

LSFS29 20.7.1989

Michelle

Q. So you're doing nursing training here?

A. Yes.

Q. And how long have you been here?

A. About eight weeks I think.

Q. Is it alright?

A. Yeah, fine, I'm really enjoying myself. Sort of like fall down and go to sleep the minute I get in the door mind, but that's okay.

Q. And where were you before?

A. I lived in SOMERSET but I've been coming to London regularly for about the last two years 'cos I've got a boyfriend here. And also, my pen friend before that, so I used to just come up and see him at weekends and things so - I knew the area... North London.

Q. So does he live round here?

A. ...

Q. Oh that's good. So how long have you known him?

A. About three years now.

Q. How did you meet?

A. I went to - he was playing in a band and I went to a gig and they were the support act - thought, they're a load of rubbish (laugh) and then just sort of like he came round pestering everyone to go and buy their records. That was that, and then we decided we'd write - write to one another, you know, and he wrote to me... didn't expect anything back, and then just - just wrote regularly and then ... August last year, decided that I'd - I'd go and visit him..

Q. So did he come like down to SOMERSET with his band?

A. No, it was actually a half-way house, it was in WEST ENGLAND, he travelled up to ... there.

Q. So it's pure kind of luck in a way that you bumped into one another?

A. I suppose so.

Q. Well - call it luck.

A. Yeah.

Q. And does he do that for a living, or does he do something else?

A. No he doesn't. You know, he just works in a [SHOP] in Oxford Street, that's just a thing he does in his spare time.

Q. But does he want to make it his career?

A. ... like to but he's (?) a football fan too, he's more interested in that at the moment. And he's trying to write a play.

Q. Trying to write a play?

A. Yep. And I'm trying to write a novel.

Q. Yeah? How are you getting on?

A. Oh, I'm doing alright, I'm doing better than he is, I - but I'm about eight thousand words... at the moment.

Q. Oh, that's...

A. ... on five, I can't type very well, it takes a long time when I'm trying to type it up.

Q. Do you read one another's things that you write?

A. He doesn't mind me reading his, but I won't - I won't let anybody read mine, not 'til it's done.

Q. Have you always been interested in writing?

A. I think so. I mean when I was at school I mean I certainly enjoyed English Literature and English Language very much, and I did that, and I did Greek Literature and I've always - always read a lot, but I just found that, you know, people were always remarking on my rather strange style when I'm writing and I thought, I don't know, I just cultivated it; I just thought - I was just sitting in the park one day

about four months ago and I thought, I know, why don't I just write about things that come into my head, and I just started writing things down, it just came from that.

Q. Sounds great. Why did you decide to be a nurse? I noticed you said you went to [UNIVERSITY IN WEST MIDLANDS] for a term.

A. Yeah. I don't know, it was nothing that I'd ever thought - you know, when I was small, I want to grow up and be a nurse, nothing like that, it was just what - as soon as I'd left university it was, what do I do now? And I was working in a supermarket... dreadful, I didn't think I'd do that, I thought well, what can I do? And I just thought, well, nursing can be a springboard to anything really, and it was - it was another qualification to get under your belt, and I thought - ... it would make me as a person a lot stronger, I thought it would really build me up, make me be able to cope with things better and make me a stronger person, just help me deal with life better. I don't know - I don't sort of like - I know that I want to do mental nursing afterwards 'cos I'm more interested in that side, more than dishing out drugs and things, I don't - I don't think I want to be a ward sister, I want to maybe go out as a health visitor or something, I want to be out with people. But I can't really say why I went into nursing, I just thought - once you've done it you can really - you're not - you're not trapped, there's so many different directions you can take. You know, that's what appealed to me. 'Cos I had no idea what I wanted to do with my degree once I'd finished if I was at university.

Q. Is that why you left?

A. No, I mean I was enjoying the course, it was fine, I hated it in [CITY] - I didn't like the other students really. I - I went for the wrong reason, I think, I ran away from home to go to university, the first place that would accept me I just went there because I was just so desperate to leave home. It was just completely the wrong reason to go, I didn't go there for the course or anything, just so that I could leave home, and it didn't work out, you know.

Q. So what had it been like at home?

A. Oh, my parents have been divorced since about '82 and there was a lot of bad feeling, you couldn't mention my dad's name around my mum, I hadn't seen my dad at all, I only recently started seeing him about - about three months ago, after seven years... and that really upset my mum, you know... but anyway, building up a relationship with my dad and we're just getting on so well, it's like, it's two strangers met, you know, 'cos the last time I saw him I was twelve, I was a completely different person. And that's getting on really well and since I've been away I find that I'm getting on with my mum better, she was just very bitter about it all and - you just - it's a bit funny 'cos you can't sort of like mention one or the other in each other's company, you know, everybody gets upset. It's just very messy and very angry and - we moved away and went, my mum went into a [SHOP] and she's very miserable all the time, and we moved away... my fault, we'd moved away 'cos I came here to do my - my sporting activities and my swimming and then when I came here I didn't do them. So -

Q. What were your sporting activities?

A. Oh, I was - I was a cross country runner and swimmer -

Q. What, for the county?

A. [REDACTED] and - I did... split up everything at home went a bit funny and I just - I concentrated more on the O-levels that I was doing, you know, and I had [INFECTION] so I was... ill, it's a bit difficult to get back in... sport... just - just very unhappy ... the move, there was a lot of depression and things. But it's okay now, I'm fine.

Q. So when your parents divorced you stayed with your mum?

A. Yeah.

Q. Was that just you or do you have brothers and sisters?

A. No, my brother and sister - all of us, all the children went with my mum.

Q. Are they younger?

A. No, my sister's two years older than me, my brother's three years younger.

Q. And so who would you - I mean would you have liked to have stayed with your dad?

A. No, I mean when he said he was leaving I sort of said oh, great, you know - I didn't say oh great to him, you know, 'cos I was terrified of him 'cos there was a lot of violence in the home before, and I thought - I thought it was the best thing in the world that they were splitting up 'cos it was horrible, it was a terrible atmosphere in the house before, it was all tense and there was just constant arguing and shouting, and, sort of like mum telling us how bad dad is when dad's not around and dad telling us how bad mum is when mum's not around, it was awful, I thought that was the greatest thing that could happen when they split up. No, it just took me - it just took me all that time before I could... stop being angry and go and visit my dad again. Which I'm glad about now, now I've got two parents again.

Q. Now it must feel much better -

A. Yeah, it's great.

Q. So did that mean that you could talk to - well, you obviously couldn't talk to your dad 'cos he wasn't around, but were you able to talk to your mum as you were kind of growing up? - 'cos that's quite an important period -

A. Yeah, when we were young we were very close, when I, you know... but when - I remember my mum, when my sister was about eleven, my mum - it was round about Christmas and she took my sister into... and my sister came out and said that mum told her the facts of life and things and gave her a leaflet with some rude poems and things. What's this? - but she didn't do anything like that with me, I don't - ...all I know I was left to find things out from friends and school, and I remember, I was very upset because when I had my first period, you know, I said, mum, you know, look what's happened, and she sort of - she sort of said, you know, oh, good girl, and said, you know - and sort of like frightened me a bit and said, you know, you've got this to look forward to for the rest of your life, and it was frightening me a bit - you know, she was okay like that and - gave me some sanitary towels and things and told me what to do with them, but then after that I - I went out and I came back and I went by the bathroom, I heard my sister and my mum having a good giggle about me and about it in the bathroom, so that upset me a lot then -

Q. Yes.

A. - so I suppose I didn't really go and ask her anything about it ... I suppose when I was about fourteen or so, my mum just said to me... when the time comes be careful, won't you? That's all the kind of thing she said.

Q. What, never actually explained what -

A. - no -

Q. - you were actually to be careful about or how to be careful?

A. No. "Make sure you get something", and that was it.

Q. So where did you learn everything from?

A. Well, I knew about - I presume it was really friends and... jokes don't mean anything to you, but - after that - most of it at school although I knew really - like I knew about pregnancy when I went to school 'cos every time someone said pregnant on television... but most of it - although, you know, as I say in my questionnaire, wasn't very effective, ... very good what they said at that school; so I suppose it - if I think about it, it was mostly talking with friends. When I used to go home - 'cos I really was interested in biology, and actually did a lot of homework and look up in the books and try and read it myself, and I suppose like, as I said, the media and visual aids are very good, what was on actually - on the television.

Q. Yeah, it sounded like the visual aids you had at school were pretty irrelevant.

A. Hilarious... whisper, whisper... video on sex, and it was about chickens.

Q. What, laying eggs?

A. Yeah, chickens laying eggs and animals and - chickens and - chickens and cats, I think it was.

Q. So presumably they didn't talk to you at school about kind of more intimate things?

A. Oh, no, nothing at all. I mean the teachers were all highly embarrassed and the class was giggling and tittering.

Q. And presumably they didn't mention AIDS or anything -

A. No, not AIDS at all.

Q. 'Cos it must have been - was AIDS around then?

A. Well I suppose I was... from about '81 to about '83, but no, they didn't mention it at all.

Q. So how did you learn about that?

A. AIDS - it must have been just the media, I think. And then I, you know, if I go past places I would pick up leaflets and I've read a bit about it, but anything I've got has come from the media.

Q. Can you remember those sort of programmes and media things?

A. Mm. I used to - Channel 4, I'd be watching Channel 4 a lot late at night and they would have a lot of - you know, they're very good, the homosexual programme, so I got it a lot from that, you know, so luckily I got it from their point of view and so - I used to - interest in politics and so I'd... Section 28 and things...

Q. Yeah

A. I did that and - I can't remember exactly the programmes but on Channel 4 they have late night, the discussions, and sometimes -some of it came up about that, I'd sit up and listen to that, but apart from that it's just, you know... government acts and things, ... I mean statistics are helpful to a point, but I mean things like -things like Brookside, I mean when they - they dealt with it a bit there. I wish I knew more when I think about it, I don't really know very much.

Q. Do you actually know how you catch AIDS?

A. Oh, yeah, I mean we actually - last month we had somebody,... before, but somebody came in and - and talked about it, I mean... to find out - I didn't know that you had to - you had actually to swallow two - two litres wasn't it, of actually saliva before you could catch it 'cos we were a bit worried about it, if you had to resuscitate somebody, you know, they were saying that's perfectly okay. I knew you couldn't catch it from kissing and obviously - sex, you know, anal or - and intravenous drug users... But I wasn't sure about oral sex but that was - that was in the low risk, I think.

Q. Did they talk much about oral sex and things like that, as a -

A. No, they didn't. They had a "How you catch it", high risk, low risk and no risk. I thought that was in low risk but I'm not quite sure. That was one I was confused about, whether you could catch it that way or not.

Q. Was this like in a nursing -

A. Yeah, we had someone come in, AIDS education or something.

Q. So could you ask questions?

A. Yes but in a class of forty people... questions...

Q. So very few people did.

A. Yeah.

Q. And what do you think are the sort of people who are actually at risk from AIDS?

A. Well, I, I - the highest category I'd put, you know, intravenous drug users, that's what I'd use as the highest risk. I know, I mean I think, you know, that homosexuals have been made scapegoats out of this, I mean obviously, you know, you said they are a high risk group, but I'm very aware of it being, you know, a heterosexual disease especially in Africa, you know, and it's certainly coming that way, but - and then we're told either - you know, drug users, homosexuals and hemophiliacs, and that's about it, and they say, or if you're lesbian you're alright.... lesbians...

Q. Is that true?

A. I shouldn't think so, I suppose - I can see why they'd be low-risk but as soon as you've got - yeah, I would have thought... risk. Yeah.

Q. So do you know the difference between HIV and AIDS?

A. Yeah, I mean HIV is - you actually carry the antibodies, but AIDS is when you've actually got the virus, it's actually developed. You could be HIV positive for years and years and years and never actually develop AIDS.

Q. Right. Do you know anyone who you think or know is at risk?

A. Mm, I would have thought so. My - it's terrible, but my boyfriend's flatmate's gay and he does a lot of (?)proteging round toilets and things and I think he might be a bit at risk. No one else really. He doesn't seem to mind.

Q. Does he ever talk about it?

A. Oh, no, but he, you know he doesn't - he doesn't actually openly admit to me that he's gay, only to SIMON, my boyfriend, he... other people, you know, but I've seen him bring men back to the flat sometimes, and he - when he's talking about people, if he's ever met somebody he'll - he'll change their name to a woman's name.

Q. Really?

A. Mm. I mean he's - he's always... on the television, oh, look at her, oh, look at that, oh, gorgeous figure she's got and he's - make a big thing of being extra hot-blooded man lusting after women.

Q. As a sort of cover up?

A. Yeah.

Q. And do you ever feel that you might be at risk?

A. Yeah, I do. That's what I said to - SIMON, I said to my boyfriend, 'cos I know he's had a lot of partners before me and it does worry me a bit but I said that - I make it clear to him that I don't care what you've done in the past, it doesn't affect me what you've done, before you've met me, but I say - I say to him, in a way I feel that if you ever, if you ever cheat on me or go with somebody else, you must tell me, that I - I - that's one thing I don't mind, but if you do it, it's up to you, but I really must know. As long as he tells me and he says, you know... 'cos this could affect me, and I say - I said... I say, because of AIDS, you know, you really must tell me. And then up to there I'll decide whether I want to see you again or not. So I just - just ask him to be honest with me... something like that I'd be honest with you. Because no matter how much it hurts me, you're putting my life at risk. So that's - that's what I think about it now.

Q. 'Cos does he think that he might be at risk? - I don't mean with you particularly but from these other -

A. No, I don't think so.

Q. It's not something that...

A. No... but I do point out now and again that, you know - because he has mentioned, you know, would you like a foursome or something now and again, I says well, you know, the idea's very nice but I'm too frightened 'cos of AIDS; and that is what I am, I wouldn't - 'cos he thinks it would be rather nice to go out and just sort of like to go to a pub and pick up another couple and come back. No, I wouldn't, no, because of AIDS.

Q. Is that what he's done before?

A. No, he hasn't.

Q. So it's just an idea.

A. Yeah.

Q. And I noticed you did say that you used a pill and a condom -

A. - no, I don't. No, I'm on the pill now and we don't, you know, we use that, but before, when I wasn't, I haven't been on the pill I have used them, but I don't like them at all. It's the smell that puts me off, they smell awful.

Q. There must be some that don't smell so awful, I don't know.

A. I must admit I do go along with people that say, you know, that they are passion killers. Terrible things to bring out. I - I - at different times I have - have actually - I mean you think you're gonna have sex and then... talk about... I mean sort of like, it has actually put me off, I've - I've not had sex because of a condom before.

Q. What, not had it rather than -

A. Yes

Q. - wear the condom.

A. Yes.

Q. So it hasn't been - your passion hasn't sort of runaway -

A. No.

Q. Is your current boyfriend the first one that you had a sexual relationship with?

A. No, he isn't.

Q. No that's true, 'cos you said you'd had -

A. Mm.

Q. - a couple.

A. But he's - he's the first person that I've actually had, you know, a long-standing - like I've only had... boyfriends. I went out with somebody for a year, but we didn't have sort of much sexual activity and he's the first person that it's been continuous with. And I had a boyfriend before him, for about a year, and we didn't have much sex, and then before that I hadn't for a couple of years. I mean I first had sex when I was very very young, when I was thirteen, and I was very very frightened at the time, and that was on the time that I put on the sheet -

Q. What, when it was unwilling?

A. Yeah, unwilling, and I - I was very very young, I didn't know what was - well, I did know what was happening, but he was about five years older than me, and he was very very persuasive and very pushy, and I was so frightened of him at the time, that you don't want to say no, if you think, if you say no then they won't want to see you again, at the time, you know, awfully painful, and just kind of lying there and shutting my eyes and wishing that it'd go away; and that went on for about - I suppose that was about seven or eight times we had sex and I - every time cringing and not - not enjoying it. It - it seems silly at the time, you think well why can't you say no, but as - 'cos I - every - I was very very afraid of men at the time 'cos my dad used to hit me all the time when I was - didn't do something he wanted I'd get hit and I was, like for a long - for three years afterwards I thought that any man would hit me if - if I didn't do what he says, that you - you know, that you have to do -if you-if you say no to somebody then they're gonna hit you.

Q. So is that - was this boyfriend your first boyfriend, that person -

A. Yeah, well, you know, apart from at school, you know, you get -

Q. Yeah.

A. Well I suppose it wasn't then.

Q. What, you'd been out with boys in school or just sort of -

A. Yeah.

Q. - been round with them. So when did you first start kind of going out with boys, was that earlier than that?

A. Well I suppose... when I was at school - when you're about twelve and you have a boyfriend and - and you see them at school but them sometimes you go to the park with them after school and you play on the swings and that kind of thing. I don't know if that counts.

Q. It depends what you play on the swings (laughter).

A. No, I suppose it really was the first one because it was very very tomboy fun really, before then.

Q. And he was the first one that you'd had sort of sexual encounters with?

A. Yeah.

Q. I mean I don't just mean kind of intercourse, I mean presuming he was kind of touching you or whatever.

A. Mm. I do remember really not liking it and then I didn't really - I suppose I sort of like saw people after that vaguely(?) but I didn't -

Q. And did he use anything?

A. Yeah, he used a condom. And I remember I was very very frightened at the time, I used to ask him, say, can you put two on please, so he used to put two on.

Q. That must have been even more painful.

A. It was horrible. And then - the next - the next I - I had a holiday romance when I was sixteen, and that was three years later.

Q. So you hadn't had any sexual experience -

A. No.

Q. - since between that. 'Cos that must have put you off.

A. It did. It was horrible. I just didn't want to. And then I was sixteen and I had a holiday romance. I fell in love. (laugh) I thought I did. And that was - this is, the one that I... asked if if we could, and I wasn't sure at all, and ... because it was the first time for him, and he asked if we could, and said ... what to use, and we used a condom then and went down to a beach one evening. I remember - I remember in my mind wanting to and being perfectly alright but I didn't feel much at the time, but it was okay, 'cos he was a nice person, and that was okay, and that was - that was just once then. And then -

Q. It was only once -

A. Yeah, 'cos that was on holiday. And the next person, the boyfriend before the person I'm going out with now.

Q. This is down in Somerset?

A. Yeah, in Somerset. We were - we were at college together.

Q. And what was he like?

A. Quite strange really. It - started going out, been going out with him for about a year, when it first started we were - I - I was I started going on the pill then, and that was fine, it was willing sex and it was lots of fun and things, and then after a while it just - it just got boring most of the time. Oh, well, go on then, not again - we used to just pretend that it was alright, you know, and I must admit I did - I did fake a few orgasms, just to make him happy. 'Cos - 'cos it - it - he was very considerate, I know, it's like he wouldn't - he wouldn't have an orgasm until I had so I thought, I thought, go ooh, ooh, ooh a bit, then he might hurry up and finish.

Q. And did it work?

A. It did actually. So I feel a bit rotten about that. And after a while we just didn't really any more, I suppose we were - we were very friendly before that, we were firm friends when we went to college and it's just a friendship, and I think the sex died out after a while and we just really went back to being friends.

Q. But had you had a real orgasm -

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. - before that, I mean it wasn't just faking -

A. Yeah. And then, you know, I came - when I came up last August, going out with SIMON, the sex has just been the most wonderful fantastic experience I've ever had with him.

Q. So that must have been a real -

A. It was, I mean blimey -

Q. - surprise.

A. - I didn't realise it could be like this, it was just, it's -I've just never ever been unhappy or unsatisfied with anything we've done together.

Q. So what's made it different with SIMON?

A. I think - I've lost - I've grown a lot of self-confidence, I mean before I wouldn't let anybody - I had to be under the sheets all the time, I wouldn't let anybody see me and I - I certainly wouldn't walk around the room naked, which is what I do sometimes, you know, together, I don't worry about that now. It - it's just the way that he was with me. I mean he was a lot more experienced than me to start with, so there wasn't any sort of silly fumbling around and he - there was a lot more communication than there was - we talked to each other before, how we were playing about, messing around, we'd actually talk about it beforehand rather than

sort of like get into bed and think oh, what happens now, but we'd talk about it a lot openly which I think helps a lot. And you know, whilst we were actually in bed, reading papers or reading books or something we'd be talking to one another and ... more relaxed at the time rather than expecting something to happen. And with - and I'd - I've - never before with the first - I'd never make the first move as such but, you know, I would now, I mean, I'm not - I'm not self-conscious... at all, because I feel as if I'm doing something because I want to. And he says, you know, don't - I never feel as if I've ever done anything in the bedroom with him that I've done because I didn't want to.

Q. So you feel in control?

A. Mm. And we talk to each other, I mean if I'm uncomfortable I wouldn't just lie there now, I'd say, you know, can you move please 'cos I'm squashed or something. I wish I could explain it but I - I - there's just so much confidence that I've grown, 'cos I was very little and very shy, you know, I was seeing a counsellor before I started going out with SIMON, I had extremely low self-esteem, and that helped because I was seeing her for six months and she started building me up, and then when I started going out with him it went straight up. You know, he used to tease me a lot and I used to get upset, things he used to say about me or - kind of teasey things, 'cos he used to play on my age a lot because I'm nineteen, he's nearly twenty-six now, but then I just learnt, you know, just to get him back and call him grandad and things. Just coping with the teasing helped me, because before I used to just go and sulk, but now I just - just do it straight back.

Q. So do you think the change is more in you than actually meeting a man who -

A. I think so, yes.

Q. - who is different.

A. Yeah. I - I've lost my fear of men. I did have this huge fear of men that, you know, you can expect to be hit by men, that's alright. And I've come to accept that's not alright, you don't stand for it, because I - I never stood up to my dad and said, you know, stop this, don't hit me, I mean I - I think I let - I was a bit - a bit of a puppy running round after men and do what they said, and I think it was actually before I got so depressed and - see a counsellor and that really helped me to actually - I mean I see my dad now, and if my dad asked me to do something that I think's unreasonable I'll say to him now. And I - I'll speak a lot more, I used to be - didn't used to say much. And I've deliberately gone out to do things to build up my confidence. You know, I never used to go anywhere or travel up - public transport up to London and things, I was terrified; I do that now and I deliberately - I'll go out on my own some evenings now and actually sit in a pub, which is - which is great for me. You know, like with putting my name and address on the questionnaire, I'd never have done that before. I - I deliberately try and do things so that I have to put myself in public situations.

Q. And then discover that you can do it after all?

A. Mm.

Q. That's good. Did - was it you that took yourself to a counsellor or -

A. No, it wasn't, it was my tutor at school because I was very upset and I was very depressed and... suicide a lot, I had lots of sleeping tablets and things and I was thinking about taking them and my counsellor... I rang up my boyfriend once and said, you know, I'm so awfully upset, I think I might take these tablets, could - could you come over, and he said well no I can't, you know, I've got to have my dinner, I can't come over now, I can't, and it was like a final rejection at the time, so I said bye then, and then I was - I got all the tablets and the water and things and the phone went, and goodness knows why I answered it, it was my tutor, he'd actually phoned my tutor and she phoned me up, and that just helped, and she said, if I make - will you go to a counsellor, and I said no, I don't think I'd go or something, it would be pointless, and she said well if I make the appointment for you will you go, and she was quite - quite an authoritarian teacher, I mean she was quite - and I

was frightened then 'cos I thought if she made the appointment and I didn't go I'd be in trouble. And so I did and I went and I wasn't quite sure whether to go again, but I did, and then I started just going just 'cos I wanted to; and it helped so much. And I told my mum that I was going, which I think upset her a bit 'cos - but... exercises for self-esteem and things, and just went there, and it was just great, 'cos I hadn't talked to - 'cos I couldn't talk to my mum about the way I felt about my dad, I just couldn't, and my brother - me and my brother were always fighting all the time and I didn't think he'd understand because he was younger, and I just - just let it all out, I suppose.

Q. 'Cos was it the family situation that was kind of getting you down -

A. Oh yeah.

Q. - or were there other things as well?

A. It was horrible, I just didn't wanna be there all the time, just couldn't bear to be there. ...'cos mum used to say, you know, it's your fault that you're here and you're killing me. I'm so ill all the time and it's your fault, we wouldn't be here if you weren't here. You know.

Q. Is that 'cos of your sports -

A. Yeah. The only reason we came to SOMERSET is for you, the only reason I came here, I did all this for you, and how do you pay me back, you know, I'm so embarrassed, I mean because - and it used to make it worse because she used to say, you know, I'm so embarrassed about you, look at the state of you, do you know what people say about you, you know, you're on drugs and you're a tart and you're pregnant and all these things, and it was utter rubbish, and it just used to make me go worse, I'd shave my hair off even shorter and dye it orange and things, I thought well, you know, if I'm that bad then, you know, that's it then. It just used to make me worse.

Q. Well, no wonder you had low self-esteem, with someone saying things like that.

A. It seems rotten, I mean even though she's my mum she's not that bad but, you know, we do get on a lot better when we're out of each other's hair.

Q. Yeah, now you've moved away.

A. Mm.

Q. So were you eighteen when you went to work?

A. Yeah.

Q. - sort of left school -

A. Yeah, and that was awful, that was why I came - 'cos I - I applied to be a nurse in SOMERSET, but it didn't work - I reapplied and came here because - you know, when I was at university my mum was so proud of me but the minute I left I was - she was - it was, what are the neighbours gonna say, you left university, you're such an embarrassment, I'm so ashamed of you. It was awful. Well ... I couldn't stay there, I was so unhappy being there, but it was - I felt... I was almost forced to be going back.

Q. What were you doing there?

A. History and politics.

Q. So did you then apply to be a nurse in SOMERSET?

A. Yeah. They actually lost my application form 'cos I didn't hear anything for a couple of months, I was working in a supermarket, it was dreadful, and my mum just kept saying, when you going, when you going, you know, I've got to look after you for the next three years; and I thought oh I don't know, so I didn't tell her, I just wrote in and reapplied to come to London. Because of course all I got - well when I left university was, you left university 'cos of that boy didn't you, it's his fault, his fault.

Q. What, SIMON?

A. Yeah. But you know, she's met him quite a few times and she's stopped saying that now, she seems to quite like him. There's nothing you can do to convince your mum that it wasn't true. But then it seemed worse when I said I was coming up

here. But I - I came up here because I wanted to come, I like it up here and I thought, and I do feel now is if I wasn't going out with SIMON I mean that would be it, I'm just here to stay.

Q. Right, that's where you want to be.

A. Yeah.

Q. So - I... - you put down that you'd been engaged.

A. Oh, yeah, it was -

Q. Was that to - was that -

A. It was, yes, to SIMON -

Q. To SIMON?

A. - it was a semi-engagement, I don't think we took it seriously, it wasn't any kind of marriage thing, we just thought...being in love and we thought - it was after I'd been going out with him for about three months or so, it was like, shall we get engaged - it was like... oh, I don't know, and we didn't tell anybody, we just thought - and we didn't think of it as any kind of marriage although we thought - we thought that we might - we'd live together after I'd finished university. But I mean I think I'll probably be living in here for three years because it's so cheap, it's forty pounds a month for everything so I don't really want to move out. And we just thought we - we'd just do it and we did and we didn't. We - we sort of found this ring on the street, this sort of - this gold band, and it was great, we just walked for ages... I don't know, just one day we were having a bit of a silly fight and started getting a bit bitchy at one another and, righto, I'm not being engaged to you any more, he said alright then, that's it, I'm having the ring back. So - and we just haven't done it ever since. It - it just - we didn't think of any kind of marriage -

Q. It was just a bit of a - a joke?

A. Yeah. But if we did, yeah, I wouldn't mind - I mean, I suppose it's because I mean we're not religious in any way or anything like that, I mean if we did get married it wouldn't be a religious thing, we wouldn't be worried about getting divorced or anything, it would just be something that we'd probably just go out and do one day.

Q. Mm. Just on the spur of the moment.

A. Yeah. And if it lasted it did and if it didn't, it didn't. That's the way we feel about it really. Because if we do get married, I mean I wouldn't invite any of my family because... it'd be absolute escapade, 'cos there'd be filthy looks and things all over the place, my mum wouldn't speak to my dad, my dad wouldn't speak to my mum, my mum would be trying to claw the eyes out of dad's girlfriend, my dad's girlfriend would feel really awful because my mum was there, it would be terrible.

Q. Disaster.

A. My sister's the kind of person that'd be saying, oh, look at the state of her, look at her hat, it's terrible, it's awful, look at you, she's - she's a bit like that.

Q. And you're not that close to her?

A. No, not really. She lives in CITY. And it'll just be - I mean - I mean if I get married it should be - it would be the day, my day, and I should be happy, and not have lots of people around who are trying to get one over on each other; 'cos all the - my mum would invite all these funny old aunties that I'd never seen in my life, so I'd just go... you know, just be me -

Q. You'd organise it your way.

A. Yeah. I don't know how SIMON would feel about it, I think, you know, he's very close to his family, which I like 'cos I used to first go round and see his family, I used to think it was great, you know... semi they lived in and all the family together, and the grandparents and - I really liked that, I think that's when I... to see my dad because there was this family, they were all together and they were all, you know,... they're not always - not all sweet and lovely all the time but they were very happy with one another, and that's what I really craved for. And I thought, well am I, am I still angry at my dad, why don't I just go and see him. I felt I was strong enough to

go and see him and, if he was the same person that I remembered him as, to not go back again, just leave and say, you know, I didn't wanna come back again. It's until I felt strong enough to do that. And I went back and found it wasn't too bad...

Q. Have you ever talked about him hitting you, to him?

A. No, no, I haven't. I've just made - I've just made comments like - we were discussing about children and things and he was - some children were playing up, 'cos we were on holiday, and he was saying well they deserve a good belt round the ear, and I said no they don't, I said, I think if you beat your children that just - that's just a sign of weakness in the parents if that's the only way they can cope with the situation is to go - with violence, I said I think that's deplorable. I said it. He says, oh, do you really think so, and I says yes. I says if you can't resolve, like, a child playing up by talking to them or using non-violent means than I said - I said that you know, that's a sign of a weakness in the person. I couldn't believe I'd said it, but I did. And he accepted that as my view. But we don't ever talk about - it's a bit too painful to talk about the past, I think it's something we - we just forget, just start again.

Q. How did you manage to go out with SIMON if he was up here and you were down there?

A. Oh, well, ... well I suppose I first came... in August and I was off...

Q. Is that August last year?

A. August last year.

Q. And you'd been writing to him before that -

A. Yeah, we'd been writing for two years -

Q. But not meeting?

A. No, I met him once, I went up and thought oh, he's okay, and he thought oh she's (?) ugly (laugh), just one of those, just - just very friendly pen friend things and we just - all kinds of things, and then I was up until October so I felt I was free then for a couple of months, and ... used to come up, and it was fine for me to get away, it was great, he used to come up and stay up there for weeks, and then when I went to university I used to come down at weekends.

Q. - which would have been last autumn -

A. Yeah. And then I left university and I was unemployed for a while so I was going... and then I was working in SUPERMARKET doing the morning cleaning, and then I had the weekends off then, I had Saturday, Sunday, Monday off, I was doing a part time cleaning job...three days that way, and then - and then when I was - got my ... up here, he came down a couple of times but there was no point really coming down to SOMERSET, 'cos there isn't anything to do. His band played down - got a gig in SOMERSET once and they all came down... We just managed it really well, we only really had - the longest time we've had apart is five weeks, I think.

Q. That's good. And how long was it after meeting him before you actually had a sexual relationship?

A. The first night.

Q. The first night? What, when he came down for the gig or when -

A. No, when I came up here, last August.

Q. Ah, well, so you hadn't -

A. No, not, no -

Q. - before that -

A. No, when I first - when I first met him at the gig we were just, you know, a bit - kissing, cuddling and that, and then we were just writing to each other for a couple of years, so I suppose... I knew him, and then the first time, when I came up once to London just to visit for an afternoon and we were just, you know - just walking around, just a couple of friends then, and then when I came last August we... together and he only - I was expecting - he said, you know, I've only got a sofa bed, you know, you'll have to sleep in there, which was fair to me because at my house we only had a sofa bed and when all my friends came they'd have to - we'd all have

to sort of all jump in bed together, so I was used to things like that, but I just came up then, and it was just really strange, there was nothing like I thought I'd ever do before, just sort of like come to bed with my t-shirt and knickers on, and I just - we - we just did, and I was so amazed, it was something that I really wanted to do.

Q. Had you talked about it or did it just happen?

A. No, it just happened, 'cos I was talking about - saying why I came up, and I says oh I - 'cos I'd just been on holiday with my boyfriend, that I was going out with at the time, and we decided that we'd go on separate holidays after the first day, we just weren't getting on, we both think we - we'd just - we'd just get away from each other for a bit and see how we felt when we came back, and so I went... for a week and that's how it happened. And I came back and I said, you know, well, told him what I did and he said well I don't want this... to go on. That was it.

Q. And so there wasn't any sort of negotiation or decision?

A. No.

Q. At all, it just sort of -

A. Mm.

Q. And then did he use a condom then, was that -

A. No, I was - I was on the pill then but I think it was - I think he knew, I don't think he would have done it without it because I had all my things out for the night and the tablets were on the side anyway, just left out.

Q. And then it just took off from there?

A. Yeah. Although he has said, you know, 'cos I, you know, I sometimes whinge about being on the pill sometimes 'cos ... because, you know, I'm still getting lots of pain and things and...

Q. What, with periods and -

A. Yeah, still a lot of pain. I was put on - one of the reasons I was put on them was 'cos I had terribly irregular periods, somewhere between fourteen and forty-one days, somewhere between that, and so it helped ... it up, but then after a time it wasn't and I was bleeding in the middle of the month and things and I used to say, you know, well I don't know why I'm bothering with this and to me he said, you know, if you want to come off that's fine, we'll use condoms. We have spoke about that, but I don't think either of us likes them really.

Q. So do you think you might stay on the pill?

A. I think so, yeah,...

Q. Well, there are other methods.

A. Mm, I know, but I - I don't like things that break up the flow of any kind of sexual relations and I ... (?) hippy, I think it's unnatural, I know the pill isn't but I don't like the idea of fitting, you know, caps and things and using spermicide creams, I definitely wouldn't have the coil or anything. That's about it really, isn't it, apart from - I wouldn't rely on the rhythm method at all.

Q. Well it's not really reliable, especially if you've got a history of irregular periods.

(Tape change)... anything about safe sex?

A. Safe sex? I think the main thing now is... condom, isn't it, creating a barrier. I know - I think more what I've heard about homosexuals, you know, mutual masturbation, you know, rather than, rather than sex really. Safe sex for me doesn't really - for me doesn't mean anything 'cos I consider my sex safe anyway.

Q. What, safe in terms of - of what?

A. Well I don't feel as if at the moment I'm at any risk from AIDS, I mean because as long as, you know, I'm - as long as my partner's being honest with me. As far as I'm concerned, what's happened before, in his life before, doesn't matter... since he's going out with me... What's happened before is alright, I mean that's it, that's the risk I took when I started going out with him. If I have contracted AIDS -

Q. What, through him, through someone else -

A. From before, before he met me, that was just - that's just unlucky. I consider that, you know, that - that's just, well, there's nothing I could have done about that. I

wasn't around at the time so I haven't really got any right to complain if it happened, I just accept that, but if, you know, if, if - that's why I consider as long as he's just sleeping with me then that's alright. I consider that safe sex.

Q. I was thinking also of - of things like kind of non-penetrative sex.

A. Oh, yeah, so - like just mutual masturbation and oral sex.

Q. Yeah, yeah. I mean has that ever been anything that you would practice?

A. Oh yeah, it's - yeah, that's usually - ... do use it on its own sometimes but it's usually, you know, as a form of foreplay really.

Q. And I mean what, actually in terms of sexual expectations, what would you say you had as - what did you expect from sex?

A. Oh, gosh. On... when we do have any kind of sexual activity, for me the - the forefront of my mind is that I want - I want to make him happy, I want to - I - I think, you know, I want to do everything for him, you know, I ask him is there anything I can do for you 'cos I just really want to make you happy, which is ever so funny 'cos he he's exactly the same about me, so for me it's making him happy and for him it seems to be making me happy. And I find that if - if I can make - I mean when he actually reaches orgasm for me that - that can actually override whatever... me 'cos I think, you know, I've made, you know, that's it, I've - I've made him really happy, and that gives me an amazing feeling, I think that's really great. But no, I certainly don't mind if, say, I don't have an orgasm, I don't mind that at all, I mean I don't - I don't mind say in the evening if we go to bed and it's - it's - sometimes it's just wonderful just to lie there and just cuddle one another and then go to sleep. I certainly don't have any expectations that, you know, if we're in bed that's the place where we must go to make love. It's certainly not like that, we don't have any - we don't ever expect sex from one another. Which helps... I think.

Q. Yes. And in terms of things like pleasure, has that - has that changed over the years, 'cos your early experiences must have been pretty, you know -

A. Oh, yeah. Incredible really.... from my head to my toes. But you know, it - it's now I have the confidence to say, you know, if something isn't giving me pleasure, well, you know, stop doing that, unless, you know, it's making him happy. I think it's - it's terrible but it's actually being in love makes it - makes it, if you really love somebody then you can just - anything you can do whilst you're with them just will make you happy.

Q. And do you - what do you do - I know you said in the questionnaire you seem to do loads of things together, like, you know,... and concerts...

A. Well we certainly - I mean we think the worst thing that would happen would be that if we were in one another's pockets, if we were with each other all the time and never saw anything... set of friends, I think that would be disastrous, so we don't - I mean I haven't - the last time I saw him was - I think it was probably Sunday, and we're meeting up tomorrow but we just say - 'cos I've just started on the wards, shiftwork,... late shift, but we - we make other - we don't - we make other plans to see other people in the week and if we don't see, you know, if we have an evening spare we see one another, but we usually try and keep weekends free for one another, although now I'm doing shiftwork I'll be working weekends. And like he - in the football season he always, always, every Saturday, he's football - and I don't really like football so -

Q. What, does he go to Arsenal?

A. No, he goes - goes to LONDON FOOTBALL CLUB actually... so I go in there in the afternoon, so he'll go off to football with people sometimes, and find something else, but, you know, we see each other I'd say probably four evenings, three or four evenings a week, you know, if we've got a weekend then we spend all day together. And we do - we go to the theatre, you know, we both like bands, on weekends we both love markets and boot fairs so we go round all those together and try and snap up a few bargains; go over to WEST LONDON to see his parents 'cos... over there.

And like on Sunday he's - get a lot of Sunday papers and we have a lazy morning and we go out - go out eating together.

Q. So do you tend to stay at his place?

A. I stay at his - half and half really. It depends where the -which is nearest because it's - it's quite nice - at his place he's got a flat mate there and, you know, he's got his own bedroom but there's always somebody else there, so it... - it just depends where we're nearest, we go to the CINEMA sometimes so we just come here, just whatever's nearest really.

Q. Do you think - in terms of - we've been talking about risks a bit in terms of AIDS, but do you think you're a person who takes any risks in other sorts of areas?

A. Other areas.

Q. I mean like smoking, drinking -

A. Oh, not talking about AIDS, just other health risks?

Q. Yeah.

A. Well I don't smoke and I - I don't like being in smoky places, you know, I don't go to discos or anything like that 'cos I just don't like it, my eyes get really upset. I don't - I don't go to busy pubs and things, if I go to a pub I'll go to one where there's a few old people sat around rather than lots of young people 'cos I don't really like young people's sort of pop music and things, you know, I'll come back here and put the classical on. I do drink now and again but I'm - you know, when I'm drinking, if I'm just having one or two in the evening I'd rather have soft drinks. What I tend to do is, like, we go to pubs and I'll have soft drinks and then if I am gonna drink I sort of like drink and get drunk, that kind of thing, so I'm very naughty like that. I don't take any drugs, although, you know, when I was at college I smoked pot...

Q. Yeah, that's -

A. But I don't take any - any drugs or anything. I used to, you know, I try to take exercise 'cos I'm used to taking a lot of exercise so I - I mean I'll walk rather than take the bus everywhere, in that way. I'm quite a strict vegetarian, so I suppose I eat quite a lot of health foods. I - I don't - I am worried about diet and I wouldn't eat, I don't sort of eat fried foods or anything like that, I mean I don't eat any kind of meat and I try and keep clear of processed foods, so I suppose I'm alright like that.

Q. And you don't sort of - you didn't used to bunk off school?

A. Oh, yeah, I used to.

Q. You used to.

A. Well, not until - '82 my parents split up and the year, it was my third year in school, '82 and '83, and I went absolutely wild, just one year. And then I moved schools and for the last two years I really got down and concentrated. So I had one year of absolutely being absolutely miserable and having most afternoons just sort of -I don't know, got in trouble when I was on (?) report, you know, because I was really - you know, I was a good pupil and then I just suddenly - because what it was, that they told me that my house tutor had said to my mum, speaking to my mum, that... what's happened and you can - you know, we will be aware if there are some odd behaviour, you know, from MICHELLE, and we can put up, you know, with a few things... bursts into tears or something, so I thought that was an excuse, that's okay...

Q. ...

A. Yeah, do what I want... my parents, and it wasn't really 'cos I was just - I just didn't wanna be in a place where - I just wanted - I just wanted to break away and find something new, 'cos I knew we were gonna move to SOMERSET because my dad had put the house up for sale, and there was so much fighting and things going on, my mother was crying and things, all the time... And then as soon as we moved to SOMERSET, I had two more years at a new school, I didn't miss a day. I thoroughly enjoyed my last two years at school.

Q. And it sounds as though it's been good here too.

A. Mm, yeah, I've been really happy since I've been here.

Q. So what do you think'll happen in the future in terms of kind of work and -

A. Well, I - I - I - I do see myself - I don't see myself giving up my student nursing, so that's three years, I certainly plan to do that, maybe... you know, hope to build up a relationship with my dad and his girlfriend 'cos I really get on well with them now, you know, I should ring them up a bit more, I'm a bit bad about that. I hope that I can get on a lot better with my mum, I think it will be easier now that we're away from one another; I'd like to, you know, get on better with my sister, 'cos we've never got on very well; when I came down I wrote her a letter, but that was eight weeks ago and she hasn't written back. I just wrote her a letter saying, you know,... if you want to come up and stay, I'm here. Well I'm okay with my brother, he's just - he's just - he's just nearly sixteen and just a young boy, you know, just a bit sort of like that. And as far as I can see, I mean I'm very happy in the relationship with SIMON and as long as I'm very happy I'd like to... as long as... That's all. As far as work's concerned I want to do mental nursing after I've done this so as far as I can see - 'cos that would take eighteen months - so I think in the next four and a half years I know what I want to do and work for but ...I don't know yet...

Q. Do you think you'll stick with nursing or - or go on and maybe do something different?

A. I don't know. I don't know.

Q. And do you think you'll get married and have kids?

A. I don't know about marriage, I mean marriage isn't something that means anything to me at all, it's just - I think if we did get married it would just be something to do with just one day, what are you doing Saturday? - I know, just, just get married, for tax reasons and things like that, that'd be it, but yeah, I mean - SIMON's often gets a bit broody, you know, 'cos he's twenty-five and he thinks... he says, you know, what age would you want to have children, so I say well, about twenty-five, and of course he's there already, and he says, you know, you can understand that I might want to have some now. Well, when I'm twenty-five he'll be thirty-two, he's afraid of being an old man ... children. But I certainly don't want any at the moment, but I think yeah, maybe I would like some children.

Q. And do you ever feel that - that you and he kind of take risks together in terms of kind of - like if you came off the pill or anything like that, would you ever think that you were at risk of kind of pregnancy or AIDS or -

A. Mm, yeah.

Q. I mean assuming you didn't want - weren't trying to get pregnant or anything.

A. Yeah, because sometimes - just sometimes I've taken it a bit late and ... holiday ...ten weeks ago ... and I didn't bother to take them -

Q. What, the pill?

A. Yeah, I didn't bother to take them when I was ... I often do that sometimes, sometimes - I'm always late with them, ... my period's always come, but I'm often late. I started getting worried a bit. I - I think I could... but ... really, 'cos often I'm late... it'll be there.

Q. 'Cos with the pill it's usually fairly regular, isn't it?

A. Yeah. It's better now, I mean - I mean, you know, I was bleeding in the middle of the month but I think that was because I had a bit of thrush at the time... but now it's fine, you know, the last couple of months it's been okay.

Q. So do you ever, it's probably a totally hypothetical question, you and SIMON seem to be fairly together, but can you imagine sort of like, saying you weren't together, and there being another relationship, that you would be embarking on, would you feel differently about kind of how you would negotiate having sex and things like that?

A. Mm. Well I'd hope that I would, you know, have learnt something from this relationship and certainly right from the start, talk about things and ask questions and - I know it's probably awful asking about the past life but I feel as if I would - I would want to know about what they've done before and ask people - ... can always

lie, but be honest. I - I would - I certainly do feel about AIDS, I would be a lot more wary now.

Q. Is it something that you do feel conscious of?

A. Yeah, I do. It sounds dreadful but I mean ... you get a lot of drunks and things... and before - ... before, but I certainly make, I really try and walk quite really round them now, 'cos I am afraid of - I am afraid of - 'cos I was at Holborn station a little while ago and there was this stabbing there, and I walked by, and somebody mugged and stabbed and they actually died and I walked by them. And I - I'm terribly frightened about muggings and stabbings and somebody passing it on to me that way. I think, I mean, I don't - if I'm out at night I won't come back across the house if I'm out on my own because I ... because I don't like walking through the grounds of the hospital here, because, you know, it is a nurses' home, dark, and it's very very dark and there's, you know, there's derelict houses out there and it's got some big bushes and I think, because a lot of men... nurses, I don't come back 'cos I'm frightened of being attacked. I did go to a self-defense course once a little while ago but I don't know how that would help me. I'd always make sure, you know, I've got my keys out and - I know it sounds awful, but I always put a screwdriver or a pair of scissors in my pocket. I really am frightened.

Q. Mm, I think -

A. Yeah, I'm worried about -

Q. - with reason...

A. You know, I - I always take the bus rather than the tube at night if I'm on my own and, you know, sit downstairs. I - I'm a bit concerned about what I do in the winter when I go up to hospitals on the early shift if there isn't any buses and things 'cos going out in the dark. I - I have come back at night sometimes, just run all the way.

Q. Do you feel more at risk from pregnancy or from AIDS?

A. Probably AIDS actually. I mean, you know, 'cos I think I've got... (?) proportion, but say if - if the ultimate - ultimately worst thing ever happened and I was raped, the first concern I would think about would be someone's given me AIDS rather than someone's made me pregnant.

Q. And do you think you would ever ask somebody to go for an AIDS test?

A. I'm worried about with the insurance and people like that, you know, if - they ask, if you wanted to get insurance or a mortgage, they ask if you've had an AIDS test and, whether you say yes or no, they, you know, they say, you know, you can't have insurance. But I've often thought that I'd quite like an AIDS test myself. I've spoke - I've said to SIMON, and he wouldn't, he wouldn't like to know -

Q. He wouldn't?

A. He wouldn't like to know, he just, you know, says, you know, he wouldn't like to know the truth. But I would. Maybe it's because I - maybe he is a little bit worried that, you know, what he's done might have caught up on him, he might be carrying something, but I -but I - perhaps it's because I don't really think that I am at risk, not that much that I would. I wouldn't mind an AIDS test actually.

Q. No, it's just like reassuring, isn't it, I mean well hopefully it seems that you're going to be negative... And if you had to kind of describe yourself then, what sort of person would you describe yourself as now?

A. Well I - I think that - I think I've been the happiest that I've ever been in my life at the moment, apart from as a delirious little child just running round as if nothing really matters, but I ... feel as if I'm in control. I feel as if I've grown up, over the last year I've grown up, and I can do things for myself, you know. I mean I can - I've been looking after myself since I was about fourteen, I became a vegetarian and I had to cook my meals and look after myself 'cos my mum didn't have time in the shop, but I feel as if I've been - I can really look after myself, I - I'm just - I can cope now. I'd like to think that people think I'm quite approachable and friendly, I'd hate people to think, you know - I wouldn't like to think that I was like petty or anything and, you know, ... I'm very careful - I'm quite skeptical, more skeptical about things

than before, I used to have a great belief in altruism or, you know, people are basically good. I'm a bit more skeptical about that now, I'm not prepared - always prepared to give people as much of a chance as I was before, I mean I don't take things quite as face value as I did, now.

Q. Do you feel sort of - like saying you're in control, that you're in control in relationships as well?

A. Oh, a lot more, yeah. I'm - I'm not very - I'm more prepared to say things like, well, can I not see you tonight 'cos I'd really like to, say, have an evening in or go out with somebody else, whereas before I used to think, you know, that was a sign of rejection. But it isn't really, I mean you're just being honest with somebody. Sometimes you don't always want to see people all the time... That's what's really helped me, I - it's like there's somebody who's always there for you when you want, you know, they know you'll always be there 'cos you're open with them, and it's just it's like having - you've got your shadow with you all the time which is, you know it's always there when you need it, and that's what I feel like with SIMON. Though, you know, I'm not afraid to be alone, be apart from him, which before maybe I would be... boyfriends I wanted to see them all the time, otherwise I'd think ...they'd be running around after the girls and things. Quite possessive I should imagine I was before, because I was so insecure about myself.

Q. And before would you kind of say - like your boyfriend before, the one you actually had a sexual relationship with him, was that kind of at his instigation or -

A. Oh, yes.

Q. - yours?

A. Always, never mine. Which I suppose - one of the reasons it definitely got boring 'cos we didn't... exploring each other, didn't really talk about it... finished, roll up and go to sleep.

Q. Is that what happened?

A. Well, really, we did talk sometimes, but I used to sort of pull the sheet up...

Q. Fat?

A. Well that's what I used to think.

Q. What, and not like anyone to see you without clothes on?

A. Mm.

Q. And what about the boyfriends, did they mind?

A. Oh no they just think oh, you know... very boring for them, like it does, I mean if you've got a friend that's always saying, oh look at me, I'm fat, it gets boring after a while. I suppose it's just like that.

Q. But they - I mean did they sort of walk around naked and things like that -

A. Yeah.

Q. - they weren't embarrassed about it?

A. Yeah. It makes me feel even worse now ... do that and they don't mind... terrible, awful all the time.

Q. Mm. But that's all changed with SIMON.

A. Yeah.

Q. It sounds great.

A. ... he was helpful, but it was definitely going for professional help that did it. And then actually being able to make me - using that initial help to do things for myself, whereas if I hadn't - if somebody hadn't made me go to a counsellor I don't know where I'd be.

Q. And do you feel if you - I mean actually just getting back briefly to, say, if you did end up sometime in the future meeting someone else, and you were on the pill or whatever, would you actually ask somebody to use a condom or would you just feel, you know, either you like this person, I'm on the pill,...

A. Oh, gosh. I think I'd - yeah, I would be - I think I always would take precautions really, I'd - I'd, you know, ask them and maybe try it and if he didn't - didn't like it then - I mean I'd - I certainly don't mind, you know, I don't always feel that you

always actually have to have intercourse, you know, I'd be inclined to go without and do something else. I feel like that now, I don't think, oh no, we haven't made love, that's it, you know.

Q. But do you find that boys, men, feel that as well? Or does it have to be -

A. No, I think they probably do -

Q. - intercourse?

A. No, I don't think so. I think it's - I mean - I suppose for their macho image they might have to feel that but, you know, the boys that I'd go out with, unless it was some kind of real pig, in which case you wouldn't go out with him in the first place hopefully, if they really like you, if they really - they do really care about you, they just would understand. I don't think that, you know, men feel that they have to actually be inside somebody before they can feel as if they've had any pleasure.

Q. And is there anything else about sexual relationships and negotiation that you've found has changed or things that you've -

A. Mm. I've talked a lot... been open a lot about homosexual relationships, discussing the idea of it myself, because I think I'm quite open, like if I did have another partner it might be, say, a woman instead of a man. I mean something I think, you know, that I've always felt in crushes at school, you know, at school about teachers and things, and I think I've actually thought that out a lot more and felt a lot less doubtful about things like that. And we've talked about that -

Q. What, is that you and SIMON or you and friends here?

A. Yeah, no. Yeah, and friends here, I mean because SIMON has, you know, MARCUS, and he has a lot of gay friends and he's got a - his best friend's gay, so we talk about that, I mean I've talked to his friends and things, and I suppose we go to a lot of gay pubs and so we actually meet a lot of gay people, so I feel a lot more - I've never sort of like - I was speaking to my mum the other week and we were talking, talking about being gay, and she sort of went, she said oh, I do feel sorry for them, and she said something's wrong with them in their genes, you know, something's gone wrong there; and I... said, you know, I don't see that at all... love is love, no matter who it's with, you know. So I just - I don't know, I'm just a lot more aware of bigots in that way. I mean - I mean I don't sort of like think, that's an awful thing to say, I just felt quite sorry for her.

Q. Mm, yes, it's a kind of very - quite a narrow view.

A. ... born with the wrong sex glands and things.

Q. That's right. So do you think you might have a relationship with a woman at some point?

A. Oh, I - I - you know, I think that - I think a certain thing that obviously - it wouldn't worry me, it could happen, I mean I also find a lot of women attractive, but just at the moment I'm not in for any other kind of relationship at all, but I'm certainly not ruling it out as a possibility.

Q. Would you think of that at the same time as you might be having a relationship with - with someone like SIMON, or as a sort of alternative?

A. Oh, not at the same time, no, I - I - I - I couldn't do that, I'd feel a bit - no, if I'm going out with one person that's it. I - I don't - I mean the thought's obviously there, some days you think, oh God, I really... him, but I wouldn't - I wouldn't, I think that would be unfair, I wouldn't do that to somebody.

Q. And do any of your friends here have any very risky, in your view, activities, to do with sort of sex or drugs or things like that?

A. I don't think so in here. I mean a lot of people, a lot of people here, speaking to them, like a lot of people here, especially the girls from Ireland, like never had a boyfriend, and so they're - I mean they're all running round, he's gorgeous, he's gorgeous, he's gorgeous, they're a bit like that, you know. I don't think so, I mean the other people have mostly still got boyfriends where they came from and they're still seeing them. I don't - I don't - I honestly don't know I don't know anyone

who's using drugs or anything, you can't tell, but I don't think so, I think they're popularly known as normal young women here.

Q. So there's no one you know who you feel - I mean apart from SIMON's flat mate - who is sort of risking anything?

A. I don't think so, no.

Q. And do you feel that things have changed at all in terms of like the context of AIDS arising and then all the publicity -

A. I would hope -

Q. - do you think people's behaviour has changed?

A. I think it has, I would hope it had. Actually, you know, I mean it's obviously something that's extremely dangerous and could be epidemic. I don't know if people have, I mean obviously AIDS is sort of like - it's a buzz-word, it's obviously a word that's used a lot in conversation, people are talking about it, which is obviously a good thing, if they're talking about it -

Q. ...

A. Yeah. I can't really tell, I mean it's something that - the number of men at the building site shouting, get your tits out love, hasn't - hasn't dropped at all. I mean appearing at the hospital and every day, just a barrage of - I don't know, I like to be optimistic and think that people have but I don't know.

Q. Do you think that you have? I mean do you think that you have approached relationships differently at all -

A. Yeah.

Q. - because of that?

A. Yeah, I mean as I said I was worried about it and I did - I did want to know all about partners, everything that was done before, I mean it's a bit - a bit rude to ask about it, but I really did want to know everything that was done before, and I really did want to talk about things a lot more. Because, yeah, I am worried about it.