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THE MIDWEST TEEN SEX SHOW



Midwest Teen Sex Show

Creators of controversial teen-sex-issues podcast talk about their divisive show

It's no surprise that teen-sexuality podcast the *Midwest Teen Sex Show* has polarized viewers since launching in June 2007: The podcast tackles issues like masturbation, pornography, and anal sex with as much bluntness as it does sarcasm—the lingua franca of teenagers. For instance, in "The Older Boyfriend," creator Nikol Hasler jokes, "If you're in junior high and you're dating someone who's out of high school, he's a pedophile. And pedophilia's a disease. Would you date someone with cancer? No." Though e-mail submissions determine their topics, Hasler, co-creator Guy Clark, and comedian Britney Barber have drawn criticism from parents and sex-education teachers for the free monthly podcast's lack of educational content. *The A.V. Club* spoke to the *Midwest Teen Sex Show* creators about their audience, their detractors, and their secret love of board games.

The A.V. Club: You're often criticized for not focusing on "the facts," but you emphasize practical knowledge and acknowledge that teens *are* having sex.

Nikol Hasler: I think a lot of what we're saying isn't what [teenagers] are used to hearing, which is, "If you have sex you're going to die." For example, I think "Backdoor Business" is a great episode to look at.

Guy Clark: We didn't really get into the joys of anal sex; we got into the practicalities of it. We talked about how to have anal sex, because that's what the e-mails we were getting asked: "How does [anal sex] work?" They want to hear a more frank discussion. That's the strength of what Nikol and Britney are doing. When you say sex is evil, and then you have sex and it's fun, I'm not going to believe what you were telling me before. There's not a focus on sex as pleasure in sex education. That needs to be out there. That's the reason people have sex. It feels good—not that teenagers should be having sex.

AVC: But it isn't just teenagers watching. Supposedly, it's teenagers up through grandparents.

NH: Oh, yeah. Even the grandparents are watching. It's all the way up to grannies.

Britney Barber: How did the grandparents find out about it? I don't even want to know.

NH: I think they were just checking their browser after their grandkids were over.

AVC: What were your sex-ed classes like?

BB: I didn't have any; I went to Catholic school. I learned about sex from my friend Kelly. I was like, "Oh my god, they put

what *where?*" I had no clue, but in my mind, when they were telling these sex stories, it was playing in slow motion and "Dream Weaver" was playing. So, I don't know if that's an accurate view of sex and if I was given the proper tools to have a realistic outlook on it. I still hear "Dream Weaver."

AVC: How does the Midwest influence the podcast?

NH: When considering the Midwest angle we were able to make fun of ourselves a little bit, but also demonstrate there is much more to teen sexuality than what you see already in the media. Ultimately, most teens are going through the same thoughts and fears—it shows that the Midwest is not only populated with corn sprouts and tobacco fields.

BB: I thought we did the whole Midwest thing so I could touch cows and make DQ references.

AVC: Are there topics you won't cover?

NH: I suppose there aren't topics we won't cover. For some of them, there are topics I'm personally squeamish about covering in the format of the show. We discuss as a team how we could possibly discuss this in a comedic way.

GC: I think anything is funny. I'm really looking forward to our rape episode, to be honest.

AVC: It seems like parents of boys show it to their boys, and think it's a funny way to learn about sex, but parents of girls disapprove.

NH: Nobody wants to picture their girl having sex. Which is *another* double standard. It's okay to think about your son being out there and poking a few ladies, but when it comes to your daughters—and you know

these parents can talk to their own daughters about sex. I don't know why they're offended that this exists if they are discussing these things with their children.

GC: To clarify, 95 percent of the feedback we get is positive. The criticism is very small. Just because we started to reach out to a bigger audience, we're gonna run into people who don't like us.

NH: It's that 5 percent that requires anti-depressants.

AVC: Well, across the board, grandparents seem to like it.

NH: [Laughs.] The Midwest geriatrics.

BB: I think it's always funny how the good comments are three sentences: "You guys are awesome! Love you! Bye!" And then people who hate us really take the time and are really dedicated in expressing themselves.

GC: I love it.

BB: But Guy, nobody is telling you you're the Antichrist, and you're the most disgusting thing.

GC: Nikol gets it the worst out of all of us.

NH: Yeah, I take a lot of flack. Sometimes they're not taking a long time to express themselves. They just say I'm the reason that people hate America. [Laughs.]

AVC: What kind of response did you expect when you started?

NH: I don't know that we expected *any* response. We thought 10 people would watch it. But I want to go on record saying something really important here: We don't hate board games. Just because we suggested that Parcheesi was an alternative to having sex and made it sound boring, we *don't* hate board games.

GC: We got an e-mail about that?

NH: Yes! "You obviously hate board games!" I don't know why that stuck in my mind and hurt me so much. I sat in my house and spread all of my board games out.

GC: She doesn't watch TV or play video games. I've been to her house. There *are* lots of board games.

AVC: You have a lot of harsh critics, but the one that bothers you is about board games?

NH: That one went straight to the heart.

BB: But all the people that were offended by the cancer joke can go fuck themselves.

—David Wolinsky

The *Midwest Teen Sex Show* podcast is available on iTunes and at midwestteensexshow.com.

MWTSS'
Britney Barber.