

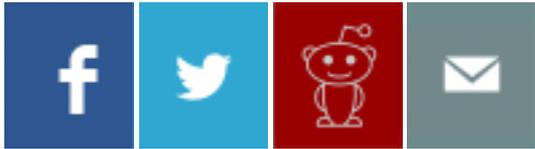
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Lizzy Caplan's 'Sex' Education: 'I Thought There Would Be Backlash About the Nudity'

TV | By **Diane Garrett** on June 18, 2014 @ 5:21 pm

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Photographed by Jana Cruder for TheWrap

Caplan talks with EmmyWrap about playing orgasmic 1950s researcher Virginia Johnson in "Masters of Sex"

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Lizzy Caplan never expected her dream role to be in a drama series, let alone one based in a hospital. Her agents didn't think she be into a project like that, either.

But the actress gave “Masters of Sex” a closer look and soon became smitten with Virginia Johnson, the pioneering sex researcher she plays in the Showtime series. And now, deep in production on the show's second season, Caplan remains captivated by Johnson, a singer who became a household name for her work studying orgasms along with partner William Masters.

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The actress, who previously starred in “Bachelorette,” plays a sexually liberated woman in the late 1950s with remarkable aplomb. Her Johnson is complicated but deeply humane, the perfect counterpart to **Michael Sheen**'s awkward Masters.

“I'm pretty in love with her myself,” Caplan told **TheWrap** during a break in shooting. “She does some things I shake my head at, but she's pretty great.”

As liberated as Johnson was for a woman at that time, she was also very private about her personal life. Thomas Maier's 2009 biography of the same name as the series is the show's main source material. It is based on the author's collaboration with Johnson in her later years, so some of the details might be understandably fuzzy.

“She was fiercely private,” Caplan said. “She wanted the work to speak for itself and didn't want to attract attention to what was going on behind the scenes,” which was her affair with the married Masters. “One luxury of playing a person that people don't have a lot of specific knowledge about is that it's not like playing Marilyn Monroe, where it can be an impersonation. This was completely open to my interpretation.”

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Some characters and situations in the first and second seasons are completely made up, like the doctor Ethan (Nicholas D'Agosto), but a character like Virginia “doesn't require us to embellish that much,” Caplan said. “She is such an interesting character she doesn't require it.”

The requisite nude scenes weren't a big problem for Caplan, who “broke the seal” for that on “True Blood” and is willing to bare all as long as she's convinced the flesh-flashing isn't gratuitous.

“Learning more about the real Virginia, I talked with parents of friends that had seen her speak at college,

and they told me how sexy and sensual she was,” Caplan said. “I realized if I was going to be nervous about it, I shouldn’t be playing her.”

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The sex scenes in the series are almost comically clinical and sometimes profoundly sad, with much of the carnal activity taking place in exam rooms with fluorescent lights buzzing. “There are none of the tricks you can put on screen to make it look intimate and not totally awkward, which is the point,” Caplan said. “The first season had some of the oddest love scenes I’ve ever been in or seen.”

The series paints Johnson as a reluctant sex partner to her prurient boss, who suggests they conduct research on each other to more closely monitor their sexual response. The more intimate they become, however, the more difficult it is for both to keep up their clinical front.

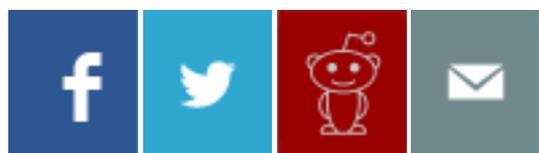
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It is a measure of Caplan’s equanimity that the scenes don’t come off as overly skeezy. Caplan’s matter-of-fact attitude also helps keep sex scenes with other couples grounded, no matter how ludicrous research methods sometimes seem to modern eyes.

“I thought there would be backlash over the nudity,” said Caplan, who has gotten to the point where she can watch her sex scenes with hands over her eyes. “At this point, I’ve lived in this person’s skin for 2 1/2 years from the pilot. It doesn’t even feel like me. It feels like her.”

Caplan had appeared in shows like “Freaks and Geeks” and “New Girl” over the years but had been seeking a non-broadcast series with juice.

“I spent a lot of years with my eyes on the prize,” said Caplan, who admitted she was searching for a comedy before “Sex.” “I had no idea it would be something as rich as this.”



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