



Let's talk about sex – what do older men and women say about their sexual relations and sexual activities – a qualitative analysis of ELSA Wave 6 data.

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Sexual relations and activities in later life

- ▶ Stereotypes, misconceptions and jokes (Allen and Roberto, 2009)
- ▶ Studies of birthday cards show how older people are portrayed as physically weak and a sexual failure (Bytheway, 1995; Demos and Jache, 1981; Snellman, Johnansson & Kalman, 2012).
- ▶ Older men and women are also portrayed differently in both negative and positive ways (Rhino versus the Cougar) Lawton and Callister, 2010.

"You want me to come upstairs and
make love to you?"

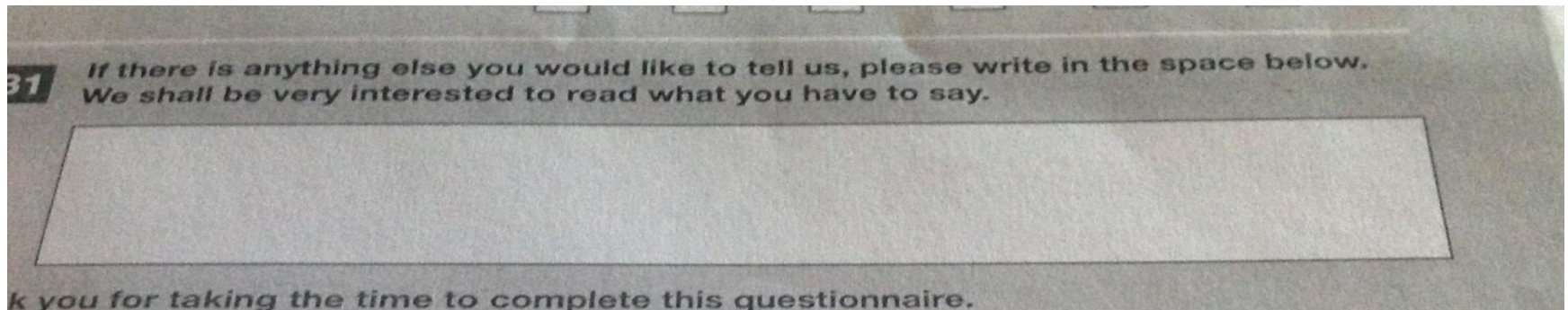


... It will have to be one or the other."



Understanding the reality

- ▶ ELSA wave 6 Sexual Relationships and Activities questionnaire.
- ▶ Primary mode of data collection was a tick box response to a series of questions. However, at the end of the questionnaire an open comment box was provided, which asked respondents whether there was anything else that they would like to say.



- ▶ Over 1000 respondents provided additional information (681 women and 405 men)

Method of analysis

- ▶ Template (King, 2004; Brooks and King, 2012; <http://www.hud.ac.uk/hhs/research/template-analysis/>)
- ▶ Why
 - flexible use, including open ended question responses on a written questionnaire
 - allows for coding template on subset of data
 - flexible and iterative approach
 - allows for more than one person to be involved in the analysis

Initial template

V1-Thematic-analysis-¶

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Sexual-relations-and-activities¶

1-Medications-(prescribed)¶

Erectile-dysfunction-(15M,-18M)¶

Stress-and-anxiety-(10F)¶

HRT-(19M)¶

2-Long-term-health-condition¶

Diabetes-(17M)¶

Motor-neuron-disease(16M)¶

Hypertension-(15M,-18M)¶

3-Relationships¶

Share-a-partner-(2F)¶

Sexual-activity-(5F,-6F,-7F,-8F,-10F,-12M,-13M,-16M,-17M,-20M)¶

Emotion-(3F,-7F,-12M)¶

4-Ageing¶

Ill-health-(6F,-7F,-8F,-10F)¶

Sex-drive-(1F,-9F)¶

Sexual-functioning-(4F,-5F,-15M,-18M)¶

Views-(11M)¶

5-Sexual-satisfaction¶

Sexual-functioning-(4/F)¶

Drugs/alcohol¶

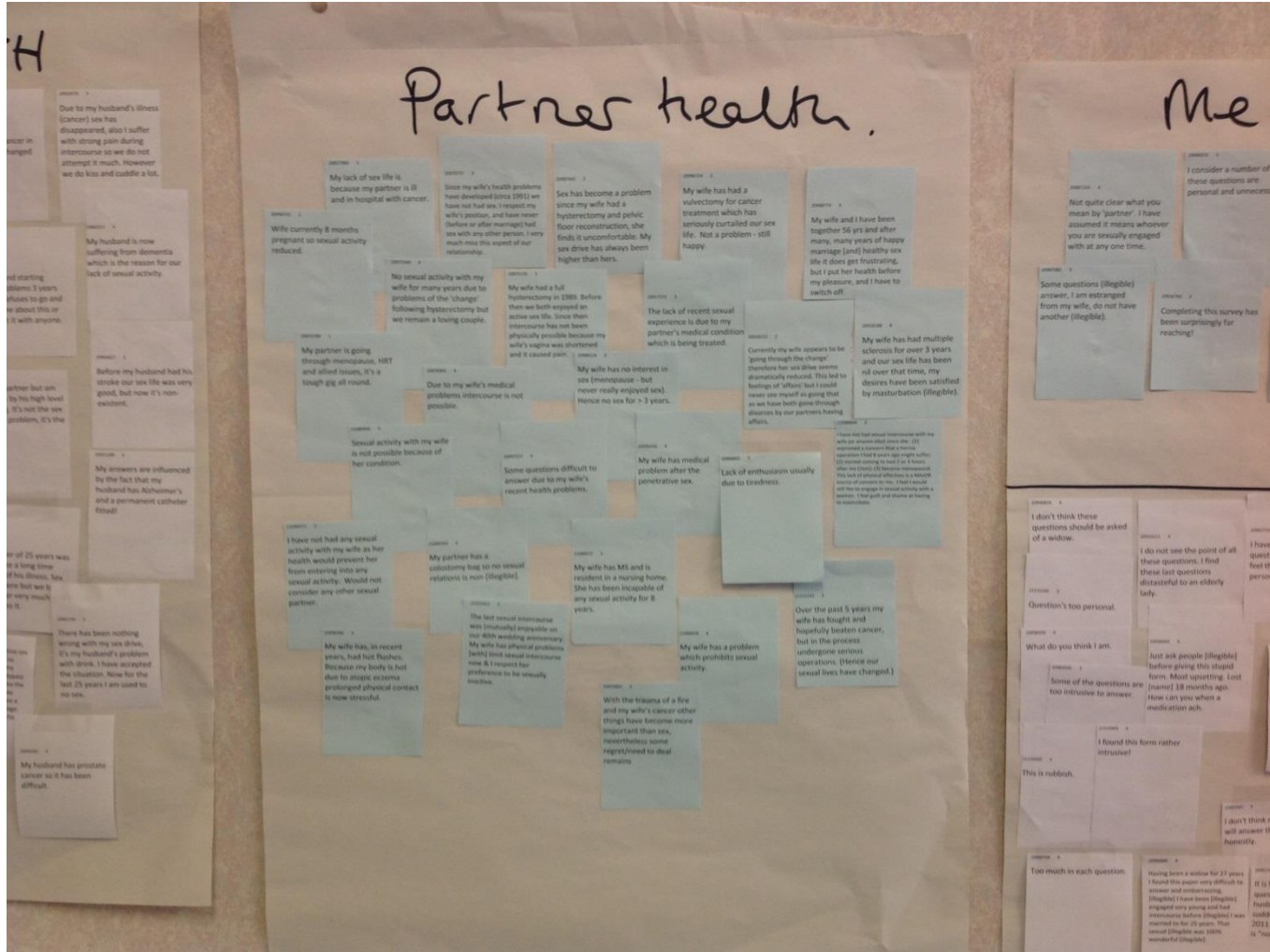
6-Attitudes-(to-sex)¶

Less-important-(11M)¶

Erotic-materials-(1F)¶

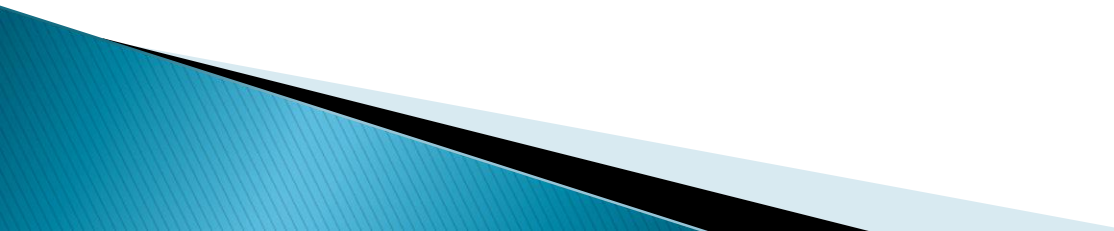
Age-(13M)¶

Our approach



Findings

Four main categories

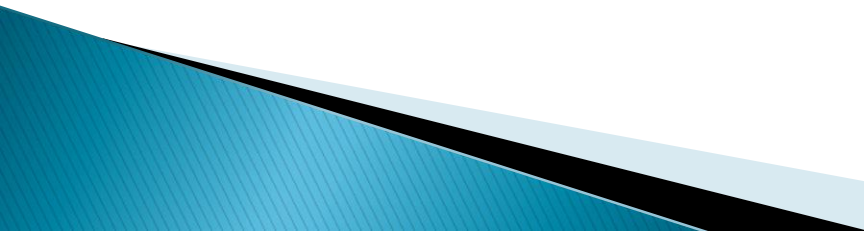
- ▶ Health (long term conditions, medications, partner health, gendered sexual health)
 - ▶ Relationships (gendered difference, sexual satisfaction and identity)
 - ▶ Ageing (stereotyping, ageism and reflection)
 - ▶ Attitudes and beliefs (religious beliefs, individual opinions, society, culture, media)
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Health

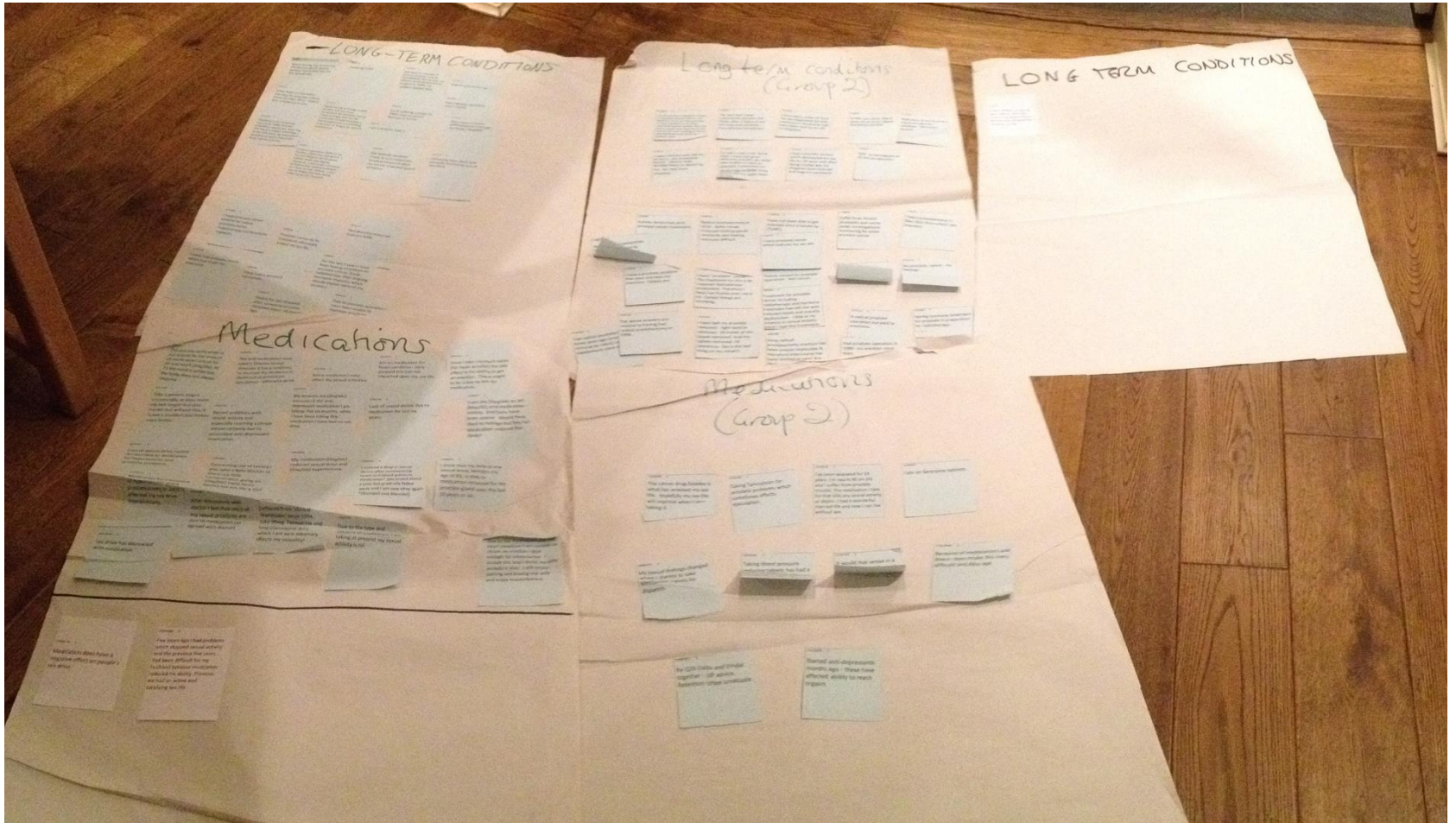


Illustrated how personal and partner health impacted on peoples sexual relationships and activities. Specific reference to long term conditions and gendered aspects of sexual health (erectile dysfunction and the menopause)

Health

- ▶ Men were more likely to make comments about the impact of long-term conditions, or medications that they were prescribed to treat long-term conditions.
 - ▶ Comments were specifically made about:
 - Prostate problems
 - Diabetes
 - Depression
 - Cardio vascular disease and high blood pressure
- 

Health



Gendered aspects of health

Erectile difficulties for men and the menopause for women were reflected as impacting on sexual activities and relationships:

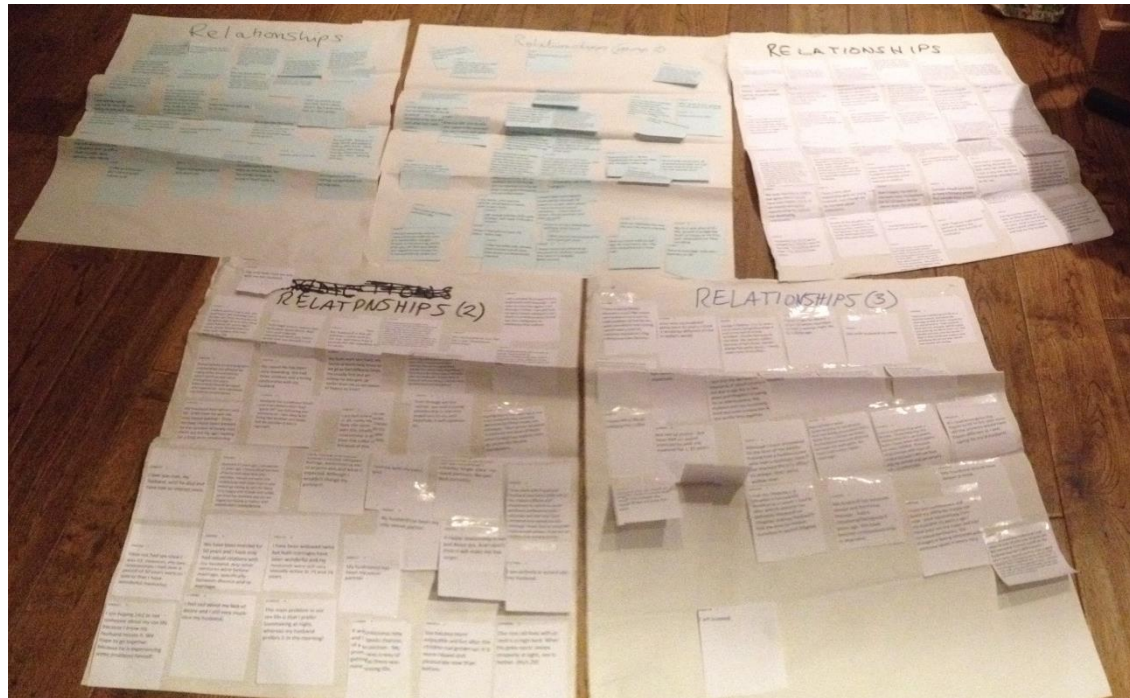
- ▶ Male (aged 60–70) How can I solve erectile problems, I suffer from blood pressure and diabeti[es].
- ▶ Male (aged 50–60) Having difficulty getting erections in the past few years has been very depressing as I have always had a strong sex drive.
- ▶ Male (aged 60–70) I have been having problems keeping an erection and am considering trying Viagra, as I would like to keep my sexual life going as long as possible.
- ▶ Woman (aged 60–70) My husband experience impotence around the aged of 50. It was strange at first but we did not see this as a problem.
- ▶ Woman (aged 60–70) Not had sex for 18 years as my husband can't do it.
- ▶ Woman (aged 70–80) I still felt sexually active, although my husband had become impotent at 55 years of age.

Gendered aspects of health

- ▶ Woman (aged 70–80) I have been happily celibate for 20 years following the menopause
- ▶ Woman (aged 60–70) After menopause lost interest in sexual activity. Doctor consulted about this. No interest at all now although help has been sought.
- ▶ Woman (aged 50–60) You should consider the role played by post-menopausal vaginal changes and available medication in women's enjoyment of sexual activity.
- ▶ Man (aged Under 50) commented that: 'My partner is going through menopause, HRT and allied issues, it's a tough gig all round'.
- ▶ Man (aged 70–80) No sexual activity with my wife for many years due to problems of the 'change' following hysterectomy but we remain a loving couple.

Relationships and identity

- ▶ Women made more comments about relationships than men



Relationships and identity



- ▶ Both men and women commented on factors that impacted on sexual relations and activities in the context of their relationships and identity which included
 - Numbers of sexual partners
 - Relationships at a distance
 - Widowhood
 - Being a carer
 - Having children at home
 - Divorce and remarriage
 - Sexual satisfaction (context of relationship/sexuality)

Relationships

- ▶ I just want to say that I would be interested still in a sexual relationship (my husband is not). However, circumstances (adult children still at home) make it difficult even if my husband was interested!! That said, sex has never been the focus of our relationship (Woman aged 50–60)

Fidelity in relationships

- ▶ After finding my wife had an affair some years ago I still have this on my mind although I have forgiven her. But our sexual relationship has suffered because of this (Male aged 60–70)
- ▶ Death of my daughter from suicide has numbed me emotionally! Infidelity by my partner has also had some detrimental effect over the past few years .. (Woman aged 60–70)

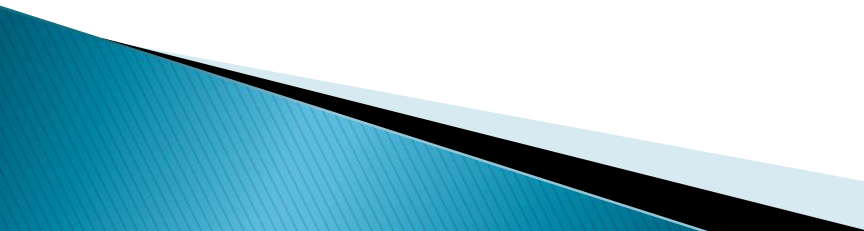
Ageing

- ▶ Comments indicated that sexual relationships and activities were affected by:
 - Stereotyping (sex not for older people)
 - Biological ageing (ill health and ageing bodies)
 - The responses of health services (discriminatory, not receptive to talking about sex with older people)
 - Reflections on the past and comparisons with the present (the mind is still 20 even when you get old)
 - Expectations (should it all be about penetrative sex?)
 - Sexual satisfaction (diversity issues)

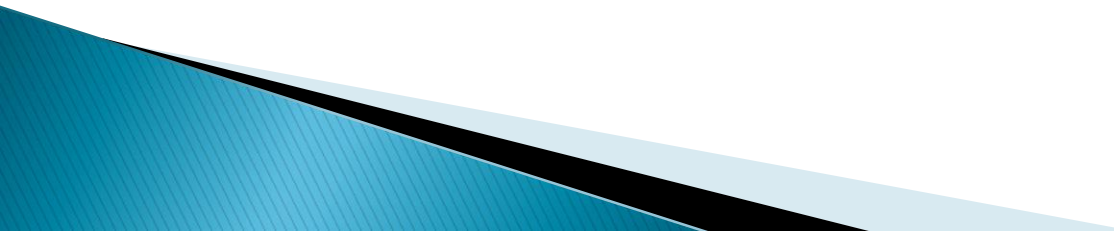
Ageing

- ▶ I would like to be more virile but since I am not I accept the situation in view of my age (Male aged 70–80)
- ▶ I am 75 and still enjoy sex. I don't see why some people say to me "oh my god sex at your age". If a couple enjoy it then what's the problem. It relaxes me (Female aged 70–80)

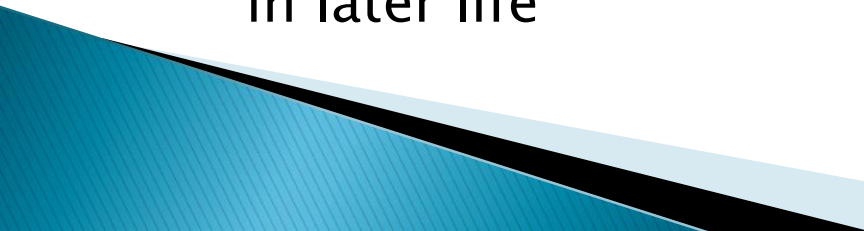
Attitudes and beliefs

- ▶ Religious beliefs (sex before marriage wrong)
 - ▶ Perceptions of age (too old for this sort of thing)
 - ▶ Attitudes and beliefs about relationships (context of sexual activities in a relationship, same sex relationships)
 - ▶ Media, culture and pornography (too much pressure on young people)
 - ▶ Individual opinions (on sex and the survey)
- 

Attitudes and beliefs

- ▶ Love is more important than sex and maybe the most important emotions to have a successful married life (Woman aged 80–90)
 - ▶ I find this a difficult subject to discuss with someone like my GP, so have not sought help (Woman aged 50–60)
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Why is this study different?

- ▶ Traditional sexology research is narrow and coital focused (Gott, 2005).
 - ▶ The collection of qualitative data as part of the ELSA moves the data on to take account of the factors that have impacted on people's sexual relations and activities, predominantly in the context of a relationship (past or present).
 - ▶ In addition to biological impacts this research identifies:
 - Impact of society and culture, good and bad (including changes in legislation)
 - Changes in real world sexual activities and relationships in later life
- 



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