

Pilot interview
LJH01 First interview 21.12.88
Emma

A. So what sort of project is this?

Q. Well it's really trying to find out about how young women feeling about sex. Ultimately hoping to be helpful around the area of AIDS -

A. Oh really? (interested)

Q. - to help with the health education programmes. Because there is not a massive amount of information about how young women really feel about these things.. .. First of all, can I ask you about your living arrangements, who you live with?

A. Mum, dad, brother. Basically, nice and simple, I'm leaving - I finish my A levels in June and I'm working for [VOLUNTEER ORGANISATION] from September onwards for a year, and I'm going on to further education, so I am leaving hopefully July, September.

Q. Where are you going to go for further education?

A. I've applied to universities and polys, all over the country. I really don't mind as long as I get into one.

Q. What did you do for your A levels?

A. I'm doing history, English and politics.

Q. And what do you plan to go on to do?

A. Social Administration, Social Policy, and maybe CQSW, but I think I'll leave that until I have done my first degree, then take that as a sub-option.

Q. So you are pretty clear about what you are going to do?

A. Yeah.

Q. How long have you known that?

A. Not really for very long. I have had to make various decisions when we wrote the UCCA form, obviously to apply to a certain course, and originally, I wanted to do History and English. But then I realised that I wasn't really very interested in doing one subject, one straight subject anyway, and I realised that it would be better for me to do a subject in which you could have lots of little option groups, a very general way and you could then specify in the last couple of years. And I thought about what area I wanted to work in and thought - however cliched it is - that I really wanted to work with people, so I thought Social Admin fitted in quite well.

Q. Yes, and it's a fairly generalisable thing.

A. Yes, and you also have a chance to do various projects, dissertations on various topics, and it looks quite interesting, certainly the courses I've picked looked interesting.

Q. Did you get much advice about that at school?

A. Not really. We've got various books at school, but you can imagine one UCCA book among 600 sixth formers doesn't go a long way. So we had to buy quite a few and then dad helped me because he is in higher education - he helped me quite a lot. It's just a matter of thinking it through yourself really, what area you want to go into.

Q. I always admire young people when they can think about what they are going to do, so often you just can't imagine, you can't put yourself into -

A. Well it's too soon apart from anything else, it comes up on you so quickly - you know, I've really got to think about what I'm going to do, especially since it is a year and a half away.

Q. What does your dad do [in higher education]?

A. My dad's [HEAD OF DEPARTMENT] so I suppose that's going to look pretty awful when I write that down - like father like daughter - he was quite useful writing PECAS (?) and UCCA forms because he knew what he wanted to see on it.

Q. Probably knows [REDACTED].

A. Is he? Oh, I'll ask him. {some interjection about the cat pulling the Christmas tree apart}

Q. [REDACTED].

A. He must know him, I'll ask, [REDACTED].

Q. [REDACTED]. There's all sorts of interconnectedness. Which school are you at?

A. NAME OF SIXTH FORM. It's alright, I want to get out, I don't think anywhere else will be any better quite frankly, because I think it is at the point where you just don't want to go to school, you

want to do everything else but. But it's only six months, so I'll stick it out. Be a shame to leave now.

Q. Well, it would be silly really, when you are nearly there ... and you've got your clear plans laid out for the future. Do many of your friends feel like that about school?

A. Most of them do, yeah, virtually all of my peer group I would say want to get out, and certainly it has become a lot more obvious in the sense that we are now in the second year of A levels and after the first year when we came back this term there was about a third of the original people that were still there. It was amazing how many people had dropped out. Some of these people would have been doing one year courses so would have left anyway, but a lot of people had left A level groups, which was quite disheartening in a way, because you felt that you were exposed now. And you are the only ones who are going to stick it out

Q. Is that usual, is this an unusual group in dropping out?

A. No I don't think it is at all. Because I was talking to someone who goes to Islington sixth form and she said a lot of people had left there as well. I think it is different if you go to a college rather than a sixth form college in that sense, like you go to Kingsway Princeton.

Q. What, you think people are more committed if they go there?

A. I think so, sometimes people have left a long time ago and are going back to those places anyway. There's also a wider range of things to do, whereas at my sixth form college you can either do A levels, retake O levels, CPVE, hardly any vocational courses at all.

Q. Did you have any sex education at school?

A. We had - we didn't have any in the first year, we had none in the second year, and I think we may have had a term out of three terms in a year in the third year. We didn't have any in the fourth or fifth year. We had one discussion session where people were asked to write on anonymous strips of paper and hand them in at the front their questions about getting pregnant. And that revealed quite a lot. But apart from that we had virtually nothing, absolutely nothing at all. We had one discussion on contraception and that sort of thing in RE. We had no straight lesson called - they do it now after my year, they do health and social lessons, I don't know what it is called, but we didn't get that.

Q. What was it mainly around?

A. It was mainly periods, contraception, nothing on abortion, and little leaflets. And that was it really, it was mainly around periods, there was not really much on anything else. Most people knew about that anyway, we'd done that in biology, biology they sort of put sex education in with that, but there was hardly anything.

Q. So where would you say that you have learned about..

A. Mum and dad. Well mum works at [SEXUAL HEALTH ORGANISATION], so. Thrust down my throat the whole time, yeah

Q. So you are pretty well informed about that. What do you think about AIDS, what do you know about that?

A. Well I like to think that I know quite a lot, where it comes from, how you get it, what to do about preventing it. It does frighten me, it really does frighten me because, well, really, we are the group that are going to be growing up with this hanging over them. We're going to have to have kids through this. It does frighten me quite a lot. It also frightens me that I have quite a lot of male gay friends who really don't seem at all bothered by it. One friend particularly is rather sort of free and easy and certainly goes for one-night stands, and certainly if not AIDS he is going to come down with something else, because he just doesn't care. And certainly, when people are irresponsible like that it frightens me. It frightens me anyway, there is not enough education going round, the government are not putting enough money into it.

Q. When you found out about it, where would you say was the main source of information that you had about it?

A. I think television, I think I watched things like First Aids. And a couple of minor documentaries, but things that are aimed at my age group I watched. I don't think we have talked about it at school really. Talked about it at home, talked about it among my friends quite a lot. But I think television has been, specifically AIDS programmes, not adverts or anything.

Q. What did you think of those ads?

A. They were useless, totally, totally useless.

Q. I noticed they have changed their style a little bit?

A. They've changed them now, with the laser and heart, have you seen those?

Q. No.

A. That's sort of drugs as well.

Q. Yeah, I suppose they are working on it. The first ones I don't know what people were supposed to make of them at all, the don't die of ignorance ones.

A. The condom ones were good, the ones about Mates, they just don't put them on often enough now.

Q. You say that your friends are concerned about it as well?

A. Certainly my close group of friends. A lot of my friends have changed their attitude towards it. Some of them started off at the beginning being extremely, almost (hesitant)- almost right-wing in their attitude towards it, saying it is a gay plague. And we used to have absolutely furious arguments over it, saying it's not a gay plague, it affects everyone, everyone is at risk from this. But we do talk about it quite a lot and certainly all my friends are well aware of the risks and well aware that they need to take precautions.

Q. Do you think that they do, take the precautions?

A. Most of them aren't in a position that they need to, but I think they would if they were, yeah.

Q. What about you?

A. I'm not in the position, but I would, oh definitely, no question. That's just- lessening the chances has got to be a priority. Before anything else.

Q. What kind of context do you think you'd feel... I don't know how to put the question really - do you feel that you would be able to use whatever method you would plan to use, do you think that if you were in a relationship you would feel confident enough to be able to tell them that that's what you wanted?

A. Yeah, well if I wouldn't then I wouldn't be in a relationship with them, I wouldn't, if they couldn't accept that. If they were not equally aware of the risks and prepared to lessen them then I wouldn't even be in that position with them. They've got to be, I think one has to be, it's just mindless not to be now.

Q. What about other, are people concerned about other sexually transmitted diseases do you think?

A. No, that seems to really have gone out the window now, and even pregnancy has sort of, gone in its fear. Now it's condoms, now as I see it condoms are directly related to AIDS now, they're not at all related to, well they are, obviously they are, but they are not in publicity and advertising eyes. Whereas for pregnancy, you use the pill for pregnancy and then use the condom for AIDS.

Q. Which method do you think you would use?

A. Pill. Maybe, I'm not sure. I think there's a lot of risks in that as well, I think the condom, that's probably safest, certainly because you can get all in one in that sense.

Q. Or belt and braces approach, somebody was telling me the other day that they used the diaphragm and the condom on some occasions.

A. Certainly a friend of mine, she was on the pill and she used a condom and then she used one of those spray foamy things as well, I can't remember what it was called. But then she was absolutely terrified because it broke, the sheath broke, but she knew she was on the pill, but I think if you do have more protection then you can't really go so wrong.

Q. So you are pretty well informed about the different kinds of contraception it seems.

A. I think so, I think I know what the choices are.

Q. And you think that your friends are as well informed as you are?

A. Certainly my female friends. I think my male friends tend to be a bit pig-headed in some of those areas.

Q. Yeah? Not open to persuasion probably.

A. No, some of them tend to be a bit blasé, which is rather irritating, but I think they are OK really.

Q. Do you talk about these sorts of issues with your male friends - you sound as if you must do?

A. Sometimes you do. I have really quite a few really close male friends with whom I do talk about those things and then I have a wider group of sort pals who I don't talk about it with much. But with my closer male friends we do.

Q. What sort of things do you do - you have these two categories, close male friends and the others, what sort of things do you do with each of these groups of people?

A. Well the more distant ones I tend to be at school with and we go out. There's usually a big group of us, male and female. In fact, they are my very close female friends. My very close male friends tend to be outside of school. In that group we tend to go out, have lunch together, do those sorts of things. And my very close group of friends I tend to meet a hell of a lot more often and go out and talk more deeply about things. A relationship which is one step further.

Q. What sort of other things do you do, what kinds of activities?

A. Parties, going to see bands, cinema, going to lunch, that sort of thing, having lessons together. Those sort of usual things.

Q. Which is your favourite band?

A. I've got loads of favourite bands. Bands I go to see the most are [COUNTRY SINGER]. My favourite bands are American and they don't come over here.

Q. Yeah. Which sort of films do you like?

A. I go and see most of the ones that are out really, me and friends tend to say we fancy going out this weekend, there's no really good parties on, there's not really anything on tele, so let's go and see a film. Then we look up and if there's something we haven't seen before and we think we might as well go and see that. We've seen, I suppose, the top ten of what are out at the moment. We don't go out particularly to see a film. We usually end up going to see something entirely different anyway.

Q. I usually have a list of films I want to see and keep having to knock them off the bottom, or top, but never actually get to see them. Finish up watching them on video. You sound like a very sensible, together person, would you say that you take risks in any area of your life?

A. Um, yeah. I wouldn't say that they were horrendous risks. Yeah, I would say that I take some risks. Certainly, I've taken some risks, I mean, it may not sound like a risk, but I have taken various risks in my education. Things like, well I did bunk off a hell of a lot in the lower sixth. That was pretty risky really, and it didn't pay off because I did really screw up that year. Yeah, I take a few risks, I mean, I drink quite heavily, that sort of thing. Usually. Those are becoming risks as awareness grows about these things.

Q. Mm.

A. I wouldn't say I was terribly risky, not really. But most of my friends aren't, we don't do that sort of thing.

Q. It's mainly the influence of your friends, I mean not so much the influence, but you do what the group -

A. Yeah, certainly, I mean I've got a very, very close friend, STEPH, and we do virtually everything together, absolutely everything together, so really. I mean we can't stop smoking if one stops smoking. We've tried before. I stopped and she didn't, and I had to start again. Because we spend so much time together it's impossible, so we are both going to stop on New Year. Not going to smoke again. Tend to be influenced by each other in that sense, we lean quite heavily on each other for support as well.

Q. What do your parents think about the smoking and drinking for example?

A. Well, they say how much are you smoking a day, so I lie. They say, do you think you are drinking too heavily, and I say no. And they leave at that really. I think I am fairly good really about how much I drink and smoke. And since I am going to stop smoking because I am aware of the risks of that. I can't afford to get drunk every week, so I don't get drunk every week. But they don't mind, I think they leave it quite a lot up to me, they leave it sort of - they might say 'we're disappointed' or 'we're unhappy', these sorts of things, but they don't terribly influence what I do. Not anymore.

Q. They did?

A. Yeah. I've been smoking since I was thirteen and I didn't tell them until about two months ago. But they did, they used to frighten me quite a lot about these sorts of things. I would be frightened to tell them. But now I think, well, it's not really got terribly much to do with them now. If I can't tell them then it's probably not worth doing. Because they don't terribly mind.

Q. So what sort of relationship do you think you have with them now?

A. Fairly liberal. They have got more liberal this year with me. They weren't so liberal last year, but that's because I was really screwing up at school and I needed a firm hand, to restrict me going out, that sort of thing. But this year I have been working harder and I think they've sort of thought, give justice where due, so they have been more liberal. And it has worked really, because I'm happier and I think they're happier. We know where we stand with each other now, which is quite good.

Q. How did you, I mean, what circumstances led you to start bunking off?

A. Oh, it was after being in the fifth year, after being in the first to fifth year, where you have to go to school every day, whereas in the sixth form you don't actually have to be there. You are not under any obligation apart from to yourself and to the teachers to be there, you legally could be anywhere else. But also everyone else did it, everyone thought it was a really hard thing to do, to bunk off a few lessons a week, and it built up to a point where if I didn't feel like going to a lesson I wouldn't. And then - I only did that for a few months - and then after a bit I realised, God I'm not going to pass if I do this. So, I did go back. And I was frightened that my parents would find out

Q. They didn't know that that was happening?

A. No they didn't really, but they probably suspected.

Q. What were you doing when you were bunking off?

A. It was only one lesson at a time, it wasn't sort of whole days. But because my school was on [LOCAL PARK] we used to go and sit [REDACTED] in the sun, it was nice. We didn't go off to any wild places, just used to sit out a lesson basically. It was easy to do as well. They knew you were doing it. I think the lower sixth is renowned for bunking off.

Q. What kind of influence do you think the school has on you?

A. A lot. Certainly politically it has had a wide influence on me, being really very militant in its NUT action and its teacher action, we have quite a few militant staff teachers and certainly been out on demonstrations, that sort of things, but becoming very aware of the situation has helped to increase my knowledge. They've influenced me also in the way you relate to other people. I mean I was lucky, I found a group of friends round about the second year, we were all so totally alike that we managed to quite easily drift our way through the five years of secondary school which is quite nice, so they influenced us quite a lot in making friends. Politically, I think they've had a major influence. Not educationally.

Q. It sounded as if that was a minor aspect.

A. I wouldn't say that school was particularly brilliant education-wise, certainly didn't give me great O levels.

Q. But you feel fairly confident about A levels-

A. I know I can probably do well enough. I need 3 C's to go to university. I need less than that to go to poly, and I think if I can do that then I'm alright. I also think that if I don't get them and because I want to work in the voluntary sector - my parents would never agree to this but if I am 18 there is nothing they can do - to working for the next four or five years in the voluntary sector and then applying as a mature student when you don't need the A levels, so they say. But I think that is probably risky, I think I probably would have to take them again.

Q. If you put your energy into working on them a bit, you've got six months..

A. Six months, yeah

Q. Shouldn't be too wearing. Or do you think you are liable to be led astray by your friends-
(Phone interrupts)

A. Only got ten days for Christmas.

Q. I can tell when it's the vacation because all the students disappear, and usually all the staff too. I'm the last lone person left.

(Discussion about an old [PET] who appears in the garden)

A. Dad keeps dropping rather large hints, like isn't that [PET] getting rather old now, EMMA. I don't know what he wants me to do.

Q. Can we talk about relationships a bit more again. What kind of relationship or relationships do you envisage having in the future?

A. Well, I want to keep my close friends for ever and ever, but personal-wise I suppose I want - I don't want anything at the moment, I couldn't fit it in now, I just haven't got the time. But maybe when I go to university, maybe in my year off, maybe later I would like certainly a fairly steady

longstanding relationship - because I want kids, I want loads of kids, I've decided that, I want loads of kids. But I don't want anything for a good few years, I'm not ready, I haven't really found out enough about myself yet, I don't really think I can get involved with someone before I know myself quite deeply, and I don't think I do, so. I do want a good, strong relationship within the next ten years. Definitely.

Q. How many children do you want?

A. 5.

Q. (shock) Five!

A. Yeah, I decided I like them.

Q. How old is your brother?

A. 14.

Q. How old are you in fact?

A. 17.

Q. I can never tell. So, there is nobody that you are thinking, from amongst your friends for example who might be appropriate for a relationship, or anything like that?

A. Not really, there used to be. The guy who just rang up is a very close friend of mine now, outside school who I met in SOCIAL ACTIVITY actually, who was a rather whacky CARIBBEAN sort of cutie (QT??), funny sort of person. I met him, he must have been about twelve, and I was thirteen and we were really good friends, we really got on well together, and since then we've grown and grown and grown and he's about 16. And there was a moment when we thought that it was getting a bit too heavy, so we talked about it and we decided that we didn't want to have that, we just wanted to be friends. Because I didn't want to ruin the friendship really, because I loved the friendship as it was, and I just knew I would never be able to go back to that if I went out with him or anything. So, we do go out, but it is purely friendship, and it's really good, I really, really like that, because I know exactly where I stand, there's no sex or anything. But he's the only one out of that group really. The others are just nerds [JH laughs], yeah.

Q. What do your other friends think about the males in the group?

A. Much the same. We all get on extremely well, we are all at the same level. A couple of us have been out with a couple of the boys but it didn't seem to make any difference to the group structure, they were still friends and you could still hug anyone even if they were going out with your best friend, it didn't matter. And that was really nice.

Q. Mm.

A. Occasionally you had someone who had a passion for someone, and that passion was not returned and that was very sad, and you have to sort of calm them down a bit. But never anything serious, it's usually always blown over.

Q. It sounds like a good group. Do you think there is anything, like, double standards going on between - different set of rules for girls than for boys?

A. I don't think so, certainly my close girlfriends don't treat the boys any different than they expect to be treated themselves. I mean, I treat my male friends almost identically as I treat less close female friends. And I think they do to us as well, it's pretty sort of asexual in that sense, everyone is sort of virtually the same, it's quite good. I don't think there are double standards, no.

Q. Would you say that many of your friends are sexually active at the moment?

A. Certainly not my close friends, no, not at all. Not the close ones, maybe a couple outside. But only really two or three.

Q. Would you say that's general, or are they exceptional in that?

A. No, I think that's really quite general. Well, obviously, there are those, well you hear these enormous long stories about them and you think god almighty what am I doing wrong, why am I not like that. Well, really, they have these enormous images to keep up and it must be such a strain. Certainly, girls in my year, you hear about them getting off with so and so at this party, going out with so-and-so, and it's all they're known for, they're not known for anything else. It's really sad, so I don't think we are an exception to the rule.

Q. There's just a few who have, what would you say, that they've got a reputation or something?

A. Yeah, I suppose that's what they have.

Q. And how do people feel about them?

A. Well it's funny. Some people sort of respect them, some people are pretty in awe of this. Other people don't really care, I mean, I don't care. Other people are completely frightened of them, won't go near them at all, but that's the sort of timid, non-person. I think most people ...don't really care.

Q. Do you think this sort of reputation thing is based on reality, I mean do you think - you talked about image just now, do you think an image builds up of a person - what they do?

A. Yeah, I think it definitely does and it gets sort of, yeah it does, and the sort of person that person is gets extremely distorted along the way. I mean, there's a certain amount of truth in it but if you expect her to be getting off with three boys at one party then you will hear that she gets off with three boys at one party, whether she actually did or didn't.

Q. Do you think it has an effect on them, the person?

A. Doesn't seem to, no not at all. They get a little cliquy group around them who sort of admire, then it will boost their ego massively.

Q. Quite interesting really.

A. Yeah it is, you can actually see the groups. Our sixth form is incredibly cliquy, thousands and thousands of little groups. Those sort of girls tend to know each other, and those sort boys tend ..

Q. Do those girls know those boys, are they in the same group?

A. Tend to be. I mean there's also going with people outside of school. Well that's a really hard thing to do because nobody knows them, and you don't know anything about this person. But they do tend to interlink, because they all go to the same sort of parties and that sort of thing.

Q. And what is the attitude amongst your friend towards -

A. Oh, we just think they are a bunch of posers. They are not worth bothering - some of them are very nice as well, but when they get in their groups and when they go to parties they are absolutely awful, they really are. Basically they are just posers, sort of society, they use people to get their position in the sixth form, you're only friends with someone if you think they can get you into the next party sort of thing, and we don't like that.

Q. Doesn't sound terribly appealing. That sounds as if it's edging on towards 'style', is there much around the kind of things you wear, and the sort of places you go -

A. Definitely the sort of things you wear, you have to wear, certainly, you have to wear certain things and you will be recognised as being a member of that sixth form. But again, the clothes differ from group to group. I mean there are like hippies, trendies, punks, non-people, sort of fairly middle-class trendy people, I suppose we're a member of that sort of one. All are fairly trendy, but some are more stylish than others, and some have more expensive clothes than others. But there are certain clothes that everyone must own.

Q. Yeah, what?

A. 501s, converse boots, DMs, quite a lot of black. Preferably the boys, quite a lot of the boys have long curly-ish hair, doesn't matter for the girls really, lot of silver jewelry, all of which I own I suppose, yeah.

Q. Laughs. She runs through her wardrobe

A. Yeah, it's my wardrobe, this is true. But it is also the way you wear it, I mean I probably own, most of my wardrobe is probably identical to a boy living in Hampstead, but certainly he could look a hell of a lot different than I do. I think you own them, but you don't - as long as everyone is well aware that somebody owns those items then it's alright.

Q. I was wondering how you decide, is this one of the occasions when I wear boots and black t-shirt.

A. Yeah, sometimes you do. I used to do that a lot more but now I don't really do that, I dress for me, I don't dress to be in with the in crowd and it just happens that a lot of my clothes are sort of OK to get in with. Some of them they stare at and think, "weirdo". But I think that matters a lot more in the Lower sixth, in the Upper sixth it doesn't matter so much, you're your own person a lot more, definitely. In the lower sixth it was so important to wear, I remember actually picking things out to wear the next day, washing them, thinking, god, will people be worried about what I'm actually wearing, and thinking "how can I turn up in this, no I mustn't, I must wear something else" but now it doesn't bother me at all, I wear what I want now, it's much easier.

Q. Laughs. And do you think that's general as well, were all your friends terribly tense about what they were wearing?

A. Yeah, definitely, but now as I say for most people it doesn't matter. There are some people to who it still matters quite a lot, but certainly in my group it doesn't matter much at all.

Q. Sounds like an interesting sociological study in itself, come and identify all the groups... How do you relate to the teachers?

A. I relate very differently to them than I did when I was at O level stage which really freaked me out quite a bit, because they are a lot more lax at the sixth form stage and they do treat you much more as your own person, and the areas of responsibility that sort of goes with, that is quite frightening. Because you're in charge of your folder, and you're in charge of your work and you don't get much work on essays, you get an essay title and you have to produce an essay, but you don't actually get much work to do in that essay. So the relationship has grown up quite a lot with teachers, it's grown up visibly over the sixth form year as well. I mean, I remember being quite frightened of a few teachers, but now you do actually talk to the teachers on quite a one to one basis. I can go in, certainly with my politics teacher and have a cup of tea with him and talk about my progress, that sort of thing, it's really nice, it's very relaxed, and there's not really any superior role being taken by him there at all. So I think the relationship's quite good.

Q. Is there any difference - you mention him, being a man - is there any difference between your relationship with your women teachers and your men teachers?

A. I've only got one woman teacher out of six teachers, which is very surprising. I'm very fond of that teacher anyway because I've had her throughout my time at secondary school, and I really get on with her very well, but there doesn't actually seem to be much difference at all, no.

Q. And not with particular subjects, sometimes you get on better with people who teach your favourite subject?

A. No not really. Because [NAME OF SCHOOL] is a very old school, boys school, a very old boys network, and [NAME OF SCHOOL 2] is a rather militant comprehensive, the male teachers in [NAME OF SCHOOL] I think are extremely biased towards the boys who went to [NAME OF SCHOOL] and I think probably the [NAME OF SCHOOL 2] women teachers are biased towards [NAME OF SCHOOL 2] girls, sort of positive discrimination in that sense. I hate [NAME OF SCHOOL], I hate it such a lot. To walk up and down the corridors with all the boys screaming at you I really hate that.

Q. Do they? What do they -

A. Oh I don't know, general abuse at every girl that walks down, mindless first year comments. It's not very nice walking down the corridors at all, I don't really like it.

Q. So when you have your lessons it's mixed groups?

A. Yeah, the sixth form is completely mixed, and [NAME OF SCHOOL] as well.

Q. So what was it up to the fifth form-

A. Up to the fifth form in [NAME OF SCHOOL 2] it was all girls.

Q. How did you like the change, how did being taught with just girls compare with being taught with -

A. Well I thought when I left [NAME OF SCHOOL 2] and I was going into the sixth form that summer before I was really frightened, I wasn't sure how I could first of all speak in a lesson with boys there, let alone even go to lessons with boys. I knew I'd be freaked out, I mean that was since primary school that I'd been in a classroom with boys, but from what I could see when we went in the boys were just as frightened as we were, so really it sort of balanced itself out quite quickly. There were dominant people as there are in any class I think, but they weren't boys, or they weren't girls, they were fairly sort of mixed. It took quite a long time for me to get used to being with boys, as I say a lot of the sixth form was made up of people who'd been to single sex schools anyway, so you weren't on your own in that sense, everyone was adjusting. And there was certainly a mad panic when everyone went in, "Have to go out with somebody, have to go out with somebody" because you were thrown in with all these boys, but that soon died down as well.

Q. You say when you go into [NAME OF SCHOOL] the boys are abusive, were the boys in the sixth form, those you were actually being taught with-

A. They weren't abusive. It's just the younger ones, definitely, just the first, second, third years. No, certainly in [NAME OF SCHOOL], in the sixth form those boys are, not a lot more polite, they're just like any other person really, they're alright.

Q. Sometimes people have quite bad experiences of sexual harassment.

A. No we didn't experience any sexual harassment at school, no, not really. Let me think, no, not really. Things like teachers sort of frighten you a bit in the lower school, I had teachers winking at me in the lower school, which frightens you quite a bit when you're a twelve year old, but not in the sixth form.

Q. It sounds as if they are treating you differently, as more adult when you get into the sixth-

A. They are, all round adults rather than educationally as well.

Q. Some people think it's better to have single sex for girls because your mind isn't taken up with-

A. That's what my parents thought, that's why they sent me to a girls' school for secondary. I think it made a difference for the first year, second and third, but by the time it had got to the fourth year - has that stopped?

[We turn the tape over]

A. What was I saying, oh about going to a girls' secondary school. It did affect me for the first, second and third year because I certainly had much more confidence, and probably more intelligent, in the sense that I was contributing and working harder and thinking a lot more for myself without the threat of 'boys', I mean that was certainly primary school, there used to be that. But after the third year when we took our O level option courses for the fourth and fifth year, I don't think it would have made such a difference to have boys there. I don't think it really matters because everyone, well not everyone, but most people had developed their own personality to a certain extent by that time, so by having boys there I don't think it would have made very much difference at all

Q. It sounded a bit dramatic, when you say when you started off in the sixth form everyone immediately responded to that fact that the other sex was there.

A. They did, yeah, well all those people who had been - there were people in the sixth form as well who had been to mixed schools, so they didn't really care. But I certainly think that quite a lot of people, I mean not personally and not any of my group either, but some of the girls it was almost like being released, like being released from a cage and whom, the boys and the girls running together almost. But that died down after about a month. I mean, I saw that this year when the lower sixth came in and you have sixth form parties, and you can see them, it's just like a cattle ground. They just go in there, and they see who they want. And there are all these stories that you hear, "so and so's going out with so and so" and "now she's going out with so and so" and "now he's dumped her", it's mad for about the first month of the sixth form.

Q. You can see how the work must be affected as well.

A. Definitely, definitely it did.

Q. But things calm down?

A. They calm down pretty quickly. You get down to work pretty soon, you have exams after the first term, most people do badly in those, then you have a shock.

Q. And start knuckling down.

A. Yeah, then it relaxes again and then the same thing, you go through it the whole time. I think the lower sixth form is one big doss anyway, looking back on it now. Most people didn't do any work in the lower sixth, certainly not to their full potential.

Q. What do you think is the reason for that?

A. Just the fact that you are not at school, you only have to be there maximum 16 or 20 hours a week, you have a lot of free periods. You think you can do your work in those free periods, and you don't do your work in those free periods and then you have all the parties to go to, to meet all these new people, work gets really shoved aside at that time. I know it did for me. Going out with new friends and meeting new people and going to new places. Work is just a sideline.

Q. This group of friends, your close-knit circle, is that where you mainly started getting that together or-

A. No. Because I went to a sixth form in the same place a lot of my friends were there, four or five girls who were very close friends, we stuck together throughout the first term. And then we met up with three boys. We all got together. That lasted for about two terms, very, very, very good friends, do everything together. Then that group was completely split, completely split up and it

ended up with two of those girls staying with the boys and four of us meeting another group of friends who we are now with and get on much better with. But now also we've become good friends back with those three boys that we were once friends with. So, this group that I'm friends with now has really sort of accumulated throughout the year and a half. Finally got together and it's a fairly solid group now, I can't really see anyone breaking away. But it has taken quite a long time to get to that point. I didn't know a lot of the people I know now at the beginning of the sixth form.

Q. What blew that first group apart?

A. Well, two of the girls used to fight incessantly the whole time, I mean not physically but verbally, and then one of the girls started going out with one of the boys, and everyone became jealous. Then another girl started going out with another boy, then they broke up. And then the boy's dad died, and he was absolutely broken. Not sort of visibly, you couldn't see him cracking up, but you could see him changing to a different person. And he became actually a lot nicer. After that the two girls had a massive row and it ended with us almost resenting the fact that they were friends with another group, but this girl, who is quite a nasty bit of work anyway, had almost bullied the boys into being friends with them. I think the boys turned up a bit, and they left this term, they left them and now those girls are on their own, completely on their own, with actually not any friends apart from each other, which is bad. We've become friends with the boys again who are a lot nicer now they are on their own. Which is good I think, we've come round in a circle again. I like it.

Q. And you said you wanted to keep your closest friends forever, do you think you will?

A. Not all of them, no. I think maximum out of the sixth form three or four. ..And the majority of those will be girls, they won't be the boys. I can see that happening.

Q. I was trying to think if I still have friends from school. I think we sort of grew apart, went separate ways. They got married, had thousands of children, this sort of thing. Do you expect to marry to have these children or is that not a necessary part-

A. It's not a necessary part. I want someone around, I'd quite like a bloke around, but I, not necessary to have them all by the same dad.

Q. No?

A. No, I don't really care, I just want five kids.

Q. How do you imagine your life would be with these five kids?

A. I don't know. From all I can see it's not gonna work. I don't want to be rich, I don't want to have a lot of money, but I want to have enough money to be comfortable. I'd have to have some years off work, definitely, I'd have to take a few years off work. Have them quite close together, then go back to work. I don't see how that's going to work at all actually, it's pie in the sky.

Q. Where do you think this desire for the children has come from?

A. I love black babies, I've got a real thing about black babies, and I don't know, I just decided I want them. I get on quite well with kids quite a lot of the time, I've worked with them quite a lot. I just think I'd like lots around me.

Q. What kind of work have you done with kids?

A. Work, well I baby sit quite a lot, and I've also worked - run a few playgroups, that sort of thing. And I've also worked at the [YOUTH ORGANISATION] on the junior summer programme in the summer where you have the kids coming in for about a month and doing various activities and I was deputy manager of that. And I really, really enjoyed that. It was quite middle-class, but there were also quite a lot of socially disturbed kids there as well. Once you got through to them it was so interesting how they react to you, because I thought they'd tear my guts out, being a white, middle-class, fairly well spoken girl, and these are little black ragamuffins from Tottenham and Brixton, I thought oh, I'm never going to be able to do this. But they were really nice kids and I really enjoyed working with them. I hope I'll be doing it again this year.

Q. How old were they?

A. Well the junior programme is meant to be from 8-16, but actually they were from about 5 to 13. These particular kids were about 11,12,13.

Q. How did you get into that?

A. I'm a member of the [DRAMA GROUP] which is based at [YOUTH ORGANISATION] and we did a show called 'Wicked' which was directed by, at that time, the management of activities,

NAME and she left. I do another drama group as well with a group of mentally handicapped kids. And she offered the job to me and STEPH, but STEPH was going to COUNTRY, and I really wanted that job. I also needed the experience to write down on my UCCA form. So I did that two weeks out of the month, I got paid for that as well, really well paid. I really, really enjoyed and I hope I can do it again this year for the whole month.

Q. That sounds fascinating. Do you do any other sorts of paid work?

A. No, not anymore. I used to work in [NAME OF SHOP]. I used to do quite a lot. No, I don't do any other paid work. I used to do quite a lot. I'd like to, I need the money, but I haven't got time

Q. Too busy with the other activities.

A. Yeah, quite a lot of other activities, but they are all unpaid.

Q. You said something about SOCIAL ACTIVITY.

A. Yeah, I used to be a member of the REDACTED. And I do a lot for my Duke of Edinburgh Award as well, my gold, passing that hopefully this June.

Q. What do you have to do for that?

A. There's three stages, there's bronze, silver and gold. Each stage takes you about two or three years, but it hasn't taken me that long, I'm running through it quite quickly. And in each thing, you have to do expedition planning, expedition training. You usually do three training sessions, then you do your expedition, it's fifteen miles for bronze, thirty miles for silver and fifty miles for gold. And then you have to do physical fitness, hobbies, community service and something else, I can't remember what. And you have to get a certain number of points for a certain amount of time, like you have to do community service for three months, six months, a year. And it goes up as you go up the stages, and I've got my bronze, I've got my silver and I'm on my gold now. I really enjoy that.

Q. What expedition are you planning?

A. Well we've done one, we did our first gold which actually went disastrously wrong in Exmore, and we've got our final in Scotland in the Isle of Skye in July. It's going to be hard, fifty miles in four days, it's just not funny. Four stone rucksack on your back as well.

Q. Could be nice, I've never been to the Isle of Skye.

A. I've never been to Scotland at all.

Q. I've seen some of the islands ...one of my friends comes from, which one is it that NAME is on, Shetlands, that's it. Pretty far north, cold. I quite fancy living in Scotland, but I think the cold would get to me. You do lots and lots of different activities.

A. Yeah, I do do quite a lot. They'll all stop once I've left home of course.

Q. Yeah.

A. I do a drama group with young people with learning difficulties, mentally handicapped, young adults of about 16 to 25. But I want to carry that on, because hopefully I'll work with that sort of group with [VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION]. I really enjoy that. That's the thing I most enjoy at the moment.

Q. I worked for [VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION] years ago, centuries ago, as a shorthand typist.

A. They are so good to us really, I can't believe how nice they all are. I keep getting letters saying 'hang on, hang on, you'll have your interview in June and then you can start straight away'. I want to get in and do it now, and you know, 'hang on, hang on'.

Q. When are you going to leave home then?

A. I'll leave home when I start with [VOLUNTARY ORGANISATION] because I've asked to be placed out of London. Definitely.

Q. Why are you so keen to move away from home?

A. I think it's time. I've got it cushy here, it is cushy living at home you get all your washing and cleaning done. I do my cleaning. It's going to be quite hard I think, managing, but I think it's also time to get out and experience other ways of living. I also do have home to fall back on, because I do have a year out. But going to university, and living away from home as well, I think it's quite a good preparation for that. I wouldn't like to leave school in June and go to university in October, and not have any experience of being away from home for that long. I'd quite like a sort of preparation period.

Q. Sounds sensible. I left school and worked for three years as a shorthand typist then went back.

A. Yeah, I think it's a good idea, having time away.

Q. It was quite handy, because you then counted as a mature student, even though I was only about 22 or something, so you got an extra grant which enabled you to live away from home.

A. That's good.

Q. Though these days the grants-

A. The grants are nothing anyway.

Q. That's a great problem, even when you are middle-class because the parents can't make it up

A. I think my parents have coveted money away already, especially for SCOTT. Except I don't think SCOTT will go to university.

Q. No, why not?

A. He's not very academic, more arty. He may go to art college or something like that. Nonetheless it will need money. But I don't think he'll go to university.

Q. Do you think your parents have influenced you in the direction you are going with all these voluntary activities and so on?

A. I don't think they've influenced me in the way I do voluntary activities. They've always encouraged us to do activities outside of school, you must have activities, they've always said. But they've certainly, it must be purely them, I do want to as well, but I mean, I've been conditioned to go to secondary school, to go to sixth form, take A levels, go to university, and that has been the line which has been set out for me since the year dot. In the sense that, because I want to do Social Admin - that was my choice, that was nobody(?) choice purely my own - I need experience so I've got to do voluntary work. So, it's wafted through that it is their influence but it's only the general which is their influence, the specific is my own.

Q. I was thinking about the drama and art, are they into that kind of area?

A. No, not at all, they are not at all arty. They can't play an instrument and me and SCOTT can, they can't really draw, and me and SCOTT can. I don't know where we got that from.

(Long silence)

Q. I've got some friends whose kids are very bright and everything, and the guy is a kind of mathematical and scientific genius but wanted to go to film school, so he's going to film school, that's his driving ambition.

A. It's interesting when people change from something to something so different.

Q. I think he was always interested, his parents were disappointed that he didn't pursue a career as a scientist, but that was what he wanted to do.

A. As long as they support you that's good. I know my parents wouldn't really mind what I did at university as long as I went.

Q. Can you think of anything else you'd like to tell me about?

A. I think I must have covered most of my life.

Q. Totally fascinating.

A. Not really.

Q. I thought of asking you a question, if you had to describe yourself, how would you describe yourself, what's your image of yourself?

A. That's funny because I was thinking about this, how I would describe myself, thinking of interviewing techniques at universities and how would I see myself going in there. I really don't know, I've no idea. Whatever you say it sounds almost pretentious. It mustn't be pretentious because you are talking about yourself, and you've got to have confidence in yourself. I certainly don't think I am confident in interview technique. To describe myself would be so hard. I think people find often because I am fairly tall and fairly big people find that a really big threat. So what I tend to do, I put myself down quite a lot, when I meet people for the first time, so they are not under awe of this sort of massive person. I know I do that quite a lot and my friends say I do that quite a lot. "You know you never show people what you're like, you always pretend you are this nothing person" and I say, "Well that's because they are frightened of me, and I don't want them to be frightened of me". So, I think I probably put myself down quite a lot when I meet people, certain people, some of the time. I think I might seem, on first appearance I would seem, fairly innocent and small. But I don't think I am. I think probably on reflection I'm not at all.

Q. Is that the impression that you think you create, or you want to create?

A. Sometimes I want to create that. It never usually works, because people can see straight through me. A lot of the time I don't really mind how I appear to people, if they can take the time to get to know you I think you needn't be worried about trying to impress them because they are nice already. There's only a few people who judge you immediately by what you look like, you stand immediately on guard. I don't really bother to try to impress people like that anyway, I think that's wrong. You can't judge people by what they look like. I've given up worrying.

Q. Yeah, you are what you are. Well I think that...thank you very much.

A. Oh, no it's my pleasure, quite interesting as well, especially for myself, I don't often talk about things, a lot of the time. Thinking about things you don't really think about, you take for granted.

Q. I think I would like to come around and look at these groups.

A. Yeah, you could go on forever, my dad was interested in that as well. He was thinking, god this is really fascinating, all these little groups. And I thought, god, you wouldn't really like to meet them, they are awful creeps. It is quite interesting the way it all divides up, it divided up so quickly, as soon as you went to sixth form, sort of where, and everyone sort of got round a circle into tiny, little groups, with just a few straggly people wandering round in the middle of it. It is interesting.

Q. I was at a single sex school as well all the way through, which I did think made a dramatic difference, because if I hadn't been I wouldn't have gone along the academic line that I did, even though I did a variation upon it. I had the impression that it made a big difference. And, also, just seeing women doing, it was all women teachers, so the women were teaching all the subjects, so you didn't get that split into.

A. We didn't have all women teachers, we had both. It was a girls' school but it wasn't particularly feminist, I'm not saying it should have been, but they didn't actually tell you the merits of being a woman and doing what you want to do, it was always... It wasn't do what you want to do because you are a woman and you are equal, it was do what a man can do, not a woman, it was always on a level comparable to the male level which I didn't like that. It didn't forward you as a person in your own right, it forwarded you as a person next to a man. Some of the teachers didn't do that, a lot of them were very good. We had a very good, STEPH might tell you about her as well, we had a very good maths teacher who I suspect was probably gay, though I'm not sure, who was very militant, very masculine looking and was lovely. We used to meet her outside school, she was so nice, one of the nicest people. She was actually one of the few teachers who did support you whatever you did for your own worth. A lot of the teachers didn't really bother. I don't think they treated you differently because it was a girls' school. It certainly made a difference to me in the first and second year, I wouldn't have had half the confidence had I gone to a mixed school.

Q. What about feminism, you mentioned it briefly, how do you relate to that?

A. I do, I mean I wouldn't consider myself a strident feminist, I mean I believe all the way in equal rights in any context whatsoever. But I do go on demonstrations, not on very many women's demonstrations, I've been on things like the anti-Gillick demonstration, pro-abortion rights I've been on. I think I'm probably rather a selfish feminist in that sense, I tend to sort of look at things in relation to me. I don't think that's unusual, I think that probably a lot of people do that. I read Spare Rib, my mum gets it, and I'll always argue in an argument in favour of women's freedom and lib and everything, but I'm not a through and through, stand up and fight feminist I don't think.

Q. I like your title, the selfish feminist-

A. I think I actually-

Q. Is your mum a feminist, would she describe herself -

A. I don't know, I think she'd probably say she was a feminist, I think she practices feminism better than I do. She runs her own business with a partner, they do quite a lot of about themselves, and also working for SEXUAL HEALTH ORGANISATION.

Q. What's her own business?

A. She runs a company [DETAILS REDACTED] and it's assertiveness training and communication skills, that sort of thing, and they manage a number of counsellors who get hired out by various companies to teach their employees various skills like that. I would say she probably was a feminist, but I also... She doesn't really talk about feminism much, but again she will always side with the feminist view. She balances out the household fairly equally. That is a result from her own feminism. My dad isn't a feminist I don't think, if men can be, I think they

probably can be feminist. But he always groans whenever we talk about it, and my brother, but I think he probably supports women's lib as well. To a certain degree.

Q. You sometimes hear stuff about post-feminism, like we've done that.

A. Yeah, I know, exactly, we haven't really got there, we haven't really got anywhere really. I think it's probably a male term, post-feminist.

Q. Yeah. Well, thank you very much again.

(Laughter.)