

mxShagpile



HOW
WAS
IT FOR
YOU?



"It seems sad that by just having bodies that identify us as female we don't have access to the same public spaces as men. And that by entering those same spaces, we may be misunderstood, or come to harm."

I was walking down a busy street yesterday afternoon contemplating the approaching bikini season, when a man yelled out to me from a passing vehicle.

Did he sing out some phrase about the shapeliness of my legs or ask me for directions to the nearest servo? No, instead he called out, "show us your c.t, you whore".

Now, having lived in Australia long enough, I have been on the receiving end of the "show-us-your-tits" drive-by numerous times. But this remark stopped me in my tracks and made my breathing still.

I felt a sensation that could only be described as pain.

American sociologist J.L. Lemke asks: "If hypnotic suggestion can produce burn reactions, amputees feel phantom pains in long-missing limbs, and stress impairs the immune system, why should we doubt that pain is as much our response to the meaning of events as to their physical force?"

Indeed, words can produce the same results as fists. And I felt like he had slammed me up against a wall.

This experience reminded me about the anger that exists in the world and that often women are the target of such anger. What would cause someone to act in such a hostile way? Obviously he wasn't just having a bad day.

Did overall disempowerment, a history of violence, or exposure to violent media produce his resentment? I wondered how often such behaviour occurs, because most men are not like this. They are not predators.

In many contemporary societies, women require escorts. (Not the back-of-the-newspaper variety.) Once they leave their home, a companion is necessary to ensure their safety.

It seems sad that by just having bodies that identify us as female we don't have access to the same public spaces as men. And that by entering those same spaces, we may be misunderstood, or come to harm.

Crossing a park in the CBD after the sun has gone down. Walking along an abandoned stretch of beach. Going down to the pub to have a drink on your own. Men take these activities for granted while, for women, they are associated with risk.

I have been the kind of woman who likes walking home from parties. It was my own personal rebellion. I found an intoxicating pleasure in leaving an event when I wished and walking barefoot through the night streets to my home. The air and the stars and the almost glamorous grownup-ness of being in the city alone.

Mothers warn us not to do this. "Better take a taxi, darling". Because, throughout history and cross-culturally the notion of a woman alone, particularly at night, translates to being the potential victim of violence.

Indeed there is some truth to this. But statistics tell us that the most dangerous place for a woman is in her own home and the most dangerous people, are not strangers, but intimates.

Yes, we need to apply caution, but let's not let fear stamp the life out of us.

— DR BELLA

NO STRINGS ATTACHED

Sure, sex is on tap and you don't argue about the dishes, but having a mate who you do more than date can be fraught with problems, as SHOBA RAO explains.

They are either called friends with benefits, f... buddies or your booty call on speed dial.

But no matter what name you give it, casual sex is still a popular option for singles not wanting a long-term relationship with emotional commitment.

And asking for casual sex, over a one-night stand, is fast losing its taboo.

While there's been no shortage of TV shows like *Sex and the City* and *Big Brother* to make us think about our bedroom values, a Femi-X study last month of more than 650 Australian women found that 53 per cent have had a regular, casual sex playmate.

But is casual sex worthwhile, and is it a safer and more fruitful option than a series of one-night flings?

Sexologist Dr Gabrielle Morrissey said a successful casual sex scenario can only occur if both bonking buddies are on the same page of the same rulebook.

"I prefer to call them bonking buddies instead of f... buddies, as it implies a sense of playfulness that's more positive for both people involved," she said.

"I don't ever judge couples' decisions, but I support those that reinforce a healthy positive sexual experience, and casual sex can do this if each buddy sticks to the rules they set out together."

Morrissey, author of *Spicy Sex*, said an invitation for casual sex must be delivered with open communication.

She said assumptions about the rules and how far boundaries can be pushed open up a wealth of "treacherous terrain" for bed mates.

"Never assume anything, always talk about how often you plan to see each other and when you can call to have sex," she said.

Morrissey said bonking buddies should be willing to accept casual sex is not "romantic", and not use it as a ploy or excuse to get emotionally closer to another person.

Bonking buddies must also be prepared to accept they could get dumped if their "friend" finds the fairytale partner.

"Casual sex is about the physicality of sex, which we all enjoy and there is no romantic mystique about it," she said.

"The situation does not have the feelings we associate with a relationship where we invest a lot of emotional commitment, and many couples misunderstand this difference."

But, Morrissey said couples must be aware that casual sex can turn into a relationship.

Red flags indicating this include the desire to spend more time together outside the bedroom.



Here's cheers: The *Sex and the City* girls (above) immortalised the concept of "friends with benefits"; sexologist Dr Gabrielle Morrissey (left).

"There should be no mingling of your lives, as casual sex is purely just sex and small chats," she said.

"But this does not mean you don't care about each other."

Those who have graduated to a casual relationship must keep talking, and be ready to discuss the possibility of taking on a serious commitment.

But if commitment is still too scary for either party, then Morrissey suggests ending the relationship before someone gets hurt.

SMS and email technology have made the break-up easier for some of us, but Morrissey hates the text dump.

Instead, she insists bonking buddies deliver the bad news face to face.

"Even though you have just had sex casually, you have also shared an experience with your bodies and you know each other in a really intimate way," she said.

"Based on this level of intimacy, the person being dumped deserves the ongoing level of respect, which was first set up when the rules of your casual sex were openly discussed."

Morrissey said there was no recommended time limit on casual sex or a casual relationship, but she stresses that couples must be aware they could get replaced with someone else more permanent.

For this reason, she said men and women must know how far they can go, before becoming emotionally attached to their bonking buddy.

"Getting emotionally attached can be devastating for either person involved, but that is a risk you take if you do want casual sex," she said.

"If this happens and you're not having fun any more, that's when you will know if your desire for a bonking buddy has come to an end."

● **mx encourages safe sex.**

BTW

Questions, thoughts, tips? Email me at dearbella@mxnet.com.au