

Elmore Community Services:

Flipping the Narrative Podcast: Pornography

Podcast duration: 50 minutes

Co-Hosts: Liz Jones and Luke Jerdy

In conversation with:

Abi Wycherley, a Violence Against Women and Girls Coordinator, and Dan Leigh who works to rehabilitate sexual offenders at Circle South East, to talk about the impact of porn on young men and how watching pornography can have a lasting impact on their future relationships. We talk about the need for proper Sexual Education in schools, ethical porn that focuses more on highlighting the intimate side of sex, and why revenge porn is on the rise and what can be done about it.

Producer: Ben Anderson, Sound Rebel

Podcast Episode Transcript

Luke Jerdy: Hello. Welcome to the 'Flipping the Narrative' podcast. I am Luke Jerdy. I'm one of your co-hosts. I'm primarily an actor and writer, and I'm interested in creating work around the traditional notions of masculinity, and challenging them. So, this is a perfect podcast for me to be involved with and to speak to other men and women, about how men can adapt and change their behaviour to make women feel safer in everyday life.

Liz Jones: Hi, I'm Liz Jones, and I'm the other host of the 'Flipping the Narrative' podcasts. I work in the violence against women and

girls field and have worked with males who have perpetrated domestic abuse and been sexually violent.

This podcast is brought to you by Elmore, a community service that works in Oxford, working with people with complex needs who slip through the gaps. It's funded by the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership.

This episode, we're focusing on porn. We have got two speakers: Abby, who has worked in sexual education and health and is now currently working in the violence against women and girls arena, and Dan, who works for Circles South East.

They work with sex offenders to help rehabilitate them safely back into the community. He works with families and is an ex-social worker. We felt that, on this subject matter, it was really important to get both the views of males and females, as porn impacts on both in various different ways.

Luke Jerdy:

This was quite a brilliantly informative, engaging, and interesting chat with Abby and Dan. We covered a wide range of topics which sprung out of the initial conversation about pornography.

We talk about how instantly available it is now, and the effect that has on men and women. We talk about the differences, if there are any, in the ways that the men and women view porn. We speak about sexual health. We speak about sex education. We speak about sex work and how that's viewed.

There's a real wide range of topics. I think, like a lot of the conversations we're having, we'll probably bring up a lot of

questions and discussion points for you to have with friends, so pass it on to mates and let us know what you think.

Liz Jones: Morning, Dan. Morning, Abby. Good to see you both, and thank you for joining us on the podcast. I'm just going to start straight in and ask you both. Porn is now instantaneously available. Do you think it's a useful way for males and females to learn about sex and/or improve their sex lives?

Abby: Shall I kick off with this? For the most part, I would say it's an absolute no. When I used to teach Sex Ed, we would use the analogy of trying to learn to have sex by using porn is like trying to learn to drive by watching 'The Fast and The Furious'. Sex in real life and sex in porn are two completely different things, even in terms of the acts that are represented in pornography, the bodies that are represented in pornography, the amount of pubic hair that's shown in pornography, use of condoms, prioritisation of pleasure. There are so many things missing from porn that should be present in real-life sex.

Dan: I completely agree. I think that's a really good analogy with movies. I think, with the stuff that's missing, one of the things for me is just the relationship element of it. That's just completely absent. If the focus in porn just knocks that away and if you're trying to learn about this stuff, it doesn't address that at all and, yes, gives very skewed ideas because of it.

Abby: Absolutely. There are some boys and young men, and men, who have the ability to recognise that in the porn that they're watching, but these are typically boys and men who've had conversations around connection, relationships, sex. The more comprehensive your Sex Ed curriculum, the more critical your view of pornography.

There's this book by a woman called Peggy Orenstein, who is just glorious. The book is called 'Boys and Sex', and in there she does an ethnographic study, so she talks to loads of boys and young men about their experiences of masculinity, sex, porn.

There are some boys and young men who recognise that in porn the only body part touching is the genitals, so it's not about having a sensual or intimate experience with another human, which is what sex is, kind of, supposed to be. It's all about the act, primarily, of penetrative sex on camera.

When you're in porn, they're having sex in a way that looks good on camera, not in a way that feels good, not in a way that prioritises pleasure or the other person, just in a way that looks good on camera - hence the lack of pubes.

Luke Jerdy: Do you think that's the same for amateur porn?

Abby: It is shifting. Bear in mind this is just my opinion. I'm no real expert, but, so in amateur porn - and you're seeing amateur porn sites driven more and more - there's a website called 'MakeLoveNotPorn'. She identifies herself as being pro-sex, pro-porn, and pro-knowing the difference.

On this site, users create their own content and upload their own content, and then people pay to view their videos. So, in there, you do see lots more intimacy, lots more connection, laughter. Laughter is common in real-life sex. You wouldn't see people laughing in mainstream porn. You, yes, definitely see more body hair in amateur pornography, I would say.

Dan: I think, still, the difference is knowing that it is a representation and it is not... You've got to be able to see it in context, even when it's amateur. Sex education shouldn't be seen as the same thing. I think that that's the important resources that people need to be able to interpret it and, yes, not confuse it for something else.

Luke Jerdy: What should sex education be?

Dan: I think, for me, just relationships a lot more front and centre, as part of it. [__ 0:06:25] things are... I don't know. Things seem to be not changing as much. It's fashionable to say, "In my day... It might have changed by now," but I don't think it has changed all that much. It's so focused on the anatomy and on safe sex, but only in terms of diseases. It's not around other areas of safety. I think it's just so absent.

Then porn fills the gap, really, a lot of the time, especially because it's so ubiquitous. Just it feels like relationships... I know, I think, it's part of the title of sex education now - health, sex, and relationships - but I'd like to be proven wrong. If there are examples of really good relationship education in

school, it would be great to hear, but I feel like it is still glaringly absent.

Abby:

I would say that there are definitely some wonderful examples of really comprehensive Sex Ed provided – relationships in sex education – in both primary schools, secondary schools, further education, but its provision is patchy. The good stuff is predominantly provided by people in the voluntary and community sector, so it requires schools or educational establishments to have the budget to bring in experts so that young people aren't having conversations about genitals or orgasms with their maths teacher, who's going to come face to face with their mum and dad on Parents' Evening.

The new and updated curriculum does focus more on things like consent. In primary schools, it's consent for basic touch, exploration of what makes a good friend. Then this develops age-appropriately through secondary school, so there is more of a focus on relationships, but, like I said, delivery is patchy.

Also, it's delivered by people. We're putting the responsibility on teachers to deliver this, who may not feel comfortable talking about penises and vaginas. If you have somebody talking about it who isn't comfortable themselves, that's catching.

To have good sex and respectful relationships, and to be able to critically interrogate porn, you have to feel comfortable talking about it. You can't negotiate consent if you can't say explicitly what you are and are not okay with.

One of the things that I found really interesting is, so the Netherlands, Holland, they've got a great Relationships and

Sex Ed curriculum. One of the things that they did is they did some surveys with students and recognised that girls and young women still saw sex as something that men do to women, if that makes sense, so that men were the more active participant in this.

So, what they did is incorporated interactivity into their Sex Ed curriculum, so then they would have conversations and sessions with young people, like, “Okay, how do you talk about what you want? How do you tell a partner what feels good? How do you communicate what your boundaries are?” So, good Sex Ed is out there.

Luke Jerdy: I guess that's down to, like, either job specification in the first instance, when you're looking to hire a teacher, if you want the teacher to cover that, or it's a case of outsourcing it to people like yourself. Or I don't know if that's what you do, but who will go into schools and deliver that information.

Abby: Absolutely. The problem is, realistically, how is that going to be implemented without funding and proper training? Training to deliver this stuff is few and far between. There are some providers, like Brook, who will train up staff, but again that requires money, doesn't it? We have an RSE curriculum. The question is will that be followed with any funding?

Luke Jerdy: I see, so there's just not enough money in it at the moment.

Abby: I would say so.

Liz Jones: It is a lot to ask, though, for teachers. This is such an important area. It's such a part of everybody's life, growing up, putting onto teachers about teaching around sex education at schools, because I think you're right, Abby: it's really difficult and uncomfortable for some people to be able to talk about openly, especially when they're seeing these children on a day-to-day basis. So, how do you feel about that funding actually going more towards our third sector or specialisms that can go into schools and do that?

Abby: That's the ideal, but I think, also, it should be both. The good thing about talking about sex is that the more you do it, the easier it becomes. It is important when you're trying to embed, because it's a culture change, isn't it? It's not just about talking about sex with young people on one-off lessons. It's about, is there the culture within that school that students can escalate any concerns or go to somebody in school that they trust if they've got a problem, because part of the...? We can't manage porn. Porn is always going to be there. As long as there is an internet connection, there is going to be some hard-core, mainstream porn, so it's not just... We can't get rid of porn.

How we counteract that is shifting the culture. Do we talk about sex? Do we talk about the realities of sex? Do we talk about the fact that sex is supposed to be fun and pleasurable, not degrading or extreme? So, whilst I do think we definitely do need specialist providers coming in, we also need to arm up school staff to just feel a little bit more confident to be able to explore that.

The thing with school staff, as well, is they've probably got no idea the kind of pornography that young people are watching, because for some teachers porn will be – their understanding of pornography might be – about that online porn, but primarily, sometimes, their experiences of porn in their adolescence would be you sneak a magazine off the top shelf. You see a triangle of bush, and, “Wow, porn,” but in reality it's very different now. You can have things flinging around that people, adults who aren't exposed to this type of porn, would find really quite jarring.

Luke Jerdy: That would suggest that, once you get to a certain age, you just stop watching it.

Abby: I'm not saying that now. What I'm saying is the norm-

Luke Jerdy: No, I was going to say. (Laughter) You're saying, “Some might have gone away from that and not been exposed to the current.”

Abby: Yes.

Luke Jerdy: I guess, once you've found your website, you've found your website. You're not going to switch, are you, if it's good?
(Laughter)

Abby: Exactly, and that's the thing. With young people, the main websites that they use are tube sites. They're free to access. They're easy to access. You've got an abundance of stuff on there. Like you say, once you've got your site, you've got your site, so who's to say whether they'll explore more ethically produced porn, or porn that actually represents people a bit better?

Luke Jerdy: What do you think, Dan? Do you think the onus should be on parents, as well? Are you a father?

Dan: I'm not, no, but it's a difficult one because, I think, there are so many barriers to talking about these things, and I was thinking about... I wonder if a thing for teachers is that it's simultaneously something that is, sort of, expected to be, "You should just go have a conversation about this, because it's so standard," but also, at the same time, we don't talk about these things. So, it would be really hard. Seeing school as an environment that is supposedly professional and boundaried, that can be misunderstood as, "We can't have these conversations," or, "It's too awkward to talk about."

I think the same will go for parents, in a lot of ways. I think ideally, but also it can be hard, it's very hard for parents to talk to children about sex, as well. That's okay. School might provide more opportunities because of the distance. People might be - kids might be - more receptive, but I think there's it's everyone's responsibility, without it being, "You have to do this." I don't think there can be dictated exactly who should talk to who at what point, but everyone has a responsibility, I think, in this.

Luke Jerdy: Yes. You don't think it should just become the norm for parenting? What did you do with your children, Liz? Did you speak to your son about sex, or did you leave it to school and other bits of education?

Liz Jones: No, both my children – I've got a son and a daughter – both of them, at the age of about seven, asked me some questions. So, I answered age-appropriately around it and made sure that it was a subject that was open to them throughout their childhood, into their teens, so they were very comfortable with talking to me about it.

Don't get me wrong. There were times when I was uncomfortable, especially if my son turned round and brought a friend home to say, "He'd like to speak to you about it," (Laughter) but I do feel that that was really important. It's an important part of growing up, so yes. We didn't have the Internet when I had my children, so it was all off my head, which wasn't always, probably, the best way to do it, (Laughter) but yes, being open is important, I think

Luke Jerdy: Yes, I think that's great. There's a comfortability there, isn't there? I think that's really good that they felt comfortable to talk to you, and you felt reasonably comfortable to talk to them. I'd like to think I'd be the same with my son when he's older.

At the moment, I don't feel like I'd feel uncomfortable at all. It's like, "Look, this is how it is. This is the meaning of consent," and all of that stuff. "This is what porn is." Like what you said,

Abby, that porn is a certain version of sex that isn't, perhaps, realistic to a loving relationship.

I guess it's about having those conversations, isn't it, and maybe bringing it more into mainstream thinking when it comes to parenting? Like, "This is how you navigate that and respond." I feel like there's not that much information out there. Maybe there is. I don't know.

Abby:

There isn't a huge amount, no, and it relies on parents to proactively do that off their own initiative and to feel comfortable enough with it. It's not even, in my experience, something that doesn't necessarily have to be this big conversation. When they're really small, you can lay the foundations for consent by saying, "Please, can I have a hug?" or, "Do you want to give Grandma a kiss before you say goodbye?" Let them know that their body is their body. Likewise, someone else's body is their own body.

One of the key things that I learnt quite early on, which has been profoundly useful, is answer the question that your child is asking you. So, if they ask you, "Where do babies come from?" You don't have to say and go right down to, "Well, a penis gets an erection." You just say, "So, a baby comes about when a sperm and an egg meet. Men have sperm, women have eggs, joins in the belly, comes out the vagina."

Respond to the question that they're asking you. They might then want to know, "Well, how does the sperm get to the egg?" but sometimes they're not that curious. They're not there yet, so just answer what's in front of you. Like I said, the more you do it, the easier it gets.

Luke Jerdy: What about the stork? (Laughter)

Abby: Not a useful analogy.

Luke Jerdy: It's not, is it? Just moving away from the impact on children and how we should educate, is there a difference in how females and males view porn? Luckily, we've got a female and a male on the podcast now, so what do you think about that? (Laughter)

Dan: I'd say, from something I've been thinking about in terms of how men - and, particularly, young men - I know, probably, this is going to be an old reference as well, but I just kept thinking about 'The Inbetweeners', and how they talk about it, and how accurate that is as a representation. Maybe with more distance, I feel. (Laughter) I can see it for that, but it certainly seems to capture how, at least this was my experience growing up, as well, that it was seen as, kind of, a joke but also a marker of how strong and laddie that you are.

It just seems so divorced from what sex actually is, and yet that was all the discussion that was had, was basically porn, but the porn equivalent of conversations, I guess. You're talking about sex all of the time, but it's so far away from what sex is actually like, but that is what develops your idea of what sex is.

I'm sure this isn't going to be the case for all men, but that really struck me from watching that and then thinking back to

my own adolescence. Yes, that felt particularly tied to masculinity, potentially.

Abby:

The research supports what you're saying there. There is some research which looks at... First up, context setting: so, there was a study that came out in 2010, and I would argue that a lot of porn has become a bit more aggressive and violent since then, because we are seeing that reflected in sexual practices. But a study in 2010 which looked at 304 random pornography scenes found that aggressive behaviour towards women was in 90% of those scenes. That was aggressive behaviour from men towards women.

In these scenes, the women almost always responded with pleasure, which in reality would not be how they would probably respond to acts of degradation and harm. So, there's research by a guy called Wright, or a woman called Wright - I can't remember their first name, so don't hold me to this - but that looked at, if you're exposed to ideas enough, they become internalised and they become parts of your sexual scripts.

This research found that, in women, the age at which they first viewed porn had an impact on how sexually submissive they are. So, the earlier women had started watching pornography, the more passive and submissive they would be in bed. They hypothesised, and they've not yet researched, that the same would be true for men: that the earlier the exposure and the watching of pornography, the higher the levels of expressions of sexual aggression in men.

In reality, sex should be a mutual, equal, enjoyable experience, but what you're seeing in porn is like the eroticisation of degradation of women. That's inevitably going to have an

impact on what you think sex is like, if no-one else is having conversations about what sex is like.

Luke Jerdy: That would suggest that females and males view it in a similar way. You think that's the case?

Abby: Yes, I would say so.

Luke Jerdy: What do you think, Liz?

Liz Jones: I don't disagree with that to a certain extent. Just I feel, though, that males see it as something educational. Studies have shown that, as well, and that they see it as how they learn about sex.

Whether or not we think it's a good forum to learn about sex is irrelevant if they think it is, but for females it's not about learning sex. It's about learning about having relationships. Again, so it's skewed - completely skewed - on those two different levels. Females see it as more as a fantasy type of thing, and men see it more as an education, so, yes, I think it all conflates together, really.

Luke Jerdy: Does it have a negative impact on sexual health?

Abby: Absolutely. I'm not anti-porn, by the way. The conversation thus far has made it sound, probably, like I'm quite anti-porn.

I'm not, but with the increase in mainstreaming hard-core pornography, ease of access with the Internet, we're seeing an increase in risky sexual behaviours, which means not using condoms. So, you see an increase in multiple sexual partners, a decrease in condom use, an increase in having sex when intoxicated, and a massive increase in anal sex, without the sex education to go alongside that.

In 1992, 16% of heterosexual women would have anal sex. By 2009 that was 40% of heterosexual women would have anal sex. Now, anal sex is not the same as vaginal sex. The vagina self-lubricates. The rectum does not, so you'll see you're having young people exposed to loads of anal sex, to the point where some people think heterosexual penetrative sex is anal sex because that's what they've seen in porn, but no conversations in the RSE curriculum alongside that or in public spaces which say, "If you're having anal sex, you have to use lubrication because it doesn't self-lubricate. That tissue can tear. When you've got tears in tissue, you're more likely to get or pass an STI."

You're seeing an increase in risky sexual behaviours, including atypical acts, without the safe practices that you need to go with that.

Luke Jerdy:

So, what needs to change, Abby, because if you're not anti-porn, then what needs to change to improve these things? Is it a case of more regulation of the porn industry? It is a case of more education for young people, because if you're not anti-porn, then what's positive about it?

Abby: Porn has got loads of benefits, as in I'm anti-mainstream porn. The three biggest porn sites are owned by one company, so one company monopolises a lot of this porn and, therefore, is in control of what we're seeing.

If you look at the tags on these sites [in terms 0:23:09], "You can search by this, this, and this," it can be something else. So, I think it's two things: we need access to better pornography, and more education and conversation with people around the realities of porn and what sex should be like, but there's loads. There's an increase in ethical porn, for example, like Cindy Gallop's 'MakeLoveNotPorn' site, where people are producing their own porn and they're getting paid for it.

Also, you've got companies like Four Chambers, which create really artistic pornography and it's more... It's less about an aggressive or... I can't think of the word to articulate the way that sex comes across in mainstream porn, but you have companies that create really arty pornographic films that focus a lot more on connection, sensuality, consent, and then different practices as well.

In mainstream porn, you're seeing the mainlining of practices that you would historically see in BDSM communities. So, you see a lot more strangulation, choking, spitting, slapping, but this is all happening outside of the context that it would happen in a proper BDSM community, whereas in more ethically produced porn you're more likely to see or have written information about the wraparound to that production, if that makes sense.

Luke Jerdy: Yes, that makes sense, yes. What about you, Dan? What do you think about that?

Dan: Yes. No, I completely agree. I think it's that culture change is important, and that context is so important. Putting pornography in that context is what would need to happen. I'm also not anti-porn. I feel like at one point I was. I've come on a bit of a journey with that, but I think I feel like it is comparable to mainstream films and art, as well, the sort of things that are being perpetuated, those kinds of narratives that are, I guess, changing a bit.

There is more prominence of stories and viewpoints from people who wouldn't have been able to express those earlier, because of the studio structures and mainstream discourses, but I think it's the same thing: if those things are the only stories told, then those are the things that people are going to internalise. They're just going to be perpetuated again.

I think the same thing goes with porn, really. The more diversity and the more that you see of other kinds of relationships and the things that you would... That are safer and more healthy, then the better, really, rather than say, "It's not okay at all."

I don't think regulation, although there should be... I think that there are certain levels of safety that can be gained through that. I think a culture change is more effective and more important, as difficult as that is to achieve

Abby: Defo. I also think, sorry, potentially exploration of different types of pornographic material. What we see is very filmy. It leaves nothing to the imagination, for the most part. It's very immediate and in your face, but what's wrong with erotic

literature? There's a website that has been devoted to erotic literature since the '90s, and the interface has hardly changed since then, but there's nothing wrong.

As humans, we want to explore sexually. We're curious. We want to see things, we want to read things, we want to imagine things, but if you explore pornography in a different way, by read it – and I don't mean like a Mills & Boon, like more intentional literature – you have the ability to then imagine in your head. You're not confronted with, “This is what this should look like.” What would I like that to look like? What do I imagine that would feel like? There's nothing wrong with that.

Luke Jerdy: Do you think it affects relationships, as well? For instance, if you didn't watch porn, does that make you more connected and loving towards your partner in a sexual environment? I guess it's a case-by-case basis, but in general have either of you experienced that in your own relationships, like compared to your relationship with porn at the time?

Dan: I think, as you say, it depends. One of the things that I think is a good thing to change around porn, potentially, is it can be very individualising and isolating, especially in the way, Abby, you were describing the three, the big porn companies.

It made me think of the attention economy, and how those tech companies operate, and the way that they want to divert you into a narrower and narrower rabbit hole by yourself, essentially.

I think that's a dangerous thing that porn... It's not that porn can do. It's the way that the porn companies and websites are

set up, really, but I think it could be something that is more communal.

It's not necessarily bad if you're just by yourself, but I think that kind of dynamic can isolate you and hinder a relationship, but I think, yes, as you say, it depends on the relationship, and the context, and how you're using it.

Abby:

Totally, I agree with you there because it can be isolating. Like, a lot of the time when you talk about people's relationship with pornography, it's them and their phone, on their own. The way that those mainstream tube sites work is you get the little video previews, and people actually select parts of the clip to use in those previews. As a rule, they use the most extreme stills where women look really shocked and appalled, and so that, kind of, leads you.

Then, obviously, there are algorithms within the site which means that, when you watch one video, it'll send you more videos like that. So, you can find yourself watching more and more extreme pornography that doesn't necessarily align with the sex that you want to have or what you thought you were into, but porn doesn't have to be enjoyed on your own. Porn can be something that's used with a partner, or partners - not judging - but something that you can explore together, and watch together and be like, "Do you want to try that?" or, "Ooh, I don't like the look of that."

It doesn't have to be some seedy, secretive thing. It can be a fun part of sexual connection and exploration with a partner, but some partners don't like porn and will feel betrayed by a partner watching pornography. Everybody has got different

values and different relationships with pornography. It's important to talk about that with a partner, I think.

Liz Jones: It can also be used as a form of abuse, as well. When I worked with domestic abuse perpetrators, how common it was that they would use porn to tell their partners that they were useless in bed or they didn't look as beautiful as these women. If the partner didn't want to have sex, they would go and put porn on in front of them and say, "Well, I'm going to do this," so it can be used really abusively, as well, within relationships. Have you found this yourselves?

Dan: Yes, I think I've come across examples like that, as well, but again that's very non-relational. It's being inflicted on someone. I think, like so many other things, it can be used in that way. It's not necessarily something intrinsic to porn itself, but potentially the porn that was being used in those examples could be fitted to that situation.

Abby: What research shows us, as well, is that when men view pornography - and it can be as little as watching porn a few times a year - you see that they have lower levels of satisfaction with their own sex lives, their own real-life sex lives. They are less satisfied with their own performance, so sex is a performative thing. They are less satisfied with their partners' bodies, as well, especially when you think about mainstream porn is predominantly slim, white women. There are people in relationships with women who aren't slim and aren't white, who don't find their partner's body as

attractive anymore, because of the pornography that they're consuming. So, it's not even just that porn is this otherworld thing over there that doesn't have real-life impacts. It has real-life, cognitive and relational impacts, even if you're not aware of them.

Dan: That's so interesting about seeing how it's viewed as education, or at least that you should be recreating it somehow. I think the same goes for other sorts of media as well, but that really portrays how there's just no... There's very little boundary between that, that it has a direct effect on how you view your own sex life. Rather than something that is part of it, it's something to measure it up to.

Abby: Then people pornography their own sex lives, as well, by recording it. I don't know how frequently people would record themselves having sex in the '80s, because I wasn't alive or having sex in the '80s, but now you see it's really normal, even in young people, and older people, to record yourself having sex, which, again, then you have to look at yourself having sex, which is not the point of having sex.

Then, also, this leads to threats of revenge pornography, which are a criminal offence now because they're so common. Or they're becoming criminal offences with the DA Act, but yes, it's really common for those videos to be used against somebody, as well.

Luke Jerdy: Why is that common, do you think, directly because of porn?

Abby: I reckon it's a combination of easy access to porn and, if you'd had to record yourself in the '90s, you'd have to set up a tripod or get a video camera. Look at Pam and Tommy. I mean let's not look at Pam and Tommy, because she didn't consent to having that tape released, but it was a big, handheld video camera, a type of tape that you had to have a special machine to watch. Having a really high-resolution camera in your pocket or on your bedside table makes it way easier.

Luke Jerdy: What do you think, Dan?

Dan: I think it portrays still the really misogynistic views we can have of porn, and also how we treat porn as still a pariah thing, the idea that, if there is a video of someone having sex on the Internet, that is something to be ashamed of. It's interesting how ubiquitous it is and yet that is still the pervasive sense. That's not to not talk about how it's non-consensual that it's put out there, but the idea that that is what would be going through someone's head were they to post revenge pornography, it'll be, "This will shame this person that there is now a video of them out there."

Luke Jerdy: Particularly if it's a woman.

Dan: That's quite troubling, yes. I've only heard of cases where it has been revenge pornography against women. I don't know [what

those statistics are 0:33:30], but it seems predominantly that's how that's used.

Abby: It is profoundly gendered, revenge pornography, yes.

Luke Jerdy: Why do you think that cyber bullying, revenge porn, is on the rise, and has increased so much, and is increasing more and more?

Dan: Ease of access, I think, will be why that would be increasing as a medium.

Luke Jerdy: Ease of access to porn?

Dan: Ease of access to doing it.

Luke Jerdy: To doing it.

Dan: To recording yourself and putting it online. In terms of why it happens, I think, talking about masculinity and gender, I think that's one of the main... That's one of the big reasons as to why this happens: what we think of as masculinity, and what it means to show your masculinity, and how you would show yourself if you're perceived to have been wronged in a relationship context. How you should then respond to that in

these cases often, what you're able to do, as a man, to a woman.

Although it is being criminalised, there is also a dark level of acceptability to this thing, which I don't think we really grapple with. When there are comments, when there are statements made by politicians that, "This is unacceptable, we don't tolerate this as a society," my response is usually, "No, we actually do. We do tolerate this as a society, and we really need to grapple with that."

I think there is, maybe, on some level, that sort of mixed mess- There is that mixed messaging going on. I hope it can change, but I think, while we pretend that it's not going on, I think... I hope this makes sense, because I think it's quite a strange, unspoken thing, but that's how it feels for me.

Luke Jerdy: It does. Just I'm wondering who tolerates it. Am I just in a bubble of all my lovely friends and you two that don't tolerate, that wouldn't tolerate something like that?

Dan: I think for me it would be the authorities because it would be so hard. I think the message you would get from the legal system, even if it is illegal, it's so hard to achieve justice in these sorts of situations, but I think just that it's not just what is written in the laws and how the institutions operate. I think even the sorts of conversations, and yes, maybe we're in nice bubbles where these kinds of things wouldn't be said, but I think you would still hear comments that, like, "Oh, it's fine. It's okay. Just get over it," kind of.

Not even directly, “That was an okay thing to do.” There'd still possibly be a, “Oh, it's not as bad as you say. Just don't look at it,” kind of thing, in the case of if there was revenge pornography. I think there is just this kind of culture, but, because of where it has been, maybe, more explicit, we've still now moved into a point where we just accept it more. That's our coping strategy with it happening, rather than actively challenging it and shifting the conversation.

Liz Jones:

It still feeds into, though, and we've talked in other podcasts around the victim-blaming culture, the slut blaming, that females get punished for having sex, much more. For men, it's acceptable for females, so there's more at stake for women when, with this revenge porn, if something is put on the Internet etc., let alone their own individual embarrassment, humiliation, everything that goes with that, and the fact it's on there forever.

I still think, as a society, unless we do this talking and start giving women agency around sex, etc., we're still socialised to see women as subservient to male, subordinate in sexual activity, etc., which I think increases the chances and the likelihood of it happening – revenge porn happening.

Abby:

Absolutely. I think socially, as well, we have opposites. I can't find the word, but sex has the opposite impact on men and women in terms of social status. For men – and I'm being very generalising here, so forgive me, but for men, typically – the more sexual conquests you have, the more of a man you are.

A lad might have had sex with loads of women. It's all about how attractive are these women? "How hot are the women that I can score?" if you will. I don't have young people's vernacular anymore. Then for women it's the opposite, so the more you give it up, the less valuable you are.

There is this kind of imbalance when it comes to videos coming out. For the man, it'll be like, "Sick. She's hot. Look what you're doing to her," and for the woman it'll be like, "Oh, my God, everyone can see what they're doing to you."

It's not just about sex. It's like a drip effect. In terms of how this happens, look at magazines: women's magazines, gossip magazines, men's magazines. These values come in at a very low level and lead us to accept things at a very different level later on.

Luke Jerdy: Why hasn't it progressed, because I feel like that has been said since I was about 14, 15, since I became sexually aware and developed as a man? That's the classic. That is the classic thing to say about how men and women are viewed. If a woman sleeps with too many men, she's considered promiscuous, blah, blah, blah. If a man is, he's considered a lad. So, has that progressed at all, or is it exactly the same as it was 15 years ago, because I feel like we've been repeating that line over and over again? Not that it shouldn't be said, but why hasn't that changed?

Abby: It has shifted somewhat, so now you see women are allowed to be more empowered sexually, to make decisions about who they have sex with, and that's cool. We've had slut walks. I was

going to say, “A few years ago.” It’s probably like a decade ago now, but this, “If I want to be a slut, if I want to have sex like a slut, if I want to dress like a slut, I can. It’s cool. I’m still valuable,” but the legacy remains. Cultural shifts like this take a long old time to unpick.

You even see things like OnlyFans, where women are choosing to, sometimes, make a lot of money by creating their own soft-core or hard-core pornography, so in that sense they’re empowered to make this decision. It’s economically empowering. At the same time, there will still be lots of people who shame them for it. Slow progress is still progress, but we’re still not where we need to be.

Luke Jerdy:

Do you think that has got something to do with the fact that, say, whenever there’s a documentary or something which shows either women that are escorts, or women that are strippers, or women that are on OnlyFans, the undertone of it is, “They’re not happy. They’re not happy. They’re not happy.”

So, are they picking out the wrong women to show this document? I’m sure there are, but are there women out there that are genuinely happy doing that stuff, making money, being objectified by men, getting money from the kinds of men that will pay to watch OnlyFans? Are there women out there that are genuinely happy doing that?

Abby:

100%, there are women there who love it. If they could pick any job in the world, that would be it. This isn’t all women who engage in sex work of any kind, whether stripping, OnlyFans, or full-service sex work. There will be some women who do it

because they don't really have much of another choice in terms of, "How can I make this much money?" or, "How can I work around the school run?"

There are loads of considerations, loads of reasons why people go into sex work, but there are very definitely women who have always been really sexual, loved sex, loved the exhibitionism of sex, loved that dynamic, loved to make money that way.

Luke Jerdy: But the view we get of it is that they don't exist, right?

Abby: Yes. The conversations around sex work, a lot of the time, focus on objectification and exploitation, which they do happen. That's unavoidable. They do happen, but that's not the full picture.

Luke Jerdy: Yes. It's, kind of, like a standard way that these documentaries work, isn't it? It starts off with them, like, "Yes, I'm great. I make loads of money." Then there's a shot of them later on where they're crying. It's like, "Oh, my God, this is awful. No women should be doing this." I guess that's because documentaries always want an angle, don't they? Actually, it wouldn't be that interesting if it was just, "I'm having a great life. I really enjoy it," done.

Liz Jones: But I do, I think you have to look at also the fact that that does happen to women, and why they do end up in sex working,

either on the streets because they're addicted to some substances that that's the only way, or they're forced to.

There's sexual trafficking that goes across the whole world, of females, so I think Abby's right: there will be some women, but I think they're not women who are working on the streets. They're not working in seedy little parlours. They're not.

These are women who have some agency and are probably earning a significant amount of money. Their lives are very, very different for the vast majority of women, who are doing it to survive more than they're doing it because they get pleasure.

Abby:

Like you say, Liz, they've got a certain amount of privilege to begin with, including enough to somewhat negate the stigma that comes with this work in the first place, but, like you say, trafficking is a very real thing. Street sex work is a very real, very dangerous thing, but then also, when we look at other sex work, a lot of it is systemically exploitative.

If you look at the labour laws that apply to strippers, the amount that they have to pay to strip in one club, all the costs and fees, the lack of protections that come alongside it. So, by its nature, unless a woman is actively choosing to engage in sex work and has enough control of how she does that, how safe she is while she does that, the money that she gets, a lot of the time it is exploitative because a lot of the time it's run by men.

Luke Jerdy:

Even if you're rich beyond your wildest dreams from doing it, you're going to have to encounter some men that you don't

want to encounter, aren't you? There's still always going to be that element, whereas I guess you're going to get that in every job that you do. You're going to encounter people that you don't particularly want to be friends with or you want to have to deal with, but I guess when it's sex involved it's a different level of intimacy, isn't it?

Liz Jones: But you're also judged then because, if something terrible does happen and you disclose that, you're going to be judged more because of you're a sex worker than you are because of, you know-

Luke Jerdy: Yes.

Liz Jones: I think that's still a societal thing that we still think that sex workers are probably the lowest of the low. I personally don't think that, but that's how they're judged. So, they don't have the same rights in society that I would have if I was attacked, and are treated differently.

Dan: I just wanted to pick on what you were saying, Luke, about the documentaries, as well. Even the narratives that can come around seeing sex works either as complete... As the lowest of the low and we should discard them, or they are victims and we need to protect them. Either way, they are erased from the story as to what their experience actually is.

That's the prevailing ways that we view them. Even when it's in a, "We need to help them," it becomes a, "We need to save

them.” Then it's often, yes, men going in and making the decisions on how to do that, still ignoring what's actually going on for them. So, it's two sides of this same coin, with the same outcome, unfortunately.

Luke Jerdy: Yes, I think that's a really good point, Dan.

Liz Jones: I did look, actually, before this podcast. I was looking online for various things. It's interesting, when it comes to preventing any sexual, unwanted cyber harassment, or bullying, or anything like that, that all the preventative measures are aimed at the females, at the victims, because they are predominately females, what they need to do to change their behaviour in order not to be attacked, which I think is one of the reasons why we're doing this podcast. So, what sort of messages to any male listeners would you like to give that they could take forward or pass on to their friends around this whole subject area?

Dan: For me, it would be just think about masculinity and what it is to be a man, what that means to you, and to your friends and in society. I don't think we even ask that basic question a lot of the time. I think even conversations around gender often obscure that, and just bringing that into the fold.

I think that can be potentially a lot less threatening way because, I think, sometimes these conversations, I can understand how it could be taken as the view that, “You're speaking to me as a man and you think I'm going to sexually abuse.”

Unfortunately, there is that connection between gender and sexual abuse there, but it can feel very threatening. That's understandable, so just opening the conversation as, "What does masculinity mean to you, and how do you relate that to sex?" I think is a good place to start, and just to start thinking about that and what messages you're getting.

Abby:

Absolutely. I would build on that to say to men, "You deserve good sex. Women deserve good sex." The sex that you see in porn, where you're pounding somebody down for 90 seconds and then they fake an orgasm, is not good, mutually enjoyable sex.

Men deserve models of masculine sexuality that aren't rooted in aggression, and dominance, and conquest. So, my challenge would be try and go, and find some good porn, some porn that explores sensuality, and fun, and laughter, and mutual pleasure.

Those representations of men having sex in that way are absolutely out there. It's a much more enjoyable experience and fulfilling experience for everyone involved, so just find different representations of sex. Then try and think about how you can incorporate that into the sex that you have, even the sex that you have with yourself.

A lot of the time when men use pornography, they'll even masturbate in the same way, use the same motions to pleasure themselves every time. Then sex can become less enjoyable because you're not getting the same sensation that you get from yourself, so play with your own sensuality and then explore that with other people, if you are someone that has sex with other people.

Luke Jerdy: So, it's not a case of try not watching any porn for a week, two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, see how you feel?

Abby: You absolutely could do that. If you want a challenge, knock yourself out, see how it... Because porn, it does impact what you need to become aroused. The more pornography you watch...

Luke Jerdy: I agree.

Abby: ...the more extreme things you need to become aroused, so, if you want to just clock out, cool, see how you feel. Then, if you fancy dabbling in porn, get some artsy stuff if you can, or some genuine amateur stuff where people are really enjoying themselves and connecting.

Luke Jerdy: Did you see 'Love' on Netflix, the film, when it was out? I don't know if it's still on there.

Abby: Which film?

Luke Jerdy: It was called 'Love' and it was like proper actors and good representations of intimacy and sex. They actually have sex on camera. Yes, it's like you say, really arty. Yes, it's worth

checking out if you want to explore exactly what you're talking about, Abby.

Abby: Yes. I definitely will watch that. Thank you. I would say also the caveat that artsy doesn't mean inaccessible. Do you know what I mean? It doesn't mean, "It's some highbrow thing that I'm not into."

Luke Jerdy: No.

Abby: It just tends to focus more on touch, intimacy, connection.

Luke Jerdy: Yes.

Abby: Also, the opposite of that is there's something called 'Liberated: The New Sexual Revolution' on Netflix. It looks at young people on spring break. Watch it, because to me that demonstrates the impact that pornography and the pornographication of culture is having on sexual norms. I would implore you to watch it and then have a self-soothing activity for after, because it's a lot.

Luke Jerdy: Great. (Laughter) We've got some good recommendations there and some brilliant points of discussion for the listeners to take away, so thank you so much for joining us today, Abby and Dan. We really, really appreciate your time.

Abby: No, thank you so much for having us.

Dan: Cool. Thanks very much for having us.

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