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|  | Speak Up – Kōrerotia  The influence of porn on young people’s understandings of sex and relationships  17 February 2021 |
| Male | This programme was first broadcast on Canterbury’s access media station Plains FM and was made with the assistance of New Zealand on Air. |
| Female | Coming up next conversations on human rights with “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”, here on Plains FM. |
| Sally | E ngā mana,  E ngā reo,  E ngā hau e whā  Tēnā koutou katoa  Nau mai ki tēnei hōtaka: “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia”.    Tune in as our guests “Speak Up”, sharing their unique and powerful experiences and opinions and may you also be inspired to “Speak Up” when the moment is right.  Ko “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia” tēnei, ko Sally Carlton ahau. Today’s topic is the influence of porn on young people’s understandings of sexual behaviour. Whew, that’s a bit of a mouthful but I think it’s important to have that really long title but that actually explains exactly what we’re hoping to talk about. And I guess in a more simplified way, we’re talking about the role of porn in young people’s lives today.  We’re thinking about online porn - which can be often very aggressive, can show non-consensual sex, shows behaviour that normally we might deem inappropriate or unhealthy; at worst, actually illegal - and if young people are viewing this porn, then what is that teaching them about sex and relationships? How are they taking these ideas then forward with them as they enter the world of adulthood and what are we seeing as the implications of that thinking and that behaviour?  So it’s a really important topic. This topic was suggested to me actually a couple of years ago by Anne Heins, who is my co-host for today, and then saw last year that the Light Project came down to Christchurch to run a workshop and it got me thinking about it again and thought right, let’s just do it. So here we are. We’ve got Anne, we’ve got Jo from the Light Project and we’ve Tracy Clelland who are all going to talk to us and share some ideas about porn and young people.  If you could please introduce yourselves. Anne, maybe we’ll start with you. Tell us a little bit about yourself and why you’re interested in this topic. |
| Anne | Cool. E mihi ana au ki te mana whenua o te rohe nei, tēnā koutou, e whakamai rongo ana  My name is Anne. I don’t actually work in this area at all but I came across the issue several years ago when I stumbled on another TED Talk by Ran Gavrieli on porn. He kind of focused on the human trafficking and slavery side of things but that also got me researching a bit more and thinking as well as that devastating issue, the porn available and so easily available now to young people, what harm that was doing and what ideas that was giving young people of all genders in terms of their own sexuality and their own, I guess, healthy relationships.  Many of us who grow up in the early 2000s, the 90s, and kind of any earlier periods might have no clue just how much that has changed since we were young and the comparatively innocent stuff we might have come across and what that’s teaching our young people about sex. So for me, it’s just a massive wellbeing issue, it’s something we don’t talk about enough, it’s something that parents aren’t aware of enough and I’m someone who is quite comfortable kind of bringing up some taboo topics in polite conversations so I just do that wherever I can really. |
| Sally | So I think that’s probably key, the fact that it’s a bit taboo. I think that will probably be something that comes out again and again throughout this conversation. You mentioned a TED Talk, that’s a good opportunity to introduce Jo Robertson from the Light Project who actually gave a fantastic Ted Talk about this. So Jo, maybe if you could introduce yourself please. |
| Jo | Sure, hi. I loved also Ran Gavrieli’s TED talk, that was a really great contribution he gave to the field, I think, and I watched that a couple of years ago and it also really inspired me. I come at this from a slightly different angle in that I trained as a counsellor first and I work with trauma and abuse in young people and alongside that, I did about seven years of sex education in schools as an external provider which I really loved, it was so much fun. And then after that, after I did the counselling with young people around trauma, I then decided to focus a little bit more and I did my Masters in sex therapy through Sydney University and in doing that and in starting to see adult couples and I also see women, I heard over and over again how porn was shaping people’s sexual repertoires, sexual scripts, what they wanted from their partners and sometimes how porn was creating betrayal in their relationship because they hadn’t consented to porn being used or for the types of porn that was being watched that really hurt one of the other partners.  So I was in that space and seeing that face to face and then I met up with Nicki Denham who is my colleague and she was in the sex trafficking field and doing lots of interviews in the Philippines around cybersex and girls being filmed and yeah, so we kind of serendipitously, coincidentally met up and she was saying what she was seeing in terms of overseas stuff and I was saying what I was seeing with couples and then we looked at what was happening in New Zealand and we felt there was a bit of a gap and so heaps of really fantastic organisations working in sexual health and in sex education, but this gap around awareness of porn specifically. So we did a really deep dive there and we did an enormous survey and then we have since developed two really robust websites. One more focused on adults supporting young people and then one solely dedicated to young people and different kinds of online sexual issues that they face. And in doing so have focused grouped that a lot with young people and done another whole survey as well. So yeah, I came from a therapeutic angle and then have landed in this youth space from developing resources, doing training in the community but I also spend a lot of time on the sites themselves to try and understand what the trends are and what an organic experience for like a 14-year-old might be. So that’s a big part of my lens I guess, is what do the sites feel like. |
| Sally | Fantastic, thank you. And Tracy? |
| Tracy | Kia ora. My name is Tracy Clelland and I’m a lecturer at the University of Canterbury. My main area of lecturing is in health education and so my passions really have always been sexuality education and health education across the whole curriculum.  Because we also need to remember that we can’t separate sexuality education from all of health education. If we’re talking about mental health, we’re also talking about sexuality. I come from a very strong education background, I was first of all a Family Planner educator at the age of 22, so very young.  I have a real passion for changing the kōrero around this topic. So I’ve had about 30 years in this space. So I’m a lecturer now and I train the teachers in sexuality education. Over the last few years, again, there has been a big shift in terms of what young people can see, how they can access information and we’re also trying to tell young people to be critical thinkers and we’re telling them to search up information. So anything you want to know, you need to search. But when we come to the topic of sexuality, we’re telling young people that you can’t search up that information because what will you find and there’s a whole real complexity around this space because as you said, there’s a real taboo around it so you search for it but then you can’t talk about it and so there’s this complexity of… so what does this mean for young people.  So my passion really is about supporting through education, ways that we can support whānau and young people to change that kōrero around not just pornography but the broader concepts of sexuality education. I’m also a mother of two teenage boys and that has been fantastic because we’ve had these conversations around sexuality and it’s just a natural, organic process.  So I wrote an article last year around how we talk to young people around sexuality and my teenage son, who was 16, walked in and said, “Why are you calling it talk *to*, it should be talk *with*, this is the problem, Mum” and I knew that but even just that change in wording, the article wasn’t saying what I knew was important. So we need to talk *with* young people.  And I’ll give you a quote from a young person - because if we’re going to talk about pornography and sexuality, we need to talk about youth voice and the youth perspective - this young person said, “I feel like that stuff is really awkward to talk about with your parents”. But then another young person said, “The big thing in the media about how terrible it is, it doesn’t help at all, it doesn’t help broach that conversation”.  But after 30 years in this space, I feel like sometimes things haven’t changed that much in terms of young people are still telling me that it’s really hard to talk around sexuality. I’m also doing my doctoral studies around parental engagement in sexuality education. So I’ve got the parent voices, the wider whānau voice around how they actually do want to have this kōrero with young people but they don’t know how. |
| Sally | So important. It’s interesting you call it ‘sexuality education’ rather than ‘sex education’. |
| Tracy | Yes well actually the new title - because we’ve just got new guidelines out - are called ‘relationship and sexuality education’. At the moment, myself and another colleague are creating a whole lot of resources for New Zealand around that guide and how teachers can implement that guide. So there’s going to be videos etc., we’ll be connecting with all of Jo’s resources because they are amazing especially the youth resources. Because teachers are telling us we understand you’ve got this new guide on relationships and sexuality education but how do we do it. So yes, really important we don’t use the term ‘sex education’. |
| Sally | We might have our first song then and we’ve got Anne’s choice which was Lianne La Havas, ‘What You Don’t Do’. |
| Anne | I guess I went for a song that was kind of the anthesis of the really unhealthy porn that we are talking about because I think the great majority of us, yeah sure we want great sex but also we want this trusting, exciting, fulfilling relationship where we are known and loved and accepted and I think for many young people it seems that the porn that is so easily available now is actually making that kind of healthy relationship potentially a little bit more difficult with some of the stuff that they might be learning, potentially even before they’ve been in a relationship. So yeah, this song is about what I see is a healthy relationship, authenticity, treating your partner well and the kind of deep, pleasurable, safe bond with someone that so many of us are looking for. |
|  | **MUSIC BY LIANNE LA HAVAS – WHAT YOU DON’T DO** |
| Sally | Ko “Speak Up” – “Kōrerotia” tēnei. Today we’re talking about porn and young people. Jo, perhaps we’ll start with you, could you tell us a wee bit about this new porn landscape that we’re seeing that Anne touched on. The fact that if we’ve grown up in the ‘90s, even the 2000s, perhaps we’re not exposed to this, but kids who are growing up these days are exposed to a very different porn landscape. If you wouldn’t mind talking us through what we’re seeing at the moment. |
| Jo | I think it’s important to remember that porn is a little bit like on a bell curve. So it’s an umbrella term for lots of different types of porn. So people often say to me like oh what about ethical porn, what about feminist porn and then they’ll really bring out really extreme porn where somebody, you know, might even die at the end or somebody gets faeces on them or something like that. We can go there today but what I want people to think about is the vast majority of porn that is what young people are consuming which is free and available and actually it finds them more often than they find it, so they come across it by accident more often than on purpose.  And so that huge chunk in the middle of the bell curve is normally quite aggressive, but not in how it used to be. It used to be more aggressive physically - as though somebody was kicked or punched or slapped - and now we’re seeing what I call invisible aggression where somebody is seeing something non-consensual but it comes across as exciting, as erotic, as a bit of a tease; like if somebody says no, it’s a token no, it doesn’t really mean no, it just means try a little bit harder. So that stuff is kind of slippery, it’s grey, it’s hard to tell that it’s aggressive.  Ten years ago when somebody would see somebody get hit, it’s easier potentially for a 14-year-old to identify, hey this is problematic. Now it’s much harder to identify and as a result easier to adopt those messages. So what we’re seeing in porn: the latest Classification Office research showed that 46% of scenes had a family or incestual theme - and I have seen that rise over the last three years in extraordinary ways - so whether that’s daddy/daughter, mother/son, stepbrother/stepsister, cousins, the whole thing. 35% had some non-consensual behaviour so it might have had some consensual behaviour but it also had some non-consensual behaviour in it where somebody said no or resisted and that particular behaviour happened anyway. Only 2% had condom use and we know that across New Zealand we’re seeing declines in condom use amongst young people and that’s creating some issues around STIs. 29% has affection in it, so that’s kissing, holding hands, saying something nice but you can see there then that that’s lower than non-consensual behaviours.  Yeah, I guess it’s pretty common to see some really problematic, really unhealthy messaging that often is disguised in and amongst something exciting, alluring and something that oh yeah, somebody would like me to do that to them.  We’ve also got an enormous amount of content. So on just one site, there’s 169 years of content to watch and that is not always the most popular site, it sits amongst the top three and it changes all the time. So you’ve got these huge availability, easy access, you can just whip out your phone now and get to anything you want within a couple of clicks. Two years ago there used to be a box that you’d have to tick and it would say are you 18 and you would tick it. I mean obviously that’s kind of ridiculous because you can just tick it, but now the box is even gone.  There’s no barriers anymore between somebody who has just got a question like “Hey how do I have good sex?” - and that’s a really kind of a great question for a young person to ask and it’s a really beautiful question that can really great responses - but they get videos and images after that question on Google and that’s the content that I was talking about before – family themes, non-consensual behaviours, no condom use, little affection, those really problematic behaviours. |
| Anne | When I was talking to my friends about how I was going to be on this show, I had two friends say to me I’ve recently been strangled during sex with no prior conversation, no consent at all. And it’s kind of… you talk about these things in theory and you realise that people that you love have experienced this stuff and also both of them said to me look, I’m in my 30s, I’ve got experience, I’ve learnt over the years to talk about this stuff and to talk about my own boundaries with partners and both of them said to their partner look that’s not OK; like, if you’re going to do that, you need to ask me first and I need to say yes, I’m comfortable with that but they both kind of said if I were in my early 20s and this is all very new to me and I don’t really know what’s expected of me, I probably would have just gone along with it and the partners also, they would have been more traumatised by not being able to put in those boundaries after the fact but also then their partners would have probably just gone on to think that was normal and that was OK. |
| Jo | Yes absolutely and that’s an important point to highlight. That this is shaping adult behaviour as well. And I know we’re here to talk about young people but we’ve got a generation that’s grown up on porn now with no counter messaging at all. So they’re all in their 20s, they’re at university, they’re definitely engaging in casual sex and in monogamous sex but I see that with couples all the time. That the porn that they grew up on five years ago when they were a teenager, is absolutely shaping the person they are now in their relationship. And so we don’t want to miss another entire generation of young people without bringing this stuff up. |
| Tracy | Jo, I think that’s a really important point because I’ve been talking to a lot of teachers lately in schools and young people are actually wanting to talk about it in sexuality education now, more than they ever have before and teachers are saying that’s happening. I mean that’s a good thing because changing that kōrero.  But that generation that you’re just talking about is still positioned within a society where there was no discussion. I’m hopeful going forward that the discussions we’re having now, the work that Jo is doing, that we’re doing at the Classification Office, that the Ministry, will actually hopefully change and help that generation coming forward. They are, they’re asking questions in class around pornography but some teachers are going it’s not something we’re going to talk about.  I met with a teacher recently, they said, “No, no, no we don’t talk about porn in our Year 10 sexuality class” and I was like, “So you don’t talk about consent, healthy relationships, communication, ethics? Of course you do”. But they were still very fixated on no, porn is a separate topic but it’s not, it highlights the issues in society and so we need to change that kōrero around sexuality and relationships. |
| Jo | I would say I’m hopeful too, but it’s very slow work. |
| Tracy | Yes. 100% agree, Jo. |
| Jo | I mean, I’ve been doing this for three years now, just specifically talking about porn - you know I’ve been in sexuality conversations for a long time now - but just specifically talking about porn in three years. So you’ve got somebody who has gone from 13 to 16, or 14 to 17, and pretty much had nothing. So you’ve still got a whole enormous group of young people who have not had much at all and so I think we can’t just rely on one group. I’m just super so enormously excited about what’s happening with teachers but we also really have to equip family, whānau, caregivers, because when we leave out an entire group, then we’re also leaving out this current generation. |
| Tracy | I totally agree with you because we often try to say this is a simplistic problem so we do one thing but it’s not, it’s incredibly complex. And so the parents that I’ve interviewed for my doctoral work, the shame that they even hold on for their own sexuality from the past limits how they talk with their children and often then when they think oh I have to do this, they draw on the very fear discourses which means it actually shuts down conversations even further. And so again the latest report from the Classification Office called *Growing Up With Porn*, it’s a really good read that I would like a lot of parents to read because it’s youth voice, it’s young people saying we do actually know a lot of this is not good and it worries us and we need to have some critical discussion around this but it’s not happening.  And yes I agree Jo, it is a very slow process but I’ve always tried to be hopeful because if we’re not hopeful, you know… |
| Jo | I get that. |
| Tracy | … it would drive us insane, I think, sometimes. As I said, since I was 22 - and so 30 years in this space - and I have seen a big shift in things such as discussions around gender and relationships but this brings another whole element to that whole space. |
| Anne | When you talk about the Classification Office, what is that exactly? |
| Tracy | Think about the Chief Censor. So David Shanks is the Censor and the whole Classification Office monitor what’s going on with social media, with videos, Netflix etc. So they’re in charge of monitoring that and looking at restrictions etc. So they’ve done three reports around this whole space and I think the research just really mirrors what Jo and I are saying and the work that Jo is doing and the work that she is seeing: it’s about needing to change the discussion around pornography within a sexuality context.  So we’ve created some resources already using some of that work for teachers and it’s very youth-centred. So lots of their quotes, talking about I want to talk to someone about it, I want to talk to my family but there’s too much shame and I’m going to get told off. So if you think you’re going to get told off about something, you’re not going to have that conversation and I’ve had years of this where I’ve had young people in my office that I’ve been teaching or then training as adults to be sexuality educators, who have never told people really important things around relationships or gender or sex orientation until they’ve actually come to one of my classes as an adult and that’s impact on them, their whole being.  So that’s why this is just such an important space at this point in time and Jo, you’re seeing it with the clients that you work with. |
| Jo | Oh yeah. |
| Tracy | Long term impact. |
| Jo | And really you know, so hard when you’re sitting with a couple and they’re feeling the influences of porn in their life in a very real, very painful way and then they’re also trying to raise teenagers, teenagers who are accessing porn and not really sure what to say or do in that space which is… you know, I think that’s the same for teachers, too, because porn has shaped a lot of them. There’s probably a bunch of teachers who have potentially some quite high use, more frequent use, and they’re probably being a little bit more selective about what they watch which is great.  But that’s a really tricky spot, knowing what to say when it’s been a part of your world as well is really hard and I have a lot of empathy for teachers and for parents who are trying to navigate that. I think we need to offer some really good scripting there. There needs to be some scripting around what kind of questions the young person in your life might ask you and how to respond if porn is part of your current or past story. |
| Sally | Should parents wait until the young person brings it up or should they be proactively engaging with them? |
| Jo | Definitely proactive, most young people at an intuitive level feel that they will be told off - exactly what Tracy was saying - and so we actually have to spearhead that conversation, and quite early. So not waiting until they’re in high school, actually, because we’ve missed a huge chunk. A quarter of young people who are going to see porn will see it at 12 or younger in New Zealand. So if we wait even until they’re 13, at Year 9, that’s a huge portion that we’ve just missed the boat on. And if a young person has seen porn a couple of times and then we have the conversation with them, that’s really great. If they’ve seen it, you know, 70 times and then we have the conversation with them, that’s much harder.  And I have a… I guess, a strong preference for adults who really care about healthy sexuality and who really care about wellbeing, to be what I call that anchoring bias. So the first time we hear a piece of information, that is often the one we feel is the most credible and we then see the next bit of information through that original lens. And so if we start the conversation first, then when a young person sees porn - and it’s more likely a *when* than an *if* - then they’re going to see it through the lens of the conversation that they had.  So I’ve got three sons, too, and we’re definitely at the beginnings of these conversations and I want them …*when*… they see porn in their future, to be able to see it through what myself and my husband have said about sexuality. Rather than then when I talk about it with them, they’re seeing it through what they’ve already seen a few times on porn. Does that make sense? |
| Anne | It totally makes sense. |
| Tracy | And it’s interesting because my children are older - and I’ve also got two boys so it just happens we all have boys - but our conversations, as a sexuality educator, you can imagine have just been part of life, the course of my family. And as teenage boys they don’t want to talk to me now - they’re finding their own sense of identity, their own way - but that foundation has been there and when they do have questions or we watch something, we can just have a conversation about it now.  So for example when the sex education series came on TV, we had some amazing conversations around that. And the conversations though were probably not what a lot of parents would expect; they were really interested with the relationships within that story rather than some of the sexual aspects and maybe it’s because they wanted to work that out for themselves and didn’t want to talk about that, who knows. But they know that they can ask something if they want to.  The problem I’m seeing at the moment though is that many people say parents need to be open with their children. Now that’s a really problematic statement and something that I’m challenging quite a lot in my doctoral studies because what does open mean? Does open mean “Porn is really bad, don’t do it, don’t watch it, now we’ve had our conversation; I’ve been open with you”? That’s very different to changing the questioning around to very open questions to: What do you think about that? What are the implications of that? Do you think that’s a healthy relationship? What would you do?  In the past I’ve had conversations like that with so many young people that I’m teaching at university. So most of these students would be around 19 to 23 and they’re saying this is the first time they’ve actually had classroom time and lessons where they can actually debate and discuss the bigger picture. Like how does gender inform relationships, gender expectations. We do a whole two lectures on love and people might say why are you teaching about love. Well love actually, when you look at love through a historical lens or you look at love in terms of how do you understand love – what did love look like to you when you were growing up from your parents and how is that shaping your relationships?  So again what the students are finding that they’re really questioning and thinking about how does the world work and that’s the important stuff. Especially with the pornography space, that’s what we want from young people: to be critical thinkers. |
| Jo | 100% agree and love all of that, Tracy. It’s hard, isn’t it? |
| Tracy | It’s very hard. We’re people who have expertise… |
| Jo | You’ve been in this for a long time. I’m in primary school level and I’ll have other parents who will say to me, “I really want to do this and I really want to talk about it with them, got no idea how to do that and I’m totally freaked out” and rightfully so, it’s quite scary, people don’t want to get it wrong. We are going to get it wrong, I’m going to get it wrong and we’re all going to mess up and that’s got to be fine and part of it. It requires a lot… I think it requires a lot more education of adults. |
| Tracy | It definitely does but I think what you just said was a really key point. Parents are saying, “I don’t want to get it wrong” and that’s very much about our neoliberal culture that you have to be the expert parent, you need to do everything right, get it right and that actually puts a lot of stress on parents and a lot of the stories that I have from parents of wider whānau shows that because of that fear, they are approaching it the wrong way but I don’t like saying the wrong way because that means… again, they feel like oh now I’m even a worse parent.  We have to look at simple easy ways moving forward for whānau but also it’s OK, it’s OK to not know what to do. We have children, you don’t get a parenting manual and every child is different. So I think that’s really important that we support all people in the community and the work that’s happening now is… I am very hopeful will make a change within the next… I’m not going to give a timespan! But we are… Look at the conversation we’re having now. People are actually approaching Jo and me and there’s a lot of research and work in this space so let’s be really hopeful for some change but realistic. |
| Jo | That’s what I call perfection paralysis. |
| Tracy | Yes. |
| Jo | Where you don’t do anything because you’re so scared that whatever you do is going to be wrong. |
| Tracy | Yeah and that’s why we have such a huge uptake of parental books, manuals. Parents are buying every book they can on how do I do things right, how do I be a better mother, how do I be a better father although the mothers tend to take on a lot more of that role which again is quite paralysing. |
| Anne | Is that regardless of the gender of their children? |
| Tracy | Yes, I was talking to this man about his sons and he said oh I wouldn’t talk about that, that’s the mother’s job and so I challenged him on that and at the end of it he goes, hmm… I think you’re right, I should have done something differently. |
| Jo | It’s so important for kids to get perspectives from all genders, from mums, from dads, from aunties, from grandmas. To hear it from lots of different people so that they can hear something from a teacher, go home, hear something different from dad and maybe hear something different from mum or hear something different from aunty and then they learn that not everybody agrees, you know, and not everybody does it the same way and then therefore it’s OK for them to do it their way. |
| Tracy | And not just hear the messages but have people around them who are asking questions and saying what do you think. Including our young people’s voice and that’s no different if you’re an adult as well. You don’t want to be told as an adult, you want people to discuss with you what do you think about this, why, what are the implications of that, what are some other strategies you could use to get out of that situation.  So using things on TV, internet, stories. I say to my parents that I work with you might say oh, I listened to this Podcast about pornography and it’s like oh I learnt a whole lot of new things, what do you think. When my son was about 11, I brought home a report and I asked him some of the questions and some other parents said oh you didn’t ask that. It’s like, why not? I want to know what he thinks.  So again we’re in a privileged space because we work in this field but he had such insightful material to talk about and he says oh mum, we know there’s some stupid kids who are doing that and it was really insightful for me as a parent. We forget that young people are not silly, they can think critically if given the chance. |
| Anne | And it kind of comes back to this script that was brought up earlier of just some key questions to start that conversation. I guess once you’ve started that back and forth engagement, that makes it easier for your child to come to you as well, when something comes up. |
| Tracy | Yes but again as Jo said it’s difficult because a lot of parents are struggling with their own sexuality, their own internal shame, or other issues. So again, it sounds good in theory but it is difficult but yes, we have to start somewhere. |
| Jo | On our Light Project website we’ve just got a whole section for whānau and we script some questions and script some responses if people want that. |
| Tracy | And that work is fabulous, Jo, and we’re also trying to do the same thing for teachers. We’re actually giving them examples of scripts and words that will help guide their teaching practices. So we’re all working together and I think that’s great. |
| Anne | That’s awesome. So the teachers that you train, are they teachers that opt in? |
| Tracy | So yes, they will be teaching health education, yes they choose to opt in. |
| Sally | Well we might have our next song, which is quite appropriately, ‘Let’s Talk About Sex’ by Salt ‘n’ Pepper. |
|  | **MUSIC BY SALT ‘n PEPPER – LET’S TALK ABOUT SEX** |
| Sally | That was ‘Let’s Talk About Sex’ which was Tracy’s choice. Tracy, if you just want to tell us why you thought that one would be so appropriate? |
| Tracy | Well obviously from the title that’s what a lot of my students are saying to me, why can’t we talk about sex, meaning actually the bigger picture of sex and sexuality, OK. Because you can’t talk about sex without talking about love, relationships, consent etc.  But it’s interesting because there’s a line in that song - and it comes from 1991, it’s quite an old song, there’s a lot of discussion around it in terms of the HIV and Aids epidemic but 1991 is a long time ago now - and there’s in it that says, “Yo Pet I don’t think they’re going to play this on the radio, and why not, everyone is having sex, I mean everyone should be making love, come on, how many guys do you know make love?” But when you watch this song and you watch the video, it is actually about these young people - fully clothed - having conversations and saying why can’t we talk about this.  Initially when I used it a long time ago in schools, oh you know, let’s talk about sex. It’s actually quite a beautiful song saying let’s have these conversations. And now the question is what do those conversations look like. |
| Sally | Jo, it would be great to hear from you some of the ways in which you are seeing young people’s porn watching playing out. Just, I guess, some of the impacts that we’re seeing. |
| Jo | I am all about acronyms. So the way I think about impacts is I just the acronym GRAMS.  So G – Gender, so shaping their ideas about gender, about who men are, who women are, but also who trans people are, gay men, lesbian, gender expression, so that men are more powerful, more dominant and control and women are weak, submissive and are really there to receive sex acts rather than have agency in their sex acts. And all genders talk about that being an influence. So it’s not just girls saying oh guys think that they’re so much more in control, it’s actually guys saying as well you know, we feel like we need to be in control and that we need to know what we’re doing. So gender.  Then R – Risky sex. So we know that young people are actually having less intercourse than they were ten years ago; however, the types of sex that they’re having is more risky. So for example not using condoms absolutely happening, maybe including more than a couple of people and therefore less safe in terms of STIs and contraception. But also having riskier practices, rougher potentially, including choking, strangulation. I was just with Family Planning two days ago and they were talking about young girls coming in with genital injury due to rough sex and seeing that more commonly.  And then racism is an interesting one so that fits into my R. We don’t have any research at the moment on the impact of racism based on seeing racist porn but what we do know is that porn is incredibly racist. We know that if it is a black or Latina man - this is American language - is present in the scene then 50% of the time that scene is going to be aggressive and we know if it is a Latina or an Asian woman is present, then she is going to be submissive and essentially silent. If you see the scenes, she actually doesn’t even speak at all through the whole scene. And so basically, if you’re a dark man you’re dangerous is the message that young people are also getting from porn and we don’t have the impacts of that research yet but we see it as a trajectory similar to gender.  And then Aggression, so that slippery, non-consensual messaging. So that it’s OK to hustle people along into doing something that they didn’t want to do initially, to think that yes at the beginning means yes to everything, so common stories of guys having sex with women vaginally and then flipping them over and having anal sex without even asking first and that is where you get genital injury for example.  And then M – Mental health. So young people, particularly those from religious backgrounds or particular cultural groups experience a high level of shame and distress about their porn use and they are more likely to withdraw from friends, from family, from their church for example. Feel like they can’t be in those spaces, that they would not be wanted, so it’s a really isolating experience. But also, you know, have some anxiety about what they’ve been watching; you don’t have to be from any kind of background to have anxiety about if your use has evolved over time. Like you are watching things now that you didn’t even imagine you were going to watch three years ago. So impacts on mental health.  And then the last one S – Sexual wellbeing. So dissatisfaction with real-life sex, needing a hyperstimulation so needing to for example… you can’t masturbate physiologically anymore, you need porn to be able to reach orgasm, guys and girls actually struggling with performance anxiety, feeling like they’re not good enough and therefore struggling to actually have sex. Some of that doesn’t have heaps of research behind it but anecdotally we’re hearing that quite a lot. I see that as a sex therapist and there is growing research there. |
| Sally | It’s certainly incredibly significant when you lay it out like that, the potential impacts. |
| Jo | Yeah I believe so too. I think my kind of anecdote for it is if I knew for example that my son was going to see sexual assault on the way to school then I would jump in front of a bus essentially to make sure he didn’t witness that on the road. But when it comes to porn and the fact that it’s on a screen, we tend to sit back and think oh yeah, they’ll just kind of be fine or I don’t need to intervene or this is just something that everybody is going to see and you know, they don’t want to hear from me about it - and they really need to. We really need to be talking to them about it, we really need them to get some counter messaging in their life because it’s risky to consume a lot of porn and not have the counter messaging. If we consume porn but we have counter messaging then we’re in a much better position to be able to take what we like, leave what we don’t. |
| Sally | I think one thing that struck me as well when I was watching your TED talk - and Anne, you also brought it up earlier as well - is that for young people, they haven’t got those other experiences in their lives that they can bring with them. Whereas if an adult is watching porn at least they’re more likely to have real-life experiences or reference points that they can base this off and think actually no, that’s probably not OK. |
| Jo | Yeah if you’ve never even held someone’s hand and you’ve watched a whole chunk of porn before you get to your first sexual experience, it’s definitely going to inform who you think you should be in that moment. |
| Anne | Yeah and that goes for men and women in terms of… aye, like this is in a very heterosexual kind of context but yeah, men are getting the messages that this is how you should or could be acting and women are getting the messages of how you should be or how you are expected to respond which I think is quite tragic. With a lot of gender stuff, we’re making quite big progress in terms of how we see gender and women’s equality and this… yeah, what we’re seeing in porn is going quite against that.  One of the things that struck me in your TED talk, Jo, was the young boy who said to you he’d learnt from porn how to please a woman… or I can’t quite remember the line. |
| Jo | Yeah he says, “I now know more about what women want” and I mean I’ve seen enough porn myself now - whilst recording things in Excel spreadsheets! - to know that they’re definitely not learning robust amounts about the clitoris, they’re really just learning that when girls say no, that they don’t really mean it. |
| Tracy | And that’s a key point, isn’t it, because we know from the research that young people looking at porn, one of the reasons they say is they’re curious or they want to learn about sex. So this is the whole problematic nature and then we have these young people saying we’ve learnt about sex through porn but what have you learnt. So again, if we shut down all the other conversations or they don’t have other spaces to go to then that’s really difficult for young people. |
| Jo | One of the quotes that came out of the Classification research which I really loved was a young person, I think they were about 17, and they said you know, if there weren’t any positives, no one would be watching it and what I hear from that is that young people are searching for something in there and what is it and how can we potentially replace it with some healthier alternatives.  So if they’re searching for sex education - exactly what you’re saying, Tracy - if they’re searching for ideas about how to be and how to perform and they’re thinking yeah, I’ve really got some positive information out of this, how do we replace that? I would much prefer somebody who deeply cares about their sexual wellbeing and their mental health to provide them sexuality and relationships education than the porn industry who 100% cares about profit. |
| Tracy | And it’s interesting, there’s a comment that’s been coming through from a lot of my educators – young people are saying, “Is it better that I watch animated porn than real porn?” And again, there’s another whole issue because… yeah, I’m sure you’ve got a lot more stats, Jo, around the area but it’s not nice. As you can imagine, when it’s animated people can do things and bodies can change in ways that would never be real. It’s still sending messages and especially some very negative gender messages. |
| Jo | Yeah animated porn is really interesting. There isn’t a lot of content analysis on it. Last summer, not the one just gone but I spent three months kind of looking at sites and seeing what the trends were and what was kind of happening in terms of sex acts and animated porn… I would say is more problematic because exactly what you’re saying, Tracy, what they do is that they twist the form of the person. So where in real life porn there can be some actual physical limitations - you know, how big someone is or isn’t and what they can do with their bodies - but in animated porn, you can do whatever you want and also… you know, you get away with… I would say more violence because it’s not a real person and the girls, the women and it’s tempting to say girl because the women are made to look like girls. |
| Tracy | With a lot of school backpacks and when you talked about GRAMS and the racism aspect, the skin colour can be different on different parts of their body. |
| Jo | Oh absolutely. |
| Tracy | The point I was making is it’s a very interesting question that young people are saying that in schools. We have to address this; we can’t just let it go. |
| Anne | If there are young people listening who are like well my teacher is not so great at talking about this, where do I go to find some of this information. |
| Jo | Yeah so we developed a site called In The Know… it’s [www.intheknow.co.nz](http://www.intheknow.co.nz) and we did a survey in Auckland’s first lockdown -because obviously we had a couple - where we asked young people what were some relatable online sexual experiences amongst peers and themselves and we got ten as a result and they included things like grooming and nudes and also wanting to cut down on porn watching but not knowing how to. If they find themselves feeling more sexually aggressive, they want to try out rough sex but they don’t know how to go about that. If they’ve watched content that they’re really concerned about, that kind of freaked them out or that their use has evolved a lot over time and that’s really concerning to them.  So what we did is we created In The Know which has ten tabs and you click on each one and it’s related to those different issues and it’s got really practical tools. So a lot of the websites we found had lots of, I would say, kind of opinion-based feedback on those issues and whilst that can be really, really helpful, we didn’t find as many that had hey here’s step one, two, three of how to navigate that issue and here are some considerations for if you are thinking about choking and here are some considerations if you are thinking about sending that nude.  So it was lots of… lots of words that we found on other websites and not as much kind of ‘how tos’, does that make sense? And so we incorporated some really practical steps, we also incorporated videos so that they could hear from other people who were facing similar issues and then some of the helplines that they could go to and we separated out those helplines into services that really catered well for Māori young people, for Pasifika young people, for Rainbow young people. So we wanted to make sure that everybody knew exactly where they could go that was safe for them.  In terms of practical sex education, how do I give oral sex, how do I do a good hand job, how do I make sure that I’ve orgasmed, they’ve orgasmed, how do I masturbate well etc. etc. There is not much there! It is a real gap. There is a one site which I like and it’s Clue… I think it’s clue.com and it’s actually a period tracking app, Clue. So when you land on the first page it’s about period tracking so it’s a barrier for particularly men who want to engage.  But then if you click on part of the site called the encyclopaedia, they have so many good responses for really practical questions like how do we have sex while we’ve got our period. Just really normal questions that you know, young people could easily just search up on Google and then land on a problematic video. What they’ve tried to do is do some bite-sized little how to’s on how to do that.  But my goal personally is to see something created for New Zealand young people that is really, really practical in terms of actual sex education. Not the relationship stuff, which is so, so important but the how to’s is a real gap. |
| Tracy | I agree. It’s totally missing and it’s what young people are asking for so we need to do something about it. |
| Jo | Yeah anyone who wants to give money to that, I will happily write the content. |
| Tracy | Yes and as you know, Jo, and we’ve been talking about today, although it scares a lot of people, we know that when they could access that good quality information about sex, they’re actually more empowered as a young person to know what they like what they don’t like and that ends up with healthier relationships - but we still struggle with that conversation. |
| Jo | Yes, it’s a battle for adults too. I mean if adults knew how to have great sex and talk about it in a really healthy way then I would be out of a job but I’m not and adults as well don’t know how to say things like I don’t like that. If a 40-year-old is really struggling to say that then a 14-year-old is *really* struggling to say that so we need that education there and I would argue, it needs to be there for everyone. |
| Tracy | And even through my doctoral studies with the parents, again that kept coming up around how do you understand pleasure? What does pleasure look like to you? The stories that they told me about their past informing their present, I felt very sad at the end that we haven’t… what are we doing for our people in our country. We’re setting them up to have unhealthy relationships.  There was a lot of fear and shame which just continued through their lifetime and there wasn’t a single focus group I ran with parents where there wasn’t tears around the past. |
| Anne | Wow. Yeah I guess even for people who are in their 30s and 40s, we can probably look back and go oh wouldn’t it have been great to learn some of the stuff that we learnt maybe through a painful way through relationships that went really badly. If we had been forearmed and mainly just knew more going in about… |
| Tracy | Yes or if we had a question, we knew of a site that we could go to that was really good, which is exactly what Jo is saying. That we need to have that so young people know where they can go because they do want to learn about sex. |
| Sally | Just to finish up then, what would you like to see happening? We’ve spoken so much about the need for education - and I think that’s probably the big one - education of whānau, education of parents, education of teachers; education broadly. We’ve spoken about the need to have clear and helpful ‘how to’-type sites for the young people themselves to access and actually find out the answers to some of these curiousity questions. Is there anything else that you would love to see on your wish list? Is it possible, for example, to try and counter the porn industry? I can’t imagine that’s possible given its probably multi-billion dollar, international… What would you love to see happen if you could? |
| Tracy | Jo, do you want to go first? |
| Jo | Another dream is that we did create some more barriers for young people accessing porn. So I do think that there’s a conversation… more conversation to be had about age verification. I think it’s sad that countries seem to have abandoned that as an idea because I think given the technological knowledge that we have, I think we could do that. And often it’s adults who stop that process and young people actually… you know, 71% said that they wanted more restrictions to accessing porn. So adults seem to be winning that conversation which I think is a bit of a shame.  And then the other thing is that there’s a gap at the moment for young people who are feeling sexually aggressive or they’re wondering about perpetrating or acting something out but they haven’t actually done it yet. So if you search for, for example, underage child content. If you search for child pornography or if you search for underage sex abuse material or how do I harm someone, how do I rape someone, how do I do this… you basically will get some how to’s or you will get some legal feedback like this is illegal, report it.  And if I’m feeling like I want to go down that path, I’m unlikely to report myself so I think that we need to do the same thing we’ve done with mental health and create some real help pathways. If I write into Google I want to commit suicide, there will be about seven different hotlines that I can call. If I say I want to hurt someone, there will pretty much be nothing. You might get one or two come up that are really dedicated to victims and they’re not long-term help solutions. So that is a real gap for me and I think if you’re growing up with aggressive porn and it’s shaping your sexual script, then we need to take that seriously and create help there. |
| Tracy | And I was going to say that same thing, about the 71% that you mentioned of young people were saying that they want restrictions for children and I think that shows us that young people are engaging in this space too, that they know that it’s harmful and it can be harmful to their own wellbeing.  What do I want to see? I want to see dedicated health teachers in schools who are not just physical education teachers but are fulltime health educators. Now, we have that in some schools but the majority are still training through physical education and teaching and understanding health education which sexuality education is a part of that, it’s much more complex than just someone who is a physical education teacher.  I would like parents to read the *Growing Up With Porn* report put out by the Classification Office because it just allows them to think about how they can change those conversations with young people. It helps parents to realise that young people are also thinking about this and it’s not all negative, it’s not all fear based, it’s saying let’s have these conversations and how might we talk about it and the quotes from young people provide a really good starting point to say what do you think about this. |
| Anne | Sounds great. |
| Sally | Kia ora koutou, amazing kōrero and I really hope that this generates a lot more kōrero because as we’ve been talking about, we’ve just got to get the word out there a bit more, try and break some of this taboo. And as we finish up we will have Jo’s song which was ‘Area Codes’ by Ludicrous which is kind of getting against what we’re hoping for but this idea of… Well maybe Jo, you want to tell us why you chose it. |
| Jo | I chose it because it reminded me of my adolescence and how I thought that this song was problematic, I totally danced and sang to it anyway and I would have loved to unpack some of that with adults but everybody was just kind of telling me what not to do. And so this for me is a memory and hopefully will spark parents to have some good conversations about what to do rather than just what not to do. |
| Tracy | Ka pai. |
| Sally | Kia ora. |
|  | **MUSIC BY LUDICROUS – AREA CODES** |