

Talk about sex: *The Sunday Night Sex Show*

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She looks like somebody's grandmother, her show is aired on Sundays, and her set has that cable-TV feel reminiscent of *Wayne's World*. But *The Sunday Night Sex Show* has some *schwing* of its own.

Since 1984, sex therapist Dr. Sue Johansen has been hosting a call-in radio program about sex. Since the advent of The Women's Network, the program has been simulcast on radio and television and can be seen at 11:30 p.m. Sunday nights. People across the country can dial a toll-free number and, Sue says, "get answers on the most embarrassing, most controversial stuff in Canada: sex."

Sue's advice on matters sexual covers a variety of topics, as on one particular show a couple of weeks ago. Ten minutes into the show, a caller asks about possible complications of piercing his penis. The doctor's response is lively.

"You're asking the lady who doesn't have a penis. If the penis is analagous to the clitoris, there is no way I would do it," she says. That alarm aside, Sue goes on to advise the young man on the care and maintenance of a penis ring, including the necessary washing and application of antibiotic cream to prevent possible infection. The caller thanks her and hangs up.

Soon the comedic prospects of a hole-y penis

fade, though, when Sue describes a letter she received from a viewer. The letter, she says, began by criticising Sue's candid discussions of sex. The author went on to say that sex is not as wonderful as Sue might have people believe, that in fact it is disgusting. Then, in a chilling moment, Sue reveals that the woman is a victim of domestic violence. Her husband forces her to watch *The Sunday Night Sex Show* and perform acts described on the program. If she refuses, he beats her.

Sue urges the woman to leave and find a woman's shelter. She says, in her most unequivocal manner, that the woman is a victim of abuse and that if her husband didn't use *The Sunday Night Sex Show* as an excuse, he would find another.

It's real life television: we have no way of knowing what the outcome is or whether Sue handled the issue in the best possible way. Instead, she goes to a commercial break and comes back to handle the next caller's question.

Sue's advice extends into relationship counselling at times. To the next caller, Caroline, whose boyfriend is hinting that he would like her to participate in a threesome with his best friend, Sue advises caution. She asks Caroline to consider how she will feel the next day.

"My theory is, if you're not comfortable with it, if it's not something that you can imagine yourself doing, if it's not something you're proud

of, that you can talk about it to your friends, then your attitudes and values are telling you 'no, it's not what you want,' then don't do it."

On this question and others like it, Sue is not judgemental, but encourages callers to be cautious and true to themselves when making decisions about sex. When the next caller, a twenty-year old man, asks if he should get a circumcision because he's dating a Jewish woman, Sue takes a practical approach. Yes, the pain will be greater for a grown man than it is for babies. She tells him he will be extra-sensitive for a while and will not be able to have sex for several days after the operation.

Then, she goes beyond the physical. "I'm reluctant to tell you to go out and have a circumcision if this is not a committed relationship," she tells the young man. "Circumcision is the outward appearance, but there's much more to it than that. It means going through the Hebrew faith."

The next caller is reluctant to get to her question. She's afraid Sue will think she's crazy. When Lisa is ready to pose her question, she tells Sue that she has "submissive urges," and would like to know if that's something she should see a psychiatrist about.

Sue always (except in the case of child molesting or abusive relationships) urges people not to feel as though their desires are abnormal.

To Lisa, who wants to be spanked, she cries convincingly, "You are not a psychiatric basket case! You are not ill!" Lisa's curiosity about different kinds of fetishes, Sue says, is not unusual. She comforts the young woman, saying that eventually, she will be able to find a partner who will enjoy sharing her proclivity for domination and submission. We can only wish Lisa luck.

Next, Mike from Kingston calls up with an interesting story. Mike has been experiencing boredom in his marriage bed and has begun an extramarital affair with a woman from his office. Mike will not be receiving the same sympathy Lisa got from Sue. When he reveals, half-proud half-worried, that he and his new girlfriend have taken to parking on the train tracks during sexual encounters and will not leave, even if they know a train is due any moment, until they have both climaxed, Sue gets visibly upset. She considers it unforgivably irresponsible for the couple to risk their lives and cause such pain to his family for the sake of sprucing up an increasingly boring sex life. She tells him, in no uncertain terms, to stop.

So sex is not a life and death matter. Healthy and pleasurable sex is, however, something that Sue Johansen is willing to talk about in a frank and knowledgeable way. Tune in and, if you have a problem, call up and ask that burning question that's been on your mind.

Sexual Healing (continued...)

and have been married happily for twenty years and it was no problem, so I don't like to make blanket statements about whether it works or it doesn't work. I just think everybody really needs to think about themselves and how it works for them in terms of getting into relationships and if it doesn't work for them then they shouldn't do it. I know one of the concerns men have is about penis size, so I wanted to ask you what is average and what kind of reactions men with smaller or larger penises can expect from partners if they're really concerned about size?

Well, when you read sexual magazines, they make it sound like the average penis size is fourteen inches and they have a lot of pictures of men with big penises, but those are myths.

The interesting fact is that it turns out that men who have smaller penises when they're flaccid or not erect, the penis grows more when they're erect. Men who have larger penises when they're soft, it grows less. So we say the erection is the Great Equaliser: it tends to balance out the size of the penis.

The average penis length is about six inches long when it's erect and there's a range that is normal. Some men do put a lot of emphasis on penis size. Sometimes it's because they've been reading too many magazines and they have a six-inch penis or a five-inch penis, which is normal, and they think all these other men have very large penises.

There are a few men who do have penises that, even erect, are much smaller than average, but that's quite rare.

Part of the thing is that I think men are misinformed in terms of how much their penis size contributes to their partner's sexual pleasure and, for heterosexual couples, for example, in the vagina most of the nerve endings in the vagina are in the bottom one-third of the vagina, so say the bottom two inches of the vagina. So really, as long as your penis is longer than two inches, it's stimulating most of the nerve endings in the

vagina. Some women also like to feel pressure of the penis against the cervix but again, depending on what positions you use, that's not necessarily a problem.

The other thing in terms of, not length, but, width of the penis. Another thing people don't know is that sometimes people think of the vagina in terms of being like a barrel, an open space, and it's not, it's like a glove. When you don't have a hand in a glove, it's totally collapsed against itself. When you put your hand in there, it expands. The walls of the vagina are elastic so they are collapsed against each other if you're

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not having sex or you don't have a tampon in there or whatever and if you put something in, they expand, but they only expand the width of what you put in there. So again, the size of the penis isn't nearly as crucial as men think it is.

For most men, the problem with penis size is their own interpretation of it, what they say to themselves, not their partner. I was on the Shirley show a couple of years ago on this issue of surgery for penis enlargement and there was a man on there who felt he had too small a penis and he was going to have surgery and his wife was on as well. In fact, his penis was not that small, it was in his mind, but he wanted to do it because he thought it would do it increase his wife's pleasure but she said she was perfectly satisfied. So again, I think for most women it's not a problem. Men think it's going to be a problem for women but most of the time it isn't

actually a problem.

Why do you think sex and violence are so often linked together? I was thinking originally in movies and television, but I guess it might also have something to do with this study you've completed recently.

Yeah, I don't know exactly how to answer that question.

Violence is not connected to sex any more than it's connected to other things. I mean, if you actually look at television and movies and count how much violence there is and how much sex and violence there is, there's a lot more violence—just violence—than there is just sex and violence. But,

in our society, we react more negatively to sex and violence than to just violence. Any violence, I react negatively. Any violence against women, I react negatively. To me, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, where you're cutting up women not in a sexual situation is just as offensive as if you were cutting them up in a sexual situation. I mean, it's pretty offensive either way you get it. But we as a society, and it goes back to my belief that we're a sex-negative society, somehow if it's violence with sex we see it as much much worse than violence in other situations.

Of course sex and violence is awful, and there is a lot of sexual violence. We did this study where we found that even in junior high and high school dating relationships, a significant number of, particularly girls, felt that they had had sex against their will, that they had been forced into having sex. We found that in surveys we did a few years

ago at UNB and Saint Thomas on campus here there's a substantial proportion of wives, fourteen per cent of wives, who say they've been sexually assaulted, raped basically, by their husband. So there is a lot of sexual violence. To me, it's just another example, it's usually men against women, violence against women and for women, sexual violence is a good way of instilling fear and controlling them. Most of the time, it has more to do with power than sex but not always.

For some people, violence is a sexual turn-on and so part of the point of sex and violence is that violence is part of the turn-on. But that's again a minority.

What's your view on pornography. Can it be healthy?

Well, I think there are two issues. I differentiate between pornography and erotica. To me, pornography is sexually explicit material that is degrading, humiliating, violent, includes children. All those are pornography. I differentiate between that and erotica, which is sexually explicit material that is consensual, not degrading, not violent. We tend to use the word pornography to apply to both of them, unfortunately.

Use of sexually explicit material can be very positive. It enriches people's sexual lives, their sexual relationships. It's an alternative outlet. I'm not saying everybody needs to use it, but for those people who enjoy sexually explicit movies, magazines, whatever — we're talking about erotica now — then I don't see any problem with it. There's absolutely no research that suggests there's any harmful effects at all. I would see it as an absolutely personal choice.

The issue on pornography is a different issue. There are some results that suggest that pornography does effect attitudes, makes men more callous in their attitudes towards women. The research is very controversial about whether it leads to violence or not; some people believe

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