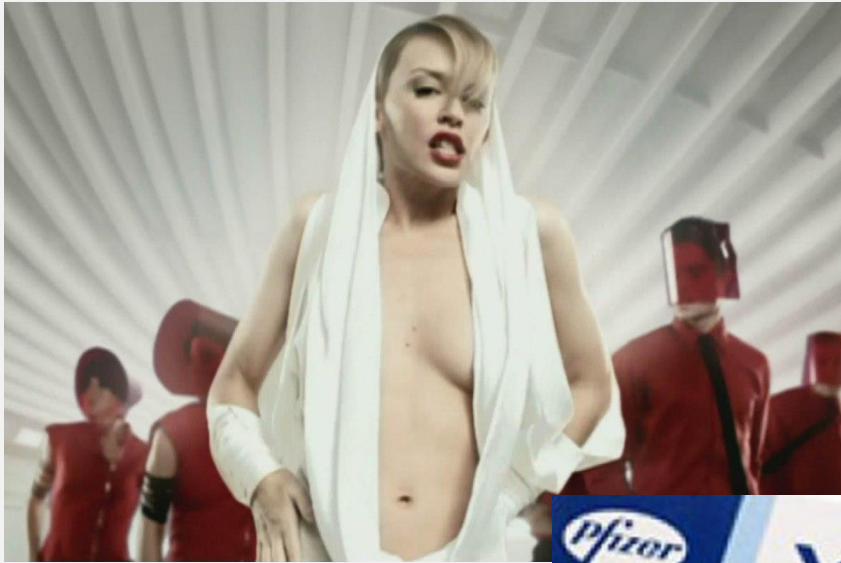


Ageing well? Exploring the sexual rights of older adults

Sharron Hinchliff, PhD

Professor of Psychology & Health





2001

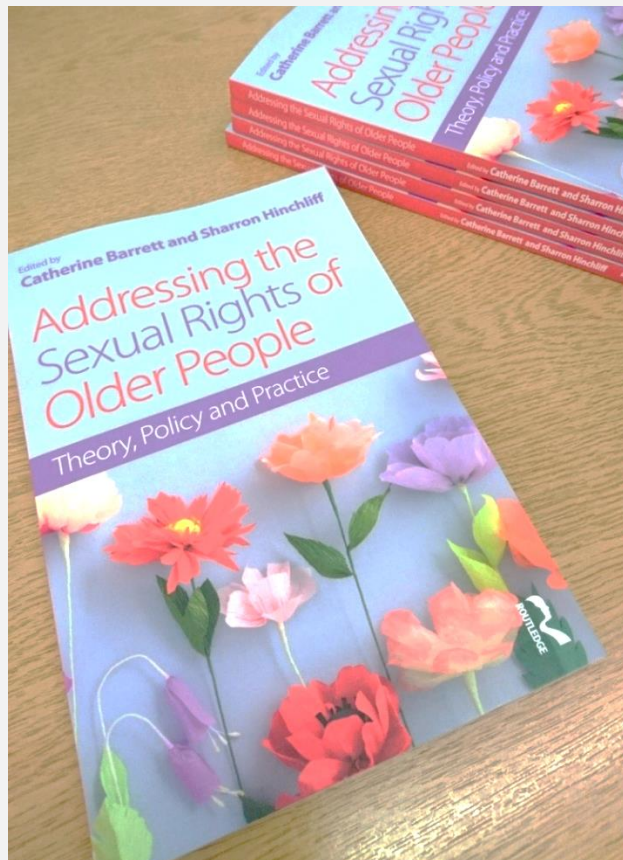


Programme of work

- Research, education/training, innovation
- Ageing, gender, sexual health and well-being
- Intimate/romantic relationships, sexual pleasure, sexual difficulties, seeking help, sources of help, quality of life
- Raising awareness, deepening understanding, and improving service delivery

Underpinned by a sexual rights approach

(human rights as applied to sexuality)



AGEISM IS EVERYWHERE

1 IN 2 PEOPLE WORLDWIDE ARE AGEIST AGAINST OLDER PEOPLE
and, in Europe, there is more ageism against younger than older people

Ageism affects us THROUGHOUT LIFE
and exists in our institutions, our relationships and ourselves

Ageism EXACERBATES OTHER DISADVANTAGE

DISABILITY
RACE
SEX
AGEISM

#AWorld4AllAges

GLOBAL CAMPAIGN TO COMBAT AGEISM

By supporting **sexual rights**, we can tackle inequalities within society, and health and social care

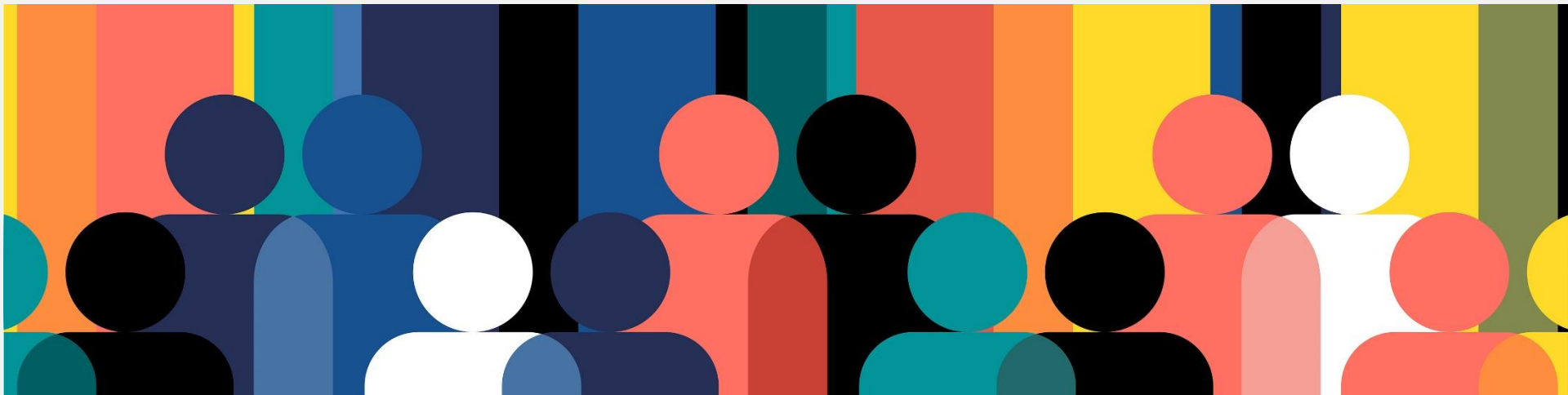
And promote inclusive and non-discriminatory behaviours and professional practice



Jade Beal art

Today's talk

- What we know about the sexual and intimate lives of older adults
- Why sexually transmitted infections are increasing in the over 45s
- How ageism affects our sexual rights as we get older



The population is ageing

“In 2020, there are an estimated **727 million persons** aged 65 years or over worldwide. This number is projected to more than double by 2050, reaching over 1.5 billion persons...

By mid-century, **one in six** people globally will be aged 65 years or older” (United Nations)

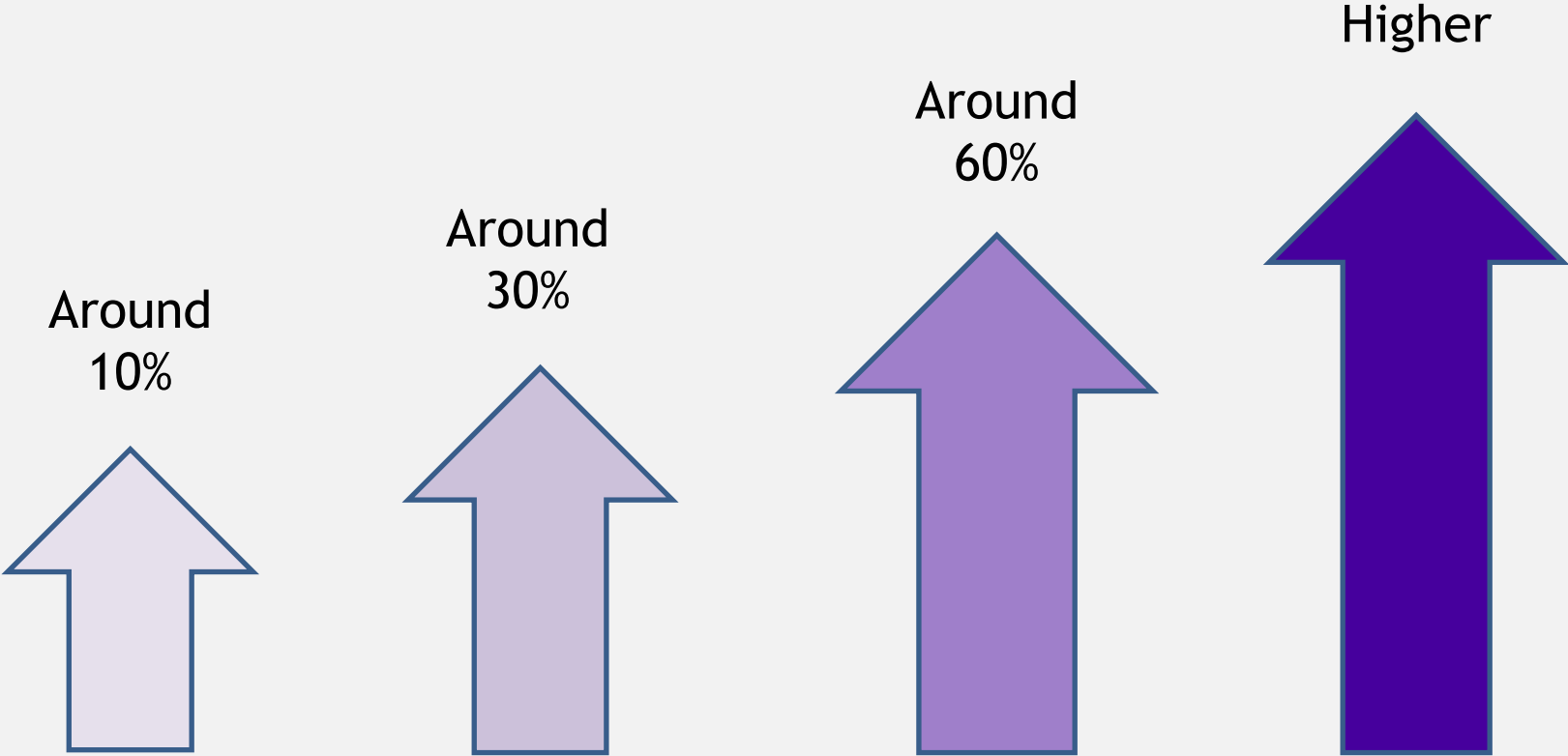
England

12+ million aged 60+
= ¼ population



Equivalent: city of Mumbai

How many people aged 60+ are sexually active?



English Longitudinal Study on Ageing 2012

Q: Any sexual activity in the past year

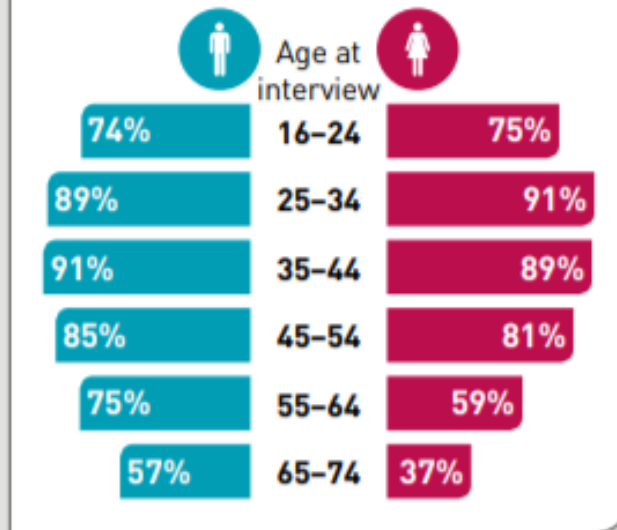
Age:	60-69	70-70	80+
Women	59.9%	34.3%	14.2%
Men	84.5%	59.3%	31.1%

Caution: any sexual activity

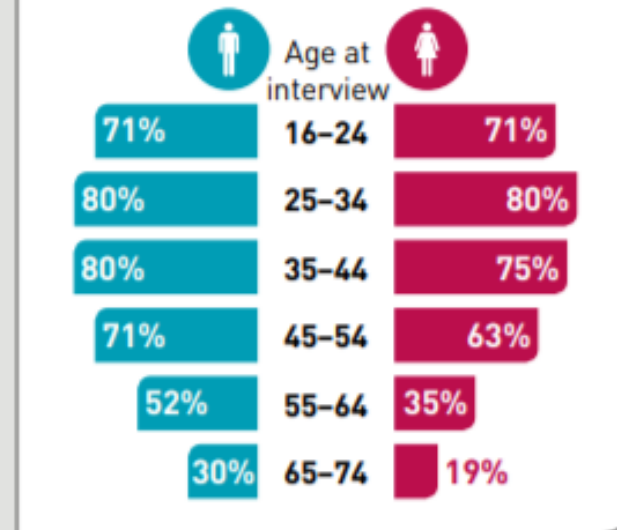
National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (2012)

Different types of sex with people of the opposite-sex, past year

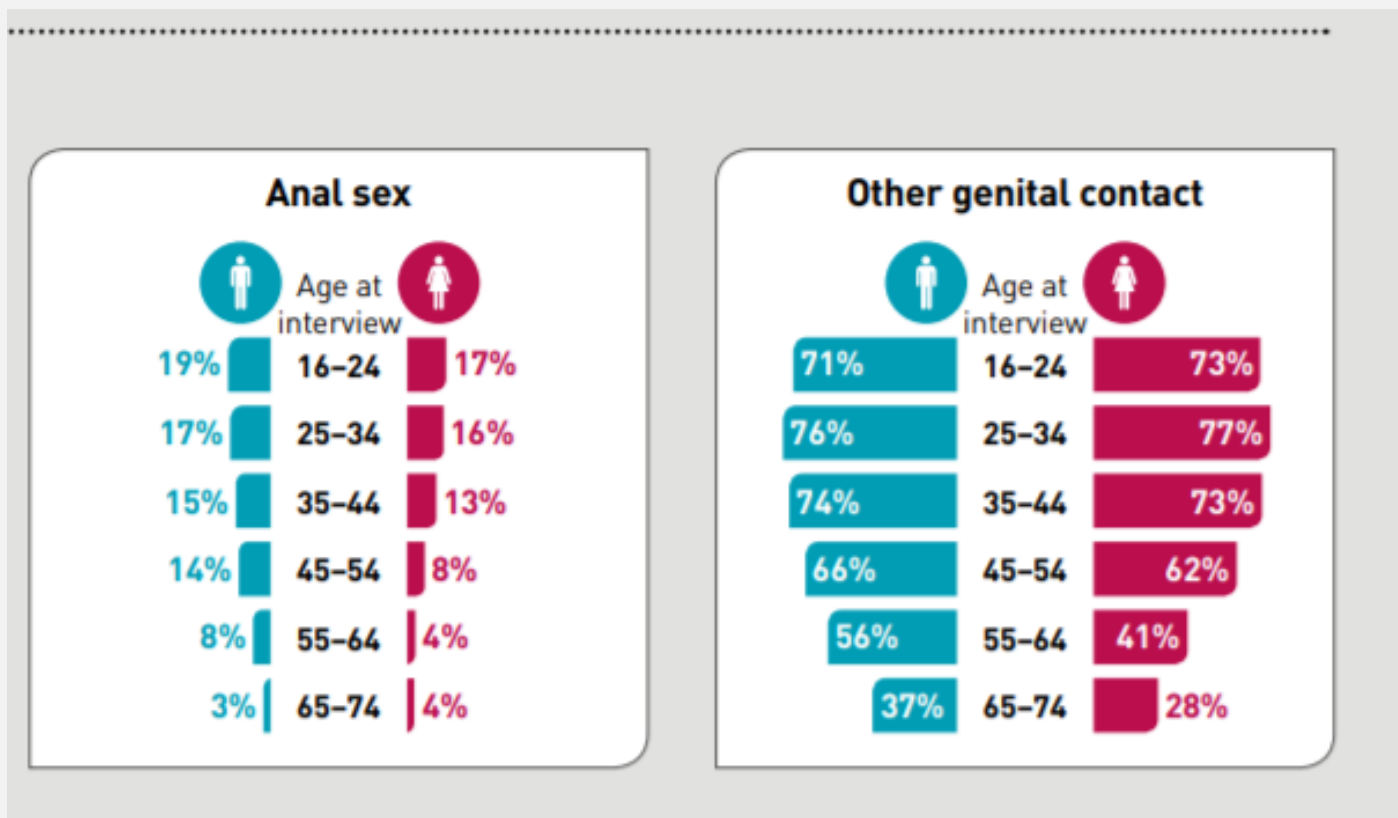
Vaginal sex



Given/received oral sex



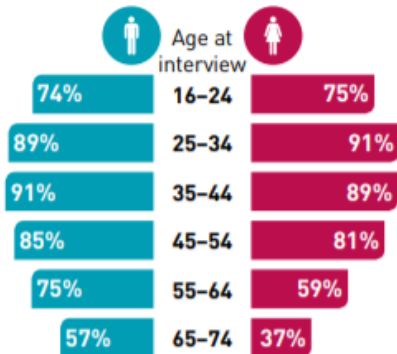
National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (2012)



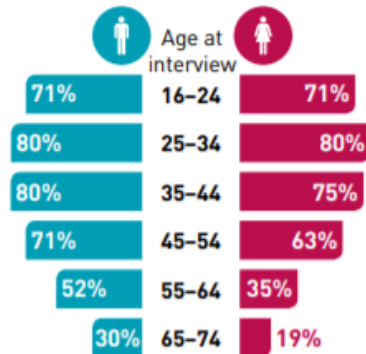
National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (2012)

Different types of sex with people of the opposite-sex, past year

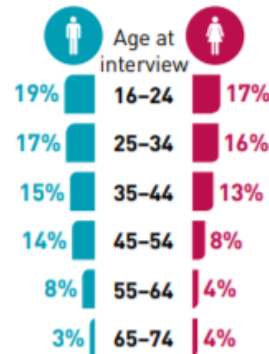
Vaginal sex



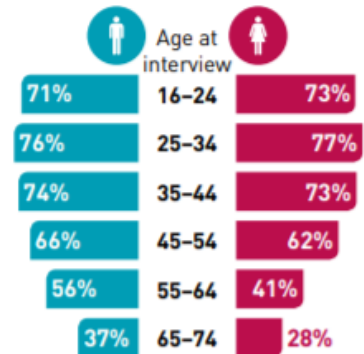
Given/received oral sex



Anal sex



Other genital contact



Same-sex experiences

Women aged 65-74 years

Any lifetime sexual experience or contact with another woman	2.6%
Any sexual experience with genital contact with another woman	0.8%
At least one female sexual partner in past 5 years	0.1%

Men aged 65-74 years

Any lifetime sexual experience or contact with another man	6.1%
Any sexual experience with genital contact with another man	3.4%
At least one male sexual partner in past 5 years	0.9%



Frequency of sexual activity declines as we get older

Sexual desire (libido), in the context of good health, doesn't wane until our 70s

Intimacy tends to increase

Sex is broadly defined

Footsy

Gardening together

Kissing

Holding hands

Intimacy

Overall, in the research:

Majority of people aged 60+ rate sex/intimacy as important to their quality of life

- Current sexual partner
- And in good health

Benefits to psychological well-being and the relationship

Expression of love, maintain sense of trust, feel desired, boost self-esteem, reduce frustration, pleasure

Sex more pleasurable with age



No pregnancy concerns

More time to stay in bed

Fewer interruptions

More comfortable in own skin

Sexual activity has proven benefits for health and well-being

- decreased pain sensitivity
- lower levels of depression
- higher levels of relaxation
- better sleep quality
- reduced risk of urinary incontinence
- better cardiovascular health
- higher relationship satisfaction

Orgasms can clear up a stuffy nose!



- Higher levels of sexual activity linked with quality of life and wellbeing
- Better able to cope with chronic disease

Source: Bulut et al (2021) Can Sex Improve Nasal Function? An Exploration of the Link Between Sex and Nasal Function. Ear, Nose & Throat Journal

Diversity

“I’m 65 and a bit horny”

High numbers of older adults are sexually active

And enjoy sexual activity

Some people have multiple sexual partners

Some have a partner who isn’t a sexual partner

Some don’t have a partner at all and want one

But the older we get, the more likely we will have a sexual difficulty

Erections less firm, don't last long

Dry orgasm

Delayed orgasm

Lack of orgasm

Vaginal dryness and pain



Due to

Age-related factors

Health conditions

“Sexual difficulties are a ‘less visible’ aspect of chronic health conditions: currently in the UK, around 15 million people have at least one chronic condition”

Side-effects of medicines

We’re more sensitive to drug effects as we get older

Raphael Perez art



Not all older adults seek help

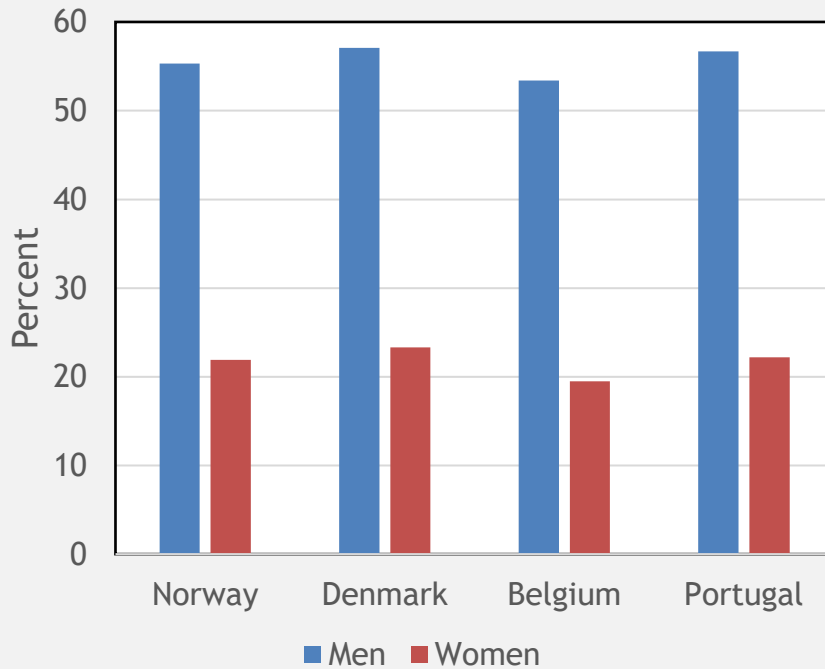
When they have a sexual difficulty, because:

- Not bothered by it
- Wait to see if it will get better on its own
- Embarrassment
- Assume it is due to ageing and nothing can be done

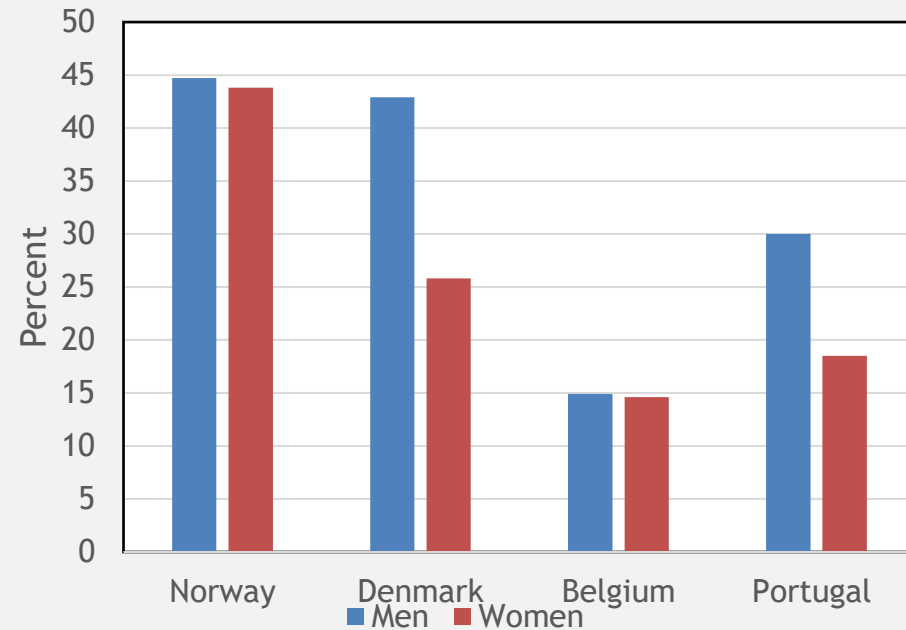
Sex can be a difficult topic to talk about

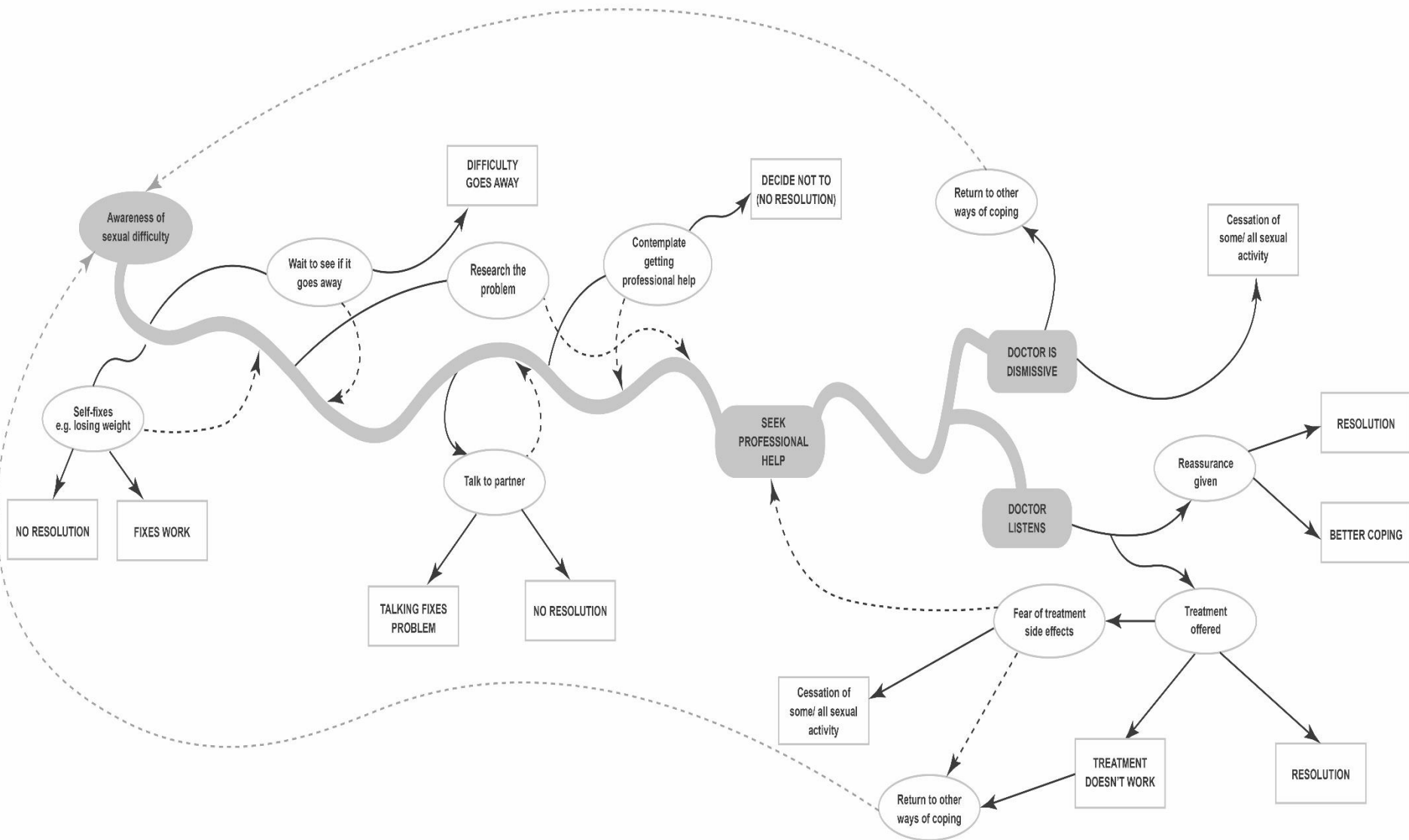
Seek help because:

Sex is important to me



Sex is important to my relationship





Hinchliff et al (2021) and others, Pathways to help-seeking for sexual difficulties in older adults: qualitative findings from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3), *Age and Ageing*: <https://academic.oup.com/ageing/article/50/2/546/6121621>

Not all practitioners provide help

- Embarrassed: known patient a long time
- Don't want to invade privacy (crossing a line)
- Don't have time
- Don't see it as part of their remit
- Feel unskilled and untrained

Not generally proactive

Want the patient to raise it themselves whereas patient wants the practitioner to raise it

Unintentional ageism

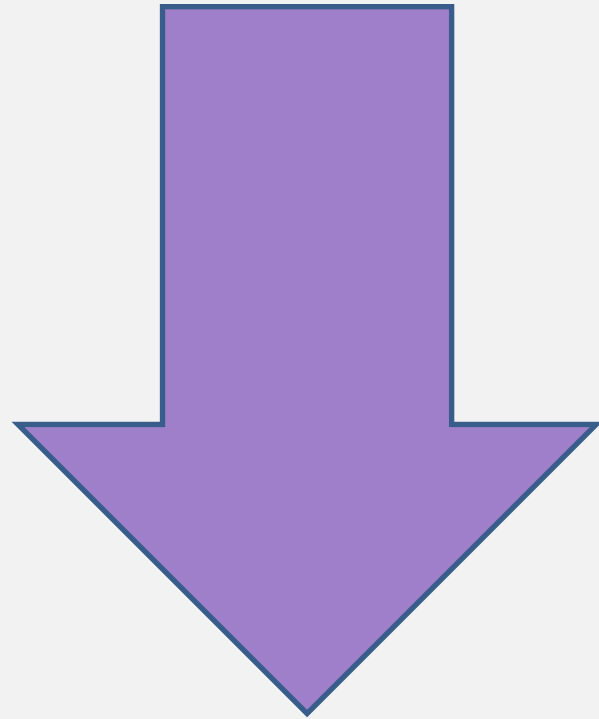
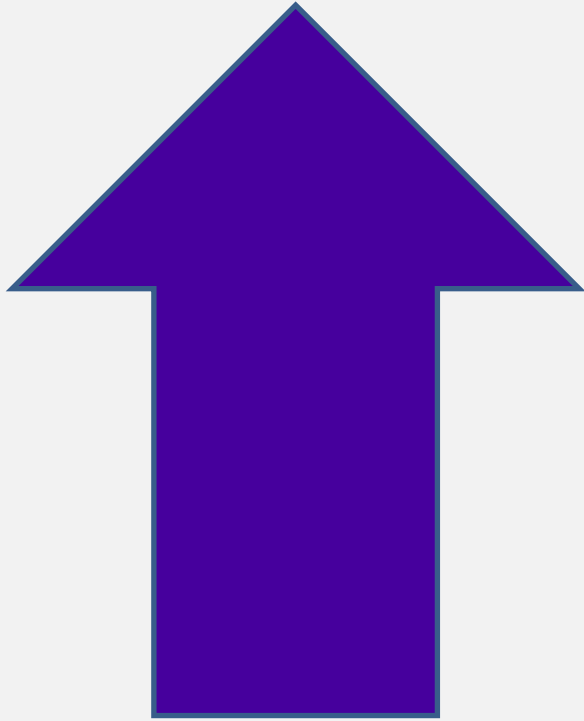
Structural barriers

- Policy
- Training
- Service set-up

Individual barriers

- Implicit bias
- Internalized ageism

Are Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)
increasing in the over 60s?



Number of new diagnoses in England: Gonorrhoea

	2013	2017	Increase/decrease
Heterosexual Men aged 45-64	620	934	50.6%
Heterosexual Men aged 65+	37	98	164%
Heterosexual Women aged 45-64	252	376	49.2%
Heterosexual Women aged 65+	9	19	111.1%
MSM aged 45-64	1590	2772	74.3%
MSM aged 65+	75	111	48%

Number of new diagnoses in England: Syphilis

	2013	2017	Increase/decrease
Heterosexual Men aged 45-64	131	197	50.4%
Heterosexual Men aged 65+	21	25	19%
Heterosexual women aged 45-64	37	42	13.5%
Heterosexual Women aged 65+	6	2	-66.6%
MSM aged 45-64	570	1450	154.4%
MSM aged 65+	16	84	425%

Number of new diagnoses in England: Gonorrhoea

	2016	2019*	2020
Heterosexual Men aged 45-64	854	1185	812
Heterosexual Men aged 65+	80	103	72
Heterosexual Women aged 45-64	360	508*	426
Heterosexual Women aged 65+	7	19*	11
MSM aged 45-64	2110	4753	3889
MSM aged 65+	90	233	152

*2018

Number of new diagnoses in England: Syphilis

	2016	2019	2020
Heterosexual Men aged 45-64	174	239	171
Heterosexual Men aged 65+	22	33	17
Heterosexual Women aged 45-64	44	69	44
Heterosexual Women aged 65+	1	6	3
MSM aged 45-64	1193	69	44
MSM aged 65+	71	102	60

STIs: what's going on?

Older adults have good awareness
But tend not to see themselves as at risk

Why?

- No risk of pregnancy
- Stigma – remember the 1980s AIDS campaign and before that 'dirty old man clinic'
- Social attitudes

Also, erection difficulties and vaginal dryness as barrier to condom use

Social attitudes

Older adults as sexless

Representation of sexual activity or sexiness on TV, adverts, film are in relation to young people

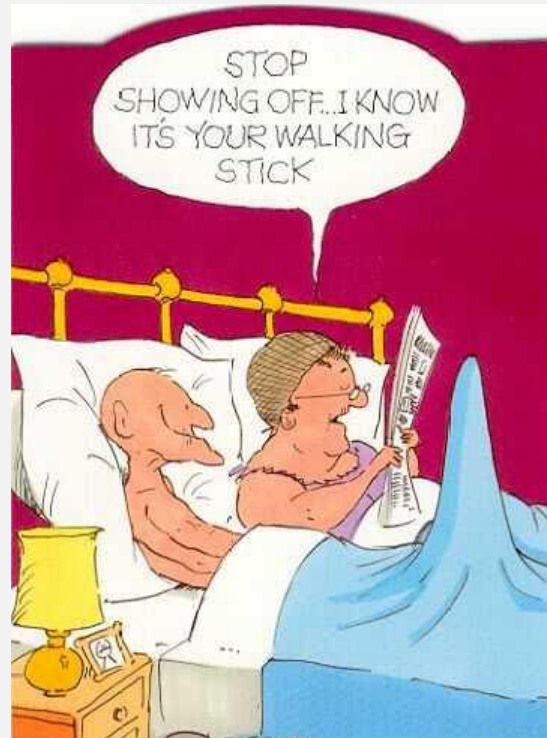
Health: safer sex messages aimed at young people sexual

→ sexuality not as visible



Raphael Perez art

When visible - humour



Or shock

Celebrated Jane Fonda's accolades:

- Oscar wins
- Breast cancer
- Author of seven books
- Status as feminist icon
- Longevity in Hollywood

“Perhaps the most startling thing about the actress is that, at 75, she is **still having sex**. Lots of it, apparently, and it's never been better”





DEBRETT'S

LONDON 1769

The bible on etiquette has teamed up with a dating app to help older singles unsure how to find love in cyber-space

BEN HUPFI

Tony Allen-Mills

A company renowned since the 18th century for its guides to the peerage has embarked on a 21st-century mission to help older people find love online.

The arrival of Debrett's in a crowded field of dating apps, profiles and online hook-ups is intended to help the over-50s singles "tackle modern dating dilemmas" – the most notable, of course, being "how do I turn my computer on?" and "why does this man want to marry me (and borrow £100,000 at the same time)?"

Recent research indicates that almost

Tackle modern dilemmas... "How do I turn my computer on?" and "why does this man want to marry me (and borrow £100,000 at the same time)?"

Reader responses

“Disgusting”

“Wow. Disgusting”

“Yuck yuck yuck”

“Ugh! Ghastly!”

“WOBBLY!”

“VOM”

“Gross”

“Ughhh!!~~~Puleeeese”

“Urrrrgh”

“Gross!!!!”

“Disgusting. FACT”

“Ewww!”

Registered Charity Number 255911

TAKING THE STAIRS

SEX

GARDENING

SWIMMING

WALKING THE DOG

Get your 30 mins a day, any way.



British Heart Foundation
bhf.org.uk



Discrimination is damaging

- Excluded from health campaigns
- Not informed about sexual side-effects of drugs
- Not offered a treatment or a service
- Be dismissed when raise a concern
- Silence = myths and misinformation maintained

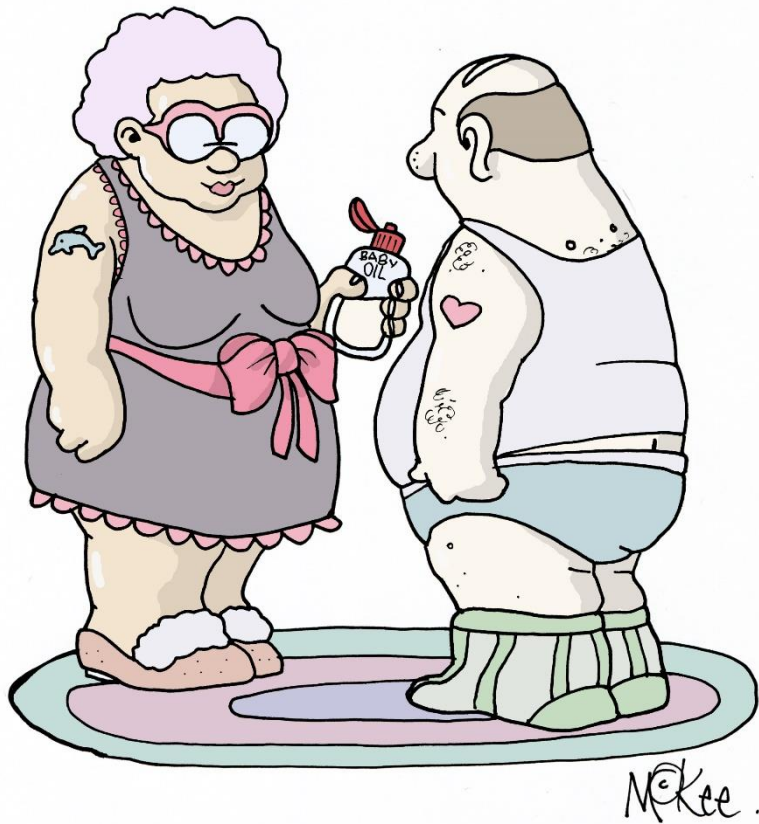
Our projects: art as activism

- Drive meaningful change
- Collaborate with artists and digital creatives
- Open and honest conversation about a tricky topic
- A way in to 'forbidden conversations'



Age of Love exhibition





A series of 12 images and short narratives that told the story of Frank and Joy as they tried to deal with a sexual problem

Watch the short video here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNqUJxg6WFU&t=1s>

How did it make you feel?

“Happy, made me smile, thanks”

“Uplifted, amused, tickled and imperfect!”

“Amused and touched. There is a very "real" aspect to the observations”

“Happy that the issue of sex between older people has been brought into the open. Humour is a great teacher!”

General comments

“Thank you for putting together such a thought provoking and heart-warming exhibition. So lovely to see research and art making meaning.”

“Brilliant exhibition that captures the essence of a lovely relationship. We loved it! Our family travelled from North Yorkshire (Whitby) to see this 😊”

“Absolutely wonderful exhibition. It encompasses tenderness, love and humour and shows you're never too old for a bit of hanky panky! Loved it!”

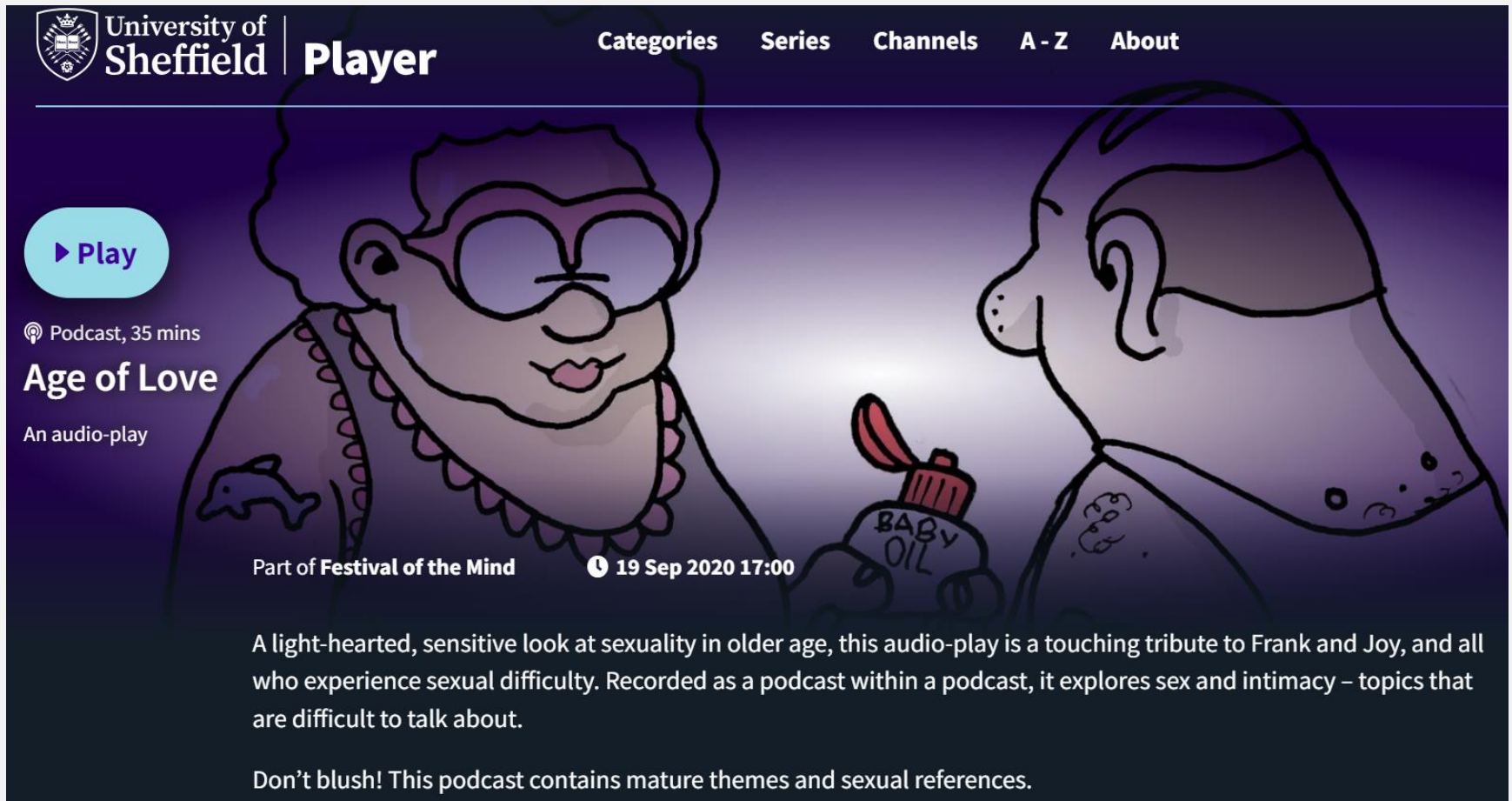
Age of Love outcomes

Sexual Rights Charter

Age of Love wellbeing
cafes



Age of Love audio play (artist Christopher Green)



The screenshot shows the University of Sheffield Player website interface. At the top left is the University of Sheffield logo and the text 'University of Sheffield | Player'. To the right are navigation links: 'Categories', 'Series', 'Channels', 'A - Z', and 'About'. The main content area features a large illustration of two characters: a woman with glasses and a man. The woman is holding a small bottle labeled 'BABY OIL'. A 'Play' button is visible on the left. Below the illustration, the text reads: 'Podcast, 35 mins', 'Age of Love', 'An audio-play', 'Part of Festival of the Mind', and '19 Sep 2020 17:00'. A descriptive paragraph follows: 'A light-hearted, sensitive look at sexuality in older age, this audio-play is a touching tribute to Frank and Joy, and all who experience sexual difficulty. Recorded as a podcast within a podcast, it explores sex and intimacy – topics that are difficult to talk about.' At the bottom, a warning states: 'Don't blush! This podcast contains mature themes and sexual references.'

Listen here: <https://player.sheffield.ac.uk/events/age-love>

Portraits of Menopause (artist Daisy M Illustration)



Liberation. Strength. Confidence. My advice to anyone? Don't believe what you think you know about the menopause. Everything you see and read will be negative. It is your transformation to your wilder, stronger and more confident times, so grab control of it, understand how to nourish yourself through to the other side.

(Vivien Rolfe)



Find it here <https://player.sheffield.ac.uk/exhibits/portraits-menopause>

Over the hill, under the covers? (artist Joi Polloi)



The recorded part is here <https://player.sheffield.ac.uk/events/over-hill-under-covers>

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PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY & HEALTH

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Thank you



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