

SHOTPUT.

The Slow Dance

Episode 5: BODY COUNT

Full transcript

16 June 2021

Respondent (R):

It's like in S3, you'd be having conversations and people would be like "oh, so how many people have you pulled? How many people have you kissed?" And if you say none or one, it'd be like "what's wrong with you?"

R:

Or they'll laugh.

R:

Yeah, they'll laugh at you, and then you feel like you can't get involved with what they're saying because they're on so many and you've only kissed like one person.

R:

But now, us in our last year, the conversation has changed from "how many people have you pulled?" to "how many people have you slept with?" Like what is your body count?

Jim (J):

That phrase, body count, we heard it a lot, and it caught our attention.

Lucy (L):

This is The Slow Dance, a five part podcast series in which teenagers educate us about sex. And we're your hosts, Lucy...

J:

And Jim. You're listening to the fifth and final episode, Body Count.

L:

What the teens mean when they say "body count", in case it's not obvious enough, is how many people you've had sex with.

J:

But, of course, the phrase comes from the vocabulary of serial killing or the battlefield. And the link between sex and murder is striking

R:

So, do you ever do that thing where you'd write down someone's Snapchat score to remember what it was, and then if they didn't reply to you, you'd check back a couple of hours later to see if it had gone up, because that meant they'd Snapchatted someone else and not Snapchatted you, so they'd seen that you'd messaged them but they hadn't messaged you back. I find there's a whole stalking kind of thing that goes on on social media that people don't really know about.

R:

There is such a funny word that we used to use, I don't know if people still use it now, grafting. So, the stages that I remember them was you'd graft for ages, which would be texting on Snapchat, or you become best friends on Snapchat, and then you would become boyfriend and girlfriend.

R:

Like if you went to a party and you saw your friend chatting to somebody, you'd be like "oh, are you on the graft?"

R:

Yeah. And a lot of people would be grafting, but they would never make it to the boyfriend and girlfriend stage.

R:

So gross, I hate that word, grafting, as if they're preying, are you on the prowl?

L:

There's another aspect to the link between a serial killer and someone who sleeps around. Just like we cheer on the villain in a crime film, so too a high body count can be a badge of honour.

R:

Just say that you've slept with people, everyone wants all the details...

R:

Like who it is, where it was, when it happened, who initiated it...

R:

Sometimes you want to lie about saying you're on more than you are, sometimes you want to lie and say that you've not done it, because of all the questions and people judging.

R:

I think it also depends the kind of people and how open the groups you're in talk about sex. I remember before, being in a situation with a group of people and they wouldn't really talk about sex, and if it was to be brought up, it would be like "oh, you've slept with this many people, right, okay." But then in other situations it's like "oh my god, you've slept with them? Yass! You must be a pro", and all that. It's mad. [LAUGHTER] A pro shagger.

R:

A pro!

R:

Gold medallist.

J:

But not everyone with a high body count is applauded. This is a gendered issue. That in itself was really interesting, because in general in our conversations, teens understood gender as a construct. But this body count issue was a fault line that seemed to push the male-female divide straight to the top. Put bluntly, our society pressures boys to have a high body count, while it slut-shames girls for the same behaviour.

R:

A boy could potentially go out and have sex with upwards of twenty girls, which I would like to say is completely fine and it shouldn't matter, it's his body, as long as he is safe and happy, that's fine. And a girl could have sex with two people, and she will be looked down upon, simply for the fact that she is giving away her body, or letting other men use her body. As if a female is some kind of tool that is solely used for male gratification.

R:

You get your boys, and they're like...

R:

Just say the word.

R:

...am I allowed to say the word?

R:

Fuck boys.

R:

Aye! Aye, like you get that, and that's the group that don't really care about anybody else apart from themselves and what they're getting out of what they want.

R:

It's like that whole thing where if a girl sleeps with a bunch of guys, or a girl sleeps with a bunch of other girls, they're a slut or they're a whole, but if a guy does it...

R:

He's a lad.

R:

...it's just a guy. He's just being a guy, that's what...

R:

Top shagger.

R:

Men consistently have the status in that scenario. They are constantly looking down on a woman for whatever. As somebody who is bisexual, I can fully say that females can do the exact same thing, where they will look down on you if you have a body count over zero. It's almost looked down upon to have physical relationships with someone you're not with in that exact moment, which as you get older makes less and less sense. Like it does not make sense to me, first, to look down on someone who is, for our age ranges between the age of seventeen and twenty-one, look at them as if they are wrong and bad and dirty if they have a body count over one. It just doesn't sit right with me.

R:

People getting slagged for the opposite actually as well. Like having a body count of zero, being a virgin, and not doing stuff. I remember in my friend group in high school, there was a group of five of us, and it would always be like who's lost their virginity first, right, that's that, and then who's got this <INAUDIBLE 7.20> now and what's happening now?

R:

Sometimes I get embarrassed saying I'm on zero, because other people are on like three, or some people could be even higher, and you just get like "oh, do I want to say? Or should I lie?" But then you don't know what their reaction to you, well, me being on nothing, you don't know what they're going to say. Like "why? Why have you never done it?" or "are you scared?"

R:

I was the worst for it. I would see girls who would put so much effort into their hair and makeup and I'd be like "oh, look at them, that's all they care about. Coming to school and putting their makeup on every morning, how ridiculous is that?"

R:

The whole thing now, even with older women, it's the full "pick me" girl thing, where it's like they're put into an archetype and a box, girls who lean back and don't do the makeup thing, people say that they're doing that just for male attention then.

R:

Yeah, the “pick me” girl is almost like masculating, making themselves more masculine in order to get male attention, because it’s either boys want the pretty girls or boys want the more masculine girls who will do what they do.

R:

It’s like the “I’m not like other girls” thing. So, anything that sets them apart. Or if sometimes if a boy says something quite degrading to another girl, they’ll agree with it to make themselves look better. Or they’ll say, kind of like internalised misogyny almost, very much that. It’s flipping the makeup thing and the hair thing and being typically feminine, it’s flipping that on its head, but still for the male gaze, still for gratification and attention. And almost at the disadvantage of other girls.

R:

The pressure of between having sex and not having sex, like you have so many guys... I know I have plenty of guy friends who got made fun of because they were virgins, and I’m like “why?”

R:

Happens to me all the time.

R:

It’s so silly. And then you have the opposite – obviously this is generalising, painting with one brush – you have the opposite where women get made fun of and slagged off because they are having sex. And it’s like “what?”

R:

There’s no medium.

R:

People have sex if they want to, can we not just let them do that, instead of judging them for doing it or not?

R:

I think there is definitely pre-described gender expectations of, one, who goes with who, but then also who does what. And definitely that’s not on, it’s just stupid why they’re there, but that’s where we are. But I think it’s definitely, big words, heteronormativity, the assumption of “okay, man goes with woman, and man does this and woman does that.” And it’s like, well, what if there’s two men? What one wears the underwear, and all that? It’s that idea that there has to be a male and female, even if it’s a male and a male, or a female and female, or a non-binary person and a non-binary person. For some reason, there’s just this obsession with labels. You get one box, you get the other. You can’t just all share it. It doesn't make sense, but that's just how it is.

R:

I feel like the society we’re in, it’s so weird because we don't talk about it but also we push it, and be like “you’re this age now, why have you not had sex? You shocking things.” But so what?

J:

So, this is a collective problem, though it has apparent winners and losers, it's one that we all suffer from in the end, one that erodes our essential freedom. One way in which teens articulated this erosion was through the behaviour of groups. That sense that it was a larger social force that was determining their actions. This is another weird and disturbing connection to certain serial killers; that sense that everything is already decided.

R:

When I was little I was really shy, I'm really not anymore, but in the small grades, he was very popular and I was looking very much up to him because I didn't know how to talk to him. And then in fifth grade we talked a lot together and all my friends were pushing me to ask him if he wanted to be my boyfriend, and it was almost like they decided that we should be boy and girlfriend, so I don't think any of us were ready at all, we just discovered each other and wanted to be together. But then they kind of put a title on us and that made it very awkward. Because I remember my best friend, she had a boyfriend too, and it's hard to explain but this place where you could sit on a bench and you were supposed to kiss, and I remember we would sit there and my best friend kissed with her boyfriend, and I was like "right, okay, he wants me to kiss him", and I was so scared because I really didn't want to because I didn't feel ready, and I felt that he felt the same too. We didn't kiss, but it was really weird and awkward, because we weren't ready.

R:

Some boys in our year, they don't understand the fact that some girls just aren't ready and don't want to rush anything, and they feel like "if you're not going to have it with me, then I will get someone else, and you can't say anything about it because you won't do it for me."

R:

And it's also if you're out at a party and the person you're with isn't there and all your other friends are getting with people, you're not just going to sit on the couch and watch. If you've got the opportunity, you're going to go for it.

R:

I'd say at high school, because everything in high school is all glamourised and it's like "you have to do this, you have to do that, you're in high school now, you have to do it." And I don't really have to do it.

R:

You don't have to do anything.

R:

Because high school is a time where you're kind of just trying to get to figure out yourself. If people use sex as a way to empower themselves, and I get that, they're like "I'm just learning about myself and it makes me feel powerful because I'm in control because it's all me", and I get that. But there are some people who are like "I'm not ready, the thought of it just isn't me. I just can't do that right now."

R:

On the list of things that can happen at a party, it's a standard thing that at some point in the evening you will turn around and there will be three random couples just like horrendously making out. It's lovely, but at the same time, it makes this... and there's no one there, and it doesn't stop, it's funny how teenagers at some point are kind of just thrown into this where they keep hitting the wall and exploding weekend after weekend after weekend. And they cry, and they cry in the bathroom and "oh, I kissed him, and you kissed him, and I want to kiss her, oh no." And they've had too much to drink, and it's cold, and the outfit isn't good enough. It's just chaos, and it goes on, it doesn't only happen once, but like for the past three years when we've been in high school, which is from sixteen to nineteen, it's like every weekend. It's amazing, we love it, but it's interesting how we survive it. But at the same time, this room full of expectations, sometimes when you arrive at the party, it just feels like it's already decided and it becomes so boring because it's just a room full of people who have already decided that they're going to kiss and going to get drunk and puke and cry, and it's going to happen again next week. So, in that way, the teenage years can be a little bit static, I think.

L:

We're getting to the end of this podcast series, and we're aware that at the moment we're leaving on a pretty bleak note. That's not inherently a bad thing, it's never been our mission to shy away from the shadows. In fact, it feels like one of the things that constitutes being a teen is taking some time in those dark places. Thinking through your values there and how you want to relate to the world, that includes sexuality. But we noticed even when the conversations went into this darker space, this space infected with the language of murder, the teens themselves always steered through with curiosity and kindness.

R:

I can't tell you how many times I've broke down and cried in front of my boyfriend and I have felt so vulnerable and he could have kicked me over, not physically, and made me feel worse about myself and really tore me to shreds but he wouldn't do that because he cares about me. So, it's like I can be my most vulnerable which has allowed me to get stronger, because I've been able to show my weaknesses and not be judged, and be like "well, yeah, I can be myself in front of you and I can open myself up and show you everything, all my insecurities, everything that's wrong with me and you're not going to care. You're going to accept me for who I am", and that's helped me as a person.

R:

Everyone loves secrets, and everyone loves sharing them, and everyone loves keeping them to themselves. It's that idea, but instead of secrets, it's intimacy and it's a friendship and it's love. And it's like "this is something only we do, something that we can do together and only us, and no one else knows or has to know. And we can do what we want." It's also another thing with sex, and just in general relationships, it's one time in life when really you are in full control, or you should be in control, and it's liberating.

R:

It's something that you want to explore, and I don't think that will – I don't hope that will ever stop, when I grow up. Because I think it's very important. It's feelings that you don't get almost everywhere else. So, it's important that you don't stop with that flirting. And also with your wife, or man or woman when you get older, it's very important to have that intimacy with another person because it's something that you don't really get other places. Not in that way.

R:

In my mind, there's another layer to it. People have sex to have babies, but also I feel like the taboo layer is the fact that it's pleasurable that nobody wants to speak about. It's like yes, 100% there's bits of it that I feel personally I would never disclose to anyone, I would never speak about my sex life just out in the open. But in an educational sense, I don't know why it was never talked about in that way. I don't remember in school being told that people have sex to have fun, it was always people have sex to have a bairn, to have a child, and that's it. It wasn't discussed in any other sense for me.

J:

Other kinds of body counts came up as well. Against the belief that sex is dirty, teens spoke about our biological drive and how sex is natural. Against the imperative for girls to be "pure", they spoke about female desire and empowerment. They spoke about masturbation as a healthy activity. They spoke about the joys of unexpected lust.

R:

It's such an intimate way to be with a person, and it can be something really special that you don't do with anybody, and it's something that we all, or almost all, really want to. And it's really exciting, I think, because everybody looks different at it, and it's always fun and exciting when you meet a new person and you get feelings for them and you maybe want to have sex with them. And it feels amazing when it happens, and I think it's also something we all need but it's something we all maybe are a little shy about, especially at our age. We all don't know how you should do it but we all want to. It's a really big part of our lives as teenagers, because it's new and it's exciting, and it's lovely.

R:

I think in a way it's a big part because it's a whole part of your life, it's something you cherish. Even when you're younger, it's a little crush. The things you think about now, it's a sense of growing up when you start thinking about sex and you start having more mature relationships, and I think it's a healthy natural way of growing as well. And I think it's important, especially with this day and age, to know it's okay to self-pleasure, because it used to be very taboo, like you don't talk about that. But it's important to know the difference between having sex to create life or just having sex for pleasure, and that it is okay to do that. It's not bad that you want to do that. It's natural, as humans we all have instincts, it's been like that for years and years and years.

R:

I have not felt my biggest lust when I have been super drunk at a party and just found some person somewhere, I have felt the biggest lust in the morning on the train seeing someone, or then there's all these random situations where you could be... So, sometimes these teenage scenarios, I don't know if they represent the situations where we feel lustful most, even though it may be the times where we kind of act out the most. I don't think that's our playground.

R:

I feel like there's always going to be part of you that wants someone. Like even if it's not to have sex with, even if it's just someone to talk to.

R:

Yeah.

R:

There's always going to be a part of you when you're at your loneliest time, you just want someone for cuddles.

R:

If you're older and you're just like "I'm too old to have a sexual relationship", maybe fifty-odd, whatever, and you're like "but I still want a companion, someone to be there for me", and stuff like that, but compared to now because a young age, we're all just like...

R:

Everyone is just sex-obsessed.

R:

Yeah.

L:

So, sex can be a scary place, there's no denying it. But teens are also curious in the most infectious ways. We certainly caught the bug. We found these teens to be funny, inquiring, sometimes confusing, and always open-hearted.

R:

I think for me, I'm a huge romantic, I've always been that way, even when I was really little, something about romance and stuff like that, it always was just something I knew I wanted. And in my teenage years, that's when it started being like "I can actually do this now, I'm old enough to have a boyfriend, old enough to do all this stuff." And I just couldn't wait for it to be a thing. I remember after breaking up with my first boyfriend, even though we broke up and I was heart-broken, I remember just saying to people "I can't wait to fall in love again, I'm so excited to fall in love again." I think once you get a taste of it, you always want it. It is one of the biggest emotions, and I guess most people in their lives from when they're young until when they die, they are looking for love, in all kinds of ways.

J:

That is the end of The Slow Dance. We are so grateful to everyone who made this happen, and to you who listened right to the end. The Slow Dance is a five part podcast series created by Shotput and funded by Creative Scotland. You can like and subscribe on all major podcast platforms, including iTunes, Apple Podcasts, and Spotify.

L:

The podcasts wouldn't be possible without the support of the teens involved. Our interviewees were anonymous, but you know who you are, thank you.

J:

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L:

Shotput is a dance theatre company in Glasgow run by Lucy Ireland, Helen McIntosh, and Jim Manganello. The Slow Dance is hosted by Lucy and Jim, edited and produced by Amanda Stanley, with music by Cat Myers, and illustrations by Ashwin Chacko.

J:

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L:

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