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**DENIAL
BY COLEEN
NOLAN IS
OUT NEXT
WEEK RRP
£7.99 (PAN)**

WORDS BY CLAIRE O'BOYLE

On fatism and sexism in TV and being the poster girl for big women..

"That is all women on TV are bombarded with now. Look at X Factor last year – all about Cheryl Cole and Dannii Minogue, what they were wearing, who was too thin, who wasn't thin enough. We didn't hear much about the old codgers Louis and Simon sitting on either side of them. It's a joke."

And with a shortage of fuller-figured women on TV, Coleen says she's ready to be the poster girl for big ladies. "I can't think of a single fuller-figured woman on prime-time TV any more," says Coleen. "Even Vanessa has had a gastric band and is decreasing by the day. Fern Britton is slimmer than ever thanks to hers. Soon I'll be the only one left but if I have to be the poster girl, then bring it on!"

But what about the biggest row of the week – sexism in TV after the scandal sparked by Sky Sports presenters Andy Gray and Richard Keys?

"I've never experienced sexism like that myself," says Coleen. "Thank God! But of course it goes on. There's a lot of pressure on us, a lot more than on men."

"At the same time, I don't think everyone should lose their sense of humour. At the end of the day, a joke's a joke, so we shouldn't be overly sensitive either."

On ditching the body worries that plagued her for 25 years..

After being a steady size 10 for around three years, Coleen was worried when she started gaining weight last year. "When I started putting a little bit on, I got paranoid that everyone was looking at me and gossiping about me getting bigger," she says. "But you've got to just get over it. You've got to realise it's about what works for you at the time."

"In the past when I've lost weight, it was for specific reasons – one was to marry Ray, and the other was for Dancing on Ice. I still exercise and, although I've gone up to a size 16, I'm still very toned. But now I think life's too short and if I want a slice of cake I'll b***** well have it. I've never been naturally thin, all my life I've had to work at it."

"But because of the industry I'm in, and the fact I'm constantly scrutinised and criticised about the way I look, I'm really aware of it. In fact, I've probably been worrying about my weight for 25 years. That's not right, is it? I'm just sick of it. If people want to say I'm fat, fine."

"I really don't care. But if they're saying that about me, then they are saying it about all of those beautiful size-16 women out there – and that is horrible."



On feeling sexier the older she gets..

So on her way to yet another birthday, how is age affecting Coleen's confidence? "I used to think that women who said they felt sexier as they got older were talking absolute rubbish," laughs Coleen.

"But I seriously am feeling better than ever. I think it's because you get more confident. Not like you wake up every day thinking you're sexier and more cocky than you were the day before, but you sort of just care less."

"I just think I don't really give a c*** what people think any more. As long as I'm happy and my husband and kids love me, then I'm fine."

And things aren't just improving in Coleen's frame of mind. "Another thing that's always getting better is what goes on in the bedroom!" she says. "I have no inhibitions now and stuff I'd have been embarrassed about in my 20s are no longer an issue. I used to worry, 'Oh God, will he like this? Am I good enough at that?' Now I just think, 'Well, if he didn't like it he wouldn't be here, and if it's no good then tough!'"

And according to word on the street, Coleen's getting chatted up more than ever. But surely she doesn't care, being a married woman and all? "I'm married – I'm not dead!" she laughs. "Of course getting chatted up is great. Everyone loves a little ego boost and a little flirt, it makes you feel good about yourself."

"Everyone has different tastes and we don't all have to look like Cheryl Cole to be attractive. Now I'm bigger again I'm getting chatted up more as I'm back to my old self and I feel confident enough to laugh."

On Loose Women and life as a best-selling author..

Not just a pretty face, Coleen has already sold 500,000 books in her sideline career as a best-selling author and is releasing her second novel, Denial, next week. Set in the cut-throat world of the television industry, Coleen admits it's partly inspired by her own experiences, but insists only one of the characters is based on a Loose Woman – herself!

"Obviously it's based on the industry I'm in and it's got all that sort of gossip in it, but it's not about Loose Women. I've been in the industry for 30 years so I've seen the lot!"

"I think of it as a sort of Mean Girls for older women and I've genuinely loved writing it. The only

character based on anyone real is Karen, who's actually sort of based on me – although she's probably a bit nicer than me really!"

"She's gone through stuff I have, like weight issues and ex-husbands and all that. I've been blown away by the reaction, there's even talk about turning them into a series!"

And as she hits her eleventh year on the Loose Women panel, Coleen says she loves its magic formula more than ever now. "The fact we're all different shapes and sizes is one of the things I love most about the show," she says. "We're all of different backgrounds, ages, accents, it's fantastic. That's why it works. I wish some of these skinny-obsessed TV people would have a look – then they'd see what people want to watch. Real women with real things to say!"