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The Slow Dance
Episode 3: SEX ED
Released 14 May 2021
Full transcript

Respondent (R):

The story and how it's told I think is the complete opposite of how it really is in the real life.

R:

In school, it's quite male-orientated, I think. You kind of get taught about usual female stuff like periods and stuff, but that's it, that's kind of where it stops at. Because when you come to PSE, you learn all about boys, you learn about this, that, and the next thing, and they don't tell you anything really about girls. It's just about stuff, "this is what you're going to get for the next thirty years", and then that's it. They don't really tell you... they don't detail, I'm trying to say this without making everyone uncomfortable.

R:

Go for it.

R:

Like you get told how to put a condom on and stuff, and you get taught about contraception, but you don't get taught about...

R:

What to do.

R:

Not so much what to do like a step-by-step guide! [LAUGHTER] But there isn't so much focus on female enjoyment. [LAUGHTER]

Jim (J):

Hi, welcome to The Slow Dance. In case you couldn't tell, this episode is about sex ed.

R:

They kind of talk about that when you're talking about boys and stuff, but they don't really teach you about it when it comes to girls.

R:
It's kind of the same where there's zero LGBT education...

R:
Yes, there is nothing.

R:
...at all.

R:
Apart from the Stonewall posters on the wall that were in the room we're sitting in.

R:
I think it's very like "okay, this is a man, this is a woman, this is what happens. And, oh, you can be gay too, but this is what happens with the man and the woman." I think they could maybe take away a couple of the few weeks that we spent learning about STDs and STIs, and maybe even just one lesson on LGBT.

R:
And they also don't talk about people's genders, like transgender...

R:
Don't talk about transgender at all, nope.

R:
Very leaning towards biological gender.

R:
Yeah. I think as well if they did teach it more at a younger age, because I remember I had my first sex education lesson when I was in like Primary 6.

R:
What?!

R:
Yeah, it was like really, really young, but I was taught about man and woman, it was nothing about the other ways, because it isn't just two ways that it is. And I think that if people did teach it at, say, first years, about the wider aspect of it, it would, I think, help solve other issues like homophobia and stuff like that because people understand it more. And it's not just two things, it isn't just man-woman, and I think that the education system are deciding to close their eyes and blindly look away from other stuff that there is.

R:
The less it's talked about, the more different people will think towards it, and people who aren't as well educated will think that people are different because that's not what they've been taught. So, if they can implement that from a young age, S1 or whatever, that that stuff happens, to stop people thinking it's not a normality to be gay or trans.

R:

I think it should be earlier than S1 and I think there should be more representation especially because if you think about it, all hatred kind of stems from delusion, ignorance, and being uneducated about a certain subject. So, if it was more commonly seen and more commonly talked about freely and not so stigmatised, I think it would be a lot easier for people who are part of the LGBT+ community to talk about that kind of stuff. So, I think if it was seen more commonly, that wouldn't be such a problem.

R:

Educate people who are actually meant to put these sex education things in place and have been doing it for far too long and aren't educated on this subject, and actually listen to younger people about it, because the world's changing, their sex education system isn't changing with it.

J:

I'm Jim.

Lucy (L):

And I'm Lucy. This is The Slow Dance, a five part podcast series in which teens educate us about sex. In episode one, we talked about firsts: first kisses, first sexual experiences. And in episode two, Send Pics, we talked about how teens negotiate sex on social media. Each episode stands alone, but if you like this one, maybe give the others a go.

J:

So, here we are in episode three where we look at a topic that never failed to ignite the teens' passions: the many and varied ways in which current formal sex ed is... well, a bit shit.

R:

Just to prove how much the sex education system has failed some people in our generation, I had a huge group of friends that when I told them there was a right way round to put on a condom, they thought I was lying. And I was like "no, no, you should put it on so it rolls down, not so you have pull it." And they were like "nah, that's not real." And I was like "I mean, it is."

L:

They said sex ed is heteronormative.

R:

Male-female relationships, that's basically in their opinion the only thing that exists, whereas us as young people know that that's not the only thing that exists, and the LGBTQ+ community exists. But that's kind of neglected in our education, and I think only last year was it ever mentioned that "oh, yes, gay people exist." And it's really outdated and everyone knows this and everyone is really against it, because it's a Catholic school and we know what we're getting ourselves into, we have to do RE all the way through the six years or four years,

however long you choose to stay for. So, yeah, everyone knows it's there, we're not happy with it, but kind of just got to deal with it, I guess.

R:

Education is lacking, it's kind of pathetic, really, how minimal it is. And then we're not even getting into the fact that it does not include, really, LGBTQ+ individuals, it just does not involve them whatsoever. You watch one video in RE, one video in Social, and that's it.

J:

They said sex ed is abstract and prudish.

R:

I remember being extremely frustrated because we never actually got into the details, like how do you have sex? How do you do it? How does it happen? Do you ask? Who puts on the condom? How do you lie? Because sex ed has always been very abstract and "oh, you just need to feel comfortable in yourself" and "oh, things will happen, you don't need to worry." But I think a lot of teenagers really worry.

R:

They split up the girls and the guys, and then to the girls they were basically like "the only effective contraception is not to have sex. And you should be proud..." they made us like say this slogan, like "be proud to be a prude." And they were like "if you have sex, you're giving up your self-respect to somebody else and you should respect yourself more than to give up your respect to somebody. Wait until you get married." And then they gave this whole thing about... I don't know, they were asking about percentages of STDs in the population, and they got a lot of things wrong, they were like "gay people have the most STDs", and I was like "well, that's not the case." They basically just made a lot of stuff up and showed us all these horrible photos of people with, like, chlamydia, and they were like "don't give up your self-respect to somebody", and that was it, that was all we got.

R:

That's vile.

L:

They said sex ed is only out to scare teens.

R:

When we get sex education in Primary 7, it was girls get a period and sometimes boys have wet dreams, and that's what we live with now. And then that was it. And girls would walk out the class crying, terrified, like "I've learned something that my mum's going to give me into trouble for."

R:

I've been here five years, I think I remember one sex ed lesson, and it was literally more like... it showed... I'm not really sure, it was about assault and all that. And it was like "can you maybe teach us about how to start a relationship, or how to be safe?"

R:

Like the sex ed that they teach you, it scares you a bit.

R:

It tells you all the diseases you can get.

R:

Like "you can get an STI from doing that."

R:

Yeah, it's like you can get this, you can get pregnant.

R:

And just trying to divert you from having sex.

R:

Yeah, they're trying to scare you.

R:

I've been in this school from S1, and I think I've had maybe one lesson about proper sex ed, and it was because we asked, because we seen other classes doing it. And it was like when you learn how to put a condom on, we had to ask to do that because every other class had done it except from our class...

R:

We never done that.

R:

...and the only other thing that we actually learned was videos of like getting attacked and what you were meant to do in that situation. You don't actually learn about the whole...

R:

They don't look at sex as a good thing, they look at it as something that's got loads of consequences and stuff.

J:

They said sex ed reinforces the patriarchy.

R:

Not that long ago, me and another friend decided the sex education system is terrible, it doesn't teach you anything, they don't even teach women about the female anatomy. They don't teach you what's what, what are the names of things, where are things. Because people are like "oh, men can't find it", we can't find it! We don't know. Like education here would be great, because it's also about looking after your health, it's not even about sex. It's like why is discharge taboo? Everyone gets it. But we don't talk about it, so it feels embarrassing. I remember getting that for the first time and like "oh my goodness, what is wrong with me?" And I'm like, well, actually, you get it and my mum gets it and my sister gets it and it's completely normal. But it was never spoken about.

R:

For me, education is a funny one, I go to a Catholic school, and things are a bit different there. So, we have biology lessons where we get given diagrams and "here's a penis", and you're like "cool", and we're just labelling it. And then there's our religious education lessons where, to put it as it is, it's basically "don't do it. No, you don't have to, just don't do it." And you never really talk about sex, it's called Call To Love, basically. So, it's all about relationships in general, but obviously part of that is sex education. But the religion just doesn't believe in contraception, and the whole point of sex is not for pleasure, it's for reproduction, and that's God's plan.

L:

But where does a teen go to get good information? Some go to their parents for advice, but that doesn't always go so well.

R:

I have a younger sister, and she comes to me a lot about just wee questions about things, and there's a funny conversation we had with our mum where we've spoke about... it kind of started off as a joke and then got more serious as a conversation, like "what would happen if one of us got pregnant?" And my mum was like "do not speak to me about that." And I said to my mum "but mum, would you not rather that one of us were able to come and speak to you about it?" And my mum was like "I don't want to talk to my daughters about that", like that. And I'm like [SIGHS] my exact words were "well, you're lucky that my wee sister has got me to come to then, because otherwise you don't know where she's getting her information or how she could be feeling if something did happen." And these things, things go wrong or things are uncomfortable so much more than people talk about. That's why I feel like you need to have at least one person that you're comfortable going to, and is comfortable having those conversations with you. And it's probably a generational thing and a parental thing, because they don't want to be talking to us about the details of sex, obviously, and I don't want to really talk about details with them either, but just having a mutual trust and someone to rely on I think is a big thing, especially being a young person discovering all this stuff for the first time.

R:

I'm from a single parent family, so it's just me and my mum, so obviously there's different genders there. It wasn't not openly discussed at home, she just kind of had the opinion that it didn't need to be because the school would go over it, and they did, but obviously as I've mentioned, not how they should have maybe. But you pick it up with friends and discussions because you're at that age where I guess you're curious about it and want to know.

R:

I think for me, with my mum, she used to be a sexual health nurse, and so she had a very specific sort of frame of mind when it came to sex. And actually, I missed my sex education at primary because I was off ill, and so she took it upon herself to give her own one, but it was just riddled with horrible photos of STDs, all that sort of stuff. And it'd be like "men will try and

take advantage of you, don't let them", dah, dah, dah. And it just sounded terrifying, like "oh my god, I'm just going to be like a walking target and it's going to be horrific and I'm going to get all these diseases and I'm going to go blind." I was actually eighteen when I had my first sexual experience, so I was a bit later than a lot of my friends, and I think as it went on, hearing people's experiences and hearing people's stories, that helped with the perspective shift before I'd even had sex. It was sort of starting to unwind all the fears and... you know, not myths, but they had kind of become myths in my head about what it was going to be like.

J:

So, if you can't trust school and you don't want to talk to your parents, where do you go? Well, teens are clever, that's a common theme in this podcast, and they found some really good sex ed alternatives.

R:

YouTube, I think actually, there's a couple of channels that are educational, sex ed, and they talk about the fun that it is. With YouTube, it's more casual, it's just "do-do-do, I'm just sitting in my living room, sitting in my bedroom just talking about..." and they can also, unlike teachers, which thank god teachers can't, they can talk about their own experiences and say "well, this was what was happening with me, and this is what I done, and this is how I felt, and this is an okay way to react. But this is also another way I could have reacted which would have been okay." I think it's a way to add fun to it, and the fun aspect of sex, as you've been saying, I think that's definitely a priority that needs to be improved upon.

R:

I learned a lot of stuff – and this is really dodgy – from TikTok. It's so strange, you get different sides of TikTok, you get the side of TikTok that's creating a Ratatouille musical, and then you get other sides who are like make-up, but then you have kink talk, which is where all the kinky people go. And some of it is very questionable, and probably shouldn't be on TikTok. But then you get people like this guy who I found, and I'm like "oh, he's educational." Have you heard of The Repair Man? It's not even graphic, it's just people ask questions, like "well, what does this mean?" And he's like "well, here, I'll tell you all about it because actually if it's wrong, it could be so detrimental." He's not inappropriate, he doesn't put anything up that's sexual, you don't get shown anything, but he's like "well, as someone who is very experienced in this field, I can tell you factually with knowledge that this is what this is."

R:

Yeah, Google. Google is our best bet.

R:

Incognito tab. [LAUGHTER] No, no, just because...

R:

What did he say?

R:

Incognito tab.

R:
Private browser.

R:
Because it's embarrassing to not know everything, about everything. Especially with someone like my mum who would go through my phone and go through my recent searches. If you want to see something like that, it would be incredibly embarrassing...

R:
And then having to have that chat.

J:
Teens are also pooling their knowledge. They're asking each other for advice, without the fear or the shame that seems to dictate school sex ed.

R:
I think with... I'll just talk about my friend group, I know I could tell them basically anything, and they might take the piss out of me for it, but they would definitely give their advice and their best advice that they could.

R:
Yeah, friends is probably the best one.

R:
100% agree. We're not like rejects in that we're completely unliked by everyone, I think also we've banded together, safety of numbers, of just gay, lesbian, bisexual, just everyone clumped together and formed their own community, as we do, we've created our own within the school. And that's just we stick together, there's maybe like two straight people in our group out of like eight or nine people in our group. So, I think we've got all that shared common problems that we see in daily life.

R:
Yeah. I learn most of my stuff from our friend group.

R:
I think I could win in a quiz about the female genitalia, thanks to my friends. But I know just as much as they do pretty much, because I think I should know.

R:
I think often it's friends, when you get older, it's more like your friends that are in the same position in a way, so they can relate and help.

R:
It's nice because you always have friends that have tried a little more or have tried a little less, so it's nice when you can discuss everything and learn from it, and you can talk all the things through. Because there's not so many boundaries as with adults because they can sometimes be more judgy, like "oh my god, you are only there." Everybody is getting through that, but your friends haven't tried it either, so it's a lot easier. Sexual education can also just be having

talks about it, and it's just easier, like feelings, and if you have had a bad experience or something, you might need to share it with somebody who has tried the same or can relate. And that's just really nice to talk about with friends because they can maybe relate and don't judge you.

L:

And some teens have taken control into their own hands, they've become advocates for better sex ed in their schools, advocating for a sex ed curriculum that's fit for 2021.

R:

Our education is not good enough. It is not good enough. So, we decided that we are going to start working towards making a better education system for our school. Luckily, I'm in a bit of a place of power within the school where I'm able to talk to teachers a little bit easier than maybe some other pupils, and I hope to use that, especially with consent and sexual assault education, that again is lacking.

R:

So, we went to the Rector, and we were like "we want to go over all the social classes in S1 and S2 and deliver what we think is adequate education on this matter", and we were shut down immediately.

R:

We spent weeks, month, doing research and looking into the charities that would come into the school, and we need to ask someone who is disconnected from the school, because if it's...

R:

A teacher you know.

R:

...my guidance teacher was someone I'm pretty close with, I know her pretty well, I've had her all throughout S1 to now, and if she was to teach me, which actually at the time she wasn't because it was another teacher, it would just be like "okay..." I would listen, but I think with some people if they had that same kind of thing they would just go "why are you talking about it? Oh..." And they retract and don't listen because they are freaked out by it. They need someone who is trained, someone who knows what they are talking about, to come in and talk about it. Because teachers don't know what they're talking about.

J:

But we heard from several teenagers a related but really interesting counterpoint, nobody that we spoke to disagreed that we need clearer, fairer, franker sex ed. As you've heard, they want to know what goes where and how to be safe and what consent is and so forth. But once the nuts and bolts are in place, pardon the pun, teens are also very aware of something more profound than just anatomy or the basics. They know that good information allows the mystery of sex to be preserved. They know that that unknown world is something to be cherished, something that makes their sexual lives their own. We heard this a few times and it was always really striking. There's one teen in particular who summed it up excellently.

R:

I think maybe a part of the reason why you feel like you're the centre of the world when you are in these sexual or feelings of love, maybe the reason why you feel this way is because these two topics are still so full of secrets. Joy or anger or frustrations are feelings that are easier to talk about and easier to... if you're really joyful, I see it and I can relate. But love and sex is still something so extremely personal. So, as long as we can't get it out and express it in a more concrete way, it stays inside and it fills us, and it's just so overwhelming and so big, and it demands so much attention. So, I think maybe at least to me a part of the reason why these things are still so big and I still admire them so much is because they're still so full of secrets to me and I still don't know what it is. And it's always changing, depending on who you love or who you have sex with. So, when I think that I'm starting to understand what it is, it changes and I need to understand it all over again, but I just never do. So, it feels like a secret. I don't know, I don't have any other words to describe it. But secrets are very well hidden and they're also hard to understand sometimes, especially for the surroundings, it's hard to understand. I feel very alone in my own love and in my own sexuality. And that's not necessarily a bad thing, but it makes the feelings bigger because I deal with them alone, because I'm the only one who is feeling my love and I am the only one who is feeling my sexuality. And you have yours, and we can try and connect and talk about it, but it's not going to be the same.

L:

Thanks for listening to The Slow Dance. Next week join us for episode four when we talk about all things hardcore.

R:

I don't want to get too graphic, so I'm trying to tone it down as much as possible. But you don't see any sweat, no one looks uncomfortable, which is definitely normal. You don't see any more than one body type, unless it's being seen as some sort of niche thing. There's absolutely, a lot of the time I know for girls especially, zero body hair.

R:

Yeah, yeah!

R:

It's just completely unrealistic.

J:

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L:

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

J:

Thanks too to our partners, Imagineate, Lyth Art Centre, Platform, Beacon Art Centre, Firefly Arts, Grangemouth High School, Musselburgh Grammar School, The Ayr Gaiety, Teatercentrum in Denmark, and Scenekunstbruket in Norway.

L:

Shotput is a dance theatre company in Glasgow run by Lucy Ireland, Helen MacIntosh, 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.

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