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The Slow Dance
Episode 1: 'FIRSTS'
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Full transcript

Lucy (L):

Welcome to The Slow Dance, a five part podcast series by Shotput. I'm Lucy Ireland.

Jim (J):

And I'm Jim Manganello.

L:

In Autumn 2020, we interviewed loads of teenagers about sex. These conversations were surprising, thoughtful, and at times very funny, and this podcast is our way of sharing those with you.

J:

We'd really like to encourage you as you're listening to put aside your preconceptions about what is good and bad and what is right and wrong, and think of these as five mini sex education lessons taught by teenagers themselves.

L:

Each episode will explore a theme that emerged across the conversations, and our first episode is called...

J:

Firsts.

L:

Is it true that sex is always on teenagers' minds?

Respondent (R):

I remember having that group of friends and we would always sit and discuss stuff and be trying to figure out sex and stuff and what was normal, and we'd sit and chat about it for hours like at sleepovers and stuff like that. And, yeah, I think it would shock parents how much kids... well, not kids, teenagers, actually think about it.

R:

I think maybe a lot of parents would be distraught to find out how kinky children are. Not children, sorry... [LAUGHTER]

R:

That was my fault for using that word.

R:

You start thinking about someone, and you maybe start having sexual fantasies about them also.

For me, I think it was I got my first kiss the same week as I got my first period, actually, and I think it was about when puberty hits, that was kind of for me when I start talking with my friends about love and boys and girls and all that in a different way than I did before. Before, it was like "oh, you want to be my boyfriend?" And then you made up and then you were boy and girlfriend. It was fun, but you didn't really think about it.

R:

That "whoa" moment, is a very physical feeling, genuinely physical, like I can feel that kind of warmth in my body. That sounds really strange, but it feels like there's a genuine feeling at the heart, like some sort of pressure. But then it's been mentioned about looking back on it, and I'm looking back like "calm down man, she just picked up your pencil, that was not love."

J:

So, it sounds like yes, sex is, if not always, at least pretty often on the minds of teenagers. That's not so surprising, but what might be more surprising is that many teens cited the dawn of sexuality not in their teenage years, they went back farther. Much farther.

R:

It was a girl, my best friend, actually. We were maybe like three, four, five, something like that, and I just remember that I... I felt so weird when looking at her because I just thought she was amazingly pretty, so beautiful. In this weird way, not the normal way, but in this more... I don't know, romantic way. But I didn't think, I didn't analyse my thoughts at all, I just remember telling my mom that "oh, she's so beautiful, she's so beautiful." And I kept telling my mom this for a few years, really. And then when I was a little bit older, she just asked me "are you in love with her?" And then I was very embarrassed and said "no, no, no, of course not. I'm not." but I think maybe I was.

R:

I remember being in nursery school, so like four and five, and I had no idea what was going on, but I had a wee fascination with a wee guy that was in my... we were in the yellow group in nursery, and he was in my group. And I think the nursery teachers definitely caught on. I must have been following this wee guy about, which is so funny! I remember it so clearly, they put together a wedding for us in nursery, which is crazy when you think about it now, and probably really embarrassing for everybody else that's there, but I was loving it. So, just things like that. But I feel like as I've got older, like that's crazy. And I don't even know... it's hard to articulate because I obviously didn't fancy him, just as a friend probably was attracted to him and they kind of took that and ran with it, maybe my teachers and the other pupils and stuff like that as well. But definitely from being a wee girl, I was like "this is my husband." [LAUGHS]

R:

This memory that I have of that first kiss is one of the few memories I think I have of romantic feelings in this way, they're not tainted by any "and then it was so painful because then it ended", like all of the stuff that comes after, all the explanations. But this is just a pure memory of joy.

R:

It could be somebody that you have known for a long time and then you suddenly get feelings for them, but it could also be somebody that you meet maybe at a party or something and you flirt and maybe you kiss, and then afterwards you meet up, and I have tried, where it wasn't really something in between, just we met and there was a connection and then we just started hanging out together. We didn't really talk about "okay, now we're girl and boyfriend", but it kind of just happened. And then these people when you've known them for a long time just as friends and then one day you realise that you have feelings for them, and sometimes they don't have feelings for you, but sometimes they do, and just slowly happens, like you give them hints and then maybe you start to flirt, and some day you maybe kiss.

L:

When teenagers associate sexual feelings with early childhood, they allowed those feelings to be more carefree, joyful, and even fun, almost like a small paradise.

J:

Yes, but when they talk about their teenage years, years that we might more traditionally name as the time of sexual awakening, they often ended up talking about a troubling, knotted, and twisty time. If childhood was a paradise, puberty is the fall.

R:

I think I was twelve when my gran sent me a text, "you're twelve now, you're turning into a woman, you need to know about the dangers of masturbation." [LAUGHTER] And this whole spiel about how you can never touch yourself or you're going to hell, Jesus sees everything, and it scarred me. Until I was seventeen, I thought I was asexual, and I wasn't, I was just petrified to be this forbidden woman, and female pleasure is a big fat no. It's so bad.

R:

I was so insecure and I was so ashamed and so shy, and it was so extremely awkward so I didn't ask those questions. To meet a grown up that made me feel really safe so that I could ask about all these things that I was wondering about, things would be so much easier if I could ask before I started doing all these things, before I kissed someone, before I had sex or things like that. But also to be able to have someone to ask along the way after experiencing the first kiss or the first time being touched or things like that. I had so many questions, and I didn't know what was right, what was wrong, or I didn't know if I had done anything wrong, and I really needed to get these answers but no one offered me the answer.

R:

Coming out is always going to be hard because of past generations. I've had this conversation with my dad, and I remember him saying that coming out isn't that difficult, and I was like "well, it is." For me, it wasn't that difficult because I have LGBT representation in my family, but for

other people, they don't see that. It's things like back in the day, or even ten years ago, it definitely would have been harder. But it's still hard. Just because a larger group of people still support it, there's just as large a group who don't. So, you never know how someone is going to react.

R:

I've come out multiple times to people in my class and then they've been like making fun of me for it, and I'm like "I was just kidding, I was actually straight the whole time, ha-ha", because I feel intimidated by the people in my class to be straight. Because I've gone through everything, I'm like "I'm bi, I'm pan, I'm gay, I'm this", because I don't know what I am, but I'm just accepting that I like everybody. So, when I try to tell people in my class and people in my family that, it's either going to be over-dramatic, everyone like "oh my god, yay", just making a big deal out of it, or it's going to be like just absolute hate, like that's not allowed.

R:

People are just so hateful. People don't understand, they just make really rude assumptions. Like for example I was in Music yesterday and I had this eyeliner on so I looked quite feminine, and I heard someone go "it's a boy", it's like first of all it doesn't matter, that's why we need to educate people.

R:

No matter what stage it is, if it's kissing or touching or sex, it's so overwhelming, I think for everyone. I can't speak on behalf of all teenagers, but I just know that the first time I kissed a boy, the first twenty-four hours I was like "yeah, this is so cool, it's so cool", and then suddenly the second day I cried, because I was fourteen or fifteen, and there's so much going on in my head. And then a half year later when I had my first boyfriend and I had sex for the first time, I remember meeting up to school on Monday and I was so tough, and I told my friends like it was nothing, I was super cool and everything's great, and then two days later I was bawling my eyes out at the school psychologist. And not because you're sad, just because there's so much stuff. And I just remember so well her being like "what happened? What happened? Are you okay?" And I was sitting like [TREMBLING VOICE] "I had sex" and she was like "oh."

R:

I was petrified. I still am getting over the petrified feeling I have, but I had boyfriends, and I wouldn't let them kiss me, I just couldn't. The whole thing spooked me so much. I don't know why, but there is such a huge importance I felt, like people had bigged up their first kiss and stuff like that, that I just didn't want to have mine, I was just so petrified.

R:

Definitely. I think especially because it's so exciting, the first time you kiss someone, because it's so bigged up that it's sort of like... I did this, and I'm sure a lot of other people did this, but you just go to parties and kiss people, and I never really fancied them but it's like "oh, it's so exciting to be kissing somebody", but I was never like "oh, I really fancy this person and I want to sleep with them." It was more just like the adrenaline you got from doing something you're not supposed to be doing.

R:

I think for the majority of, let's call them love interests, of my teenage experience, in all honesty they were at house parties. You're in this tiny house, like forty people or something ridiculous like that crammed into a living room with god knows how many bottles of god knows what. Someone's going to tell someone they love them and cause some drama. You get a couple of drinks and then you'd be like "I love you, let's be in love. Let's be in love now." And sometimes that's just how it is as a teenager, you just fall in love at a house party and then the next day you're like "oh, shit."

R:

In Norway, house parties are very common, that's the type of parties that you have here. I think every country has a term for this, but in Norway we call it to hook up, and it's a special term for when you just kiss someone at a party. And of course you can hook up with a person that you like, but the term is about just kissing anyone that you met. That is on the list of things that can happen at a party, it's like a standard thing that at some point in the evening you will turn around and there will be like three random couples horrendously making out. And it's lovely but at the same time it doesn't stop. It's funny how teenagers, at some point they're kind of 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", and we've had too much to drink, and it's cold and all the outfit isn't good enough. And it's just chaos and it goes on, it doesn't only happen once. It's like every weekend where you place your love and lust is on Friday night at the only youth bar in town. It can get really frustrating sometimes.

L:

I think after listening to all that, it's really clear that the teens are aware that it's a difficult place to be in, but it's also not such a bad place to be in.

J:

Yeah, they talked about it almost like a fall from paradise, the actual entry into puberty. But maybe that fall was into an interesting, complex, yes difficult but worth it world.

R:

I remember seeing them, it was literally an across the room moment. You know, "I saw them across the room", but I did, I saw them across the room at volunteering and it was like "you've got amazing eyes", and I instantly fell in love with their eyes, and I just thought they were so handsome.

R:

Yeah, like your heart stops, your breath has just gone "voop", you just don't have it anymore.

R:

You get very excited, yeah.

R:

Yeah, I think I must have yelped or something! He walked past and he high-fived me, and I went "oh my god!" I remember in the middle of school as well, and I think the librarian seen me and

they got quite concerned because I was like “oh my god!” But, no, it’s just like this wave of happiness and joy, and you’re like “oh!”

R:

I think there’s also a certain level of anticipation. Like even if it is a casual, like you’re surrounded by lots of people, like “oh, hello.” Obviously this is not going to go anywhere, but in your head, you’re like “oh!”

R:

Your mind wanders.

R:

Yeah, your mind’s like...

R:

...else that can happen, like “wow, if that happened, I mean...”

R:

I don't know if anyone else does this, but even before you go to bed, you’re just lying and thinking of scenarios, like “oh my gosh, imagine our first date, and like our children” [LAUGHS]

R:

Yeah, pretty much!

R:

I remember the first time I was ever given a boy’s hoodie. I sat and I put on my romance song playlist, and I just sat and I held it and I smelled it and it smelled like him, and I got even more excited! Yeah, I don't know, I always think of scenarios and stuff, even if I’m just sitting talking to them, I’m like “our wedding would be so good.”

R:

Your mind wanders when you’re talking to them!

R:

Or if you have a dream about them and then you go the next day and you’re like “oh, hello!”

R:

It’s like “oh, okay, hello.”

L:

I think the teens are really aware as they’re on the cusp of adulthood that it’s still possible to find the playfulness in the sandbox of adult life as well.

J:

It might not be as easy or carefree, but it’s almost like they start talking about a perpetual first, that there’s always something new to be discovered.

L:

Yeah, and it feels like something they all strive for.

R:

There's nothing nicer than someone liking you. Like someone likes you and you're like "oh, someone likes me, that's cool." It's like having a really great full tub of Ben & Jerry's to yourself. And I think once you get it once, you're kind of like "now I really want that again." Again, Ben & Jerry's, you have one spoonful of Ben & Jerry's, you're not going to stop and put it away, are you? No, you're having the whole tub. So, I think when someone does show interest in you for the first time, I know for me personally, someone showed interest in me and I was like "oh, how can I make this keep going? I like this." And having that, even just friendship-wise, going back to that, having someone be like "yeah, I like you, you're my friend." It's nice, it's a nice feeling. And then with the physical aspect of sex as well, it is relaxing, it destresses you a little bit, it takes that, like... it's a moment or moments that you can... I don't know, sort of be natural, I guess, and have this pleasure that... I was going to say it doesn't come with guilt, but that's not always true. [LAUGHS] Yeah, you can have this physical pleasure that's nice and you can share it with another person.

R:

I remember I used to think losing your virginity was literally like losing something rather than gaining something. I saw it as like a loss. I remember when I was sixteen and one of my friends lost her virginity, and I was just like "but I'm worried about you, you've lost something." [LAUGHTER] She was like "you don't understand, you don't lose anything, you're gaining." I was like "what?"

J:

We were really astonished consistently throughout all the interviews by how these teens were not only able but eager to see what's exciting about sex, even at a time – that is in their teenage years – when sex is probably really complicated and confusing and even oppressive, or at the very least misunderstood.

L:

Yeah, and of course the teens that came forward to speak to us all felt comfortable speaking to us about sex and this topic.

J:

Yeah. It was not at all a scientific sample, but on the whole it felt like these minds and these voices really demand attention. Like they could genuinely teach us about sex in our society.

R:

If I'm going to be honest, then very often when I look back at my life, or when you look back at your life, I think that you have some points, like small hilltops, where you stop and look around. And then when you look back in your timeline, these become points where you go "and then from then on it was like this, and before that it was like this, but it was never the same." At least I have it like this. And those points for me have been like death, someone dies, and then love. The romantic, or the sequences of life where you were devoted to this person, either if it was a relationship, a one night stand, a kiss, a boy from swimming lessons that I would go home with for like four months until I quit swimming because he quit swimming. But

for some reason, I don't know how to explain it, love is also... and sex as well, of course, but especially love and lust has been just these points that I can point back to. "What was that time? That was the time I was in love with..." Or "what was that period? I remember it because that was the time that I kissed..." and that's kind of how my brain has worked.

L:

So, that's the end of our first episode.

J:

That's it.

L:

Yeah. Thanks for listening. Next week, the teenagers take us to a riskier place, one of the darker corners of social media, in an episode called Send Pics.

R:

It can be very nerve-wracking in person to make that first move, but with photos, you're in your own room, you're in your own space, you can make yourself look however you want to. And you can start it at your own pace instead of being in person and it being full-on straight away.

J:

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 Myres, and illustrations by Ashwin Chacko.

J:

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L:

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