

the official channel 4 interview

by benjie goodhart

The first series of The Sex Education Show was a broad overview of sex in this country. This series is a bit different, isn't it?

Yeah. Series one was pre-watershed, and the content that we had reflected the general attitude towards sex that was appropriate for pre-watershed transmission. Now we're going to 9pm and the content this time around is reflecting that. Specifically we are looking at how porn is affecting the high street, our sex lives and most particularly how it's affecting teenagers.

What's your attitude to porn in general? Is there a place for it in society?

It's really interesting, this, because before I started to film this series I felt very strongly that I absolutely didn't want to be the Mary Whitehouse person saying 'porn is wrong'. I enjoy a bit of porn, porn has its place, I would be the last person on earth to say that it's wrong. But interestingly, coming to the end of shooting this series, I've been exposed to a lot more pornography that is on the internet - pornography that I didn't even know existed. And I've become quite disturbed and quite upset by the amount of stuff that is out there. So much so I think there's a place for it, I also think there's a lot of deviant stuff out there that's easily accessible, and without doubt it has an affect on your psyche.

How about the girls? How are they affected?

The girls we spoke to are all extremely concerned about not having perfect bodies. For me, one of the most revealing exercises that we did this series, was we had a vagina gallery, with big, graphic, open-legged pictures of vulvas. And we brought in a group of 15-year-old boys and asked

them to have a look at these vaginas, and to just react to them in general. And, I kid you not, they didn't bat an eyelid. And when I said to them "Can you go and stand next to the vagina that you think is the most sexually attractive?" they all, bar one, stood next to the vagina that had absolutely no pubic hair whatsoever. Now that, clearly, comes from pornography. And when we did the same test with the girls, they too all stood next to the vagina that had no pubic hair or very, very little. And when we talked to them further, the girls admitted that they are also starting to shave all their pubes off, and that the boys kind of expect them too. When I was a teenager, 20 years ago, I didn't touch my bikini line, I didn't worry about my pubes at all. I find it worrying that 13, 14, 15-year-old girls think that their pubic hair is not normal.

Presumably there's also something to be said for correcting a lot of the misinformation that teens pick up from porn?

Yes, which is why we're doing some really frank sex education in schools, showing kids, with live models, what vaginas and penises and bodies look like, and doing our own bit of education. There's also new government guidelines in that every school must have compulsory sex education from a young age. I think that with knowledge and education hopefully we can tackle this crucial subject. But I think it's a slow process.

What else is going to be in the series?

The spine of each show, effectively, is us going into schools and teaching very frank sex education lessons, and the response we're getting from the teenagers from those lessons. It is ex-

traordinary what these kids will say to you. For example, we'll say to teenagers, "If you watch porn, how far do you think the average guy can come when he ejaculates?" And they all say "Oh, it must be about five feet," or "Oh, I've seen a film where this guy could shoot it at least nine feet".

We'll also have separately filmed items where I'm looking at the sexualisation of the high street, and the fact that in supermarkets now you can buy vibrating cock rings. How is that affecting us? You're going down the aisles, you're getting loo roll, you're getting courgettes, 'Oh, I'm going to get a cock ring as well'. That would never have happened a few years ago.

Obviously your attitude to pornography has changed the more you've seen its darker side. Does that mean you would never be able to enjoy any form of porn again?

I hope not. No, no, of course not, it's not going to hinder or inhibit me. But I talked to the crew about making this series, and I think it affected us all in the same way. When you are this up close to it and exposed to it in this way, it has put us all off sex for the time being.

Have you found making this series a harrowing experience, then?

No, I wouldn't say harrowing. It has, at times, been distressing for me, and I wasn't prepared for that. And at times it's been disturbing. At other times it's been joyful, getting your message across to teens and seeing that they've learned something from you. It's a spectrum of extremes.

