



IT'S GONE WILD OUT THERE

WOMEN'S STORIES ABOUT
SEXUALITY AND AGEING

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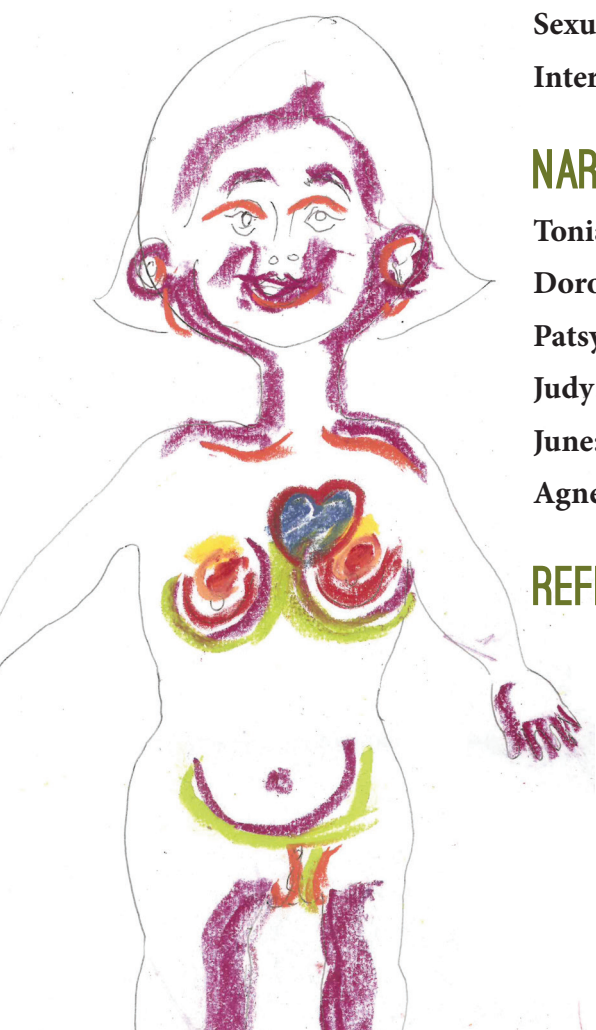
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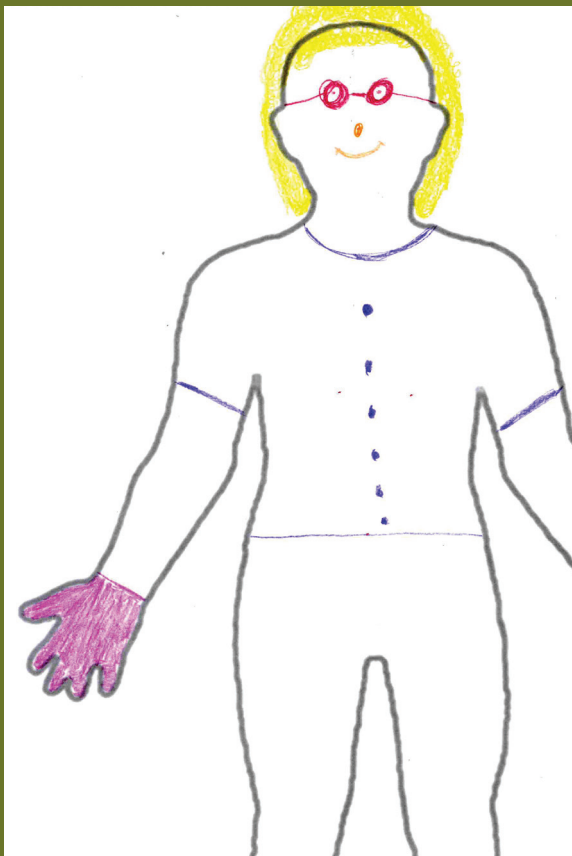
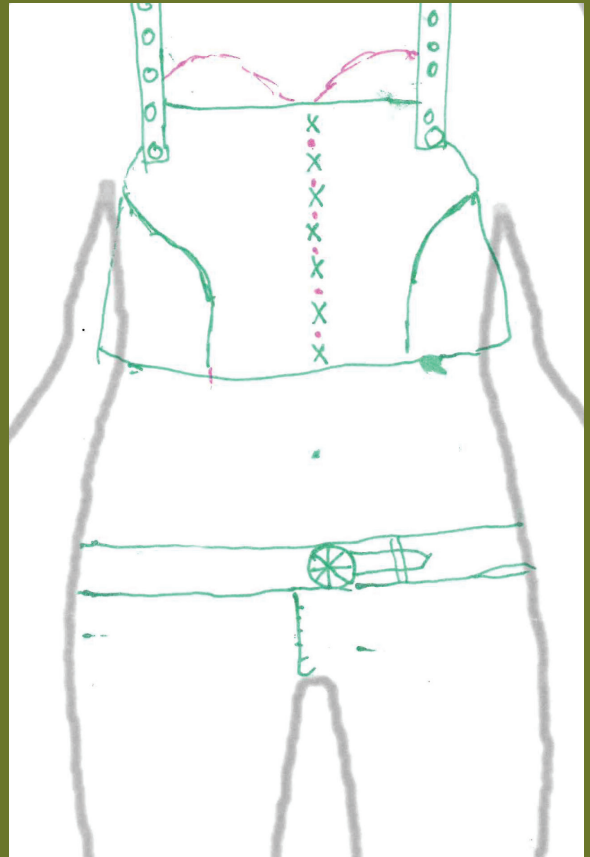
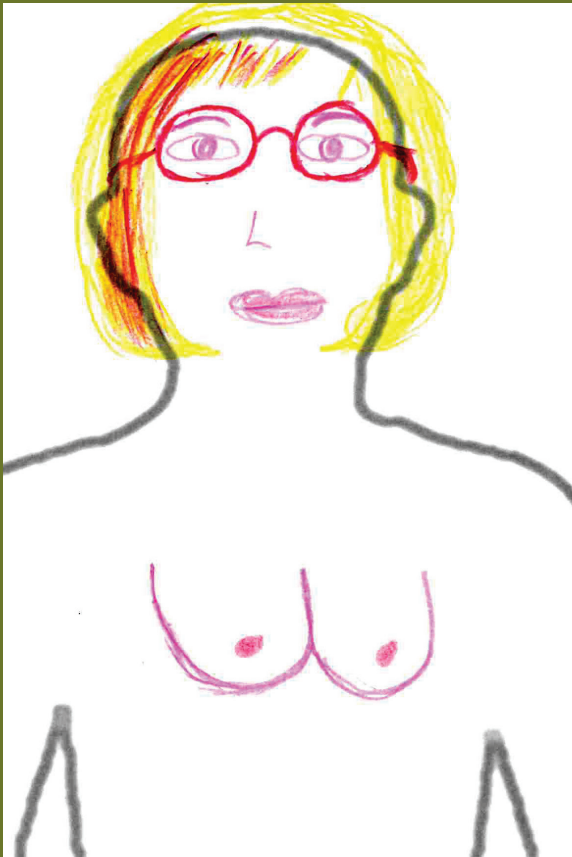
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INTRODUCTION

“

*I dreamed I was gonna live forever in this beautiful rose coloured cottage. I was gonna have a boy and a girl. * I was raped – my first time, when I was 15. I let him go to a certain extent and then when I said no, it was too late and I had to fight for my life. * I got married when I was 17 and then I got divorced. * I did fantasy phone calls. Guys thought they were talking to a tiny blonde – that I had long hair and was 36–24–34. And you’d be sitting there and you’d have your trackies on, and your bloody moccies and you turn Days of Our Lives down while you did the call. I had two kids. I think if you’re desperate enough, you’ll do anything to make sure the kids are looked after. * I married Lou and he made me feel like I was it and a bit. You know what I mean? And it gave me confidence in myself. He gave me love, he gave me companionship, he gave me security. No other man – I don’t care who they are – could ever replace that. But then now Lou is gone, I’m back to plain.*

”

This montage of quotes comes from a story shared by Agnes, an older woman who participated in a small pilot documenting older women’s stories of sexual wellbeing and safety. The project responded to a recent study that sought to build an evidence base on strategies to prevent the sexual assault of older women. Ninety five people participated in the study – but none were older women (Mann, Horsley, Barrett & Tinney, 2014).

The absence of older women’s voices in a data base on strategies to prevent the sexual assault of older women is concerning. It suggests that we have not yet created safe spaces for older women to talk about sexual assault.

There has also been suggestion that the term ‘sexual assault’ may not be used by older women – particularly where perpetrators are intimate partners (Mann et al., 2013). Others note a myth that old age is a protective factor against sexual assault means older women who report sexual assault are aware they are unlikely to be believed (Mann et al., 2014).

This gap needs to be addressed. It is difficult to understand how sexual assault can be prevented unless we create spaces where older women feel confident and safe sharing their stories about sexual assault.

PROJECT AIM

This report outlines a project that sought to create safe spaces for older women to talk about sexual assault. The project was conducted by the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS) at La Trobe University in partnership with The Australian Women’s Health Network, a peak health promotion organisation that provides a national voice on women’s health and wellbeing and Women’s Health in the South East (WHISE), a regional women’s health service that aims to improve the health and wellbeing of women in the Southern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne.

The project explored whether broadening the focus from ‘sexual assault’ to ‘sexual wellbeing and safety’ would successfully engage older women. Older women’s stories could then be utilised to educate service providers and policy makers to ensure that older women’s needs and expertise are taken into account in the development of policy and services.

PROJECT METHOD

This small qualitative project utilised narrative approaches. There is dearth of older people narratives in sexuality research despite the fact they are powerful tools for social change (Barrett, 2015). We are ‘story telling animals’ and hearing stories is required for democratic functioning and social change (Plummer, 2013a). Stories generate empathy (Plummer, 2013b) and are required to progress the development of sexual rights (Plummer 2010).

Story collection involved the ‘spoken word’ as well as Body Mapping, a creative art technique. Body Mapping was developed in South Africa as an art-therapy method for women living with HIV/AIDS (Devine, 2008; MacGregor, 2009; Weinand, 2006) and later adapted using narrative processes (Solomon, 2002).



A Body Map is usually a life-size body image created by storytellers who trace the outline of their body and then use drawing, painting or other art-based techniques within the outline to visually represent their lives, their bodies and their world (Gastaldo, Magalhaes, Carrasco, & Davy, 2012).

While initially developed as a therapeutic tool, Body Mapping has been adapted as a qualitative research method (Gastaldo et al., 2012).

Prior to the pilot the Body Mapping approach was explored with an older woman who was an artist (see image on left). The woman was physical incapable of participating in a body tracing and so drew her body freehand. As the Body Map was drawn, sexuality was discussed and there was consensus the technique could be an effective tool for discussion with older women. The Map enhanced enabled the older woman's voice to be privileged.

However, concern was also expressed about the confidence of older women to participate in such a project if they felt they were not artists. To address this a blank body mapping template was provided as an option for participants.

A project flyer was developed and circulated through the networks of the Australian Women's Health Network, WHISE and ARCSHS. Ten older women (aged 65 years or more) were sought to participate in in-depth interviews and Body Mapping. Ethics approval was provided by the La Trobe University Human Research Ethics Committee.

An information sheet and consent form was provided to interested participants. The information sheet outlined that participants would be invited to discuss the following topics:

- What your sexuality means to you
- Whether your sexuality has changed over time
- How your body has changed
- What sex is like for you
- What sexual wellbeing means for you
- What sexual safety means for you

PARTICIPANTS

In response to the project flyer the researcher was invited to attend an older women's group to provide a project briefing. The group was well established, had a very strong bond and met weekly for social support. To protect their identity, no other details of the group are provided.

The women expressed interest in participating – but wanted to be interviewed as a group. The researcher was invited to return to the group in two weeks' time.

In the following meeting seven women were present and six participated. One did not speak during session. The women ranged in age from 60 – 82 years with an average age of 67.4 years.

Art materials and blank pieces of paper were provided and all women chose the body mapping template, rather than a blank canvas. As the body maps were drawn the women talked in depth about their sexuality and their sexual safety.

NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

The audio recording of the session was difficult to transcribe – at times it was impossible to attribute text to particular participants. However, the transcript did highlight the powerful way in which the women bounced off each other. The result is a series of conversations between the women demonstrating a camaraderie that enabled sensitive conversations to be had – as well as some individual narratives.

The conversations and individual narratives were shared with the women's group in a third meeting in which women discussed strategies to protect their privacy and made a small number of changes to their individual narratives.

WORKING WITH WHAT IS

The initial disappointment at not being able to interview the women individually was replaced with recognition that something powerful had emerged from the group process. The women provided a safe space for each other to discuss sexual safety. They shared stories they had not previously shared and responded to each other with supportive comments and often with laughter. In some ways the depth of conversation was enhanced by the collegial support the women offered each other.

What emerged provides a glimpse at how older women could be supported to talk about sexual assault. The broadness of the 'sexual wellbeing and safety' topic generated interest and sexual assault emerged as part of the discussion – rather than a response to a direct question by the interviewer/facilitator. Older women shared very diverse life experiences, probed each other's stories and learned from each other.

There is a need to further explore group discussion and peer support in promoting older women's sexual wellbeing and safety and preventing sexual assault.

BODY MAPPING

Body Mapping provided an interesting focus, enabling participants to interact with their own images and those of other participants. However, the group context made it difficult to assist the women to build on their map or to explore the maps in depth.

The use of Body Mapping templates needs to be explored further to enable women who don't feel confident expressing themselves through art. The use of templates has potential but would need to be reconsidered to enable individuality to be expressed.

OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT

In the following section key issues discussed by the group are presented. This includes what sex, sexuality and relationships mean, gender roles, sexually transmissible infections, the use of Viagra, and internet dating. Then the Body Maps and narratives are presented.

The narratives shared in this small pilot may be a useful tool for stimulating discussion in other groups. The results will be disseminated to women's groups and aged care service providers nationally. In addition, funding will be sought to expand the pilot.

KEY ISSUES DISCUSSED

In the following section, the key issues discussed by participants are presented. Each issue begins with a participant raising a topic and then members of the group respond (indicated by the letter 'R'). Responses are not attributed to a particular participant and readers are invited to experience the conversation flow.

SEX, SEXUALITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

There's more to a relationship than just sex. I mean, I really do think that it's important to find somebody that you really feel you can trust and be with in that very, very full way.

You can have sex as sex. But to have a proper - full sexual relationship - it does take a while to build up the trust in that person to let yourself go totally. To start with you are holding back, you're keeping that bit of yourself, you're protecting your emotional self.

R: I personally - I might be a bit old fashioned, but I think first it's about love - and then sex is just a progression of that. Then you'll just get to that stage where you feel comfortable with one another, and that leads to sex.

R: To me, I'm a bit of an old fashioned type. I suppose I was married fairly young. I happened to have a decent husband. It was a bit different. And I mean let's be honest, I think all of us go through the phase where it isn't all that much fun, and you think to yourself, "Is this all that life is?" I remember saying to my mum, "Crumbs, I spend half my life picking up things from one place and putting them somewhere else, and next day they're back again". So I had to do it all again.

R: I had this discussion with my sister. She got quite friendly with a guy who was quite a bit younger than her. She'd gone through a divorce and I suppose it's flattering to have this young bod and he was a very attractive bod and he came from a very well-to-do family and all the rest of it, he was Spanish.

I said, "Well, look, Stella, it's really up to you" I said - "There's one thing I'm just going to point out. It's not unusual in that country and in that class of people to encourage their young men to have some relationship with an older woman but" I said "When the time comes for him to get married, he'll want a virgin. It's going to be to a Catholic virgin who's family has got money.

R: It really depends on what they're looking for, if you're just looking for a physical relationship or whether you're looking for a long-term whatever, you know, relationship.

GENDER ROLES

What I didn't realise is that for a lot of men there is a fear almost as well with them. Because they are vulnerable, and they're not in control. So they also have had to let go of that control, and I think for some of them in their - when they're very young, it can be quite scary.

R: The thing is too; we expect them to know it all. Because they're men and they should. And to realise that they don't know it all can come sometimes come as a shock. And not only about sex, but you know, just about anything. You think, "Oh, yeah, a man, they should know".

R: They haven't met Richard. Poor man. I put up with him.

R: You have to.

R: I don't, I've got him so well trained. I won't start again.

R: Well, that's it; you've got to train them.

R: You do.

R: But you can't train them until you're strong enough and know yourself well enough to know what you want.

R: When you have sons, you've got to teach them how to treat a woman. When you have daughters, you've got to teach them how they should expect to be treated. To protect themselves.

R: I don't think many men really realise that a woman has a hymen; that it has to be broken before they can actually have intercourse. I mean once upon a time, back in those dim days, they used to make sure that you bled on your wedding night, didn't they, to ensure you were a virgin, that's all gone by the by.

I think that most guys don't even realise that it's there and it sort of worries me to think they don't really understand what they are doing to a woman and how important it is that.

Whereas I would have thought that men know that. Well, I always thought they would too but I discovered they don't.

I mean customs have changed over the time. I think that young men have more understanding. They're taught – well, this is what gets me and I suppose I'm being a bit simplistic about it - but they seem to think that because they can get an erection and get into bed with a girl that's what it's all about.

There's a great deal more to a sexual relationship than just the physical factor - that they can actually 'do it' and somehow or other that all seems to have been pushed to one side. In a sense I think is a bit of a shame.

VIAGRA

I just heard on telly that there is going to be Viagra for women.

R: Well, I think if men have got it, why shouldn't women have it? If that's what they want.

R: If that's what they need.

R: Yeah, because you know, when you hit menopause the urge goes down.

R: Yeah, you need something to spark it up.

R: Well, like a good car - a good engine, it needs oil in it.

R: You've got to maintain it.

R: You know, what about a bit of seduction?

R: Is there more to it? I didn't know that. Oh, what, do you want more than a tap on the shoulder? (laughter)

R: Yeah. Like a bit of - you know, loving and it's not just bang, bang, thank you ma'am, like, what's the matter with men? 'Cause I don't think they're half emotionally there, half of them.

R: They think it's all just for them.

R: How does Viagra work?

R: I don't know.

R: It's just a tablet.

R: I don't know. It must increase your libido.

R: Yes, it must do.

R It'd have to.

R: Some men can't get an erection.

R: The men's one increases the blood flow, so - would the women's one do the same?

R: It's doing all the hormones and everything, I'd say. But you know, sometimes you mightn't - you're a bit flat in that area.

R: It's all to do - like with the blood flow - that's what arousal is, really.

R: The blood flow? It must do their sexual urges at the same time.

R: But I mean how would you go if you've got heart problems?

R: So then we must not have the sexual urges.

R: Yeah, well, I don't know about that (laughter).

R: Well, I got back into it two weeks after the heart surgery.

R: Well, there you go.

R: What, sex?

R: Yeah.

R: Could you?

R: Yeah.

R: Did you?

R: Well, if you die having sex, well, you've gone a good way.

R: That's true.

R: I thought, "My God", I was still in hospital, I thought I hope I can still have sex

R: I want a man that's got skills, massage.

R: Wine and dine you?

R: Yeah, beforehand, otherwise he's not getting any.

R: I just want someone to come and do me garden.

R: Which garden though?

R: I was waiting for that

R: Get serious, you lot.

R: You've got to have a laugh.

SEXUALLY TRANSMISSIBLE INFECTIONS

On this television show about sex workers they talked about there were different things you could do to be safe. But there was one phase in the relationship with a new client where the girl had to inspect the goods, and I thought, "Uh-huh", to make sure that the girls are guaranteed to be clean. They've got doctors and nurses making sure the girls are clean but they can't guarantee that the client that's coming in is. So the girls are taught what to look for, and if there's any suspicion of it, the client is out the door.

R: But that doesn't happen in a casual hook up

R: STIs were never part of the conversation when we were growing up

R: What's an sti?

R: It was not discussed.

R: I didn't know about it in those days.

R: It was a taboo topic, yeah.

R: Sex education was more like about not getting pregnant.

INTERNET DATING

It's a very scary situation. After I got divorced, I got on a phone line dating, and I met a lot of men. But all of them only had one thing on their mind. And you learn not to trust, you know? I just decided that was it. I'm happy to be on my own, I don't need to be loved one minute and spat out the next. It's so demoralising. It's very hard when you're my age - 67, and single, and because of my experiences, I want to stay single.

R: It doesn't say much about the men though. You'd think they would know better, being the older generation.

R: It's a different scene. I mean I couldn't believe it, but - 'cause I say I suppose that I just didn't have to think about all these things all that much because I had a husband.

R: I met a man on a dating line - and this is what he said to me when I was standing there naked. He pointed at my breasts and groin and said, "If it wasn't for that and that, I wouldn't be interested in you".

R: Oh, God, thank you for that!

R: Yeah, get lost.

R: Really?

R: It's better when they tell you straight up though, because you know what you're in for.

R: Well, that's true too.

R: There are ways of saying things though.

R: Yeah, what a creep.

It makes you not feel - I didn't feel good about myself after that.

R: And you didn't say to him, "Well, that little dingle dangle don't do much for me"

R: "I've seen better on a newborn".

R: Or turn round and say, "Where is it? I can't see it".

R: But see, men think they have the right to say that.

R: That's awful, isn't it.

R: But if you say something like that to them, it's like, "Oh my God".

R: Oh, you're the worst slut ever.

I saw on Dr Phil - he had this – what is it they call them? When they're scams these guys? There was a woman on yesterday, and she'd sent overseas to this guy - supposedly \$218,000 odd she sent to him and I mean she was nothing to look at and all she had was his photo.

R: Oh my God, how do these women get sucked in like that?

Anyway, Dr Phil had hunted up this guy, who was in Ghana. And the woman still said: "But I do love him, you know, I really do love him."

R: How can you love a guy and you've never met him?

But she was 70 odd and Dr Phil was saying they reckon it's like an addiction.

R: They're so desperate for someone to love them.

Catfish, that's what they call them and Dr Phil is doing a lot on this Catfish, that's what they call it.

R: Oh, I don't know how you can fall in love with someone you've never seen.

R: Because they're vulnerable and they meet this guy and they're lonely, they're vulnerable.

R: I think they're half in love before they even start.

R: These people are hungry for companionship and love and they ...

R: They'll take anything.

Yeah, this is their knight in shining armour so then when they say, "Look, I can't get out of the country because I owe back taxes, I need so and so."

He was going to marry her and he was going to come over, but as Dr Phil said she'd been on with this guy online for two years and Dr Phil said to her, "Haven't

you wondered why in two years he hasn't been over?" You know, and even when she saw this guy and he spoke to her she said, "Yes, but I still love that person."

R: Because she's made that thing up in her mind.

R: She loves the image.

She'd lost her husband and she got online and she joined this Christian dating it was called.

R: There you go.

The site was called Christian Dating and she thought Christian Dating has to be honest, upfront.

R: And this how they roped them in.

R: And it's always the older people. I think with age sometimes you do feel a bit lonely, you do feel alone.

R: You don't realise you're doing stupid things.

R: Yeah.

R: Because you haven't your got husband any more or your partner any more.

R: Yes.

R: And your children don't bother with you any more.

R: It is a lonely existence.

R: You need to talk to people; you need to talk to people so thank God we've got this club because otherwise I'd be ...

R: Giving them all her money, all her millions.

R: You'd be on with some Nigerian...

R: Yeah.

And this woman even, because she'd send him money, the last bit of her money, she lost her home. She had her own home in a retirement village, she sold that. She's living now with her brother-in-law and his wife because she's got no money. You felt so sorry for her because she really did believe.

R: Genuine need.

And I thought how can you be gullible? But I suppose when you're old and you're lonely.

R: There's a lot of people that are like that.

R: Depends what you've got in your life or haven't got in your life.

It got so bad the woman's son won't speak to her. Apparently she lost her grandson, he was about 16, 17 when he passed away, and she didn't have enough money to go to the kid's funeral because she's sent it over to another country. Her daughter ended up crying because of how much she lost her inheritance.

But the older woman she still says, "But I love him." Even though she could see this guy and knew it wasn't him, in her mind – and they reckon it's an addiction, it's like an addiction.

I: What is she addicted to?

R: The idea of love.

Well I think she was just lonely and someone showed an interest in her, she'd lost her husband and she just wanted companionship I suppose and she got online.

R: Some women are quite vulnerable, aren't they?

So she thought that she was safe because it was Christian Dating, you know. So she's gone on there and she's met this guy online or this scammer, and because he's fed into her what she wanted to hear - and this is why it's so sad because you and I or any of us here would say, we'd probably say, "Oh what an idiot," you know, but in her mind ...

R: The red light usually flashes.

R: But in her mind it kept her going.

R: Because it's hard getting through those years, the first couple of years after losing your husband

R: If you're that lonely and you really need a man then there's lots of places you can go to meet men.

R: But see at home its private and no-one knows.

R: If you're that low and you really need a man, then there's lots of places you can go to meet men.

R: Where?

R: Just Google it.

R: Google it, that's my favourite saying.

R: Yeah, they're online, they get lonely, some of them can't go out, some of them have got no-one to go out with and so they're stuck at home on their own

R: That's what I'm saying, you can go out but at home it's private and you can easily get roped in.

And it was something Dr Phil said yesterday – because I tape it every day, I think he said, "So far there's something like \$85,000,000 people have been scammed out of.

R: Good grief, no way!

R: And it's always the older people they scam.

R: The pricks.

R: Well maybe we should change that and we should start a women's group that scams men.

R: We could get rich.

R: This is why this group is so good because we can all come together and if there was more groups like this out there where people could come together our age and have discussions like that – these scammers wouldn't be in business.

R: No, no, that's right.

R: I think you're safer getting in a women's group.

NARRATIVES

In the following section six narratives are presented, ranging in length from a few lines to several pages. Four of the narratives include body maps – two women did not feel they had the artistic abilities to create a body map. Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of participants.

TONIA: A LA NATURAL

It's me just a la natural. It's how I come into this world. I tried to give myself some boobs. I did pink for being feminine. I found the nipple to be perky. They are a bit high, aren't they? Never mind. And I just did a bit of nail polish, and put me jewellery on, and me glasses on.

I'm naked. That's just what I feel being natural. I think that's my sexuality, just be myself. I never used to be, but then as I've got older, yes. I don't - whether it's the stubbornness comes out in me, I don't know. But - 'cause I can be very stubborn. But I am a lot more confident now than I have ever been.

Actually my daughter put on Facebook yesterday - "How did girls perceive themselves as they were growing up? Did they take perceptions from the Barbie Doll, from the telly?" And I thought it's not something I'd actually ever thought about. I can't say I was influenced by TV greatly, or barbie, to be feminine.

If Richard sees me walking around the house like that - "Allo, allo, allo". Poor Richard.

I didn't really give it much thought, I just drew it.

I don't know why I did the grass. You want to run around naked outside, without any inhibitions. I've never done that actually, run outside naked.

I feel good. I'm in a good place at the moment, so. You do get more confident. Depending on the circumstances. Something might happen that could knock you back a bit, I suppose. But I've been very lucky, so.

In terms of sex education when I was growing up, I got more information from my dad. And he would only answer what we would ask. And if we didn't ask any more, he thought, "Well, that's all they need to know". Like periods - that was mum's department. But, how to get babies, he would just tell us. I was lucky, I suppose, it was very open at home. But I was very shy too, and old fashioned. I thought I would save myself till I got

married. I saved myself till I was married - well just before and I was a little disappointed.

I was disappointed my children were a lot more freer from what I brought them up to be. But then they are adults and it's their choice. So you can't do much about it, but.

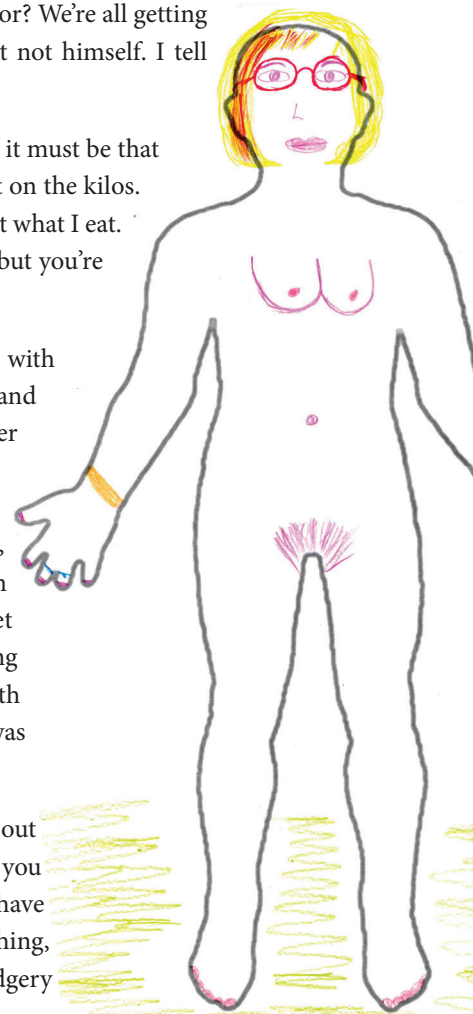
We need to educate the boys on how to treat girls. Morality. But it's like there's no meaning for a lot of them because it's all just sex. You see? That's what I'm getting at. There's no real connection as far as I can see. Because sex is not the be all and end all.

Richard, he looks on the TV and says, "My God, they're getting old, aren't they, have a look at them". I said, "Have you looked in the mirror? We're all getting older". He sees everybody else but not himself. I tell you, it's weird.

I used to be quite skinny, and then it must be that darn menopause - and now it's put on the kilos. I never used to have to worry about what I eat. I thought I was finished growing, but you're growing in different areas.

Women I know can find love with husband number two, husband number three. My dear friend, her first husband passed away and then she met this other fellow, and she was 50 odd, and she married, and she loved him dearly. But then he passed away. And then she met this other fellow, but she's not getting married now. But she stayed with him for years and years. And she was happy with each and every one.

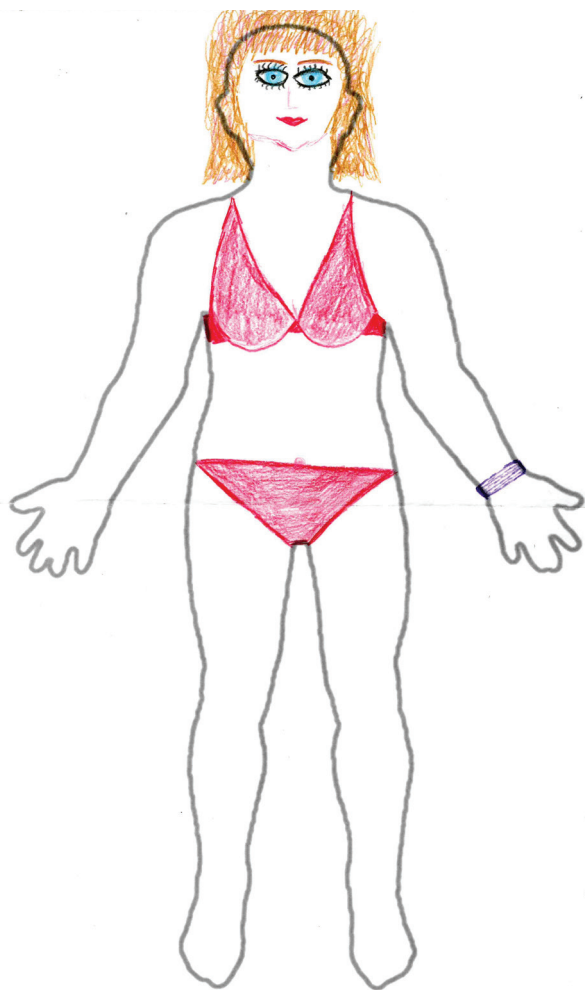
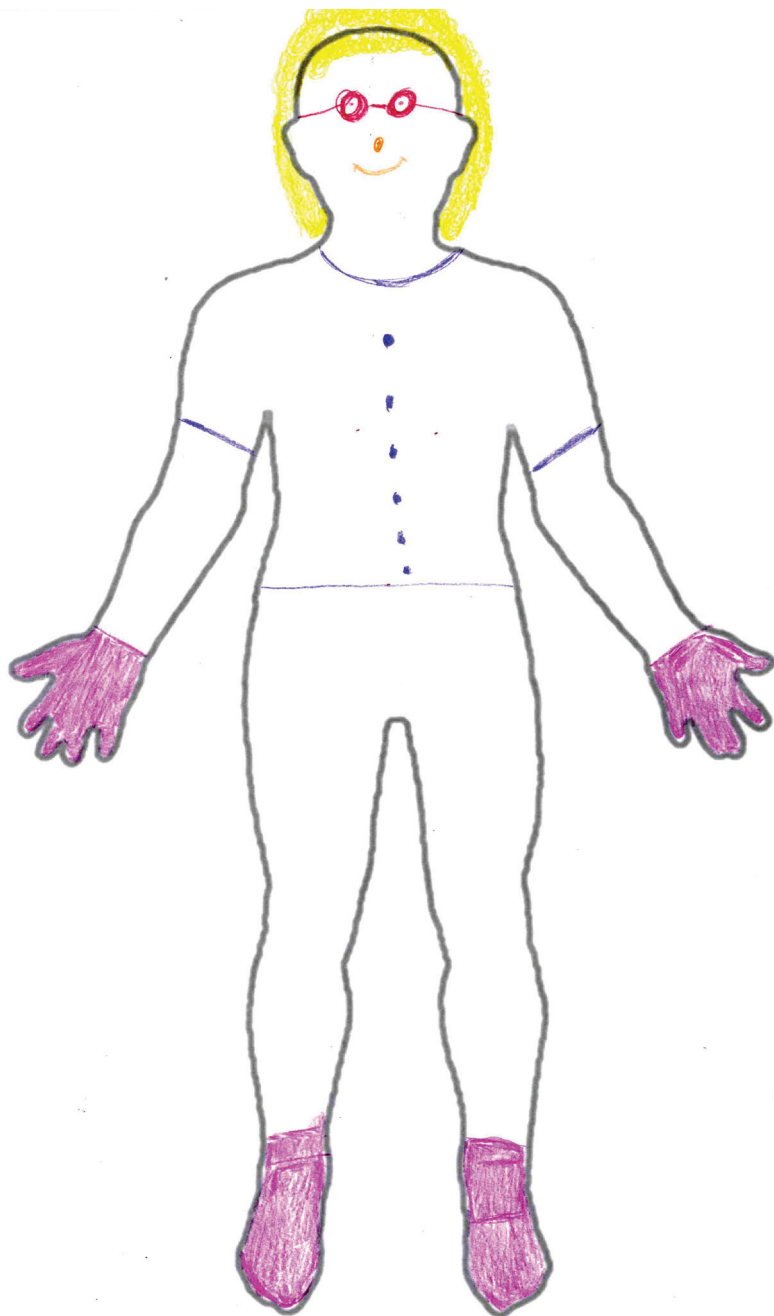
Some women are just going out looking for sex. But, see, if just you go out to just have sex, you don't have to worry about doing their washing, cooking their meals. All the drudgery type stuff.



DOROTHY: LITTLE BITS COVERED

Its red, all systems go. I just reckon - whether you're male or female, the body looks better when it's got the little bits covered. Because, it's a bit ugly. They're not the prettiest things.

But see when you're older and your boobs are down here, you put a bra on, and it sort of gets back up where they were. You just roll them up and tuck them in. You know, sort of holds them. I suppose as far as my sexuality goes, I feel more sexual when I'm covered than when I'm not. 'Cause then when I move around, you know, all the bits aren't going flop, flop.



PATSY: MY BODY IS SAFE

R: It just looks like long johns.

That's what it reminded me of.

R: You haven't got any boobs, love.

That's all right, I don't mind if they're flat.

R: Are you freezing? Socks and gloves?

Well, I chose to do the feet and hands 'cause that was pretty safe. And then I thought, "Can't just leave the body naked", so I put the sleeves in first, and I thought, "Oh, neckline might go good, and some buttons". And yeah, that's about the extent of my creativity.

No, my body is safe, but I just thought I couldn't go wrong if I coloured in the hands and feet.

R: That's honest.

R: Fair enough.

JUDY: I'VE STILL GOT A WAIST

It's a generation thing. I remember a friend of mine saying, "As far as my mum was concerned, her only role in life was to make sure I got down the aisle in a white dress".

I think in some ways we sort of made it a bit more open for the younger generation. Because a lot of the guys, where once upon a time they would feel they had to protect women, now they sort of think, "Oh, well, you can do it all".

The women of today, like - younger than us, they don't think of it as women's lib. They think of it as just their everyday right.

I had a dad and an older brother who treated me quite nicely. My brother was very protective and I didn't have to think about all that. But there are a lot of women of our era that were not treated the way we should be treated. They were treated as second-class citizens, you know. "Your place is in the home, barefoot, pregnant, whatever I want you to do."

So our generation had the Women's Lib. The generation now and to come - think that's just the way life is. That's their God given right.

There's an awful lot of pressure put upon girls, if they know that it's almost expected of them to have sex. And I know it's only a thing on TV, but I always remember one of those English programs where there were gangs. The girls were expected to have sex with members of this gang, because if they didn't, they were fair game for the other gang.

Now, where do you go from that? It's become all a bit nasty, hasn't it? What are you going to teach those girls about love and respect, and bringing up a family, and making a home - all those sort of skills, which a lot of people feel are a bit beneath them or something. But I mean it's a very rewarding thing to be able to do, if you've got the right person in your life.

It's a different scene now. I mean I just didn't have to think about all these things all that much.

But they go on about swinging London. They've got hotels that people go to deliberately and if you leave your door open, it means that you're game. And people just have swinging weekends.

Do you know, I think one of the most eye opener things on TV - I don't know if anybody else saw Stephen Fry

when he was doing his little trip all around America? One of the segments, which was very open, was he went to a high-class brothel.

Now, Stephen Fry is gay, you know, quite open. So he didn't go to the brothel in order to - for the usual sort of things, but because it was a high-class establishment. The woman who ran it made sure that the girls were all looked after and all this, that and the other - and the girl that he was interviewing was very open. She was quite attractive and young, and she said she enjoyed sex.

But the thing was - they had a meeting phase with clients. It wasn't just a "Wham, bam, thank you, ma'am", type of deal. It was meant to be a high-class situation. Well, they had their own rooms - and they're all nicely furnished.

Do you know the thing that annoyed me the most about ageing? It probably sounds silly, but its flabby arms. Anything else I can disguise anyway. I've still got a waist. My mum always used to say, "If you've got a waist you've got a figure, you can disguise up or down". But all you gain is there are these really pretty dresses, and they've got no sleeves whatsoever.

One of the comments made by a guy in one of the shows that I watched, he says, "One of the funny things about sex", he says, "If a woman is completely naked apart from her stockings", he said, "That is erotic, but" - he said, "When a man is naked apart from his socks", he said, "That's ridiculous".

JUNE: EVERYTHING'S GONNA BE ROSY

My mum and dad have still got their big wedding photo on the wall and when I grew up I was always looking at this beautiful white dress. And you grow up in a fairyland. Then all of a sudden you meet someone - at 18, and the guy used to drink like a fish, and I'm thinking, "My dad didn't do this, and my dad didn't smoke, what happened here?" So your father's a big influence. And we were always looking at the wedding photo thinking everything's gonna be rosy.

When I was 24 I was going out with one guy who used to take drugs. I mean I didn't know at the time, but I found out later. He pulled a fist at me one time; I was in a corner. I said to him, "I've got three brothers, you do that and it'll be the last thing you do". I was lucky,

I talked him out of it. But you - you don't know what they're gonna be like.

My husband died about seven years ago. I've had a couple of boyfriends, but one I stayed with a year and a half, and the person I'm with now, we're coming up to six months. I don't want to be on my own; I hate being on my own.

When my husband died, my girls were still seven and nine, so it was very hard. I don't drive, so it's a really bad situation. But I always keep fighting on.

But I like to go out with people; I have about three or four different groups. But I like to - 'cause I don't drive, it's nice to have a man maybe take you out - you know what I mean? I love the dancing, so this one I'm with now, we go dancing every Saturday night, and now Sundays. So I'm sort of burning the candle at both ends at the moment. But the girls are a lot more independent, and they've always got a party on the weekend or something, so. It's more companionship than anything else. I don't want to be on my own.

My daughters they're all virgins, so they tell me. But the boys go through their groups of girls and they just go from one to the other until they can get as much sex as possible. And this is Year 11. They think they're grown up.

Even online now - a lot of people get on the computer. I've got friends that go on the dating sites. To me it's an amazing way to meet a murderer, that's what I call it. But only because of what I see in the newspapers.

A lot of my friends do go round and meet men, like on a week-to-week basis. And they're all just looking for sex, that's all, pretty much. Because they're in their 50s or in their 60s, they've got families, they're divorced, they've got grandchildren. And all they're looking for is a good time, pretty much. It's hard to find someone that's honest.

Now it's not fashionable to stay in a long-term relationship. I know some that don't want to bring someone home because they are maybe scared that person will molest their children or something like that. So some of them - one weekend they have their children, and then there's a weekend that the children go to the father's, and so they're out. They're out from Friday right up till Sunday.

One of my friends' said that last week "Oh, I'm happy now" - 'cause her children are still in primary school, and she just said, "Oh, I'm happy now to be on my own", but she has her hook-ups every two weeks, as they call it hook-ups. But she doesn't want a man to move in with her, because she wants to be in charge of her life. But then those children - they don't see these people come in and out because she's not looking for someone to marry her or look after her and her children. She's just looking for hook-ups every two weeks and that's it. And the hook ups change every two weeks.

It's gone wild out there.

But at least both parties are consenting. And they can meet each other; have a cocktail or two down at the bar, or whatever. You know, it's accepted.

One person that I met - we started talking, and we got onto Facebook, and then he rang me just the once. He'd been divorced about four years or something, and he said, "I was happily married for 29 years" or something - and his wife had enough, so she left him. He goes, "There's no way I would ever sleep with the same woman in the one bed again". I went, "Ooh".

It scared hell out of me. I'm going, "Ooh, I'm not ringing him again, I'm not talking to him again". I mean on Facebook he travels a lot. We've still got friends on Facebook, but I thought, "I've got two girls and I need someone responsible, you know".

A lot of people say, you know, "You're gonna lose your house, watch out for your girls". I don't think so. I usually have an idea of what they're like, and I haven't been wrong so far. Nothing's ever happened. I mean no one's ever moved in with me. We've gone out, or they've stayed a couple of days, but no one's ever moved in. So, I'm not really worried about that, because I think in myself I always make a good decision.

I try to find someone that doesn't drink and maybe doesn't smoke - but the person I'm with now smokes, it doesn't bother me. But I guess, you know, after the first couple of weeks if they start swearing at you, or they're very rough - you get an idea of what they're going to be like.

I think I'm a good judge of personality, and I don't put up. I always say as a joke to the girls, "There's a shovel in the garage and if anybody hits you, they're gonna cop it at three in the morning".

AGNES: BACK TO PLAIN

Well, it's nothing really, it's just I'm clothed. I want to be sexual, but at the same time I wanted to be covered up. I put clothes on, the jeans or whatever, the high boots, the crop top and the belt and the little belly button showing. That's what I'd like to be, but at the same time I'm covered.

I'm not exposed. I don't look in the mirror when I'm dressed. I refuse to look in the mirror. If I see a window when I'm walking around, I look the other way. I don't know why, I just do. I just don't like the look of me, I suppose.

When I was with Lou it was lovely to walk around with a younger man that quite a few sheilas were after him, and I got him. And I thought, "Ooh" you know, and that give me my confidence. But then now Lou is gone, I'm back to plain.

So I think that's what matters with me - that's how I'd like to be. How I'd like to look. That's the figure I'd like to be - to be able to wear the clothes. But I want to be covered up. Even if I see a nice guy, he's not seeing nothing.

I've got bloody boobs down me belly and a spare tyre. We've got to stop eating our bickies and stuff. But then I look at it this way - if you like something, you never know where you're gonna be tomorrow, you could be dead. So you might as well enjoy.

I had a girlfriend who had the most beautiful figure. She was tiny, petite, she was in her 40s and yet when you saw the face, it was lined - totally lined. I always say the fat irons out the wrinkles. She had the most beautiful, attractive figure. She used to love to sunbathe. So her skin was really very weather beaten. And guys are going, "Ooh, yeah", and then the moment they saw her, face it was the opposite.

But you can still look attractive; it doesn't matter. It's a confidence thing, I think. Yeah, within yourself, in here, inside. See you could get dressed up and look beautiful. At the same time I live in reality.

The facts of life

When I got my periods, I woke up - as you do, and there's blood everywhere. I was 12, and I thought, "Ooh", you know, and I went down and I said to mum, "Mum, I'm bleeding, I think I'm haemorrhaging or something". And she just stood there, and she "Oh", she

said, "No", she said - she said, "That's your period". And I says "Period?" And she said, "Yeah", she said, "Just don't let any boys touch you". And that was the extent of my sexual education. And she said to my sister, "I thought you'd tell her, being as you're older".

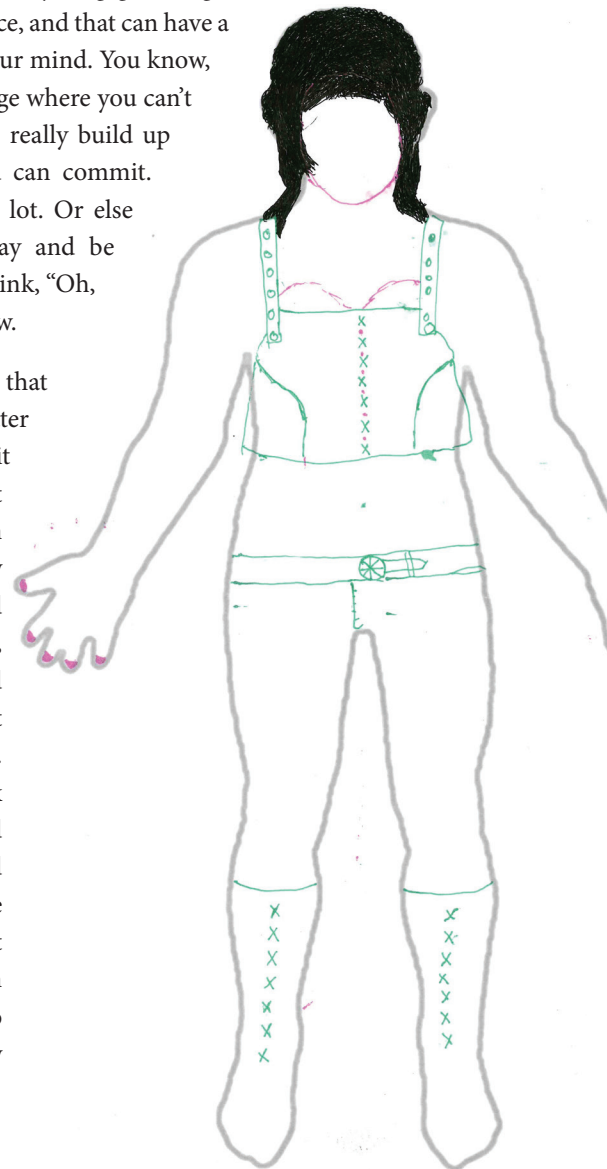
So Mary, my girlfriend whose mum was a nurse, and Patrick, our other friend - I always remember, we sat round the kitchen table and we got some of her mum's nursing books down, and Patrick, me and Mary found out the facts of life then, through that.

I didn't get it from my parents, no. And that's because the era they were brought up in. They were brought up that you didn't talk about it, you know. And that was behind locked doors.

Sexual assault

It's all born in what your first encounter with sex is. No, what I mean is - you can go by your life experiences, you can go with - some young girls might be raped on their first experience, and that can have a prolonged thing in your mind. You know, and you get to the stage where you can't trust. So you need to really build up that trust before you can commit. But it takes an awful lot. Or else you go the other way and be totally - love it, and think, "Oh, this is good", you know.

See the point I think that where kids are better off now a little bit more today, is the fact that sex it's taught in schools. Like I grew up with very old fashioned parents, so that wasn't talked about. That just didn't happen, you know. And you got no sex education. I found that when it happened to me - that I'd led the guy on. But I didn't realise I'd led him on, because I had no education, you know what I mean?



I was raped - my first time, when I was 15. But I sort of - because I thought I knew it all, and sort of like - I let him go to a certain extent.

And then when - when I said no, it was too late and I had to fight for my life - which I did.

But what I'm saying is nowadays kids are lucky, they get it in school, they get sex education. And if I'd have had that, I'd have known how far to go and to be careful. But I didn't. And then I found out after that happened.

I met my first husband a few months later, and I stuck with him. We never had sex till we got married. I didn't want it. And then when we did have sex, to me what he wanted to do with sex, to me was dirty, you know what I mean? We weren't sexually compatible. And I think that's sort of probably, in the end, why the marriage failed.

But this is from my experience of not being taught from an early age what sex is like. Where the kids nowadays - they get the sex education in school. As you said, a lot of it's on the movies too, and there are some movies that have a lesson in it. You know, where the girl doesn't realise that she's doing the wrong thing, and it's easily done. 'Cause young girls, they think they know it all, you know what I mean?

So that's what I meant when I said today I think kids are luckier than what we was.

You know. I mean after I was raped I snuck in, and I snuck up the back stairs and tidied meself up before I went into the lounge. My brother and sister-in-law were looking after me. And my mum and dad had gone overseas, and I'd snuck out and met this guy who was 21 year old. Thought it was cool, you know, 'cause I was sneaking out. And even went into a barn with him, which was - I didn't know anything.

And then when I came back, I thought, "Oh", 'cause mum had always said, "If you ever bring any trouble home here, you're out", and all this and that. So I couldn't tell mum and dad. So I snuck in and I went upstairs, and I thought, "If my brothers find out, they'll find him and they'll kill him". And I had all these visions going through my brain, because we were brought up so strict.

And then sort of like I went upstairs, tidied myself up. I had a lump on the lip, inside of the lip, and I had some scratch marks. I couldn't walk really all that straight, 'cause I put up a bit of a fight. But I made myself

presentable, and I walked into that lounge room like nothing had happened.

And then about two months later I'd missed two periods - and then I thought, "It's too late now, if I'm pregnant, it's too late now, and mum's gonna chuck me out, and mum's gonna do this" - you know.

I thought I was pregnant; it was the hardest time, 'cause I was - just turned 16. And you know, I had my birthday after this happened, and - and I thought, "Well, what can I do?" I still didn't know anything. I thought, "Well, at least I'm not sick." You get morning sickness when you're pregnant, so I'm not sick, so that's a good sign.

And then I'm saying to myself, "And I don't fancy eating anything." Which is another sign of pregnancy - do you know what I mean? All these things. But then I'm thinking to myself, "If I am, what do I tell mum and dad?" 'Cause they said bring home any trouble - they'd chuck me out. I mean mum and dad wouldn't have, but at that stage you don't know. Mum just told us that to frighten us, I think.

And I lived in a village and I thought, "Well, everybody's gonna know". And all these things go through a teenager's head - who doesn't realise.

And these little girls today - I see them now with their boys, and they're all 12 and 13, and I think to myself, "My God", you know. But then I suppose they've got a better chance than I had because it's taught in schools today.

No, my first time wasn't very pleasant. And guess what, he was a Hoover salesman.

And then luck happened and I got my period - and really bad. And whether it was a miscarriage or it was just a shock on my system, I don't know.

Raising children

But this is what I'm saying, you know, it's different now. And I've brought my boys up differently, but if anything, I've brought them up the other way. Where I told them, "Come and tell me anything" because I wanted them to. But I did the wrong thing there, because they couldn't tell me things. So obviously I did something wrong.

One of my children was molested, which I didn't know until last year. And the other one - well, he's gay - turned out he's gay. I found out this year after 48 years.

And I always thought that - oh, you know, "My kids can come to me with anything". Because I had parents that were so strict, I went the opposite.

And when I divorced, I had all my teenage years all in - I suppose for 15 years I did everything I wanted to. And then I think to myself, "Well, really, I put my kids in danger - but I didn't think. I just knew that I'm off the leash; I can experience what I never experienced.

Being single

Well, I lived on the single scene. I was divorced at 24. I didn't get remarried till I was nearly 50. So I would go to the pubs or go to the single scene, and I did all the single scenes that women do - over 28 singles and whatever.

I went onto the drugs, I took drugs - tried them, didn't like them. Only tried once, didn't like it and that was it for me. So I went through a thing, and it still stems from, I think, when mum and dad - can't be honest with me, like growing up. And I had a lot of experience with that. But it got me to a stage where I thought, I saw a lot and I heard a lot, and I thought, "Not interested", totally - till I met my second. Twenty years I was on my own.

So it's sort of like - I saw a lot of what went on. Like I had a friend Liz - I used to look after her. I used to be more of a protector for Liz. She was very sexually active, specially when she had a drink. And the guys would naturally latch on straightaway, and I'd say, "Liz!" Or I'd tell the guys to "piss off" - excuse me, I use their language 'cause it's the only language that they understood. Plus I had a hate of men anyway.

So - and then she'd say "But I lllllike it". Anyway, so she said to me once, "You always look after me when I'm drunk", she said, "Cause I get a bit loose". And we're still mates to this day. She's married now - married to George, and she's - you know, she's 70 odd now, Liz.

But sort of I experienced all the single scenes and - I mean I was raging, I was out Thursday, Friday, Saturday nights every week to the pubs or singles clubs.

What men are looking for is adult conversation, especially when you've got kids. And you just want to have that adult connection, and someone that you can go out and talk to that's on your level.

See the point is - and this is it - unless you've been in that situation of being single and on your own, if

you've had a good marriage and - and you've had a good life with that husband, you don't know.

Sexually transmissible infections

Nowadays, say if you sleep with a man, you're probably sleeping with ten women that they've slept with before. But at that time you don't think that. And you think it can never happen to me, you know, like with young girls, "It can never happen to me".

And then when you get later on in life, when you're a bit older or a lot older, or in the nursing homes and all that, you'd probably think to yourself, "So what? I may as well enjoy what bit of life I've got left, and if anything happens, well, tough luck". You know? That's - if I want it, I've got it, and so what, I'm on the way out anyway.

That's just people's perspective - that's probably why they enjoy themselves and have sex, and they don't care.

A rose coloured cottage

I dreamed of the cottage, and that's when I got married at 17, you know. I was gonna live forever in this beautiful rose colour cottage. I was gonna have a boy and a girl, and then when I got divorced, and I'm thinking to myself, "Now, hang on..." The devil hears your plans.

I was going out with a biker and I thought now, Gerry wanted to go round Australia, and I said, "Well, wait till I'm 40 and then my boys are adult enough to look after themselves", blah, blah, blah, blah.

And yeah, and then Gerry died when he was 28, so that put paid to my bike ride round Australia. And then my boys grew up, and I said, "Wait till my boys grow up", and thinking - and then I met Lou and he had three young boys.

It was really strange. I had my life mapped out. And then when you get older, reality sucks, you know, that's it. What sucks is the fact that I didn't get my chance to go round Australia on a motorbike. I don't know; I used to think it was great, being on a motorbike. I was a little bikies' chic.

The love of my life

My last partner was my last. No way known, no way known on God's earth would I have another relationship? It could be bloody Jack Nicholls and that - you know, because I think - well, I had my time. As I

said, I had that much time on the single scene, and so that's all past now.

I couldn't think anything worse than an old man putting their hands on me. That makes me - I know it's awful, but sort of like ... putting teeth in, and taking their teeth out, and putting them on the side of the bed.

Well, when I married Lou, he was ten years younger than me. And very, very attractive guy, all my girlfriends fell for him, you know. And I thought, "How the hell did he end up with me?" But he made me feel so special, and he made me feel like I was it and a bit. You know what I mean? And it gave me confidence in myself. And I think when someone can give you that; no one else can ever come up to that standard with me.

He gave me what I really needed. He gave me love, he gave me companionship, he gave me security. I had someone there for me that was there 24/7. I nursed him through cancer for two years. He passed away on me, but he gave me that.

So no other man - I don't care who they are - could ever replace that. I think this is it with a lot of people. If you really, really love that - you can go with someone else. Because that's the love of your life. And I couldn't even so much as see myself, you know?

When Lou had been gone about a year, I moved down here. And I used to go out with a guy years ago called Lee, and I was quite into him, we'd gone together for about two years, you know. I went in the hotel with my friend to play darts, and there's Lee there. And I thought, "My God", and he came over, and of course we got chatting, and he said, "Oh", he said, "Come down, we're staying in the caravan park down at the beach". You know, and he said, "Oh, come down and spend the night".

So I thought, "Well, yeah", 'cause he was a friend, you know, and I can trust him as far as I knew him. He wasn't a stranger. And then when I got all the way down there I'm feeling guilty, and I'm thinking, "Sheesh", you know, "What are you doing, Agnes?" And then when we got there, like Lee and I talked and he cooked me dinner and everything, and we had a bit of a laugh about old times, whatever.

And then when it got to going to bed, and I was dreading it - and he says to me, "Oh, where do you want to sleep?" He said, "I'm sleeping in there, if you want to come in with me". And I said, "Nuh", I said, "I'll

have the bed on the floor". So he made me up a bed on the floor and I stayed there the night. You know.

And I told him all about Lou, and I opened up about Lou, and it was good to have him there as a friend. But I still felt funny - even though I'd known him for two years, it was just weird. I was so attracted to him, and then I looked at him, and I thought, "Nuh, you're not Lou", and that's just it.

I can't understand - if you really love someone, how someone can take their place, I just don't.

Family violence

I knew a girl once and she was telling me that her husband used to abuse her.

And anyway, she'd had enough. And this night, he went asleep, and she went and got the kitchen knife, she said, and she held it to his throat and she woke him up. And he woke up, and she said, "Everybody has to sleep, you know". And she said he never touched her after that.

Yeah, but she - and the way she did it. And he thought, "Ooh", you know, "I do have to sleep". It worked for her.

Internet dating

When I first went on the computer, on the Facebook, and I didn't know much about Facebook, you get guys that send you to add as a friend, and I sort of added them without checking them out first.

Some of them were Arabs or overseas guys. And you know, they say, "Oh, you look beautiful", and all this and that, and you think, "Oh, God", you know - you're the biggest con merchant going. So I think, "Nuh". So I just totally realised - I blocked them.

Now I've got a girlfriend in America - Edna, and there's this guy from - I think he comes from Afghanistan or somewhere. And Edna is just nothing to write home about. But he puts on Facebook - "You look so fantastic." And you think, "Oh God", you know. It just - to me they're just sleazebags. You know, and you hear a lot of them. I've been watching.

Fantasy phone

I did fantasy phone calls. Men ring up and they've got a fantasy, and instead of going out and doing it - they talk it on the phone. Some people are shy, some people are lonely and they're ringing up and they believe everything you tell them.

Well, I needed some money, and it was an easy job. I had to tell mum I was selling insurance, and I had a hate on men at the time. And I really thought, "Well, I'll get you", I did, you know.

What we used to do – Alf, the owner had a TAB account, and they used to ring Alf up and put the money in his TAB account, so that anyone thought they're just betting. But it wasn't, that's how they pre-paid. But if they just rang up, then you'd ask them for a phone number and an address. And when they hung up, you'd ring the operator like you're looking for a phone number, and if the phone numbers corresponded, then you knew that was a genuine person.

Some of the things that men come out with - I mean you have your genuine ones. There's a guy living interstate and it was his 21st birthday, and he was lonely for his family. So he rang up, and all he wanted to do was talk about home and the footy and how he was going and whatever.

Then I had Steven from Mildura, and Steven was a regular guy that used to ring up. And Steven got cancer, and he'd ring me up and talk me through what he was going through, and I was talking to him, as a friend. He connected with me along them lines. Like that part of it didn't go. It was just - it got to the stage, they know you and they open up, because you have your regular clients and they open up.

They can just chat, chat. So you know, even though it sounds bad, but did provide the service. Well, that's the way I look at it. Maybe that's my way of saying, "Well, that's my excuse for doing it", but I mean the money was good too, believe me. And at the same time - like when Steven got the cancer - and it was his birthday, I gave him a call for his birthday and it didn't cost him anything. When he was in hospice he just used to ring me up to talk. So as well as becoming a client in the beginning - they usually become your friends.

But you'd also get the nutters, and I mean I think that made me hate men even more. Like one guy rang up and he's whispering, and I said, "How come you're whispering?" He said, "Oh, my wife's asleep in the bedroom". You know, and I thought to myself, "My God". You know what I mean?

Alf said "You don't have to talk, if you feel uncomfortable with anything, you don't have to do it, you just pass it on to the girl that's comfortable with it,

if you feel uncomfortable what you're seeing, then you just don't do it - hang up or whatever.

It really opened my eyes up to the fact that there are gullible people out there. Guys thought they were talking to a tiny blonde – that I had long blonde hair and I was 36-24-34. And you'd be sitting there and you'd have your trackies on, and your bloody moccies, and you turn Days of Our Lives down while you did the call. And this poor guy on the other end.

But do you know what? To me it was, "I'm getting my own back on all them ratbags out there". But when I look back now, I think to myself, "Well, it was an awful thing to do", you know. But at the time I made \$400 a week, you know.

And then they'd send you things through the post, and some of the things they sent! I've had a life - I can at least honestly say I've lived.

The mistress calls were the best. I mean you'd sit there and think, "Satisfaction", you know. Its bloody idiots on the other end. And I thought, "Revenge is sweet".

I had no job, I had two kids, and you know, it helped 'cause my husband never supported them. I think if you're desperate enough, you'll do anything to make sure the kids are looked after. Any decent mother would. And I wasn't going out doing it. I was in a safe environment where I was giving a service.

I'm honest, you know, and if people don't like it, that's their tough luck.

There's some sad people out there. There's lonely people. There's some people out there that talk to you about their problems, and they haven't got the confidence to go out and meet people.

But they've got the needs, and this is a way of meeting their needs. It's a fact that while they're doing it anonymous on the phone, they're not out there making idiots of themselves. And a lot of them were old. When they're older, they just don't like going out there. They feel they haven't got any confidence.

I think they connect with you, because you're a faceless person. And they know that you can't encroach on their life. And - you know, if they can do it over the phone and get the satisfaction over the phone - because they feel they shouldn't go out, because maybe they feel they're too old to go out - their families wouldn't expect them to go out and have a life.

Where they're in a safe environment of their own home, and they can enjoy themselves without having to go out there and risk being caught. Or explain to anyone. You become their girlfriend.

Older women as teachers in schools

I think what - would be an idea would be to go round schools. People like me with my story, to go and talk to young girls in a sort of class type thing - with just girls, and explain - what happened to me. And maybe something like that might be beneficial in schools. So that students get the perspective from someone who's been there and done that, known the consequences. And sort of maybe give them an idea of what not to do, and how far to go, you know.

They need to have someone educate the girls on what can happen if they're not careful. And someone go in and educate the boys, you know. Because it happens to boys too.

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