APPENDIX I

SCHEDULE

Introduction and explanation of study.
(Tell about myself, how I’m involved, history of research, little about vaginismus).

1) What sense do you make of your condition? How do you understand it?

2) Tell me a little about the history of your condition.
   (What was happening at the time when it started, precipitating factors, how long you have had it for, primary vs secondary vaginismus, has it been present in all your relationships)

3) Are you currently in a romantic/sexual relationship?

4) Can you tell me a little about your relationship with your partner?
   (How would you describe your partner; what are the relationship dynamics; how do you handle conflict, decision making; has there ever been infidelity; emotional closeness- do you talk about your deepest feelings and emotions; is sex discussed within the relationship; tell me about your sex life; are you attracted to your partner)

5) Have you had previous romantic/sexual relationships? If so, can you tell me a little about what these relationships were like?

6) Does your condition influence your relationship with your partner in any way? If so, could you describe precisely how?

7) I would also like to know a little more about you. Can you tell me a little about your childhood and your relationships with your family members?
   (What was your relationship like with your mother, father and siblings; how would you describe your parents while you were growing up; how emotionally available were they; how was the topic of sex and menstruation handled when you were younger)

8) Do you think that there is a connection between your life experiences and your developing vaginismus? If so, how do you think these experiences may have predisposed you to developing vaginismus?
Hello,

My name is Nicole Canin. I am a Masters student, studying psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of my course requirements, I am conducting a study looking at women who suffer from vaginismus. This study aims to explore the relationships experienced by women suffering from vaginismus.

I wish to invite you to participate in my study. If you agree to participate, this will involve attending an interview with me. The interview will explore your personal experience with relationships. The interview will be tape-recorded, however your confidentiality is guaranteed. Only myself and my supervisor, a clinical psychologist, will have access to the tapes, which will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Participation is voluntary, and there will be no repercussions if you decide not to participate. Some of the questions are of a personal nature. However, you have the right to refuse to answer any of the questions should they make you feel uncomfortable.

A general summary of the results of the study will be made available on request.

Yours Sincerely

Nicole Canin        Dr Gavin Ivey (Supervisor)
APPENDIX III

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I ………………….. agree that I may participate in the above mentioned study. I understand the procedure involved and am willing to participate in the interview. I understand that this can be withdrawn at any time without negative consequences.

Signed:____________________  Date:____________________
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR THE USE OF THE TAPE-RECORDER

I …………………… hereby give permission for the interviewer to use a tape recorder to record the interview. I understand that the tape will be used to transcribe the interview but will be destroyed following the completion of the study.

Signed:__________________    Date:__________________
APPENDIX IV

EXAMPLE OF A TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEW: PARTICIPANT 3

I: Tell me a bit, we’ll start off with a general question, what sense do you make of your condition, how do you understand it?

P 3: Uh, at first I didn’t understand it. I couldn’t understand it, I couldn’t understand what was going on. I thought maybe I was cursed or maybe I’m not a woman, maybe I’m a man or something. I don’t know, I don’t know so many things runs in my mind. I thought, why, why can’t I do this, why can’t I have sex. Every woman, I feel so less of a woman, umm right now I’m twenty three years and I haven’t had sex. Because some people they don’t understand, they feel that you’re stupid, why, how is that possible? Cause when they see that you didn’t have sex yet, but you’ve got a boyfriend, how is that possible? That’s why your boyfriends are all leaving you, cause you couldn’t sleep with them. And those were the type of things they said, and it felt, I felt so hopeless and so useless. Yah, why can’t I do the thing that every woman can, why can’t I have sex like every woman. Even now I still feel that. But I think there’s hope because I came to E and I can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Something good is going to come out of all this. Besides, my boyfriend understands and he is so supportive about it. So that it, it makes it easier for me. I feel that this whole load is getting lighter and lighter.

I: So this condition affects your self-esteem, and your feelings about yourself as a woman.

P 3: I felt so less of a woman. Besides, I didn’t even know that I had a problem until I met L, because when I was growing up I didn’t even think about using tampons. I just wanted to use pads, I didn’t even think about that. But then when I started engaging in so called intercourse then that’s when I noticed that there was a problem. Then I told him about it, even if I did know, I didn’t even know what the problem was, but you know what happens, you know the ins and outs, he couldn’t get in. I was tightening the muscles so much, they were getting so tight, and nothing can go in. And then we decided to try it again and again and again, but there was no success, and eventually we decided that you know what, umm since that I’m connected to the internet, I’ll go to the internet and find something, there must be something out there, umm, I’m just gonna go and find some, find out what the problem is and hopefully I’m gonna find something, and I did.

I: So, is that when you when you found out what it was called and what its about.

P 3: Yes, from the internet. I didn’t even know what it was. Yah, because when I send E an email on Newstar 24 on the internet I told her that I had a problem, my boyfriend cannot penetrate me, and I got a reply, you have vaginismus, and then she explained everything to me. And then I decided to come here and start therapy.

I: How long ago was that?

P 3: It was last week. I was here last week already. And then I found out about that problem I think two months ago. So you know how it goes, I had to explain it to my boyfriend, uh I went to the clinic, and there’s this treatment, I think it’s a good idea that we start because anyway it’s this type of thing. There’s therapy, we have to be here together, we are not even sure that everything was okay before I start with him but he understands. Yah, he’ll still support anything, we’ve been going out for like two years. Just imagine, and he gave up at some point, he was giving up. He really was so frustrated, he wanted to give up, wanted to end the whole relationship.

I: Because you couldn’t have sex?
P 3: Exactly.

I: How did you feel about that?

P 3: I felt so bad. But you know what at the end I decided that you know what if you want to leave you can leave, there’s nothing that I can do. I mean there’s so many women out there, you can go to them. Just because I said that, he says okay fine, I’m not leaving. Because I couldn’t do anything at that point, I was already giving up on myself. I didn’t know what to do, but I decided that if you want to leave then you can go, I can’t stop him. But since that time he stood back then, then I knew that you know what I have to do something, not only for me but for the both of us. Cause him understanding and for making sure that everything goes well I had to do something about it.

I: So because of his attitude, you felt you wanted to sort this out.

P 3: Exactly, his attitude towards this whole thing made me realise that I have to stand up on my own two feet and do something, I can’t just sit down, because I’m a grown up already, I’m 23, I have to give my mother and my parents grandkids. I have to do something for it so I have to do something while its still early.

I: So you want to sort this out now.

P 3: Yes now. I that it, it’s a bit late but its never too late. If you want to get something done its never too late, yah even if I was 35 I was still going to sort this thing.

I: So the first time you realised that there was a problem was with your boyfriend? You didn’t realise it before.

P 3: No no I haven’t. That’s why, that’s why, that’s why I said that I didn’t even think about until L. When I was 16 in high school I didn’t have pressure to use tampons, sanitary was the thing for me, I didn’t even care about these things, I just wore my my underwear, tampons, uch pads and that’s it, I didn’t think about pads. And I had boyfriends but we never got to that point that we started un engaging in sexual intercourse. We never got there, there was no time, maybe I think everything was so so hectic, so there was no time for us to just get private and relaxed and start doing it, so so now, since that I met L, and I’m working and he’s got his own place you understand that the privacy that we have, it’s a lot, yah for us to start engaging in sex, yah and then by that time we started, it was, I realised that you know what, I have a problem and I didn’t even know what the problem and I thought I was the only one. Because every time when I, when I meet with my friends maybe at a party or something, you know how it is, they start talking about sex and then how they did this and that last night, how it was, how they, and I do, I make it a point, when they start talking about that, I’ll just leave the room and go somewhere else or maybe change the topic, change the conversation, talk about something different. And they wouldn’t even notice what I was doing, but I knew deep down that you know what, I can’t talk it, I have nothing to talk about.

I: How do you feel about not being able to contribute to that conversation?

P 3: I feel so bad, really bad, I feel so alone. And they would ask me questions, how was it, how are you… how was your first time, how is the boyfriend? And I would just say, uch, you know what, lets not talk about it, I’m not feeling okay, lets have a break. And I pack my bags and I go home. Yah, I’ll make it a point that I, I always run away from those kind of situations. I always run away but they don’t notice, they don’t. But I keep quiet, none of them know about this.
I: So it's something that's very secretive.

P 3: Yeah, it is, it is because sometimes I can't think to talk about it. I don't feel comfortable talking about it, you know even if it's a woman. Umm, even if it's a woman or ladies or something, I won't talk about it, I don't know why. Because, somehow, some people think that it's normal to you know, already they concluded that you have had sex already. They'll think I'm lying. That S is having sex and that's it, so talking to them now and telling them that you know what I'm a virgin, because of this and this and this, they won't actually believe me, so, sometimes I just you know ask what's the point? Why must I tell them that I'm a virgin, it's my thing. And I just keep it to myself.

I: So it feels like they wouldn't believe you, or understand.

P 3: They won't believe me and they won't understand. (Phone rings). That's my phone, let me just switch it off. Sorry.

I: That's okay. At the time when you and L first started, when you first realised that there was a problem, what was happening at that time? Tell me about your life at that time.

P 3: He actually thought that I was, I didn't want to make love with him. He thought that, you know how guys are, they already think that, oh you don't want to go to bed, it must be them. And then I said, and back then, first of all him and I, I didn't want to break my virginity because I felt like I wanted him to marry me first, then only I'll do it. You understand? And then the first few times, then I realised that you know what, I'm, everytime I'm engaged in sex, I open up but at some point, I close up, I get so tense, I get so so scared that I just want to close everything and I, I, always focus there. I don't focus on him kissing me, and having fun and caressing, I always think about you know, I have to stop because I, I don't want him to go there, because I'm scared, it hurts, so much. You know we tried so, so many a time, and it hurts every time. Yeah, and there was some point where we actually thought that, you know what, he said to me, uh do you know where your hole is, and I didn't know where it is, I have no idea, I wouldn't know the back and the front, I wouldn't know what happens to children. And then he said to me, do you sometimes look at yourself, sit in the mirror and look at yourself. I said 'I never ever do that'. And that's true. I don't ever do that because I feel that its so private, sometimes I feel private to the fact that I can't even look at it. Yah, but but since last week I was here last week, I think it was Tuesday and then afterwards I went back home, I took a mirror and I looked at myself.

I: And what was that like?

P 3: It felt so so, I didn't know that. I knew how it looked but opening everything and just looking at the detail and how it exactly, how it looks, where exactly is that hole? And then I felt so good, I felt so good, really I did. And I did that, I did that the whole week. Every time afterwards I would go to the bathroom, get the mirror and just look...

I: Discovering yourself.

P 3: Exactly, exactly. That's how, that's how I felt. I'm discovering myself, yah and seeing that I started this whole umm therapy with E, I had to do something with myself, I can't depend on that because this is about me, if they make a decision anything, they can't experiment about another vagina somewhere else, they have to do it with me because I need help, so if I don't do my homework it's not going to help me anyway, umm yah so I'm starting by doing that...

I: Starting by exploring yourself…
P 3: So that when they start with me, because I’m starting with the sessions next year, yah, I’m not gonna start now, when they start with me, I know I have an idea as to what’s gonna happen.

I: Tell me, you said a bit earlier that initially you felt that you wanted to wait until you got married…

P 3: Yes.

I: Tell me a little about that.

P 3: I can remember, I don’t know why, maybe it was because umm at home they always emphasise the fact that you don’t have sex before you get married. When you do this, its when you get married. And I used to hear this all the time. And then, somehow, somehow I actually feel bad umm one of the reasons why I close up is that somewhere in my head, its somewhere there that you can’t do this until you marry someone, you can’t do this until you get married, but then in the process because seeing that he is so understanding, he told me that you know what, if you want to have sex, your first time won’t always be the way you planned. Because initially, when I was going out, I wanted to see how it was romantic, for my first time with candles and with strawberries and cream, but it all changed because that was a a fantasy for me, so maybe this is, maybe this is real life, he said you know what your first time will never ever be like that, you can plan it but it will never be like that, its gonna be something different, it might, your first time might be somewhere in a park, somewhere in a car, somewhere out there, in a place that you never ever thought of, and he made me realise that you know what, umm, if if you want to have sex after you’re married I understand its fine, its fine, but if you get through it now, if I’m able to penetrate you now, then that’s it. You understand? And then I sat down and I realised that you know what I’ve been living in a fantasy for so long, I was thinking about this and that and marriage and what if I don’t get married? That’s what I said to him, what if I don’t get married? Does that mean I’m not gonna have sex? And in the process, then I just, umm I decided that you know what, let me just umm relax, take everything when it comes and see what happens. Live each day. I’m not gonna think about the future of getting married, just live now. You understand. And that’s exactly what I did. And then, in the process, then we realised that there is a problem, and we looked at magazines, and read newspapers, but nothing came of it. And and I was feeling scared to talk to anyone about it, about that because I thought that if I, if I tell my sisters and they see that oh S can’t have sex, she’s now a big girl, and she’s a very old lady, and then I kept it all to myself and then I told L that you know what if you find anything, if you hear anything outside, if you see a clinic or whatever just talk to me, just let me know we’ll sort it out, and then he said to me there’s a clinic somewhere in Sandton, its called DISA, just lets try it out. So I couldn’t get through to the internet so I went through to news 24, and that’s when I knew where it was. Okay so there’s a clinic in Sandton and I had to make the call, but it it wasn’t easy, it wasn’t easy, because for making that call that appointment to come here, it was one of my biggest achievements ever. I felt so proud of myself and eh I’m getting there. I know something is going to come of this. And L was also excited, he said to me if you need money, I’ll give you money, even if its R10 000, I’ll give you 10 000, just let me know 10 000, I’ll give you. He was so understanding, so he is, he is understanding.

I: So it felt like this was the first step.

P 3: The first step, exactly, that’s how I feel now. I feel so comfortable, and laughing, but I felt so worried even to talk about it, but you know how E is, she’s free, she’s, she can talk about anything, she’ll make you feel so comfortable about talking about these things. I felt so comfortable and then it was I still have a way to go but at least I can talk to
someone about this, because at home I couldn’t talk to anyone. And I would get so depressed, everytime, just before we engage in sex, sometimes I would like a weekend away I would suggest that you know what okay let me just get it over with and then a minute later I would think what’s the point of going and trying, we’re never going to do anything. We’re gonna try, we are going to try, but we’re not going to be successful so what’s the point and I would cancel the whole appointment, I won’t be able to meet him, just running away from this, I I would run away so much, so much, just run. And I would decide I don’t want to go on this weekend.

I: So eventually what you did was start avoiding it.

P 3: Started avoiding it. Sometimes when I go over to his place, we just sit and talk, and you know how it is, how is this relationship, just before bedtime, we would just uh pillow talk, talk about things and then we would start kissing. That’s how it is, we would start kissing, and then at some point I would think that you know what, what’s the point of this, we’re not going to get anywhere anyway. And I would just stop then and there, and I would say, ‘I have a headache’, I would come up with some story, just so that he he understands that its not going to turn out that way. I would try to avoid it by all means.

I: So, any type of intimacy is avoided because you’re nervous…what’s this going to lead to.

P 3: Exactly. Exactly. I get so nervous, and I get so scared, because I know…sometimes I will start kissing him but then I will feel so so bad, like why am I starting this if I know where its going to end, and at the end of the day I’m just going to make him get an erection and then say I’m sorry I can’t go on, nothing’s gonna happen so what’s the point.

I: I know this is a little bit of a personal question but other types of sexual acts, other…

P 3: Yah..

I: Does that still happen?

P 3: Yah, it happens, it happens because it has to anyway, because I had to, I had to come up with something as quickly as possible, because just imagine, you know how guys are, just imagine I’ve started to give him sex and then just five minutes, ten minutes I say no lets just drop it, I have to substitute it with something else. So I would just give him a blow job just to make him feel better, just to make him feel, you know what I actually want to do this but I can’t so sometimes I give him an erection, a blow job and that’s it, but he will feel so good about it, he even said I’m good at that. (Laughs). Why can’t I do this but I’m good at that? I said, ‘I don’t know, I don’t know’. I’m glad I’ll take this as a compliment, I’ll take that as a compliment because I can’t do more than that. I can only get to a certain point.

I: And in terms of you, do you allow him to do certain things to you.

P 3: That’s another thing, that’s another thing. I don’t like him to go near my private parts, I don’t know why. Sometimes he decides he wants to give me, I don’t know what you guys call it, umm there is another term.

I: Cunnilingus.

P 3: Yes, but we call it muff dive. We call it that. So, I refuse, I tell him no, you can’t do that. The other day he was so upset with me that, he was so upset he said to me, why I give you my body, I allow you to do anything. You can even touch my penis the way you want to, you play with it how you want, but all I ask you to do is let me see it, let me play with it, you don’t want me to, why? I felt so bad, cause he allows me do things to
him, why can’t I do that. I couldn’t understand, even now I still don’t understand. I
don’t want anything down there. No one I don’t even want anyone to go there. I avoid
gynecologist appointments, I don’t want to go there, because obviously when you go to
the gynie you know what’s going to happen. So I just try not to think about it. I don’t
know I feel so scared I don’t want anything to go there. I just tense up.

I: And if you had to think, if you had to just brain storm why you think that is, do you have
any ideas?

P 3: I have no idea, I don’t know why. I’m being honest I don’t know why. I can, I don’t
know if its to do with the mind, is it the body, because sometimes I will just relax, and
just get so calm, and comfortable with the whole situation, and I would decide that I’m
just going to relax, but at some point, I will just say ach let me just give him a blow job,
just forget about it, its fine, I don’t care, it’s fine but if you think that umm he is not
satisfying me, and that’s true, he is not satisfying me cause I’m not allowing him to do
that but me allows me to. Maybe, sometimes I think its because of, because I have a
discharge, and I’ve had it for quite a long time, I’ve had it since primary school.

I: Why do you think you have a discharge?

P 3: I don’t know why. Because most people where they turn, I couldn’t tell my mother that I
had a discharge, because if I had told her, because okay in my mind, in my mind I
thought that people who have discharge are people who are sexually active, so I couldn’t
tell my mother because she was gonna think that already I’m sexually active and by then
I was only 14, 15 so I couldn’t I couldn’t talk to anyone about this. I was so private about
it, till today, I only spoke about this to E last week. I couldn’t, I couldn’t talk about it,
and I don’t know what causes the discharge, I have no idea. Because I spoke to E last
week and I said to her, I don’t understand, I’m not sexually active but I have a discharge,
what is that? And then she said to me, you can have something inside that causes it. She
gave me some tablets and I’ve been taking them for a week and a half now, and I have to
give her feedback. I don’t know what causes it. So maybe that’s one of the reasons that I
don’t want anyone there. Its not a nice thing to look at.

I: So you’re nervous of letting anyone else see that.

P 3: Yah, yah because you know sometimes you get a discharge and its just white, but you
know there’s a type of discharge that you get just before your period, and its not nice,
well I have it everyday. And if I’m so stressed out, it gets even worse. It gets worse and
its something that I can’t control it. Like if I, like now I’m sitting down, the minute I
start standing up then I’m gonna feel something leaking. Yah, it gets so bad sometimes, I
feel so embarrassed.

I: Have you or would you go to a gynecologist about this.

P 3: I don’t even want to go to a gynecologist cause I know how gynie’s are. They’re just
going to use their spectulum, not understanding what your problem is. Yah and my
mother said to me umm last year,when are you going to a gynie, why aren’t you going to
see a gynie, why because already she thinks I’m sexually active. So she’s wondering
why am I not going to the gynie, because every woman does that. Once they start getting
sexually active, they go to gynies. So she does not understand why am I not making
appointment, but I said to her, just leave it there, I’ll go.

I: So you didn’t want to tell your mom that you hadn’t had sex.
P 3: Yah, I feel like I don’t want to talk about it with her. I can talk to her about everything, I talk to her about everything, but this one, L said to me last week, you are such a secretive person, ha, why don’t you want to tell her that. I said, ‘I don’t know, I don’t know’.

I: How do you think she would react if you were to tell her?

P 3: Uh, besides, I don’t even know what to…how to start telling her. What’s the first thing that I should say? There are sometimes we’re sitting, just say, ‘mom, I’m sick’. If you start saying that to your mother, ‘mom, I’m sick’ you know that she’s gonna think ‘oh she’s pregnant’ or ‘maybe she’s HIV positive’, or maybe there’s something wrong, so I try to find the right time, but anytime when I find the right time to tell her, I decide not to, because somehow I feel that she wouldn’t understand. She wouldn’t understand.

Because I have to, when I explain the problem, I have to, I have to explain to her in detail and I can’t seem to do that. I have to, I have to tell her in detail, what does vaginismus mean, I have to but I can’t seem to do that. She wouldn’t understand anyway.

I: So its really hard to talk about it, and it feels like she wouldn’t understand even if you did.

P 3: Mmm, so I decided that I would just keep it to myself. And, I’ll tell her whenever. Maybe later on, maybe in two months time, or maybe tonight, or maybe tomorrow, I don’t know. Right now, I worry that she wouldn’t understand. Okay she would understand, maybe she would understand but she’ll be confused. She’ll be so confused because, uh, when I was in standard…I think I was 15 or 16, I had a boyfriend by then, we used to go to the movies together, we were so, we loved each other so much, and then my mother decided that you have to go to contraceptives, you have to go to the clinic and get contraceptives, because by then she thought we were so close in the sense that…my mother thought that we were having sex. She was wrong…okay I I didn’t want to argue with her and say anything and tell her that we were not having sex, at the same day we went to the clinic to get contraceptive tablets, so I’ve been using the tablets but I’m not having sex, so it’s a bit confusing, I don’t even want to talk about it because people will be so confused, you are lying you are not a virgin, why are you taking tablets, why are you these contraceptives so that’s why I don’t want to talk about it. So I’ll just keep it to myself and you know what, L doesn’t even know that I’m on contraceptives.

I: He doesn’t know that you’re taking such tablets.

P 3: He doesn’t know, he doesn’t know. Because he would be so confused, I mean its confusing as it is. You’re still a virgin, you’ve got vaginismus, but you’re taking your tablets. It’s confusing. But then I, the reason I, okay, is that I use the tablets just for the sake of my mother because she thought I was having sex. So I decided that just to make her happy and better, so I’ll take the tablets just to make her feel at ease because she thought I was gonna get pregnant. So I decided, ach, you know what let me just umm, start taking tablets, and we’ll see what happens at the end. And then I stopped taking them for like about a year, but I had a problem because I was irregular, and the periods three times heavier. So I went back to the tablets and I used them and everything was back to normal. So I’ve gotten so used to them that its part of my life. I know I only my period for a few days, yah three four days and that’s it. Its helping me now, I can’t I can’t seem to stop them. I don’t know why. I can’t seem to stop. It makes everything so perfect for me. I can live my life the way I want not like any other way…but he wants a baby, so I don’t know how is he going to get a baby with this problem. (sighs – gets emotional).

I: It seems as if there’s so much that you’re dealing with at the moment.
P 3: There’s just so many things, so many and I just keep them to myself. No one, no one knows about this, I just keep it to myself, and decide that you know what its my own problem, and ill sort it out. I’ll just make up, I’ll come up with something, that’s how I live my life.

I: You say that’s how you live your life?

P 3: In the sense that I don’t feel comfortable talking about other things to people, I feel that I can solve them myself and can come, can come up with solutions. I don’t need anyone else to solve them for me, especially with this vaginismus thing, that’s what I thought at the beginning. But then, you know, the other day it was about a few months back, I suggested that you know what, how about I drink, I take lots and lots of alcohol and then we have sex. He disagreed, he said to me No ways I cannot do that, I would feel like I was taking advantage of you, because I’m having sex with you and then you’re under the influence of alcohol. He said ‘no, I know you’re trying to avoid pain, but lets rather do it while you’re sober. Let’s not do it while you’re under the influence’. And then I felt, ‘fine, its fine’, but I tried, I tried to talk to him about it, but he wouldn’t listen, he said, ‘no, this is a big problem, and you’re making it seem like there’s no issue, lets seek help and once we do that, we take it away.’

I: So you just wanted to get completely drunk, and see what happens.

P 3: Exactly.

I: Whereas he was saying no, lets do this properly.

P 3: Exactly, and his attitude is making me feel so, it makes me feel so at ease, so calm about this whole situation. And he understands. If he didn’t understand, I wouldn’t be here today. The problem is I would have broken up about six months ago over that, yah, cause he understands.

I: Tell me a little bit more about your relationships with L.

P 3: Umm, our relationship is like, uh, how can I explain this. It’s fun, we do everything together. We understand each other and, at first I couldn’t understand it, but now and during the process I felt that you know what, this is the right thing for me, he is the right one for me, but I don’t even tell him, I just keep it to myself. Anyway, we seem so, not actually we seem so, we are happy together. We love each other so much. We talk about everything, if we didn’t talk about everything, I don’t think it would be easy for me to talk to you guys about this. Because I started talking to him about these things first, I spoke and then, he’s understanding towards this whole situation, and it made it easy for me. He made me feel so comfortable with it, cause I can say anything, anything that I want to say. Its so happy, I don’t know how to explain that. Everything seems fine, I thought that umm, I’m at the right place, I feel comfortable, I feel umm so steady with it, I feel like, I don’t even, I don’t even look at other guys, because he is the one for me. That’s what I tell myself, that he is the one for me and I’m staying. I don’t think I would actually tell any other guy this problem, I don’t think so. He makes me feel so, so comfortable. I don’t, I don’t feel tense in any way. I don’t feel tense. But the problem is, I feel tense when he started to get sexual, then I tense up.

I: So in every other area of your relationship, you trust him you feel comfortable with him, its just that one thing that’s difficult.

P 3: Yes, exactly.

I: And if you had to describe him, how would you describe him?
P 3: Hew, he’s such a charming guy. He’s charming, he’s fun, he’s bubbly, he’s not a boring
guy. He’s so, he’s so comfortable with everything, he lives life, he lives free. He’s so
carefree. He lives life for today, he does not think about tomorrow or about yesterday.
Everything is so comfortable with himself, he’s happy, he’s jolly, He even said that the
other day, I’m glad I met you, I’m so happy, I can talk everything, about everything…I
feel happy and and I don’t know how I’m going to say this. He just a charming guy, he’s
so bubbly. Everytime when I’m upset, he will make it a point that he cheers me up so
that by the end of the day I forgot about everything and I’m laughing, that’s the type of
person he is. He wouldn’t get mad for nothing, he drinks a lot. Yah, he drinks a lot but
he’s a good guy. Yah.

I: When you say he drinks a lot…

P 3: Yah, I mean occasionally. He drinks when he goes to parties, he drinks, during a
function he drinks but he wouldn’t just drink in the middle of the week, or today during
the week, drink a beer he wouldn’t do that. But when he gets a chance to drink, he
drinks a lot.

I: When you guys have an argument, how do you resolve it, how do you..

P 3: Okay, at first, when we had an argument, umm we would just scream at each other, but
by the time he leaves, everything would be all fine. We would make it a point that no
one goes home, except whenever you leave if we’ve had an argument, I’ll make it a
point, okay both of us, we both make it a point that you go home happy. The problem is
solved, and then we came up with the solution to solve the problem. But since
December last year, every time we have an argument I would just go home upset, and he
would go home upset, and we would just stay like that for two, three days without calling
each other, he’s waiting for me to call him and I’m waiting for him to call me, and then I
would just sit and then umm, and then after any argument in the course of the year, I
would make it a point that I would just call him because I don’t want to get upset over
something that we can resolve, you understand, I just want to get it over and done with.
What’s the point of getting upset the whole month, I mean its pointless. I mean
sometimes you think, what’s the point of this relationship if you’re going to get upset for
a whole month so rather just sort this problem out, and move on to the next part, and then
we resolve our issues. And then towards, actually towards the end of this year, things
started changing, everytime when we have an argument, umm, he would come back to
me I would get so upset because sometimes I feel that you know what umm this guy is
he’s giving me everything, he’s showing me everything that needs to be shown, he
shows me that he’s such a charming guy, he understands so much about me, and then I’ll
get so upset that I can’t even give him anything in return, okay I’m giving him my love, I
love him so much, he knows that I love him, but there’s just one thing that I can’t give
him, and we’ll have an argument and I’ll think you know what, he’s going to leave
because sometimes we’ll have an argument about something else but at the end of the day
it will go down to sex so I would think that he’ll get an excuse to start an argument with
me and then at the end of the day he will talk about not having sex, its its one of the
biggest problems in this relationship, so and then he said to me I’m not going to leave
you, don’t ever ever say that to me cause I love you and I’m here to stay, I’m going
nowhere. So stop saying that if you want to leave you can go, and he asked me the other
day why do you say that. I said to him, I said its because I have nothing else to offer. I
love you but I can’t give you sex, but I know that you can get it outside, he gets so upset,
and he’ll say to me that at the end of the day I don’t want to go out there, I don’t want to
go, I’m keeping where I am. I want to stay here and I want to make sure that everything
is sorted out, I’m not going to leave until everything is sorted out.

I: So its become one of the main problems in the relationship, all arguments
end up…
P 3: End up in us thinking about sex, nothing but sex. And then he said to me just go and get help, you must just do this, just do that. And sometimes I don’t want no-one to say, I would just keep quiet and listen, and screaming and yelling and this and that and I don’t want it.

I: Who screams and yells, is that about other things or is that related to sex.

P 3: No no sometimes, like I said, it would become, we would start arguing about something else and it will go down to sex, but once he starts talking about sex, he would just talk to me and try and understand why can’t I have sex, that was before I found out this vaginismus thing, he would say why, why, what’s wrong, did somebody tell you something or did something happen to you when you were young or something. And he couldn’t understand, and you know what I couldn’t understand either, and I didn’t know what was going on, cause sometimes when he asked me all these questions, I would keep quiet and say nothing because I don’t know what to say. I don’t know, I don’t know where to start. I can’t say I have whatever, whatever and just I didn’t know the name of the disorder that I have. You understand, so I would just keep quiet. I don’t know what’s going on, I don’t know what’s wrong with me. I don’t know, I found out, I found out what... now we’ll see what happens.

I: So its something that you really want to sort out because its such a big thing in the relationship.

P 3: It is, it is. So, umm, one of the reasons why I started on the internet about this is that I felt that I’m not doing this for him, I’m doing this for myself, I want to feel like a woman, I want to feel the things that women do, I want to be able to, to use a tampon, I want to be a woman, to feel like a woman. I don’t want to feel less that a woman. So, I decided that I have to do this on my own. I did tell him that. He said to me, just before I came for an assessment, I told him that therapy is something like R4000, and I can’t afford that, I won’t be able to. He said you know what, even if its R10 000, I’ll pay for it. I said no, no, no I don’t want you to pay for everything, I’ll, you’ll pay half, I’ll pay half and that’s what happened with last week’s session, he paid half, I paid half. So its gonna be like that until I finish with the sessions.

I: So it feels like you’re both contributing something.

P 3: Exactly, that’s what he said to me. Its not your problem, its our problem. But I tried to explain to him that, but its about me. You’ve only known me for like two years so how can you say like this is your problem, It can never be your problem. I would get so upset, and say this can never be your problem so just back off and leave me alone. He would calm me down, and tell me no its not, its our problem. Let’s resolve this together. Let’s sort this out together. We can do anything if we do it together. And he made me talk, because I talk, I’m so free, I talk about everything. He makes me feel so comfortable, so at peace with myself.
I: So you can talk about your deepest feelings, your fears…

P 3: Yes, yes. And tell him how I feel about this, how I felt about that, all that stuff, I can talk about anything, everything. I feel so comfortable. I don’t feel tired or feel like I’m not going to say this because he’s a guy, whatever happens in my female life, I explain it to him in detail. This is what happened, and then he will give me ideas, advice, do this, sort of like umm, a psychologist or something like that. Cause every time I’ve had a problem, the first person that I think of its him. I first think about him before anybody else.

I: And in terms of just being open with each other, umm, sexually. Are you comfortable with discussing sexual things, like wants and likes. Do you talk about those types of things.

P 3: Yah, we do. we do actually talk about these types of things. Because you know a few months back he asked me, why aren’t you free with your… yoh I’m so uncomfortable, I I, we talk about these things and then, the other day he asked me, why won’t you have, why won’t you let me go down there, why don’t you want me to go there. What’s the problem, what are you scared of. And then, and then I couldn’t tell him why. I couldn’t tell him why. I I knew what the problem was, I couldn’t let him go there because of the discharge. But I couldn’t tell him, I can’t let you go there because of the discharge. I just kept quiet and he said to me, you know what, I think you have a low self esteem about your private part. So you just, just sort yourself out. He packed his bag and left. And I, I felt so bad. I felt so bad. I didn’t know where, what to start, where to go. I felt so alone. But about a few minutes later he came back, he apologised, and then he said to me I don’t want to speak about it. But he knows what the reason was, he knows, yah, he feels that there is a problem, that’s why I don’t want to talk to him. And then he said that I should come here, this is the place for me talk about these things, because women will be counselling me. And he would get so upset because he couldn’t understand. He said to me, I allow you to play with my penis however you want, but why can’t you let me do the same thing, its one sided, why can’t it be both ways. He couldn’t understand, even now…

I: So as much as you can talk to him about your feelings, there are certain things that are too difficult, too hard to talk about.

P 3: Exactly, somehow you feel so embarrassed. Cause some guys, you know guys, they always feel that you are so having sex, you run around, you sleep with other guys, they always think that. So, I decided to keep it to myself. Because I know the truth, I know what the truth is, and if everybody thinks that I’m this and that, I don’t care, I’m gonna sort this out.

I: So you’re worried that if you tell L about the discharge, he’ll jump to certain conclusions.

P 3: Exactly. Exactly or he’ll think that maybe she’s sick or there’s something wrong, so I just keep it to myself. Till today. But, but we, at some point, at some point I have to speak to him about that. I have to, I have speak to him but last week, I thought I’m, I’m gonna speak to him about these things. Last week when I was here, E gave me some tablets, and he wanted to know what these tablets were for. E said it was something for treatment, for the discharge, just to keep the discharge, and then he asked me ‘and then, what’s with the tablets?’ And I had to explain it to him about the discharge. I tried, I couldn’t explain it but I said there’s some discharge that you get out of the vagina. And he said, show it to me, show it to me, and I said I can’t do that. I couldn’t, I couldn’t.

I: So that’s difficult for you.
I: So you feel like that makes you different from a lot of women.

P 3: Exactly. Everything makes me different from other women, vaginismus I didn’t, I didn’t know it was a disorder. I thought I was different, I thought that maybe umm when I was young, somebody’s pinched that hole or closed up that hole, I thought so many things. And then the discharge, you see, I feel so embarrassed about that, I don’t want to talk about it. I just keep it to myself.

I: I wonder how it feels for you discussing these things here or with E.

P 3: I feel so free, I feel like, like the whole load is lighter now. I feel that there is something out there to help me. The only way that a person can help me is if I let them know what the problem is. They wouldn’t be able to help me unless I give them, umm, the key for them to help me out. So I have to talk about these things so that I get help, so that’s why I’m talking about these things. Cause what’s the point of keeping quiet...for how long? How long? So, rather talk about them now.

I: So you feel you need to talk about your feelings in order to get help, and that this in itself feels freeing.

P 3: You know that, because, just before I came here for an assessment, E gave me umm, she taught me a lesson, she told me that there are other women who have the same problem that I have. And then I said to her I didn’t know, and then she told me that they couldn’t talk about those things either until they came here, that’s when they started to talk about these things. I felt so, when when I got here, the first day, when I was here, I thought that you know what, if I want help, the only way I’m going to get help is if I talk. What’s the point of doing something that’s not going to help at the end of the day. So rather make your money worthwhile.

I: So you felt like okay if I’m going to do this I’m going to do it 100%.

P 3: I’m going to talk about it so that if anyone else comes or calls me and they need to do some research I’m just going to talk to them about it. Because keeping quiet doesn’t help. Okay, okay I did, okay I’m quiet at home, I don’t talk about these things at home. I feel that they wouldn’t understand. So let me talk to professionals first and then only I’ll talk about it at home. I feel comfortable talking about it to a professional, not to somebody who wouldn’t understand.

I: So you feel comfortable talking to professionals because you feel that they understand, but you don’t feel comfortable speaking to other people because you worry that they won’t understand and might jump to the wrong conclusions.

P 3: Exactly, cause sometimes I don’t even umm, I just decide that I’m not going to talk about it because they won’t understand so I feel like I’m just going to waste my breathe, keep it to myself, and then I decide, the other day, the other day my grandmother asked me when are you going to give me grandkids. I just looked at her, and then I said I don’t want to promise you anything I don’t know, and everyone sees that I’m working and I have a boyfriend, a steady boyfriend, they all think that you know its time, my auntie asked me the other day, when are you getting pregnant? When are you getting pregnant? I said no, I will, I will, so somehow its pressure from other people my relatives and everybody, they’re putting so much pressure on me. But then I’m not going to let that umm, come into my way, get into my way in the sense that I’m just going to do everything at my own
pace, and do everything the way that I think. Because if I do things at their own pace, I’m going to do the wrong thing. So rather that I concentrate on myself. This is about me, this is my problem. I have to sort this out myself.

I: So there’s a lot of pressure coming from different places. But you’re saying no I’m not going to worry about that…

P 3: I’m just going to focus on me, and concentrate on me because if I concentrate on them, and just listen to what they say, then I’m not going to do the right things, I’m not going to. I just want to do this at my own pace, and I know I’m that type of person, If I do everything at my own pace, at the end of the day I get good results. Everything works out the best for me. But if I do things at other people’s paces, then nothing is going to work out, cause I’m going to do mistakes.

I: Does it feel like you could do a mistake? Does it feel like there could be a mistake, or like something could go wrong in terms of solving your vaginismus?

P 3: Yes, so I would rather just do this my own way. And, and, and come to umm therapies, at the right time, and do my homework, and I’ll talk to do my homework, and I’ll ask L to help me do my homework. I think that’s the only way this is going to work out. So if I tell them at home that I’m going to E, she’s sexologist, they wouldn’t understand, they would be like why? Why haven’t you talked to us about this, and I think now its late for them to ask about it, you understand. So I feel that I just want to sort this out, that’s all, with L by my side. (Pause) how I’m sorry, my stomach is so hungry.

I: That’s okay, you’ll be able to eat very soon. I just want to know a little bit more about you, can you tell me a little bit about your childhood, what it was like growing up with your family.

P 3: Umm, the thing is I don’t know…

I: Tell me what you can.

P 3: Okay, my childhood was okay, it was fine, you know you grow up as kids, and play with other kids outside, umm, just like a normal childhood, go to shool, come back home, play with your toys, drive with your parents, go play with your parents, it it was a normal childhood. Yah, it was normal. I have nothing else, you know some other things I can’t even remember. The only, you know what, the only time I remember, its when I was in primary school. That’s the only time I can remember before then I can’t remember I don’t know why, yah. Like I don’t remember working, cause I went to to work at school, come back in the afternoon, go outside, play with my friends, and then come in, take a bath, wash, go to sleep, sorry…

I: No, no that’s good.

P 3: Go to sleep, and umm, I can’t remember most of the things.

I: And in terms of your relationships with siblings, parents…

P 3: No, everything is fine, everything so cool. They treat us equally because there’s three of us, my eldest sister, me and my younger sister, so my elder sister does not live with us anyway, so its just me and my sister and my dad does not live with us anymore. They’re not divorced, its just a seperation. I don’t know, seems like its going…and

I: How long have they been separated for?
P 3: Umm, since 2000. Yah its been four years now, since 2000, the only one’s at home are my mother, me and my sister so everything is okay. Yah, but but I I guess umm I think one of the reasons why I did not know why I have this problem is because that, when we lived with my dad, he was so strict in the sense that he didn’t want boyfriends, he didn’t want us to go with friends, any time after school we would go home, umm wash your socks and school shirt, cook, dish up, wash the dishes and go to sleep. It was the same thing every day. So he didn’t want boyfriends, he didn’t want going out with friends, he didn’t want that type of thing. But since he left in 2000, I felt so free, that I can do anything. I guess that if he was still at home, I wouldn’t even know that I had this problem because he wouldn’t let us have boyfriends so I wouldn’t know about the problem. So, somehow, somehow, I guess it’s a good thing that he left, so that I can at least know myself, know the type of person that I am. Know how I relate to other men, know how things are done in a relationship, because by then I didn’t know anything, cause every time I, when I tell L, like every time I I’m not going to lie to you, but your penis is the only one I know, I don’t know any other. He wouldn’t believe me, well at first he couldn’t believe, didn’t believe. But now seeing that he knows I have a problem, now he believes me. So, I I guess, I wouldn’t know what goes on with other people, I wouldn’t know that other youngsters do such and such, I didn’t know that. Youngsters go to parties, they go clubbing, they go jolling, I didn’t do that. I only started doing that about last year, or in 2002. That’s when I started going clubbing, going partying, and seeing what’s out there. What I had been missing out on. And somehow a good thing, somehow, it’s a good thing I did. Somehow, because I guess…I was able to learn myself, be the kind of person that knows how to relate, how to solve issues in a relationship, how to go out and relate to men, something like that.

I: So you feel like growing up with your dad, you were very sheltered, because you weren’t allowed to go out and see other men, and now you’ve been discovering about that.

P 3: That’s why I said that I don’t think it would have happened, if he was still living with us, I I don’t think I would have realised there was a problem.

I: What was your relationship like with your dad?

P 3: Our relationship was okay. We never talked, we never talk even now. I just told him whatever that’s important, and that’s it. But we never sit and have a conversation, I’ll never sit and have a conversation with my dad. And its been like that for years. Its been like that for years, you know, we never talk. We never talked, I just say what I want to say, and then that’s it. And then he’ll say what he wants to say, and that’s it.

I: And how was that for you, how did that feel?

P 3: For me it felt okay. Yah, it felt okay. There was nothing wrong. I felt like that’s how things are. That’s how things should be done. You know me and my dad we never talk. Even now I still feel that I have nothing to talk to him about. Always he’s my dad but somehow I don’t feel the need to start the conversation.

I: How do you feel about him, in general.

P 3: I think he’s okay, he’s very strict. He’s very, very strict. He’s very strict. So, maybe, I guess that’s maybe one of the reasons why it wasn’t easy for me to talk to him, because he’s always been so strict that…no sex before marriage, umm, you can’t get pregnant while you’re young. You have to get married first, I don’t want boys around, this and that, even now he’s that strict. So I guess that one of the reasons why I don’t have to talk to him. He was so, he always had this long face, he’s so unapproachable. You can’t say anything, you can’t start a conversation. He’s so unapproachable.
I: So it's feels like it's difficult to talk to him, to approach him about things.

P 3: Yah, if I need something, I will just talk, I will talk about that and that's it. I wouldn't start a conversation and talk about the family, not at all.

I: And your mom?

P 3: I talk to my mom about anything. We talk about everything, everything, everything. And there's one thing that I realise, its that my mother, how can I put, how can I say this? I didn't know my mother until my dad left. I didn't know what kind of a person my mother was, until my dad left. Because, before, while we were living with my dad, my mother wouldn't talk, she wouldn't start a conversation, make a joke. She was always so umm, so tense. I don't know why but she was always so tense. But after my dad left, I started realising that you know what, I have lived with this person for so long but I didn't know my mother could talk so much. I didn't know that my mother can make jokes. I didn't know that my mother can do this and do that. She's such a cool person to be around. I didn't know that. Or maybe, I guess that the reason was that I was so ignorant, I don't know. I didn't know my mother until my dad left. But I lived with her, I was living with her but I didn't know she would just joke around, have fun, go out with friends because she was always so tense. But right now I'm able to talk about anything with my mother. We talk and chat and laugh, and have fun.

I: And when you were growing up? What was your relationship like, I know you say you feel like you didn't know her, but what was your relationship with your dad like when your mom was still there?

P 3: Our relationship was okay, you know how mothers are to their daughters, we used to talk but not about everything. I would start a conversation with her, I would joke around but at the end of the day, she was umm I guess maybe she was so focused on the whole marriage that we didn't get enough time to talk. You know she was so focused on the marriage, they were always resolving their own issues in the marriage that they couldn't talk to us that much. But right now she'll see that she has enough time to talk to us, to spend some time with us, to go shopping with us, and I get to realise that she's actually a fun person to be with. I can actually talk to her about things, I can do anything. Say anything that I want to say to her.

I: So when you were upset when you were growing up, who did you used to speak to?

P 3: My sister. She was the only one who would actually listen to me.

I: Your older or younger sister?

P 3: My older sister. My sister was the only person I could talk to, even now I can talk to my mother, tell her my problems, but this one, I can't talk to her about this one. But I can talk to my sister about anything, if I upset me or plays funny things then I tell her about it. Did this to me what should I do? And she will advise me. This and that, try resolve the issue and don’t blame yourself and don’t blame him. Assess the whole relationship first, and then, the whole issue and then you’ll be able to resolve, sort it out. Yah, I can talk about anything, but not this problem.

I: And when you were growing up, things like menstruation, things like how sex works, how did you discover that?

P 3: Umm, I started menstruating when I was eleven. The first person I told was my sister, I didn’t tell my mother cause I didn’t know what was going on, I thought maybe something cut me or this is not supposed to happen. Of course I was so confused. I spoke to my
sister and then my sister told me that, told my mother and then my mother said to me that, she explained everything to me and said to me that, you know the first thing she said to me was that, now you’re menstruating and if you have sex with a boy you’ll be pregnant. That’s what she said to me. Whether the boy is the only one, if you sleep with a boy you’ll be pregnant. And then, we never, we never spoke about sex, she never spoke to us. My mother always told me that if you have sex and you don’t have contraceptives, you’ll get pregnant. That’s the only thing she ever said, we never talked about sex. Even with my dad, sex and sex and this and that I get it from outside. All that information I got from outside, I never got if from my parents, I got it from outside. With people talking and watching TV, and looking at magazines, but no one ever spoke to me about sex. Its something that I umm just happened when I was growing up. You learn things. You learn that oh this is what sex is, this is how it happens. And so even now, even its all new to me, like I said earlier on with L, his penis, it was new to me. I didn’t know about it before. There is a first time for everything. And so somehow even though I I’m 23, but I feel like some of the things I don’t know. Some of the things are new to me, like my, the very first time I have sex will be new to me. It will be, I don’t know what it will be but I I’m hoping that everything is going to be okay, and eventually, I don’t know when but eventually things will work out.

I: So you have hope that this is going to be sorted out and this is going to be a new experience for you.

P 3: I have hope that it is going to work out. It has to, it has to. I can’t, I can’t, I can’t go on like this. It has to work out. And the only way for it to work out is if I, I’m willing to learn. I’m willing to listen to everything that I’m told. I don’t want to become…end up a virgin for the rest of my life. So the best medicine is for me to listen and to do what I’m told.

I: So you want to do as much as you can to make sure this works.

P 3: Exactly. So that’s why I’m here, that’s why I came here, because, and there’s a reason for everything. There’s a reason for people making love at that point, there’s a reason for people kissing and grabbing , somehow I believe that, you know, back there when I started going out with L, I believe that there is a reason why we can’t have sex. But even today, I don’t know, I don’t know what that reason is. Okay, part of, part of the reason why I can’t have is because of vaginismus but the fact that I didn’t know what, that it was a disease, I didn’t know that I had a problem, so we would just sit down and then I say to him, there’s a reason for this, there’s a reason why we can’t have sex. I just have to figure out why why do we do this, why we do that, so that next year when I start the therapy, hopefully I will work it out.

I: So it feels like next year, its going to be a whole different experience, it feels like that’s when you’re going to learn and know.

P 3: …and know what the ins and outs of stuff, how to do things, how to contract your muscles, E showed me last week how to contract your muscles and do…it seems exciting. It seems like its going to be a whole new exciting thing in my life, something that I have to do open heartedly. I have to relax, and and resolve everything and learn, that’s what I have to do. But somehow I think that it its funny, people right now E and G are teaching them how to have sex. That’s how it is, they are going to teach me how to have sex, and I sit down and I think that you know what, I’m such an ass, I’m so stupid. Other people don’t learn how to have sex, it just happens, why can’t it happen to me, why? Somehow I thought that why must I pay R10 000 just to have sex, other people don’t pay money. I feel so bad, I feel so bad. But then I thought that this is going to help me, and this is the only thing, I just have to stick with these people. They are going to help me.
I: So there are those feelings like what’s wrong with me, why can’t I do this. Why do I need help?

P 3: Yah, why? Why must I get help, when other people don’t get help but then I thought that other people, we all give…everyone has their own, they all have their own problems. They all have their own stories, I might not know that, just like mine, they don’t know about mine. So everyone has their own problems. So I’m not gonna go into detail and worry to that, I’m just going to focus on me, and just forget about that. But every time when I go to this clinic and I walk away and drive home I think that oh when I see another women driving her car, I feel that maybe she can have sex but she has her own problems as well that she cannot sort out, and then I’m glad that I was able to come here and talk to E about my problems. Something good will come out of this.

I: So this is your challenge and other people have their challenges. But at least with you, you have a place where you can come…

P 3: And talk and talk about it and feel free talking about it, you know, and not worry that if I talk about it, they’re gonna tell people about it. I know that everything that I say will be confidential, and and nothing is gonna come out. It helps, it makes me feel better.

I: Not so alone.

P 3: Yah, I hate being alone but umm right now I feel alone but then I know that I can get help. If I need to talk I call G or E and I tell them that this is the story. But back then I couldn’t and I would just cry, sometimes I would sit down and I would cry, cry and feel that why, why me, what have I done? What…I don’t deserve this. I don’t deserve all of this. Why me? Why, why does this happen to me, and sometimes somehow you think that, you feel this, women, other women look at her she doesn’t work, she doesn’t go to school, but she’s able to have sex. She’s able to have babies, but you, I went to school, I’m a work designer at a company, a huge company but I can’t have sex. It doesn’t make sense, it doesn’t make sense. I sit down and I think why? I mean I’m qualified, why can’t I have sex.

I: So you’re able to do all these complex things but something that a lot of people think is simple…

P 3: Yah, because sometimes I just sit and think that stupid people can have sex, why can’t I have sex. I don’t understand that. Even now, I still don’t understand that but I’m hoping that sooner or later, maybe next year this time I’ll be talking the phone through, I’ll be sending e-mails I won’t be saying what I’m saying, and I’m hoping that… I hope and I pray that it is going to work out.

I: I have interviewed many women who also at one stage thought they were alone and then realised hang on, this is not just me…

P 3: I felt very alone, I didn’t think there was anyone else…

I: In my research, I’ve found that 2% of the population suffer from this, which is substantial.

P 3: Shew, at least I know there is a place where I can go to get help. And and I’m glad I discovered this while I was young, I’m 23 I still have a way to go, I’m I discovered this now. Because because if I leave this and decide that I’m not going to go do E anymore, I don’t want anything to do with E, I’m not going to have a man in my life, they’re all going to run away, they’re all gonna pack their bags and just leave me, and I’m just gonna stay alone, and without a man.
I: So it feels like this could prevent you from having other relationships.

P 3: Yah, in a way, and I think that because umm, I’m not saying this because, umm, some people think that if you have a man in your life then you’re all happy, all jolly, its not always the case. You can have a man in your life and still be frustrated and feel so miserable, so…and, and the other day, when I was talking to a friend of mine, she said to me that all of the boys, all men come and they want to know you, they want to flirt with you and do this with you, and then she said why is this so? I said I don’t know, but deep down I felt that all these men are coming all this way but they don’t know that this person has this problem. So, sometimes when a man approaches me, I would just think you know what I don’t want anything to do with you because most men say sex makes up 10%, but they all lie, they make, to them sex is 90% of the whole relationship. So what’s the point of starting something that umm, start with a guy that at the end of the day is not going to stay with you, so I just rather tell him that I just can’t go out with you, I can’t do this. I won’t give him desserts, honestly.

I: How did you manage with L.

P 3: With L, umm, we started as friends, and then, umm, I know him through a friend of mine, umm that I was at the college with, so umm I met L in 2002, we became friends for 2 or 3 months, then we started something and then at first I didn’t tell him that I was a virgin, but I sat down and then I just decided that whenever we actually start having sex, then he will realise that I am a virgin. I’m not gonna tell him, because if I tell him he will be like I’m lying, so some things you just to let, let people see for themselves, you know, you don’t tell them. So I decided that you know I’m not gonna tell him, he’ll just see for himself that this is the situation. But then he couldn’t understand but you’re so open like with your friends, I said no I want to get married like I said earlier on I want to be married first and then I’ll break my virginity with the right guy, and then he said but I’m here to stay. I’m going nowhere, and then in the process that I realised that’s the truth, that’s the truth. He said that he’s here to stay, that he’s not going to go anywhere until I’ve sorted myself out, until I feel that I’m a woman, until I can do everything a woman can do. Until I can do anything I want to do.

I: So you decided he was going to be there through everything.

P 3: Yah he said that, he said that he would be there for anything if I need him, if I can’t make sense of anything, then I just chat to him. You know.

I: Do you think there’s any connection between any of your life experiences and your developing vaginismus.

P 3: I don’t know, nothing, nothing…like I said earlier on, when I, I don’t remember, I don’t know why but I don’t remember most of the things that I did when I was young. I don’t know how it started, I don’t remember ever going out there…I remember some things but I don’t remember ever going out there and playing, I was always at home. I only wanted to be at home, I didn’t want to go out there and play, and most of the…I like when I was growing up, I like playing with boys, like with cars and this and that. I hate Barbie dolls, I don’t know why. So, I don’t think anything contributed to…I’m trying to think, but I can’t go there, I just can’t seem to go back. I don’t know how is it possible. But otherwise everything is all cool. Its fine. I don’t know if there is anything else I can tell you.

I: Is there anything else you want to tell me about your relationship with L, about growing up, about how you feel about vaginismus, anything else?
P 3: Umm, about vaginismus I feel, umm why, somehow I sit down and I think that why must there be a disease called vaginismus? Why must there be a disease as shit as that, because most women you want to feel like you’re a woman, you want to do the things that women do, you want to be able to have sex as much as you want, with our man, with our partners, with our faithful partners. So, I feel that umm its its s good thing that this was discovered, because some people, like, the other day when I was with E she told me that there’s a couple and the wife is suffering for 5 years and she didn’t know it was vaginismus, so somehow I feel that its so important to do research and find out more because there are women out there, so many women who suffer from this, some who don’t even know that there’s something called vaginismus. So we need a lot of research just like umm pregnancy or HIV/AIDS, people go out there, they find out about these things, why can’t umm there be more research on vaginismus, I don’t know the government should do something about it. They talk about abortion, about everything, politics and the rand to the dollar, and everything but why don’t they, why I don’t know, they talk about cancer, they talk about tb, they talk about everything, I don’t understand, I don’t understand. They must just make it easier for us because if I didn’t go to the internet that day, you know, I wouldn’t know what I’m suffering from. I wouldn’t even know that it’s a disease, I would think that I’m a virgin and that’s it and you know I’m a man. I would actually think that, but now I’m 23 and I know that it’s a disorder.

I: It’s difficult because not many people know about the condition.

P 3: Not a lot of people know about this. I don’t know why. They must talk about these things, they must put in on the street these things. Put it on shows like Carte blanche, , it must be something that’s spoken about everywhere so that people can know about this things.

I: Did it make it much easier for you knowing that it had a name, and having more knowledge.

P 3: Yes, yes. It made things so much easier for me. Because I knew that I had a problem, but asking myself, this problem doesn’t this problem have a name, so when I sent E an email a few months ago I explained everything to her, and then she said to me you have vaginismus, it has to do with muscles etc and she explained everything, and I was so glad, I was so excited that at least when I speak about this problem, I could actually have a name related to it. But I don’t want to speak about it to other people, its not something that you can just speak about. Yah, vaginismus is something that, for me, its something that is so embarrassing, I don’t want to talk about it, I just want the problem resolved. I just want the problem sorted out. But I know that when I’m here, I’m able to talk about it, I’m able to, when I see other women coming in to the clinic, I think oh maybe she’s suffering from the same problem that I’ve got. But I’m glad that I’m here, I’m glad I’m getting treatment, you understand, so it makes life so much easier for me, so much easier, but once I leave this premises, once I leave this place I just want to forget, I pretend that nothing is happening, I was not at the clinic, (laugh).

I: it doesn’t exist…

P 3: It doesn’t exist, when they ask me where have you been I will just say I was shopping, I’m not going to say anything about, but when I’m here I feel so free. I feel so comfortable talking about this, I feel so comfortable. Cause keeping secrets, what’s the point of coming here when I keep secrets. I’m not gonna get any help.

I: So this is a safe place.

P 3: Yes. It’s a safe start. Umm what’s the time.
I:  Its nearly half past 12.

P 3:  Is it.  So, that's about it.

I:  Let me just ask you, how have you found this interview.

P 3:  It was interesting, it was nice just to talk about everything.  I was able to tell you my problems, and feel free, it was fun.  It was interesting.

I:  I just wanted to make sure you didn't feel distressed or upset about anything we discussed.

P 3:  No, no, no, because I knew why I was coming, so I was prepared.  I feel less heavy, less baggage.  I feel lighter and lighter every day because I'm able to talk about these things. Because before I couldn't talk about it.

I:  Well thank you for speaking with me.  And also to let you know that once I'm finished, which will probably be November next year, its a while, if you want a copy of what I've found, only with pleasure.

P 3:  To be sure, I'll do that, I'll give you a call.  Thank you very much, Nicole.  It was nice meeting you.

I:  You too.