

THE OTHER SEX TALK | EMMA A. JANE

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

UNSW Centre for Ideas: Welcome to 10 Minute Genius, an eight-part series created by the UNSW Centre for Ideas, to provide pause and create a space to engage with new ideas from UNSW Sydney's thinkers, dreamers and envelope pushers, as they help to make sense of the relentless information vortex in which we live. In under 10 minutes, or roughly the same amount of time it takes to put a condom on an expired EpiPen, Associate Professor Emma A. Jane will give you the sex talk you probably should have had when you were a teen, outlining the importance of a well-rounded sex ed curriculum.

Emma A. Jane: As a parent of a teenager, I've survived my fair share of bad sex ed classes. The first was when my daughter was halfway through primary school. It was an early evening session run by a woman who encouraged everyone to get the juvenile giggling out of the way from the get go. She was super nice to our kids too. Can anyone name a part of the female reproductive system? Was one of her first questions. My daughter could barely contain herself. She was all, "Pick me! Pick me!".

er answer was the inner thigh. Not quite on the money, but close enough. One of her friends got equally excited when the instructor crowdsourced synonyms for penis. "Oh, I know! I know!", this kid said. "Anus!". Again, so close. And finally, who could forget the school bully whose stage door dad kept feeding him answers to the really tricky questions. Imagine our surprise when this kid correctly identified the mons pubis and urethra, as well as both labias majora and minor.

As a feminist gender studies academic I was glad this particular sex ed session got granular about the whole vulva region, but I was still appalled at the glaring omissions. Where are the clitorises in the anatomical drawings? The same sex couples having their special snuggles? What was this, 1950? Maybe these topics will be covered in the next session I thought, and

waited patiently for another two years. The 'here comes puberty' talk was even worse. Despite a plethora of deets about erections, ejaculations and acts of heterosexual penetration. There was zero acknowledgement, one, that sex isn't just about the procreation and two, that sex doesn't just involve penises in vaginas.

When we got home my daughter thumbed through her complimentary take home pack of surfboard sized sanitary napkins. Apparently, some parents had vetoed the handing out of tampons, on the ground that, I don't know, too useful at swimming carnivals? "Um, um, um, what do Josh and Tyler do when they have sex?", my daughter asked after I'd used one of my expired EpiPens to demonstrate condom operations. Josh and Tyler are two of our queer friends. "Uh, mum, and how do Sarah and Amber have their babies?". Sarah and Amber are two of our other queer friends. It was time for us to have the *other* sex talk. I'm talking about the queer feminist sex talk, where you explain that sex isn't just about the marriage, the baby making, the man parts and the money shots.

Since then, I've been doing my best to fill in the gaps and there are a lot of gaps. But now my daughter's halfway through high school. I feel like I'm in a losing battle with a tsunami of penis-centric propaganda. Take virginity for instance. Lately I've been overhearing a lot of hair-raising chit chat about virginity and who has or hasn't 'lost it' in my daughter's peer group. Losing in this context is such a weird choice of verb right? It sounds like something you do if you were careless or absent minded. Ah, has anyone seen my virginity? I could have sworn I left it around here somewhere? Let me try to remember the last time I was using it. Societal obsessions about teenagers and virginity usually concern age and marital status, but traditional notions of virginity define sex as a penis parking itself in a vagina. Sorry, way too simplistic. I meant to say in an ejaculating penis parking itself in a vagina. This strikes me as a bizarre and terribly unhelpful way to define sex for our kids. It's a teaching model drawn directly from some creepy combo of *Mad Men* and PornHub. The first time he discovered the revelation that is solo sex, the first time you kiss someone passionately on the mouth, the first time you fall hopelessly in love. Why don't any of these count as virginity terminators? And why the hell do we need to identify a single act that marks a person's transition from unsexual to sexual anyway?

So what? You might ask. Who cares if our enduring obsession with virginity is such a dick act? And what does it matter if queers and orgasms and consent and masturbation are all off the sex ed menu? After all, we never got taught that stuff at school and we're doing all right. Well, sadly, we're not. The grim truth is that more than one in five Australian women say they find the sex in their relationship unpleasurable or only moderately pleasurable. Meanwhile, around 95% of heterosexual men, usually or always orgasm during sex compared to only 65% of heterosexual women. Yes, concerned parents, the orgasm gap is real. Yet the subject of pleasure is still conspicuously absent from most sex ed curricula, where the focus is almost exclusively on the mechanics of either, A, making new humans, or, B, not becoming a Petri dish for disease. These are important parts of a well-rounded sex ed curriculum. But sideline the real reason most peeps have sex in the first place. It would be like teaching a cooking class focused solely on the clinical anatomy of digestion! Mmmm peristalsis! With no mention of the fact that food can also be pretty damn yummy.

In addition to ignoring the needs and desires of queer and trans kids, the reproduction and risk-based model of sex ed curricula overlooks the fact that the skill set required for negotiating pleasure is the same as that required for negotiating sexual health and consent. That is the confidence to speak frankly, and with a sense of non toxic entitlement about what we're up and down for in the sack. Providing more nuanced, inclusive and realistic sex ed for our offspring is important, because if they don't get this info from us, they're going to get it from their screens. And regardless of whether the genre is rom com or hardcore porn, the sex we see on screen is geared almost entirely to straight men's pleasure.

While only between 18 and 25% of women orgasm solely from penetrative intercourse, the vast bulk of on screen sex either explicitly or implicitly suggests this is how everyone gets their collective rocks off. In films and TV shows, the standard sex script is usually straight off an Ikea instruction manual, insert tab A into slot B. In porn, it's even worse. Research shows that 93% of boys and 62% of girls see online pornography before they're 18 with many of them using it as a sexual textbook. The standard anti porn line is that pornography is dangerous because it is contributing to the sexualisation of culture. My view is that culture is always, and already, sexualised because its constituent human parts are sexual beings, and that porn is dangerous because it is contributing to making straight men bad in bed. I have a friend whose

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man friend performed unrealistic porn trope Y, then chastised her for not enjoying it properly, when she said it didn't float her boat. I have another friend who told her new partner she wasn't into his Energizer bunny sex stylings, and was gobsmacked when he said that, like most women, she just had an anaemic libido. Call me old fashioned, but I don't want this sort of sex for myself, and I don't want it for anyone else.

Anyway, when I had the other sex talk with my daughter, it went weirdly well. Here's the TLDR, people don't just have sex to make more people, but because it can be enjoyable. Everyone likes different stuff, and lots of this stuff isn't depicted in the media. If she started making out with people who'd only ever seen sex on screen, they might not be to crash hot at it. If she wanted to enjoy herself, she'd need to get good at speaking up about what she wanted. And that comment about the inner thighs had been super cute. I also asked if we could please reassess our use of the V, for virginity, word and reframe sex is involving a wide range of acts starting with conversations about sex itself. My daughter made it clear that hearing her parent talk about sex rivalled having to eat raw tomato, in the cruel and unusual, please God never again, stakes. She did, however, manage to refrain from plugging her ears and chanting, la la la la la, until the inner thigh reminder, at least. Your mileage may vary, but I'm calling this a win.

So now I've given you the *other* sex talk, maybe you can have it with someone else. And this can be one gap that we all fill together!

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