

## Transcript of individual interview with Cleone

### ***Question 1: What feelings do you have about yourself as a sexual person?***

**Cleone:** After I acquired my disability I had to basically relearn to accept myself as a woman, as a sexual being, but I think that in time and the way I feel now is that I fully embrace myself in all aspects that I am not only physically, because I think, I think that I'm an attractive person, compared to able-bodied persons, I don't know how I would feel at this time of my life if I were able-bodied but I know that as a person who has been able-bodied before to now, that I embrace myself as I am.

### ***Question 2: How would you describe your femininity as a person with disability?***

**Cleone:** Femininity, I think I embrace my womanhood, but I think it's very difficult to, to be able to express yourself in a completely feminine way where your, you know, when the media portrays the perfect role of a woman to be tall, big busted, you know, upright, so when, you know you're always kind of aspiring to be that person that is accepted by everybody and what is accepted today? What is more accepted than an able-body? So, it's difficult to sometimes, you know, be truly feminine when society dictates how femininity should be portrayed. But in all, I think that I'm not too lacking in my femininity (laughs).

### ***Question 3: What has your experience of dating and relationships been like?***

**Cleone:** Well, I've been married, my experiences of dating and relationships involved, involves being married. Before I had my accident I was married for one year and after being married for a year we, I was involved in an accident, my ex-husband and I. In terms of my self-esteem, it wasn't good; in terms of my sexuality, it wasn't good; in terms of my accepting myself as a woman, it wasn't good; it was disempowering. And the relationship didn't last. Because of the, because of me being disabled. But since then I've been in a few relationships that has really changed my view on how I see myself, because of the, you know, the positive

relationships that I have been in, and I feel that as a partner I think I gave, I was able to give quite a lot to a relationship in, immaterial of the fact that I am a person that, you know, is differently-abled to somebody else. So I've had good, and I mean none of them have lasted because I'm not in a relationship now, but they were good experiences none the less, you know? There were some not-so-good experiences, but it has always been my choice as an individual whether to continue with the relationship or whether to not. So I don't think, as a woman with a disability, that I'm any less empowered than, you know, as an able-bodied woman would be.

***Question 4: How have you experienced access to reproductive health services?***

***Cleone:*** My last experience was being, going to a public hospital, because prior to that I was on medical aid and I always had private, you know, health services that I been, had access to. And I was very pleasantly surprised as to how easy and how accessible and how very helpful their, you know, their staff and their services were. Even though it was long waiting times, but it was easily accessible. And they also accommodated my personal needs to the contraceptive, the type of contraceptive that I wanted, and even though it was a very expensive product, you know, I was very pleasantly pleased.

***Question 5: How have others reacted to you having children?***

***Cleone:*** I have mixed reactions I think maybe because they think that, you know, I'm a person with a disability, I'm sitting in a wheel chair, I'm disabled, how could I possibly have two children? And it's easy, I'm a woman (laughs), I have a reproductive system, I had sex, I popped out two children (laughs). And in the beginning, especially because I had my first child before I had my accident and my second after, the reactions that I received were, some from shock and possibly horror as well: "Like, how the hell could you do that to her?" (laughs). But I didn't care, it was a good experience. Being able to experience pregnancy still in my life as a woman, fulfilled my womanly needs and desires to be able to be a mother and to prove myself as a woman being able to carry life, which is wonderful, it's a miracle.

**Question 6: What is your experience of being a mother and a wife and how does your disability affect your experience?**

**Cleone:** Shortly after my disability, that was a terrible time because you're just, able to do everything being an independent person to be able to doing nothing for yourself, to being dependent on everybody for everything else in your life and shortly after the disability, for about one year, two years, I was physically disabled. I couldn't do absolutely nothing for myself, I was ill, I was a patient, you know? And to my husband at the time, which was terrible you know, literature says that you should not have your partner as your carer in the situation of a CSI, spinal cord injury, and because our finances didn't allow us to have the private carer he was forced to be my carer as well as my husband and my lover and my partner. And of course that didn't work and I understand fully his reasons for, I understand his reasons for wanting to move on and live his own life because his life was basically, at that time, evolved around me. A carer, a nurse to the person that he loved, which was a terrible burden on him as an individual, you know? And as being a mother, again the first couple of years since my, after my disability, it was tough, but my children, as children learn, they learnt their roles in the, you know, system that we had in our home, and they grew up accordingly and me as a mother, whatever I was able to do I did and we just synergized our roles in that way which works. It works differently in all families. So, my role wasn't diminished because of my disability at all. There were things that I could do that I think I probably do better than other mothers and women. And there are other things that other women could do better than me, so I'm, my role, I mean the other day my daughter went and did some voluntary work at a home for persons with disabilities where, a group home, and I asked her about her experience because she wasn't, she doesn't really often interact with other people, persons with disabilities. I asked her, "Well, what is different about us?", she says, "But mommy, you're normal, which is weird!" because that is her perception of our lives, our lives are just normal, they do everything, and things I can't do, some things I can do.

THE END