moment. Except I feel like I could vomit.”

This book is coming into the world at the perfect time. Maybe some of the most important books are hard to read? Masquerading as contemporary young adult lit, this book highlights the plight of girls in our society. It brings to the forefront the poetry of female rage; “the coal of anger inside me grows hotter and redder every day. I could breathe smoke.” But this isn’t as straightforward a book as you think, a last minute twist casts truth in a broader light.

Mandi Schneck says

***Let me start off this review by saying that it may be the most disorganized review I've ever written, and give a huge trigger warning for rape/sexual assault. I'm writing this not caring about grammar, or flowy writing, or anything else, because I walked away from this book so rage-y that I can't really put into

appropriate words all the things I felt. Also my reviews usually do not contain spoilers, but this one does because it's the only way to accurately express my full range of emotions. If it turns out you love this format of review, let me know because this is different than what I normally do but I'm happy to change up my style if that's what you guys like reading!***

Honor Code by Kiersi Burkhart follows Sam, a fifteen-year-old girl who gets into an elite private school, where behind closed doors she learns and experiences things she never expected. From having to line up naked and be ranked by upperclassmen, to being forced to join a sports team, Sam isn't sure she's ready to handle what's in store for her, but her desire to earn a scholarship to college keeps her motivated to tough it out. When she gets matched with the hot upperclassman she's been drooling over for the school mixer, she thinks that she's finally fitting in, until that upperclassman takes advantage of her attraction to him and her naivety and rapes her when she went to him for help with schoolwork. Wanting to keep the school honor code sacred, Sam seemingly tries hard to avoid exposing the incident or identifying herself or the prosecutor, but she still fights in her own way to seek justice.

My thoughts through the first 2/3 or so of this book were all positive. We need more books about rape culture to bring the issue to light. This showed why girls don't come forward when they've been sexually assaulted, and details all the fallout that happens when they finally do. YAASSS, I thought, this book is everything. Until the plot twist happened that had me raging until the very last page (and I'm still raging, as evidenced by this review).

SAM DIDN'T ACTUALLY GET RAPED. It was her roommate Gracie that went through that traumatic incident, and Sam in some deranged quest to help her decided to make the story her own and go public with it. Yes, the boy who raped Gracie attempted to rape Sam too, but she was able to escape before anything happened. **THIS MADE ME SO ANGRY. DO NOT TAKE SOMEONE'S SEXUAL ASSAULT EXPERIENCE AND MAKE IT YOUR OWN.** I don't care if you want to help them. I don't care if you're trying to expose someone and make them seek justice. Rape is such a terrible and deeply personal occurrence that if the person who experienced it doesn't want to pursue reporting/exposing it or do anything about it, **THAT IS THEIR DECISION**, not yours. Please, come forward with your own experience of how he attempted to rape you, and make him face justice for that, but **DO NOT MASQUERADE**.

Now I do think this book had some great themes. Exposing corruption in private schools, showing how girls are treated cruelly after coming forward with this type of information, and how rich white male privilege is unfortunately alive and well today are all things that it is important to address, and it did all these things extremely well. That being said, I just couldn't wrap my head around what Sam did and why this is ok. I'm not sure if it was her fifteen-year-old mind and care for her friend that made her think this was a good idea, or if she just wanted the spotlight, but this just does not sit right with me. And judging by the Goodreads reviews, I'm the only one that thinks this.

I've struggled a lot with my rating for this book because while the false rape report really set me off, I think it tried and succeeded to shine light on the overall rape culture issues our society faces today. I originally wanted to rate it as 2 stars, but I think I'm going to bump it up because despite the problematic plot twist, the message was good and the writing was fantastic, and I did really enjoy reading it.

Overall Rating: 3 out of 5 Stars

Thanks to Lerner Publishing Group for allowing me early digital access to this book. Honor Code by Kiersi Burkhart releases on March 1st!

Jen Petro-Roy says

Gripping, raw, and unputdownable.

Greg Andree says

TW - rape.

Still thinking about HONOR CODE. How fear and guilt can drive us. How friends protect each other, or fail to. How someone's voice can be stolen. And what we'll do to get justice. This would be such a great bookclub choice unpacking not only rape culture, and toxic masculinity, but also sexual predation. It is a "feminist revenge quest" as the author says, but it only has to be that because students at this prestigious school fail to actually honor and protect each other, and the teachers, administrators, and other adults trusted with the safety of these students fail their duty. Instead they protect themselves, their sources of revenue, and the "boys" who prey on girls. With echoes of the real-life trial of Stanford rapist Brock Turner, we're forced to ask ourselves why we value some lives over others, and who it is that we should actually value and protect.

This is such a great book.

In a bookclub or classroom it would be a perfect book to pair with Brendan Kiely's TRADITION.
