

LJH19 Melissa

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Q: ...sorts of things we've been doing.

A: No, not really 'cos I don't - I don't know any...

Q: ...

A: Did you not get much of a response from it or what?

Q: Well, about ten I think, or something like that. I think some people were away at the time, there weren't very many people around when I came through, with the questionnaires.

A: No, my best friend...

Q: Would she be interested? 'Cos I could let her have one if she was interested.

A: Yeah...

Q: Right, I may have one with me but if not... send it. It's very likely that I haven't got one on me, I could check in my car, I've probably got loads in there. One of the things we're interested in in this research is to find out how young women feel about their relationships and so I was thinking to ask you first, which relationship or relationships are most important to you at the moment?

A: My best friend...

Q: What's that like?

A: Well it's quite funny, we've always been in the same school together ever since... and we didn't like each other for about the first eleven and then when we went to secondary school we went... both had problems with a group of friends that we were in and we were both being kicked out of the group and - I don't know how exactly it happened but I had a boyfriend and she went out with my boyfriend's best friend and I just got to know her. Ever since then it's been really... but I mean that's the most important to me. It's because she's so much like me. It's really good because if I have a problem I don't even need to tell her that I'm upset, she knows, if... she knows there's something wrong so, because she's doing different courses from me and because it's coming up to the end of the time that we are gonna be in the same school it's important to know that...

Q: That the relationship will go on. What kind of courses are you doing? You say you're going to be doing A-levels. What are you gonna do?

A: I'm doing English, History and Politics. I want to take English at university. And she's an Art student, she's only doing Art and English... she'll go to art college and I'll go to university, hopefully...

Q: But it's a good thing that - it seems to be a fairly established relationship so it will go on.

A: Oh yes. Nothing - there have been so many bad things that we've been through together - you know, family problems, boyfriend problems... family problems and stuff like that, and other people interfering, that - I'm (?) also bored with coming to this school 'cos we were at another school until the fifth year and then we came to this one, the sixth form, so obviously like... meet more friends and stuff like that, so we've made quite a lot of friends here, and -she's been going out with someone in a serious relationship since - for about eight months now just from the school, so that changed the relationship a bit, I mean to begin with I was worried 'cos I wasn't seeing her as often and I felt like I shouldn't see her, I shouldn't expect to see her, but I mean I know - I suppose I was (?) jealous but I mean I knew that my friend would change, that

we would always be best friends or whatever, but it was just the fact that it was a change and, I don't know, so I mean although - I talked to her about it... she said not to worry about it, you can't help but feel those sort of things.

Q: Mm. What about when you had a boyfriend yourself?

A: Well I went out with someone for eleven months before I came -it was just... started coming here, and she wasn't going out with anyone then, and it was a different tune, come out with us and these group of friends - and I suppose in a way that I sort of resented the fact that - but - I didn't go out with my boyfriend because it - I don't actually think I could have done because it was just those two before but it was my boyfriend. There were loads of us sort of going out with each other.

Q: Mm, kind of group activities. So... perfectly natural... You haven't got a boyfriend at the moment?

A: No. No, not really. I don't know, it doesn't seem - I want just, I want a boyfriend - I'm looking for the sort of perfect -

Q: ... looking for the perfect person. It'll be a long search, won't it?

A: Yeah, I know but I just - I live in a boys' school and so I've had quite a few boyfriends from there and it sort of got to the stage now where I just want someone who is like me, who I can relate to and that is what I'm looking for...

Q: What were those relationships like in the past?

A: Well... phase of going out with quite a few people within a short space of time and then I - I've had one major relationship that I would actually class as major, and that was that one for eleven months, but apart from that... you know, it's not something - it's always sort of been going out and then becoming friends, and we just stay friends sort of thing.

Q: What was the relationship, the eleven months one, like, did that include sexual -

A: No, we didn't.

Q: Have any of them?

A: Yeah. I slept with two people. But I don't know if it was for some reason - I don't think it was necessary and I don't think, if we had done it we'd have...

Q: Yeah yeah.

A: - I mean the first one was... it was just...

Q: What were the circumstances of that?

A: We were at his house and his parents were downstairs, which was quite embarrassing. It was - oh, it was just - I was just thinking... sort of thing... this is what all the fuss is about.

Q: Had you decided, you said it was to get rid of your virginity, you'd decided you needed -

A: No, it wasn't I decided, it was just, I was curious; and I used to go to a girls' school so - it was, you know, it was something that everybody was doing sort of thing, and I was just curious. It wasn't a major thing, it wasn't, "I've got go do it to prove myself", it was just... what was going on.

Q: You sounded as if you weren't terribly impressed.

A: No, not really. But that was because it wasn't the right person. Now looking back I wish I'd waited but, you know... I mean, I would tell my friends, if we ever talk about sex or something like that, I always say I think you should wait, I wouldn't say...

Q: Wait until -?

A: Wait until it, you know... because it wasn't - it was just, it wasn't a very deep relationship or anything, it was - it didn't mean anything to me and like even like good friends. I mean usually

I'm the sort of person where I can be friends all the way through, especially afterwards... ex-boyfriends, that's important to me, but I mean I see him sometimes.

Q: ...

A: No, not really.

Q: What about the other one? You said there was another one.

A: Yes. That was a reaction against my eleven-month relationship, I mean it was basically, basically what happened was I was staying up... four months, I was in a play, and I don't know, apparently... and my boyfriend got very protective and possessive, and he has, he had been because I came here, because it was a mixed school... male friends sort of thing 'cos - I don't know, I find it very easy to get on with boys, and he was getting very possessive, so I stopped going out with him and started going out with somebody else, someone who was completely the opposite of him, and I just... that finished (?) two months.

Q: So that was better than the first time or -

A: ... He was more experienced than the first one, but I don't know, I have this knack of, I don't know, just - with people I really like I think I'm scared to sleep with them because people that I have slept with, they were - I don't know, have not been my sort of person... not been very comfortable...so I'm probably scared. I think that's a major thing. I mean - I mean sex isn't all that important really, I don't think it's as way important as friendship and trust and stuff like that, so - but it puts a heavy strain on the relationship I think, especially, just like in such a young relationship like the relationship between two young people, so -

Q: Do you think that's why you didn't - you didn't want to have sex as part of that relationship, the eleven month one?

A: No, I was - I was too scared to, too scared that I might lose him sort of thing. I know that he wanted to sleep with me but - I don't know...

Q: It's complicated really, isn't it.

A: Yes.

Q: - that you find you can sleep with people that you're not interested in -

A: Yes, yes.

Q: - but can't with those that you are. What do you think's going on there?

A: I - I mean I have thought about it a bit but I don't know - I mean I'm sure it's just to do with paranoia or something.

Q: Something like that.

A: Something psychological.

Q: One of the things that we're interested in is to what extent young women feel that they've got any power in the relationship, like any control over what happens.

A: I'm a very dominant person.

Q: Yeah.

A: Very, I mean because I've lived with boys around me all my life, since I was eighteen months, I get along with them very well, therefore they're not used to girls being able to talk to them and that puts me in a very dominant position because... think what goes on. There isn't - I don't think - I think all this rubbish about there being such a difference between girls and boys isn't true, I think that's the main thing, is really the relationship between girls and boys, is the fact that girls think there is such a different thing between boys and girls, so when a girl says no there isn't, and treats boys just like anybody else, like a girl say, like a girlfriend, then it sort of... 'cos they're not used to that. But that... the fact, because I've been labelled a flirt I mean,

but I mean if you think about it, if you get along with boys, the boys are alright, the girls are sort of the problem.

Q: Mm.

A: But if you don't, then the girls are alright, the boys are the problem.

Q: But you can't get along with both.

A: No.

Q: Do you think it's something to do with a double standard or something?

A: Oh, definitely. Definitely, I mean it's quite funny 'cos some of the boys here are scared of me because - I don't know, I suppose I can be quite aggressive and I also say how I feel quite a lot and - one incident here before, a boy was spreading rumours about me, and I took him to pieces literally, and I don't think they expect the girls to... but there is a double standard, I mean - I think girls, girls have a double standard as well. If you talk to boys then you're a flirt or a slag, something like that, and that's from the girls as well. The boys won't say that, the boys here think I'm one of the lads, but the girls don't see that, I mean it's only just recently that I've been getting to know more girls through the boys, through them talking about the girls... and stuff like that, that I've actually been getting to know them. I mean obviously some girls here, they don't care... sort of thing, but some girls do. The boys I don't know - the boys are more, I think they're more able to take you for what you are, not for what you appear to be, the girls are - and also the boys are less cliquey, the girls here are so cliquey, it's really funny I mean, but at my old school, it was so catty there... the groups, the not so badly as they are here. I think it's a lot to do with boys being present here.

Q: Girls' school... little groups... in conflict with each other?

A: Yes. I think they don't realise but they are, but there are, I mean I've been in the sixth form listening, because I don't know these people as well as they know each other, obviously because I'm an outsider coming in, I've the advantage of listening to what everybody else says and not knowing about -

Q: Yes that's right, yeah -

A: ... getting to know people for the first time, whereas the girls, they know about whose boyfriend she pinched and stuff like that.

Q: Yeah, it must be quite interesting coming from the outside, I spoke to somebody else from here who was saying that in the sixth form, because it had been single sex and suddenly it's mixed, it was quite strange, you know, the first experiences of boys and girls together... Let me ask you some of the questions about AIDS, which is one of the objects of our study.

A: Sure.

Q: What - when did you first hear about AIDS, if at all?

A: Well the first time I ever remember actually thinking what is it, was in my old school in a Biology lesson, we were watching a video and it just showed a man with AIDS. And that was all it was, there was no explanation or anything. And then - I don't know, when all the media went mad... I don't know, it's difficult to pinpoint an actual time...

Q: Where do you think you got the most information about it from?

A: Probably the media but not (?) rags ... you know, television and watching programmes and the news. I don't ever remember my parents telling me about it and -

Q: What about school?

A: Yeah, I mean sex education there was all - it was just practically non-existent. I mean there was... and it was, it was very, very basic... and most of that, whatever I learnt, is from friends, you know, like it's like learning about periods... primary school...

Q: What about your parents, did your parents give you much information?

A: What, about AIDS or -

Q: Or about sex education generally -

A: My mother gets slightly embarrassed because she's - I think it's, she's an only child, she was brought up in the country, and -I mean I think she's totally (?) unliberated, so I think she finds it difficult to talk. You know, when she had [SERIOUS ILLNESS] and she didn't tell me until she'd been to hospital to have it checked out and removed and stuff like that, I was very upset by that obviously. But since then she's - I think she had made an effort, I mean really has made an effort, I mean we get along very well. My father's, I don't know, my father's - I don't think I ever got any information from him but that's not to say that I couldn't talk about it if I needed to. 'Cos I remember when I first started my periods and I was asking my mother to get me some sanitary towels and I was really embarrassed, you know... and he just made such a joke of it, you know, sort of thing - not, not taking the piss out of me, but out of the whole situation. And I really appreciated that 'cos I was really... so I mean if I did want to know anything... but my mother...

Q: ...

A: Yeah. But the school have been pretty useless.

Q: This one probably thought you knew by the time you got here.

A: Oh yeah. I can't talk about this school but the other school was pretty useless.

Q: Which school was that?

A: [ALL GIRLS SCHOOL].

Q: Oh right.

A: ... it's such a school that's going down in standards, so -

Q: Yeah, not a lot of good.

A: No.

Q: Yeah, quite a lot of young women I've talked to are rather unhappy about the sort of sex education that they got in the schools. I think it's terribly variable, some places it's brilliant, some places it's atrocious.

A: It depends on the teachers... I mean I know here that they have a male, the third year this year had a male Biology teacher, and they had to get my History teacher... to go and explain the sex and stuff like that because he was just too embarrassed and the girls were embarrassed and -

Q: Yeah, mm, problematic. But what - about AIDS then - what do you - what do you know about AIDS? What do you understand AIDS to be?

A: What, specifically?

Q: Yes.

A: It's a sexually transmitted disease or - not only sexually transmitted. Drugs and stuff like that... I mean, I don't know -

Q: Do you know the difference, for example, between HIV and AIDS?

A: Not as much - I don't think I know as much as I should do ... I don't know as much as I should, I think -

Q: Had it bothered you -

A: Oh, you mean -

Q: Yes.

A: I mean it -

Q: Two things: has AIDS bothered you?

A: Obviously it's bothered me -

Q: Has it, yes -

A: I mean I think anybody who says it won't make any difference to me is stupid...

Q: In what way does it bother you?

A: ... knowing who you can trust, it's always... so -

Q: So you think it's changed the way you regard sexual activities?

A: Mm, yeah. But - but... I don't know, the boys I know are quite young, they're still inexperienced, so...

Q: You think there's less risk, is this what you're telling me?

A: Yeah, I think that's what I'm trying to say. But -

Q: Right.

A: I mean - I don't know, I mean, at the moment I wouldn't sort of dive into bed with anybody... but it's difficult, it's very difficult to know - to know what to say with AIDS. I mean you can't exactly say, do you have AIDS, sort of thing.

Q: That's right, yeah.

A: I mean it's ... but -

Q: What do you think about safe sex, have you heard much about that?

A: Oh yeah.

Q: What does it mean for you?

A: For me? Well, always be protected, and never sleep around...

Q: What did you use?

A: Well I went on the pill for a year and... used a condom...

Q: And that was mainly to prevent pregnancy?

A: Yeah. That was -

Q: That's what it was for.

A: Yeah, it wasn't that - I don't think - I mean I don't really conceive what I did as protection from AIDS.

Q: Mm. And what about now, what about in the future, do you think that would be a consideration, AIDS? Well as I say, not necessarily the people that you might be... now

A: It's difficult 'cos I don't - I don't know what's gonna happen in the future, and going to university will change... sort of growing up... I mean I also think, because of all the problems, you know all the sort of disappointments with sex that I've had, it would - I mean I'm not ... I wanna get to know someone before I sleep with them now. And -

Q: Mm...

A: Yeah... It seriously hasn't been much of a problem for me because I've always known quite a lot about my boyfriends, because I'm a nosey cow.

Q: Yeah. Has all this worried your friends, I mean -

A: What about?

Q: AIDS, do you think it's affected them, have they changed their thinking about sex and their behaviour, or anything?

A: No, because ... one of the problems I see is because, to begin with, it was well, you only get it if you're homosexual and then it was all completely blown out of proportion in the media,... but it's you don't take it as seriously as you should do, I think. But I can't really speak for them.

Q: Mm. But that's the impression you get... comment about the sort of, not just media presentation of AIDS as well, but some ... the campaigns ... have you caught any of those, on the telly or papers -

A: Oh my God, ridiculous.

Q: Yeah?

A: Well it looked like a complete waste of money and waste of time.

Q: Mm.

A: I don't know, I don't ... They - they were using a method of - it - it just came over to me to be superior, and they were using the wrong sort of - they weren't getting across to people at all and the way that the music was so over-dramatic and so frightening - I know that AIDS is frightening and everything but they were using it so in that sort of context that you don't - you sort of shut it out, that's a normal thing you do with things. So - I don't know, I thought, I thought they were just a bit too subtle, not subtle, but you know when they have that black and white and that sort of symbolism and everything, I think there was too much of that, you just - you just sit down and say, - you know what they've been doing with the drugs and stuff like that, that sort of thing -

Q: That's more -

A: Yeah, that's more effective.

Q: What, more information?

A: More information, it's more realistic than having, you know ... or whatever they were on -

Q: Yeah, giant slabs from outer space or whatever, yeah.

A: That was - that was just a reaction, it was all completely blown up out of proportion in the media, it was a reaction to ... out of proportion.

Q: You rejected the original claims that it was a gay plague or something like that?

A: Oh yes. But it was - cos you - it was also a time when it was really anti, anti-gay, it was a very anti-gay time, but ... when they started saying God's punishment and stuff like that, really stupid ...

Q: Yeah.

A: ... I mean that makes me angry. It - it's just not being able to - not allowing people to be with whom they want, that makes me very angry, because I think you should get that choice. It's a very difficult situation, you know.

Q: Mm, quite complicated at the present time... If - could we just go back to safe sex again, you were saying that you always protected yourself - what do you think of safe sex as being? If I say safe sex to you, what does that mean?

A: Well it means - obviously you're not gonna - for me it's to do with pregnancy –

Q: Yeah, yeah, right.

A: I suppose - I was just thinking about it, you could... and stuff like that, couldn't you?

Q: Yeah, you could, mm. And some people sort of think of it as being safe sex - sex that doesn't necessarily include intercourse, for example.

A: You mean a withdrawal -

Q: Not necessarily putting it in at all. Other sorts of things that you can do.

A: Yeah, I don't know....

Q: Mm.

A: Oh yeah, I mean ... so - but, because, I don't know, there was always this issue that if you're gonna do this with me then you might as well sleep with me sort of thing, that was always in

the back of my head because that's what, you know, that's what was - not brought up but that's what everybody else sort of thinks. And besides, he thought I should be sleeping with him because all his friends thought I should be sleeping with him.

Q: But you felt ...

A: Oh yeah, I mean I would never sleep with anyone if I really didn't want to.

Q: Mm.

A: I mean the second guy that I slept with there were times when, you know, don't want to, go away...

Q: Mm. So you had sex which didn't include - it was a sexual relationship, your eleven-month relationship then, but just didn't include intercourse -

A: Yeah.

Q: - but it included all sorts of other things.

A: Yeah. Well it was more than a sexual relationship. I think sexual relationships has got such bad - such a bad (?) enigma about it, I mean I think it's just - it was more than that really. And that's - and that's what's important, the fact that we didn't have to sleep with each other.

Q: Mm.

A: Well, I felt that we didn't have to sleep with each other. (?) DAVID, he was getting some pressure but I mean he must have felt... you know...

Q: Mm. Well I mean, those other forms of sexual activity can be perfectly satisfying anyway. I mean, did you find it so?

A: Oh, yeah. To me it's more important just to be hugged, 'cos you can get off with anyone, just go to a party and get off with someone, but if there's nothing - but actual... some stability. But that's I think what I'm looking for, some stability in my life, some sort of security.

Q: No, I was just going away from what I should really be talking about. No, I was just gonna say, there was something you were talking about in the break-up of the relationship, it was you who decided that as well.

A: Yeah.

Q: Because he was becoming too possessive.

A: I don't know if that was just an excuse or if that was how I really felt. I think it had something to do with it, I think most of it was probably saying that I want security, I think that probably it was because I was scared that I was gonna do something... or that he was gonna break up with me, so I ruined it first.

Q: Yeah. Gosh. There's a lot of sort of power relations going on, contradictions, in the way that you think about... relationship.

A: Well I think I'm that sort of person anyway, I'm the sort of person... and I actually do mean, they say that... that I change or things in my head change, you know like thoughts change or people change and I do something different...

Q: ...You're the first person that I've found that has these ways of thinking and feeling about these things. I mean I find it in myself as well, there's this sort of ambivalence -

A: Well different things change, you change.

Q: Yes, you want something different, the situation sort of -

A: Yeah, if you feel trapped within your situation you're bound to go to the extreme, and I think it's only natural. You want to take yourself off... and you want to be hurt so the thing to do is hurt him and to get rid of the situation.

Q: Mm. And go to another one.

A: Mm, as well but no better.

Q: Well like they say ... (?) change ... mutual.

A: Well I have done.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: You have done.

A: So - it's all very ... somebody told me that you go from boyfriend to boyfriend to find the right one and it's just continuous change...

Q: Mm...

A: Yeah.

Q: When you were talking about, I mean say whenever you've had sexual involvements before, actual sex, and you're always protected, so you don't take risks in that area in that way, do you think you take risks in other areas of your life, do you do anything else that's risky?

A: What, do you mean like stupid things?

Q: Well, not... stupid, I mean who am I to judge, but I mean some people think smoking and drinking is risky.

A: Oh, I know. I smoke, I shouldn't smoke, I'm trying to stop.

Q: Mm.

A: But - yes, I think I probably do. I know that some people...

Q: What do you do?

A: I don't know... so -

Q: You think sometimes people think that you take chances?

A: I don't know, I think they think - I think they think... there's a friend here and he thinks I'm really weird and everything and I told him that nobody understands me. I don't - I don't think I want to be understood, because if you're understood that means that you're vulnerable. I don't know, I have done some stupid things.

Q: Such as -

A: Oh, walking on the top of a bridge, that was pretty stupid. Getting - getting too drunk... There are a lot of things that I would consider stupid but nobody else would, (?) hitting my sister.

Q: Yeah?

A: I regret that, it was about two years ago, and I slapped her on the face and - I don't know, I think that was stupid... Mucking up this relationship, the eleven month one, that was stupid. I don't know, it's difficult to say because what I think is risky and chancey because I was - I'm an impulsive person and I do things without thinking about them, they don't appear in my head to be risky but they may -

Q: They may be.

A: They may be to other people.

Q: Yes. Or to you later.

A: Yeah.

Q: What about straightforward risky things like taking drugs and things like that?

A: Oh no, I'm not into that.

Q: No?

A: No, not at all, I mean if I can't have fun just being sober then - or, you know, not high, then I'm not gonna have fun. I don't dope my head because the people that I have talked to - all my friends, you know, who do take drugs and stuff like that, I know that they take drugs and

they're not happy - bad trip. A friend of a friend sort of thing and she took acid, and is now in a mental institution, has been for about three years now, so I - I don't...

Q: Mm. Do you think many of your friends do take drugs at all?

A: I think they're growing up... I don't tend to judge them on it. Quite a lot of my friends smoke but - it depends, I know that some of them do take quite soft drugs like dope and stuff like that, and I know some of them do take coke and - but you can't, I mean they know what I think about it, they know that I think it won't do you a hell of a lot of good... I think it's stupid, but you can't sort of force your morals down somebody else's throat, they won't thank you for it, it won't do you any good, you might as well stay in a position where you're friends and you can help...

Q: Mm.

A: ... I can't stand these people who sort of prance around telling everybody what to do, I mean it's your own decision and if you decide to do that then you have to take the consequences.

Q: Mm.

A: It's not as much of a major thing as it used to be a couple of years ago or even last year, but I think - I think it's on the increase though.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's coming back. Perhaps it's just the people I hang around with now.

Q: No, I was wondering about whether it's an age thing or perhaps it's a fashion thing or -

A: No, I mean - like it can be a fashion thing, like with ecstasy, that was a complete fashion thing, and I - people came in after taking ecstasy and they wouldn't like stay still, it gives you such a buzz, and it doesn't persuade me oh, you know, ... take that...

... English... anyway it was for oral communications and that...

Q: So you got used to it.

A: I can't stand in front of loads of people and talk at all, so it's really funny because like I was... in a play and that - that's a risky thing -

Q: Yeah

A: - as well, I think it's risky because I was in a - in my dad's school play, where I live, in front of all these boys who were completely - if I mucked up that would be it sort of thing -

Q: Yeah

A: - and in front of all those people and the governors... and to stand up - I thought that was - and to sing -

Q: Mm. Taking chances.

A: Yeah.

Q: How did it work out?

A: Oh, fine. Went to - recorded it. But I mean I don't mind standing in front of people as somebody else but I'm not particularly fond of standing in front of - as myself -

Q: As yourself.

A: Like for Politics I've had to get up and give a speech about, you know, sort of an essay, and I'm very protective about my work, it was really - 'cos I want to be a fashion journalist or an author or a journalist but I have to get over the stage of - because I don't feel it's ready. I want...

Q: Yeah, I was gonna ask you about that, what are you thinking of for the future, so you want to be a journalist or something?

A: A journalist or an author. I want to write. I think even if I did become a journalist, a fashion journalist, I would write something because I love writing. I'm able to express things that ... I think I'm one of the people who thinks quicker than she speaks.

Q: Yeah.

A: Or speak before you think. So my brain is going and going... so to be able to write... change things and your thoughts are there... imagination... but with art you don't have - you can't use the words...

Q: So that's your desire, your desire is to be a -

A: A writer.

Q: A writer. Yeah. Well it's quite - I mean the ways, all the ways that you describe it are the charms of it really.

A: Yeah. I've always loved writing.

Q: What do you think your chances of achieving that are? Or are you determined to do so?

A: Oh, I'm determined.

Q: Mm.

A: Even if I - I mean I've been - got some friends in ... and (?) weddings at home sort of in the summer and I really love that, so -I want to get my English, I want to get that and then do a journalism course, all sorts - I want to do so many things, honestly I, listen to myself - I want to travel round the world and probably just go to university and get everything done and just start work again.

Q: Mm. Would you travel before university or after university?

A: Yeah I know but I think I'll probably travel after university but I may be too old and - and if I travel before - I don't know, I don't think I'll travel before, I want to get...looking forward to doing it.

Q: ...under your belt.

A: Yeah. And get started, yeah.

Q: There's one or two other things I was gonna ask you. One was religion, I think on the questionnaire you said that your religion's Church of England.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you think that affects your life, I'm talking about moral - your moral position?

A: Oh - the reason that it's lapsed is because I find it an extremely sexist - specially Christianity - sort of way of expressing myself. And I - what I believe is that there is something of a higher nature, not he not she, something that is supreme and ... and is total good. I don't think it's - I don't believe - it's not I don't believe, I think that the way Christianity is - is it's completely orientated to men and I don't think it should be like that at all and it - look up the Bible, it's full of contradictions which ... but I don't know, it's just contradictions, and I don't think ... by this book is outdated, it's outdated.

Q: Yes. Well, it is, it's hundreds of thousands of years old.

A: Yeah, I find that services and sermons, the way, the layout of religion as a whole, is just so sexist, and I can't relate to it. I don't think religion should be like that and I don't think - I think basically religion is an excuse, like God's punishing me, I think it's an excuse for not accepting your own responsibilities.

Q: Mm.

A: And I - I believe that there is something there, if there's a being that is not interested in ... male or female, just, you know, how much good you've done and stuff like that and I don't think we have the powers to understand it and I don't think we should pretend to try.

Q: So it's a sort of very personal type... you object to religions but have -

A: Yes, it's a very personal thing and I've found that with all the men and the priests and the apostles and everything like that, I found it completely - I felt that I was being kept out of it, I

don't think that it was meant to be like that. And I think it's - I think the Bible is ... I don't think it's worthy of the name or of having so much - I mean it's what Christianity's based on, bygones, and I just don't think it deserves to be.

Q: Mm. Did you - did you used to go to church?

A: Yes. Well, before it was mum and dad used to drag us out and it was quite nice and... Sunday, and then I got confirmed, and went to church a bit by myself and stuff like that, but then you sort of grow up and you start to think, you sort of see, you become aware of your own presence, your own being, your own importance, and I - I kind of learnt I couldn't go to it any longer.

Q: Mm, yeah, that's very similar to my own experience, I went through almost the same process. What about your - I've forgotten the question I was gonna ask you now, about your image of yourself, what is your image of yourself?

A: That's difficult, because most of my friends don't know what I'm like, even my best friend who - she knows me inside out... I think I - I think I think that... but I'm quite a perceptive person, I'm quite sensitive, I hide things too much, I find it easiest to give little emotions to people, feelings... so that I won't get hurt, to keep the other things locked inside me until they burst, which is the wrong thing to do, I know, but it's just the way I am. There are - I mean I reckon I'm pretty normal I mean, I don't know what to say really because I don't know how everybody else really sees their ..

Q: ...

A: I don't know what the standards are, before... risky things, I don't know, I mean -

Q: Well I must say when I asked that question, I mean I leave people to decide for themselves what's risky and I mean, a whole range of things come up as being risky for different people. What about your - others' image of you, I mean you say - you keep - you keep such a lot -

A: Oh, most of it is completely wrong,

Q: Yeah?

A: Completely. At [NAME OF SCHOOL], at school there, they think I'm stupid because I allow them to think I'm stupid because it's easier that way... but I don't - sometimes I don't understand why because I see myself giving away such messages... full of, full of everything that I'm feeling at a precise moment, I mean they just don't see it.

Q: ...

A: But I don't think you should force yourself, I don't like ... but I like to know that some people are there. I mean I've a very high standard for my friends, I value them very very highly, real friends because of the problems I had, you know like drop out of groups and... the obvious things and being let down so many times, the friends that I really trust and value, they have high standards ... ever meet that... but I trust them a lot, value them. I mean those sort of relationships are most important to me, I would do anything for my best friend, and she would always be there for me.

Q: Mm.

A: I have a tendency to let people walk all over me and this... what that debt... too much and then I just snap. That's a bit of a problem because people think I over-react I think, because I take it ... they don't realise they're doing it, winding me up or anything, they can just say nothing but that will be too much, you know... Not as bad as I used to be, I've calmed down a hell of a lot, I've had to really.

Q: Why did they think you're stupid at the other school? You said it was easier to let them.

A: Oh, oh, well it's a very traditional school...and I mean it was just easy for them to think that I don't know what's going on and a lot - not that I'm stupid, just that I don't know what's going on, that's what they think, but it's so easy to tell things from people's faces, and the way they move and their body language, and what's said, if you read other people, you know, beneath the lines -

Q: Mm. That could be when people are having difficulties with you. I mean you say that you - you feel as if you've been giving very strong messages about what's happening whereas you would have read the messages very clearly -

A: Yes

Q: - and they haven't.

A: Yeah, that's - I'm giving out messages that I would pick up. I've never thought of that.

Q: ... bit more high definition messages or something like that, a bit more information. Yeah.

A: Yeah. But I don't know, if people know you well enough they'll understand what I'm trying to say to them, because I find it very difficult to talk about the way I feel or the way I think... the way I feel deep down inside is very difficult... It's - it's, it's all the same thing as vulnerability.

Q: Mm. Fear of vulnerability. Do you feel you have been vulnerable in the past?

A: Yes, I have, and that's probably why some of these people think I'm pretty aggressive, that's probably why I am aggressive, because it's - most people here are... wrong, but it's easy that way.

Q: ...?

A: Yeah. I mean I also - I let people assume everything, because if they're gonna assume that... and if they want to find out anything different... talk to me. But if not...anyway...

Q: ...I mean all of that is interesting, in terms of how you understand what people are thinking...

A: I remember watching people and that you can see so much of them and not know them at all, not - I don't mean not know them as strangers but not know them in the fact that they give you out a different image from the way they actually are.

Q: Mm.

A: ...

Q: Mm. Well it's no wonder that you think that people should be able to read your messages more easily.

A: Yeah.

Q: Is there anything you'd like to ask - one thing I'd like to say is if you want to find some more information about AIDS -

A: Yeah, I think I should do -

Q: I think you should. I think you'd probably find leaflets and things easier than family planning places or anything, probably at school they've got bits and books. No, no, it's just, it's just - it's not a..., I mean I'm not making any judgements at all, as you know, I'm a totally non-judgmental person, I suppose you've been able to tell that from the vibes that I've been giving out (laugh), but it's - I mean it would be useful just to know -

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah, yeah, and I - you're - you are not atypical, I mean lots of people know very little about it despite the amount of information that's been put -

A: Yeah, I mean I think it's because there is so much information and there is so much of conflicting ideas -

Q: That's right.

A: - that it's impossible -

Q: Yeah, and also the information is changing very rapidly so you sort of feel, you know, one minute you've found out one thing and you've got to learn another. I mean I feel like that, working in the field myself sort of thing. But just from the point of view of your own - your own protection sort of -

A: What exactly are you trying to find out?

Q: Well, what we're interested in in this study, which is taking place here and in Manchester as well, is, we're really interested in young women's sexuality, in the way that they feel about it, how it develops, what they think about it, but it's important in terms of AIDS, really why AIDS comes into it is that information can be used to, you know, to better direct that sex education material.

A: Sex education was a complete waste of time. I think that girls are becoming aware of how to use their sexuality, I mean I know that, I mean I can - I can get people to do things easier if you - you know, if you're charming and things like that, and I think... I think women have been charming and everything before, but they're seeing that they can use that, they can use it to dominate people and for them not to realise.

Q: Mm.

A: I think that's what's happening now,... you know you can see that from a lot of films about the working girls... women in power, that's how they get into power...

Q: Mm.

A: ...subtle, women are far more subtle than men, I think. And it's because of that subtlety that they can get men - they can manipulate, it's manipulation. I mean I've been involved in manipulating people, and I do. But the way I see it the people let themselves be manipulated and - I know it's a bad attitude...

Q: ...they can make their own judgements, and their own decisions about how far they want to be manipulated. Perhaps they just don't recognise that they're being manipulated -

A: ...

Q: Yes.

A: - therefore what harm would it do them. (laughter)

Q: It's true what you say, using sexuality in all sorts of ways, I mean that's - in a sense it's always been going on, because that's one weapon which women do have.

A: I think women are just realising how easy it is to manipulate people though, but - whether men realise is another thing.

Q: Mm, well they're probably flattered and things,... a wonderful person or something.

A: ...

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to ask about the research or anything?

A: So what you're doing - you're just interested in finding out about relationships and women?

Q: Mm, yeah, at the moment we're just working on young women because we - I mean we felt it was important to do that, it hasn't been done by anybody else.

A: Right.

Q: I mean it's obviously important to look at other women as well and hopefully afterwards we can do that...

[REDACTED]