

MUR3 07 (RT)

QU: ...Tell me what you've done up til now..

AN: In what way?

QU: ..in college, whatever...(002)

AN: I'd describe myself to be working-class, white, female, age 20, 21 in December.

QU: From Manchester?

AN: From Manchester. Originally from...(006)..Glasgow. I'm a Mancunian. My parents, my father was from...(007) and my mother's deceased. She died when I was almost 14. She'd been ill for a very long time; she had cancer of the cervix...(010).

QU: Was that a long painful thing?

AN: She was ill for about five years, and seriously ill for three of them. In and out of hospital all the time. I've got a very odd background family-wise; I have a step-father, a half brother and half sister. My step-father's remarried; it's now his third wife and they have two children.

QU: Are they like a family to you?

AN: No, they are a separate family unit which I don't belong to. I do see them, but not that much. I see...(019-020)....I see them about twice a year...it's terribly disastrous!

QU: You don't really get on with them?

AN: No.

QU: When did he leave then?

AN: He left when I was about four.

QU: Did you not have much invested in that relationship?

AN: No, I don't think you really do...(023)..My life has really revolved around my mother.

Qu: Where did you go to school?

AN: I went to school in north Manchester. [NAME OF TOWN].

QU: Which school were you at?

AN: I went to [NAME OF SCHOOL]. It's not a very good school. In fact, it's appalling.

QU: I'm trying to work out if any of you have been to that one.

AN: No, don't bother. (laugh) I set up a women's group there when I was 16. I was thought of as a trouble-maker, trying to raise people, their consciousness, their political awareness, their sexual awareness. Awareness of what sort of situation they're in. What they are going to...(030).. their lives. (?)who was going to set up a school? It was mainly aimed at 14-16 year olds. Who came from working-class backgrounds, who were not very well educated, you know it...(034).. at school..and who were just going to end up working in factories..get pregnant. One friend of mine, she's close to me, she's got three children. The first one she had when she was 15. I've got various friends who've all got children, and all at the age of 21.

QU: Do you see that as a real pattern of a (?)pressurised home life, cos I've seen that happen to a lot of girls in north Manchester?

AN: I thought it was a frightening trap to get into, which a lot of my peer group and those below me have got into. It was a way out of home; a very depressed area; the jobs that were available, are still available, are very low-paid factory jobs. Education was almost frowned upon, being bright, and trying to do well, being ambitious...(045-046)..was...(?)out of your class....'Who do you think you are?' But that was very dangerous; and the way to get out of that was to set up your own family unit, to have children.

QU: I've had a lot of conversations with girls in the same position, aged about 16, and girls who've got pregnant. They have talked about it as if they 've made a mistake and they didn't want to get pregnant. Do you think that, to an extent ...

AN: I don't think anyone sets out to get pregnant. I think it happens. When you are pregnant you think - Well, what are the options I've got? Many are afraid to tell their parents and boyfriend...(053)...about pregnancies..so she was 8 months pregnant...(054)..huge. But...how

she could do it, and it was only an accident...(055)..Most of my friends that I went to school with are now married or have children, or are married and with children. So...

QU: What made you different? How come you got out of it?

AN: That was due to my mother. My mother was a sociologist, no, not a sociologist, well she was that too; she was a psychologist. And she brought me up as, like a permanent experiment; always talking, always going through things. So, I was very aware, from being small, about the things around me, what affected my life and how I could affect it. So, just through having my eyes open to things, I could see things around me, and also things I was terrified of being sucked into, which is so easy.

QU: Were you made to feel separate?

AN: I felt like an alien. I always did. And I've got hundreds of memories which are really funny. I'll give you a very good example. [NAME OF TOWN] has got a middle school system. You leave Junior school, you go to Junior High, which caters for 11-14 year olds, then go for another two years to a Senior..Well, I was in the third year; on the bus coming home. It was mainly girls for some reason who got on the bus. There were a few lads. And these lads were hell-bent on trying to embarrass these girls, by saying - 'Do you masturbate?' It was obviously...(076)..The girls that knew what it was, most of them went scarlet. Put their eyes down, their heads down, went - 'shut up, shut up'. Just simply because it was embarrassing...(078)..

QU: Girls aren't supposed to do it...

AN: Girls aren't supposed to do it. Boys do it because it's their virility. They've got a willy, so that's what they're supposed to do, but I think a lot of men don't even realise that a lot of women do masturbate. They got to me and said - 'Do you masturbate?' I stood up and said - 'Yes. I do. What about it!' The lads sat down and went - shut up. And they didn't say a single word til the end of the term. They were just horrified. They were very embarrassed. The school was very much like that.

QU: Did boys give you a hard time because of that?

AN: Nobody gave me a hard time because I'm quite a strong individual. I think some of them were a bit frightened in the end simply because I told the truth. I'm not frightened or embarrassed about things, certainly not about my body or my feelings or anything.

QU: Did your mum give you as much information as you needed about contraception, sexual things..

AN: Yes. She gave me some; it was very difficult because she was ill for most of my adolescence...(092)..was very difficult because she wasn't around. So, I started my periods when I was on holiday on my own. I bought my own bra first of all...(094)..all the stages I went through on my own. But I felt strong because I had the backing of my mother to strike out on my own in that way.

QU: She'd prepared you?

AN: Yes. She'd prepared me to go through the changes.

QU: What type of things did she explain to you? Did she help you understand? Did she talk to you particularly about sexual matters, or was it general?

AN: It wasn't. It was very general. So, I mean, a fact of life from being very small, a baby... (102)...toy...(103)...So I knew because of good friends, and I asked questions which were answered honestly, without embarrassment. Sometimes you'd pick up words that you'd heard, like, it would be a (?)musical...(107) a song about cunnilingus. Various things. I didn't know what they meant. So, we're all sat round having our tea: 'Mum, what does this mean?'. (108) So, there was no embarrassment. I never felt that sex was dirty or disgusting. Relationships she explained as well. Cos I was very confused for having two fathers; cos I had my step-father...(112)..So she explained the relationships, what she felt towards me. That also leads on to sexual matters. Sort of, sex goes hand-in-hand with a relationship. It's fulfilling something, putting it further into the (117) that you feel for someone. That's what I

always think: a lot of fun. If you don't feel that, you want to have sex for pleasure... (118)...either.

QU: So she didn't try to protect you from sexual experience?

AN: No, she didn't.

QU: What type of sex education did they give you at school?

AN: At school? It was very very poor. It was, the education that we got was mainly what bits people had. But in.. female genitalia there was no mention of things like the clitoris; of what it does, what it feels like, what's the importance of it. It's mainly - 'That goes in there and (?)produces the child'. And so that was it.

QU: So it was completely scientific?

AN: It was, scientific, nothing else.

QU: Were people given space to ask questions?

AN: Yeah. So. I remember asking a few questions, and the teacher went bright red and started saying - 'and anything to do with what we're doing at the moment?'

QU: Right. 'We'll get onto it!'

AN: Yeah, we'll get onto it. Pushing it away. Friends of mine went to a catholic school, and they actually had all the sexual organs cut out of their science books. And so, there was this space between stomach and your thighs. It was unmentionable. That's right. It just wasn't there.

QU: Yours was slightly better then?

AN: Yes. Slightly better.

QU: Did they talk about contraception?

AN: We hit contraception when I went to Senior High school. That wasn't too bad. We did discuss things like, that was in General Studies, but I was doing my 'A' levels, when we hit this.

QU: In the sixth form?

AN: This was at the school I went to in the sixth form...(140)..We discussed the coil, the cap, the pill, the sheath. I think that was about it really. There was no mention of side-effects, what it actually does to a woman. It was just 'These are available'. That was about it.

QU: Did they take up any sexually-transmitted diseases?

AN: Yes. There was..what did we go through? We went through the main ones; syphilis, gonorrhoea. We didn't discuss, like, crabs. Cos that's dirty! Or warts, that was not discussed, which I think is very, very important. Especially as my mother died of cancer of the womb..which is connected to warts. That was not discussed.

QU: How did they present talking about STDs? Was there a moral framework they put it under?

AN: Not really, no. I think it was very well done; under the conditions, the materials they had to go on. So, I was lucky. I had two science teachers who took us, both male. And, with what we had to go on - it was a very delicate subject in their eyes. But I think they handled it very well. But it wasn't full enough; they didn't go through all the STDs. We very briefly covered AIDS...(163)..at that point. But you've got to remember 1982 was the first time anything came in about it. I was lucky, in that my father was very, very scientific. And on a very few visits, he forced me to read 'New Scientist'; 'New Economist'...(164)...

(laugh)

QU: Is he a scientist?

AN: He's a civil engineer. And so, everything to do with AIDS, sex, everything at all you can possibly imagine, I've read. Years and years of scientific magazines, so I've read quite a lot. On new developments of it; the way it's mutating and you get different strains of AIDS. And we would discuss things like, what happens if the virus becomes air-borne, cos it's mutating so much. So I really knew quite a lot.. I probably knew more than my teachers.

QU: I'm sure you did.

AN: It was, the importance of AIDS was not discussed fully. It was said that you can die of it; but it wasn't connected to the fact that YOU can die of it. It was that somebody can die of it. It was far away. It's like cigarettes and lung cancer. It's other people.

QU: When you were talking about it, when did it become an issue?

AN: About '85, '86.

QU: Was it presented as a gay disease, or something that happens to promiscuous people?

AN: I think, it was(n't) portrayed as being something that drug-users get. That was actually mentioned. It was mentioned that gay people are more prone to it. But..(186)...It's more a gay disease.

QU: The type of people?

AN: Also people who sleep around. There always has been a lot of emphasis on - don't sleep around...If you do - it's your fault. It's because you've slept around. It wasn't really fully discussed, just how serious it is. We went through a few things of some..(192).of AIDS, like any of the diseases we've gone through, but it wasn't really fully mentioned.

QU: Were they clear about how it was transmitted?

AN: They weren't that clear, no. They did mention that you were more prone to get it if it got into your blood system. It wasn't mentioned 'how'. That was bordering on embarrassment..

(198) ..sex is not discussed at all. Nobody does that..(200) So that wasn't mentioned at all. I'm trying to think, anything else that was discussed?

QU: So this was only when you went into the sixth form?

AN: This was only the sixth form, yeah.

QU: This is quite a small minority, anyway..

AN: We're talking about a very small number of people that go to the sixth form. I think only 20 or something, maybe 40 people out of the entire school got this education. And when you think there's, what, 400, it's like 10%. Those who weren't very bright or whatever, they actually get no sex education at all. Unless they do Biology and then it's like a totally (?)different subject. And it's debatable whether STDs actually got mentioned at all, cos they might not have been on the syllabus.

QU: It wasn't seen as something they should be covering for everybody?

AN: No.

QU: If they could get out of talking about it..

AN: If they didn't have to talk about it, they didn't.

QU: No. Did the people at school talk to you about it? Presumably you knew a lot more than most people, and especially a lot of the girls, your friends?

AN: Well, everybody talks to me, always have done. Going back 13,14, my friends started having their periods. They came to me. So I wasn't embarrassed, and I'd sort of help them out of an embarrassing situation. In the sixth form, if somebody had a question they'd come to me, cos I made jokes with them; things like: I was in the upper sixth and I overheard a couple in the lower sixth..thinking, it was, because it was April Fool's....'I know what we'll do - we'll really embarrass this girl about this Durex in her pencil case. Get hold of the pencil case, throw it around a bit and suddenly discover them'. It just so happened that I had a pack of three in my handbag. So I said - 'Ooh,(?)brilliant idea; here have one of these, and use that. Cos they'd been saying - 'Who's gonna get it, who's gonna get it?' And they were horrified. 'This girl!'

QU: ..who could carry them...

AN: Yeah, awful! In fact everybody in the school knew about it before long and..(228) I really don't care at all.

QU: Were you portrayed as being some sort of sexual monster because of this?

AN: In some ways, but not really. It was..(232)..embarrassed about these sort of things, because secretly, there's nothing to be embarrassed about. Everybody really knew about me, but if they did have a problem, or they wanted to know something, then they asked me.

Simply because I wasn't embarrassed. I wasn't gonna turn around and say - 'Ugh, that's disgusting!' Or, I wasn't gonna tell everyone, because it was very private; or if they'd come to talk to me about it, if they wanted everyone to know they'd go and tell everyone, it's like, my advice. So, in that way, yes, I did get an awful lot of things..

QU: Were you quite happy, then?

AN: Yes, quite happy. It's not embarrassing. If someone wants to know something, then they have a right to know.

QU: Did you come into contact with a lot of the public education campaign around AIDS?

AN: Ummm

QU: ..linked with the adverts..

AN: ..the adverts on television, yes.

QU: What did you think of those?

AN: Well, I remember the herpes campaign. In fact you don't hear about herpes anymore now do you?

QU: No.

AN: I looked at the politics behind it. Sort of going back to Victorian values..(249)..You're not allowed to sleep with anyone, because you'd now be terrified into..the fact that you might get AIDS. And they said ridiculous things like: 'AIDS - Don't die of ignorance' ! and yet not tell you anything. I was quite astounded by all of this, because it was a campaign of fear, and not of education. It was no wonder that a lot of people were very worried and very frightened; and certainly girls who I used to talk to in the group I set up at school, really were very frightened about their first sexual experience, because there's a massive myth around that anyway. About all the things that happen, what do you feel. It's either the worst experience, or the most wonderful thing in the world, which it's not.

QU: And you can't get pregnant as well?

AN: Yeah, all sorts of things. Behind this there's this: 'AIDS: Don't die of ignorance'. 'What is it?'. 'How do you get it?'. 'Can I get it?'. 'Will I be able to tell if I've got it?' Loads of questions. Which will have been answered.

QU: So did you end up talking about this a lot, how it's transmitted?

AN: Yeah, that's right. To really sort of put forward what the Government has not been telling us. So, when I was about 17, I went to the gay clubs, also because a lot of my friends are gay..I was quite pleased to see that there was a very good response to all the adverts, to the threat of AIDS. Also, because the gay community's being victimized. They still are. There was a lot of material, really good material in all the gay clubs we were going to go in. And there'd be leaflets, and you'd just pick them up and put them in your pocket. So you would be able to read about it. things were very educational, and actually, I stole about 500 of them. (laugh) Pass them out at school.

QU: Was the literature aimed at gay men?

AN: No, it wasn't. It was slightly. But it was predominantly just educational, saying - How can you get it? How you can transmit it. What do you do if you get AIDS..(281)..what to do if you get AIDS, and how to avoid it.

QU: Was it quite explicit?

AN: It was explicit. It was very frank. It wasn't explicit in the way that it showed lots of pictures or anything. But the education, the material was there. And it was much better than anything I'd seen before. That's why I took it to the school. But the school authorities didn't respond in any way and they didn't put any material out. It really was a taboo subject.

QU: At the school you were at were there a lot of girls leaving with pregnancy?

AN: Yes, yes we did get quite a few, I know, who had been to my school. And also all the schools around. Cos I tended to know a lot of people. We did get a lot of people leaving cos they were pregnant. Some came back into the education system. But with pregnancy with school girls it's very difficult. I remember one of my friends, she actually thought that she had

stomach cancer; and it wasn't until six weeks before the baby was born that she (?)knew she was pregnant.

QU: In the hospital?

AN: This is a doctor. A G.P., like, 'Oh God, your stomach's getting bigger...have your periods stopped? Are you 17?'

QU: So you can't be having sex!

AN: Because you're still at school. Which is the most ludicrous thing I've ever heard in my life. (302-303)...young girls... ..have children (interference)

QU: You know a lot about what those young girls were going through at that time; why have they not used contraception?

AN: Because there's a lot of fear behind it. If you go to your G.P... your parents have to know. If you go to your family planning clinic, 'somebody might see me'. Oh! even worse: 'somebody might know me'. And the boys...(312) The idea of walking into a chemist and buying sheaths is, like, horrifying. They'd go in to buy a packet of hankies, throat pastilles, anything, But wouldn't actually have the courage to just buy a packet of those. But you can actually get them free from the family planning clinic.

QU: And men can get them, if any of them have ever been told..

AN: I know. I go there. I'll pick up a huge box. Not only for me, but for my various other friends. Simply because I'm there. It's like, if you go shopping for toilet roll, or something, if someone else needs it you'll pick it up for anyone else.

QU: How educated were the young men in your school in that area?

AN: Very badly.

QU: Did they think they needed to be?

AN: No, because they really had nothing to do with it. They weren't interested in contraception. It was totally up to the female. That attitude is all over the place. It's not confined to one age.

QU: No, but it tends to be quite extreme at that age.

AN: Very extreme.

QU: Was there an attitude amongst the young men that you knew at school, of being against using condoms, that they were unmasculine or something?

AN: Well, I don't think that many of the young lads at school had any sensitivity of what it meant. So that argument can't be used against it. I think it was purely embarrassment of going and actually buying them, getting them from somewhere. I think that was the main factor. And also, they fell back on the idea that the girl would go and get them. It was always the girl...(341)..that was...embarrassment. And they wouldn't take full responsibility, of not getting pregnant, if that was considered at all. It was never thought - 'oh, my girlfriend'll get pregnant'. And if it is it's her fault. But there was no campaign against, there was no idea against sheaths. I don't think it was really discussed that much. Cos I was allowed to talk as one of the boys, probably because they could talk to me as easily as anyone else, and didn't get embarrassed.

QU: So you would actually talk to them about sex as well?

AN: I would talk to them, yes, of course. So..

QU: You probably saved a whole generation! (laugh) Tell me about your sexual experiences when you were that age, were they quite different from your friends? Because you put forward strongly what you wanted. Were you going out with the same boys from school?

AN: Yeah. I always went out with boys that were a lot older than me. So, I don't know why, it was probably because a lot of the boys my age were emotionally immature and I couldn't have a relationship with somebody like that. It would be.... like almost mothering them, well I've never been able to do that, I've got to see the equal. So, I think that our relationships were very different because of that. But also, obviously my friends also went out with older

boys because it was seen, because it was the done thing. Makes you older, you know! You're 16 and you see somebody's car turn up, God! I can get...(371) So, but I think we're very different.

QU: Tell me about your first sexual experience, when you lost your virginity.

AN: I actually lost my virginity to a woman, believe it or not, yes. When I was 13, 14. I'm not a lesbian, lots of people have lesbian experiences who are not lesbian. So, my first relationship with a man was when I was 16, and I'd been seeing someone on a regular basis. But I think it was...(383) ...(laugh)

QU: ..Did you not see it as a very dramatic thing for you, as you say there're a lot of myths around it?

AN: There was a lot of myths but I wasn't part of that. I was 16 he was 18, he was in the sixth form of my school. And we went on holiday together, a skiing trip. That was wonderful because we were seeing each other, we were doing something together, skiing down slopes and things. And there was no myth behind it; it was just another part of the relationship. So, the first time wasn't traumatic.

QU: Did you use contraception?

AN: Yes, from the very start.

QU: Who..

AN: That was a mutual decision. Because I was a bit worried, because I thought, well, I don't want to get pregnant, I don't want to get carried away, and then find myself pregnant. And so he said - It's alright, so we used a sheath.

QU: Did you then go on to use the pill later on?

AN: Later on; I have been on the pill.

QU: Where did you go on the pill?

AN: That was for a combination of reasons. One, extra security. So, I've always made sure I've used the sheath. And also, to (?)lighten my periods, because I went through a phase of.. (405)..

QU: So you were on the pill and using the sheath at the same time?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Why were you doing that, was that extra security so as not to get pregnant?

AN: Yes. To make sure I didn't because I've had experiences of it splitting or coming off. Things like that, there not 100% secure.

QU: Were you given advice about (411) to do that, to use two methods of contraception?

AN: No, it was actually something I'd read. I discussed it with my father. Because though we don't get on, we have very frank discussions, presumably because we have to.

QU: So you don't see enough of each other to beat around the bush..

AN: No, It's like - 'How are you, I've got this ..(417)!.It's really nice to see you', and I haven't even taken my rucksack off my back. It's always been like that. Even though we can't stand the sight of each other most of the time. We can go for two days and that's fine. But what's happened in those two days, in the past, have been very good for me, in that if I've got a problem I'll be able to discuss it.

QU: So, he's happy to talk to you about sexual matters, is he?

AN: He sees it as a very scientific study. Honest to God! You've got to meet him.

QU: He sounds wild.

AN: He is. A very odd man.

QU: To get back. You say you weren't seeing people your own age group, were you always in situations where you felt you were an equal...you were never in the situation of being with an older boy and wanting to impress him...

AN: No, I've never done that.

QU: Is that one of the traps that you saw?

QU: Yeah, I saw friends, people I knew, going out with older blokes, and being frightened to say no or, to suggest things, because the bloke would be older. And they didn't feel fully in control of their bodies. They weren't sure of them anyway, with the amount of education that we got. Feelings, like, what was an orgasm. Most women didn't know what they should feel. It was very much being on the receiving side, doing something to please someone else..not pleasure for themselves. So when it came down to contraception, 'oh, I went on the pill to please my boyfriend, cos they didn't like sheaths', for whatever reason. I think they probably got worried, or they didn't feel in control, as an equal, with the same rights as their boyfriends. Because they were younger.

QU: Did you always feel that your sexual pleasures were as important a factor?

AN: Yes.

QU: From the beginning?

AN: Yes. It's a two-way thing. It's like, if I've got to lie back and think what the shopping is because I'm bored, then something's wrong. There's got to be something in it for me as much as for anyone else. It has to be very much pleasure for both.

QU: Have you had any problems in enforcing that in relationships?

AN: Yes! God, yes. Some terrible things. A lot of men don't actually realise that you do have pleasure out of it. Or that you should. Or they're so engrossed in what they're doing, or what they're feeling, that you don't actually come into it at all. You could be asleep. But that's happened to me as well. (laugh)..and I've actually gone back to sleep. (461)...

QU: .. you don't have to do this anymore..

AN: Or you think - why am I bothering? Why am I doing this? I've got a busy day tomorrow, I should be asleep. Then you realise that things are definitely wrong. I have actually in the past, been like that, in bed with someone and not actually wanted to be doing what I have been doing. I've got a busy day or something and I just can't be bothered.

QU: So what have you done about that, have you always been able to...?

AN: I haven't always. I've had a few really big rows. There's very little that someone can actually do; if you close them off, or leave them, or curl up, or go to sleep...(478)..there's nothing they can do about it. After you've tried reasonable argument, discussion, of the reasons why you don't want to do it, you just don't feel like it or whatever. Usually the woman can get her (?)point across.... say about that. It is difficult. It's very easy to get pressured into saying - well, alright then, just to stop someone from going - oh, go on, you don't love me if you don't. That argument is..I'm sure men must have a book that they rehearse these lines off. Cos I've heard that - You don't love me, you really don't. (laugh)

QU: It's very easy for people to say that people should talk about it, that people should be responsible..

AN: Most people don't..

QU: How easy do you think it is, in those situations, to talk about those things, actually to be able to say..

AN: Very difficult. It depends really who your partner is. Cos I've been out with an awful lot of men, but in saying that I've had very few relationships, real solid relationships. I think, I've just split up with someone, about three months ago; and that was a wonderful relationship. And after that I haven't actually slept with anyone because I don't want to go through the mechanics, without a real solid foundation of feeling there. Cos I could discuss anything with my (?)last boyfriend, like, 'I get pleasure this way'; and he'd say - 'oh, right', and he'd respond. With some partners you can often feel - 'I'm not really enjoying this', or - 'I'm not feeling as much as I could', but you can't say - 'look if you'd just do this', because you don't have the confidence within the relationship.

QU: A lot of it is understanding your own body. Knowing what bits do what, and being able to talk about that. Has any of the education you've been given, given you any sense of that?

AN: Oh no. No, the feeling about your body, not at all. Nothing. Not the way you feel. Like feeling comfortable in your own skin. The majority of women don't. They go on diets, to put on weight, lose weight...(533)..., they don't feel happy in their own bodies. They also don't know how things feel. They're all so afraid to touch themselves, never mind have somebody else touch them. Because it's not allowed. It's morally wrong to feel pleasure like that. Cos they don't actually know how things feel; erogenous zones...(541)..what do they do? They haven't, they don't feel comfortable enough within themselves; because they've got the background of all the morals of: Sex is unmentionable, your body is unmentionable. Your body is there to do things, like, to work, run, anything else, but not to..

QU: ..to have babies..

AN: ..to have babies, yeah, but not to actually feel sensual.

QU: You look at the information you get, and the public education campaigns around AIDS and other STDs quite critically?

AN: Very critical.

QU: What sort of information do you trust when it comes to that sort of thing? What are you mistrustful of?

AN: What am I mistrustful of?

QU: Yeah. You were saying a lot of what you've been told you realised was ideological in some way.

AN: Yeah. That's a very hard question. To be quite honest I don't actually trust anything that I read. I think most of what I've learnt has been through discussion, through meeting people, through talking to them, through being in relationships. I can discuss certain things. Usually with other people who know more than I do, or people who have different ideas than I do.

QU: Things like women's magazines?

AN: Oh women's magazines are terrible! They really are. To a certain extent because of the politics behind it. These magazines are for people who want to be like that. Be the smart young business woman with all these ideas. Nothing's really discussed about your own body. You do get some good books, like 'Our bodies, Ourselves'.

(interruption)

QU: We were talking about...information..

AN: I've never seen any written information really, which is helpful, fully, which explains things..

QU: How about scientific information? You were saying that you read that, that things were presented in a scientific way. Quite a lot of the information around sexuality is presented in a scientific way, what do you think about that?

AN: I don't see how you can put a scientific (?)slant (592) on sexuality. It's a ridiculous idea! I think it's very good if you want to know some things, like - 'What happens if you get AIDS?' What happens in a scientific way to somebody's body. Blood cells and diagrams and things. But with sexuality, you can't do that, because it's different for everyone. It's something which you can only know through experience and discussion and experiment. At school, we never discussed anything like this. Relationships. Very few parents would discuss relationships or bodies, or all the things to do with growing up. They'd very rarely discuss sex. Apart from the mechanical, scientific thing. A lot of people had to find out through their peers. Which is very dangerous because of all the misconceptions, like - 'AIDS is a gay disease'. That's put into a school, and you've got everyone at school who isn't a questioning person, who doesn't have other people to go to, believing that - 'Well, I'm not gay, so I won't get it'. I don't know where you can get that from. There are some books; I mentioned one, but they're not very well advertised. They're never put into..they're really for the converted already; those who are looking and questioning, and who they're by, are looking and questioning. They're not for,

say, a 16 year-old, who's just beginning to understand her body, have relationships, really doesn't have anywhere to turn to. And so she thinks there isn't anywhere, where she can find out. I really don't know how to resolve that.

QU: Since you found out about and looked into AIDS, did you change your behaviour in any way to conform with that?

AN: Yes, I did. Not in cutting down in the relationships I've had....that sounds all sorts..but what I did, I made sure that I had sheaths and also 'safe-sex'.

QU: What do you understand as 'safe-sex'?

AN: 'Safe-sex' is as pleasurable an experience as actual penetration. (?)Oral sex...just things like touching somebody else's body in a very gentle way. Kissing. Appreciating one another's body.

QU: Have you always known that it was possible to have sex without penetration?

AN: Yes. I always knew that.

QU: Was it presented to you...?

AN: It's never been discussed. It was never discussed at any school I've ever been to. I've never actually read anything about 'safe-sex'. But I've noticed that there are some leaflets about it, which don't actually discuss much at all. It's more - 'Safe-sex is if you lie in the same bed together!' (laugh)

QU: ..Sexual fantasy..(663)

AN: Or if you share earwax or something. It's ridiculous. But that's really what's been presented. Very few people know what 'safe-sex' is. But in the past relationship I had, most of it was 'safe-sex'. There were very few occasions when it was for intercourse. I've had very many hours of pleasure.

QU: You think ..of it as occurring..

AN: I think it's just as fun, if not more. You concentrate on each others' needs a lot more, you're a lot more aware of them. And you're aware of each other's body a lot more. I don't know because 'safe-sex' can be so wonderful. You start doing things together. That can be....(686-687)...Instead of 20 minutes of bang, bang, bang, you've got a whole night; you watch the dawn come up, and you still..(689)..feel a lot of pleasure, because you're giving somebody else pleasure. All it means is that you're not having penetration of some kind.

QU: Have you had to convert your partners, have you come across men who understood sex as being something other than penetration?

AN: Yes....(700)..I've said - 'I don't want to do that' or 'why don't you try this', before they know it, or before they're converted, because (?)I've had a word and they've suddenly realised - 'well we haven't actually done this', 'well, I'm tired now, haven't you had a good time?' You can change a lot of people's ideas. A lot of men really think it's - wham bam thank you m'am.

QU: One of the ideas I've come across in conversation is that if a woman gives a man an erection, she's then responsible for it, and there's only one way that that can be solved. That women and men have fundamentally different sexualities.

AN: You can also find yourself getting blackmailed: 'Oh come on, I'm gonna be in agony if you don't, oh please, I'm begging you...

(end of side 1: 726)

QU: Would you put all this down to the way that you were brought up, you were shown that you could ask these questions?

AN: I think a lot of it's to do with the way that I was brought up. My mother was a very, very strong character. The sort of thing she told me: 'I have my rights', and I'm responsible for myself, for my body and my actions. And if I don't want to do something, then I don't have to. It was bad in some ways because if I don't want to do it, I really won't do it. I don't care what

happens, but I'm not going to do it. In a blackmail situation, where a (?)boys got an erection and he wants to have sexual intercourse with me, I don't. Then I'll talk about it and I'll start laughing. I'll say - 'Look at what you're doing, it's totally unreasonable'. I'll put the funny side onto it. Get them to actually think about what they're doing. Cos the majority of men don't, they don't think - well, why am I doing this? I feel...(740)..I thought there's a lot of people who did things they really didn't want to do. I'm thinking, well, why did they do it? Through thinking about things like that, everyday things. So I think I can actually discuss things with people which are of a delicate nature, like that. I have got over things, like...(748)things, but I did go through it. I haven't always been able to say - 'No, I don't, no, I won't'..and just submitted..

QU: Yeah, I think we all have.

AN: Yeah, it's terrible..

QU: And you hate yourself for it.

AN: You wake up next morning, you think - 'Why did I do that? I didn't want to'. And you find yourself thinking - 'Well tomorrow I'd better get some cauliflower, because I'm gonna make cauliflower cheese'...

(laugh)

QU: I know, I know.

AN: It happens all the time.

(break:751)

AN: (796)I wanted to do 'A' levels. It was a very odd school. The amount of education I actually got was minimal. So, I actually sat in classes in which the teacher has asked one of the girls out. I've been asked out by teachers. The teacher has been watching somebody's bosom, heaving up and down with the...(801). That was the level of education that I got. But I wanted to go further. I wanted to do 'A' levels.

QU: Did you have to fight to get there?

AN: God, yeah. Fight. In the end I ran the house. When my stepfather remarried. She was very young, she was 28. She became pregnant. She was on pregnancy leave, when I was on 'O' level leave. I'd go home, I wanted to revise and I'd say 'What's for tea?' and she'd say - 'I don't mind what you make'. And she'd go upstairs reading women's magazines. So I had to do that. And after the baby was born, I looked after the baby. And I was working part-time to bring some money in. I was also studying. In the end I couldn't cope with it. So that's when I left home.

QU: How old were you then?

AN: I was 17.

QU: And where did you go?

AN: I went to live at a friends house. I paid my rent and I also carried on working. I'd missed an awful lot of (814), simply because I was doing so much. And I became ill through it. So I was off school for two months, because I was just run down. Getting an education was a real struggle. I didn't have a right to an education; Who was I to think I did? I still have that fight. So I did an Open University course. What I was actually getting was letters from my grandmother, from my father, saying - 'Why are you doing this? Why don't you get a decent job as a secretary? You're getting too old; you're 19. You're getting too old to be a decent secretary. Why don't you find a nice job in a shop?'

QU: Were you told at school when you were doing your 'A' levels that you could go to university?

AN: Yes, I was. When I was doing my 'A' levels I was. And I actually took a trip to Oxford to have a look around. But there's no way I could've got the grades, not with the sort of background I had, and with what I was doing; it was just impossible. I'm hoping in a few

years time, when I can go to university as a mature student, I can do that. Because I know that I can, that I've got the ability. That I will eventually get the education that I've been fighting for most of my life. But that's the sort of background I come from. And I realise that, I did have that right, but I've got obstacles in my way. But a lot of women, young women around me, didn't actually know that they could do that.

QU: Didn't know that it existed.

AN: No.

QU: One thing that amazes me, when I ask girls in north Manchester, where they go out; they'll go to Oldham or Rochdale, they won't go into Manchester...(837)..

AN:butterflies...(838)

(laugh)

QU: ..they'll get pregnant...butterflies. It's like a small-town mentality. They don't feel they have anything to do with Manchester in terms of the city.

AN: Yeah, I find that as well. If I go back..and I walk into friends..., they live round the corner from where (?)we used to live, a five minute walk from their parents', or boyfriend's parents, husband's parents, they've got all the same old friends; ...(841)..the mentality or what they're doing. They're still the same people that I went to school with. They've not gone further. It's a very small-town mentality. It's very sort of 'Coronation Street': cobbled-stones and terraced houses; apartments, concrete-blocks and flats. Really run-down areas. It was very much like that.... (845)..in education, job worries, ambition, trying to get out to a different area is a million miles away.

QU: What sort of achievements and aspirations do people have in that context?

AN: Some are comfortable to live a relationship of getting married, maybe a couple of kids, full-time work, a holiday every year...nice Christmas...(851)..And apart from that there's no thought of - What will I be doing five years from now? Or, when I'm 60 will I still be here? It's all taken for granted, on a very short-term scale. It's a very middle-class idea to be able to better yourself. The class systems very rigid; it hasn't changed for hundreds of years and it probably won't. It's: you're born, you live, you die in that area. But you can get a T-shirt in Manchester that says - 'Born in the North, live in the North, work in the North, die in the North'.

QU: Is that just..

AN: It's Manchester..it's North, it's this point..

QU: ..yeah, about ten square miles..

AN: Right. I moved to the other side of town, when I was 18.

QU: Was that quite a symbolic move?

AN: That was very symbolic because I hated [NAME OF TOWN]. It was small- minded, very narrow. There wasn't any cosmopolitan areas; I like eating different food, meeting different people, different backgrounds, different colours. All sorts of things; different religions. I don't like coming from a very straight, small, narrow-minded, catholic, protestant area. ...(868)..is if your catholic or protestant. Just hoping to get married, that's all. South Manchester; the buildings are nicer, the area - there's more green, more trees. More things going on. Like I do things like Tai'Chi, I'm pretty sure that most of my friends think that Tai'Chi is an Indian meal, or Chinese or something. That's very symbolic. I also didn't know anyone there. I had to put down new roots. And I did that. And although I've moved again, I've got a lot of friends there. It's a lovely area.

QU: Where's this?

AN: I lived in West Didsbury. It was really nice. I now live in Hulme.

QU: Did you know a lot about South Manchester when you lived in North Manchester?

AN: Uum..

QU: Cos when I'm asked by girls I talk to where I live, and I say 'Chorlton', they say 'well, someone's got to live there': real cutting remarks..

AN: There are two Manchesters: the North and the South. They are different, different countries altogether. And their mentality is totally different as well. In South Manchester, you're allowed to be ambitious, you're allowed to study, allowed to try and do things. Whereas North Manchester's totally different. The difference is so strong. Accents as well. Like I don't have a very strong accent. I sound Mancunian, but only just, really.

QU: You don't say 'lickel'.

AN: 'Lickel'; 'bockel'. [NAME OF TOWN]s called (?)'nigging'. It's a very strong accent where I was from, it was like - ' 'ere Gaynor, d'ya want 'alf a lagor, or a bi-or?' It was very nasal. Cos a lot of my friends speak like that. I don't because..my mother was Scottish, ..(890)..was so strong that I had elocution lessons. So that people could understand me. ..(892)..so I'm very proud of that..I've done public speaking, debates and things..(893)..

QU: Do you think that's helped you to an extent, not having a North Manchester accent?

AN: Yes. Cos I think North Manchester's a lot harder. Physical fights. You see a lot more fights. The 'Young Governors' were arrested recently, and I went to school with them. Things like, when I was doing my 'O' levels..(899)..I hadn't seen a friend of mine for a few weeks, a bloke called (?) [NICKNAME], and I later found out that he'd been arrested,... (900)..and he'd kicked somebody half to death. And [NICKNAME] was lovely; he used to carry my books, and he was very quiet and nicely spoken to me. But things like that, it is a lot rougher. And I think things are harder. Even though the..... (903)..

QU: It seems like they're harder..

AN: Yeah, their lives are much harder.

QU: I get the impression when I talk to girls from up there, that the women, even the young girls, expect that a woman's life is a hard life..

AN: Yes. Even from being very young, most girls already do a lot of housework, because their mothers are working; their father's are probably unemployed, or even in prison. Looking after younger brothers and sisters, and that is before they've even hit 'O' level age. Getting a bus; I used to get a bus from South Manchester to Central Manchester. It was very nice, very quiet, well-spoken. And then you'd get on a bus to North Manchester, and it gets harder and harder and harder, the conversations you hear. Curl your hair. Cos you think, these kids should not be talking like this. A lot of people smoke, very young. I started, first I got (916)when I was 9. Friends in Harpurhey which is really rough. I started smoking 20 a day when I was 14. And I have done ever since. So it is a lot harder. The mentality is very different. There's a massive divide. You can spot people who come from North Manchester, when you go to central town, because they dress differently. South Manchester is very much a student walking place; even if they're not students. I just look.... (923)..so there's a very big difference.

QU: What's the attitude to students? Do they hate them?

AN: Very few of them have actually seen a student because there are no colleges there. Sixth forms, even; everyone else is just working..look very smart or...(928)...dress. But you don't look like, your Doc Martens, your jeans, your haircut, your haircut's very important cos.... (laugh) ..that's right..you get a spiral perm. You tend to all look like everyone else. Individualism is terrifying; you don't find people who dress outrageously. And if you do, many of the people who stick out like a sore thumb are (934)..and go out to show it that way. Though in every other way, it's.... the only release is through their drugs. And that's very rare.

QU: Is there a lot of drug-users in that area?

AN: Yeah. Middleton, in particular, one of the highest drug areas, hard drugs. Not soft drugs. South Manchester you find a lot more draw and soft drugs. North Manchester you find a lot of smack. You don't find cocaine; that's a rich man's drug.

QU: Speed.

AN: Speed. You find a lot of speed all over the place. Rochdale is..Yeah, that's it, you tend to inject speed in North Manchester which is like really bad news. Other places, they take it orally or nasally. There are an awful lot of bad drugs; that's something else I've read a lot about. I actually went to school with three dealers. If I go into North Manchester, I can guarantee any pub I go to, I can get drugs, if I wanted to. I usually know them. .. (949)..people like everyone else, the majority. The hard drugs, yeah, you can get a lot. You can get a lot of sniffers, or you used to when I was living there. I knew people there taking gas..... (953)

QU: So, in your opinion, given what you know about AIDS and HIV, would you think that a lot of the young women you know, especially drug-users, would be at risk? And do you think that people have taken notice of the information about how to protect yourself?

AN: No. Things change very slowly. Ideas change very slowly. And I don't think that there is anything that has changed at all, in the past 10 years, in North Manchester, in [NAME OF TOWN] in particular, cos that's where I know best. No, there's no change at all. No there's no more (962)..I don't think there's any more use of sheaths than there has been, in the past few years. I don't think awareness is that high at all. I think there's a lot of people at grave risk. And that's all because they aren't taught, then when they do leave school, there's no further education. There's no more discussion really. I think that area in particular is more at risk than any other part of Manchester.

QU: Is there discussion amongst women? Do they give each other support?

AN: No, there's no sort of sisterhood. It's very much a ..(973). ..school. You discuss the same things you've discussed all the way through your school life. When I go back and meet up with old friends, out of curiosity, the discussions are very much the same...(977)..What they're doing, what they feel, what they want to do, any insecurities they've got, or any worries; those aren't discussed, they're very very private. They'll not even usually discuss the bloke that they're seeing. It's usually taken for granted that they want to get married, settle down, have a couple of kids. All before they're 25. Which is like, incredible.

QU: ..(982)..

AN: That is how it survives! Yeah. That's it. They find that they get stuck into a routine, which may be interrupted by marriage, but they will be set in that routine, virtually until they drop dead.

QU: Do people not have any expectations outside of that?

AN: I don't think so. No. A couple of weeks holiday in Spain. Usually with friends, neighbours. They actually go over in three couples, go to the same place. They've got rooms next to each other. I've seen this. Like every time they go to 'The Olde English Chippie' in Benidorm, it's just like a...(991). They don't interact with any of the ideas outside their own. They don't have any of those outside influences. It just doesn't seem to penetrate to that area....You do get some people who don't go by the rule; I like to think I'm one of them. I have known other people who are exceptional because they're not like that, they have got different aspirations, got ideas and they're open to other people's ideas. It's not as closed or insular. It's a pretty frightening place to come up from. My younger brother and sister there, are still

living there. And I watch with...(1002)..the sort of things they come out with. They can always talk to me about anything, and they do, because they don't feel secure enough to go to their father or stepmother. So they do talk about sex to me.

QU: How old are they?

AN: My brother is 15 and my sister is 13. So they're just going through all the key stages now. I also listen to what their peer group has said, sometimes I'll talk to their friends as well. Just to find out what is going on there now. And it's exactly the same. ..(1010)same fears, same worries; but not with any of the outside influences that I had. Cos my brother and my sister don't have my mother to fall back on. Or to give them their own strength. So they are

much more strongly influenced by their peer group than I was. Which is quite worrying, because I hear very narrow remarks.

QU: Like what?

AN: My brother actually goes to Grammar school, which is a very racist school. And I've actually heard him come out with a few racist remarks. Very questioning; he doesn't mean them at all. But also to do with sex. My brother in particular, because he's not matured, in the same way his friends are. He's still got a high voice. His face is still like a young boy. There's a lot of pressure on him to start smoking, start drinking and to start sleeping with girls. Some of his friends have started doing that already. But there's nothing on relationships, on contraception. None of that's discussed at all. Not even within the peer group itself. You get a few jokes about condoms or whatever, but that's about it. It's really like living 30 years ago.

QU: Most of the girls I talk to say I know the pill is dangerous and I'm not going to stay on it for long. They've got sexual liberation in that they can have sex, but they've not got the understanding and so are at risk to all STDs but especially HIV..

AN: ..which is the biggest killer. There is a massive class difference. You'd have thought that it wouldn't matter anymore, but certainly in North Manchester, the ideas are very different about sex. But also it is very behind in the fact that - 'O.k. I'm on the pill, I know what it does to me, but I'm not using a sheath because I don't have to. It's not thinking about that you can get all the STDs as well as AIDS. It hasn't caught up yet. Even if you could get people's awareness a little bit further along, then you'd be doing something. But it's very hard.

(End: 1049)