

LJH3
Sophia

Q: One of the things that we are interested in, in this research is young women's experiences and relationships and really what I was wondering was, what would you say was the most important relationships that you have had.

A: You mean relationship other than sexual relationship or with friends or -

Q: Well, whichever - what is the most important to you.

A: Well at the moment it is the relationship with my boyfriend but before that it has been a relationship with my best friend really, that has been most important.

Q: In what sort of way was that relationship important.

A: Well I think it was because it was the first time I had ever had somebody who I felt close enough to talk to, that is why it is important because we both share quite similar interests as well, so we do quite a lot of things together anyway. We're always together and I know that she is there for me and I am there for her as well, which has not been the case in past times.

Q: That is quite a recent thing.

A: Yes. In about the last two years really. Because before I had just groups of friends, but say within the group just 2 close friends, that was when I lived at home, but I was never really sure that they would be there for me if I needed them, but I know that she is, and has been.

Q: Is that your friend who you describe as being a little bit older than you?

A: Yes

Q: And you met through college.

A: Yes

Q: And that was a case with your boyfriend as well, you met through college.

A: Yes, you meet everybody at college. It is strange because most of the people that I have found close friends with are older than people I used to date and I think that has been the case since I left school, I have met older and older people rather than people the same age, because of the college I go to has a lot more mature students.

Q: Yes, and when you were at school you were within a sort of group of friends.

A: Yes, well a group of 3, with 2 other girls, but it was a very changing sort of relationship, where sometimes one person would be more popular than another and it was changing like that, then as we got older we mixed with more people, but I had close friends but not people I could go to or talk to.

Q: That seems to be one of the things that you value most in the relationships.

A: Well yes, I think it is a thing that has recently come to me the fact that I can talk to other people, because I have always had, I have got three sisters, and I am quite close to them as well but I have never been able to talk to them about my problems, and still not, but my boyfriend and my other friend it has only come recently that I have been able to talk to them, I do not know whether it is because of them people or it is that I have changed anyhow, or they have made a difference to me.

Q: Yes. Have you found, I mean this is not the first boyfriend that you have had.

A: No, no.

Q: But it is a different sort of situation.

A: Well. I think the thing is when I was in school I had a boyfriend for quite a long time, about three years, before that I was the sort of person who would like, had all my own problems and all the things that I thought and I would not really tell anybody, not my parents because I was not really close to them at all, and not my sisters, I was close but in a different way really sort of, because I found you would keep everything to yourself.

Q: Yes

A: And the first boyfriend I had he was the first person I was really able to talk to, and I talked to him quite a lot about myself and I talked to him so that he was like breaking the ground, and I feel that most of the people I have been able to talk to have been boyfriends and if I cannot talk to them then they don't really matter.

Q: Yes.

A: Since then it has made me able to talk to my friends, sisters and that.

Q: Yes. You couldn't speak to your parents, you felt you were not having..

A: No no, I have never been close to my parents at all they are a very non emotional family, you know, that you do not share anything, any emotion, there is never any sort of physical contact or anything like that.

Q: Yes.

A: Then it is only that you don't talk to them and you don't tell them anything, because they are not really any help even if you were to.

Q: What about that first boyfriend, was that a sexual relationship or..?

A: Well it was, after about a year of seeing him, or about a year and a half, yes.

Q: What made you decide that it would become a sexual relationship.

A: I don't know really, I think the reason why I was in that relationship because it was the kind of thing to do, I mean that was not the reason why I stayed with him, I found myself falling into a pattern, like other people who had boyfriends and stayed with them for ages and I think it was a kind of progression, things to do, but it wasn't really just that, I mean, it just came about, but I was aware of thinking about it quite a lot before, but it just seemed like some kind of natural progression between us, and think that is why.

Q: How old were you then?

A: 17.

Q: Well had you thought about contraception, or I mean, did you use contraception when you first started?

A: Yes I did. I didn't go on the pill when I first started, in fact I didn't go on the pill until quite recently, I was trying to avoid it for as long as possible, I think that contraception at that age is - you can either go on the pill or use a condom, they are the only choices to you, and I know that I did not want to go on the pill at all, because I had decided that I did not want to take the pill because I didn't see why I should take something internally and mess up my body when he could use a condom, but since then I have changed my opinion about that and I would rather rely on myself than anybody else.

Q: Yes. You think it is because you have control over what happens in that concept.

A: Well, yes, I think that I am using the pill now as well because have I been in this relationship for well over a year, and I also thought about having to use a condom all the time because of AIDS, and I had an AIDS test and so did my boyfriend, so then we decided it was alright to use the pill, but I think that it is because you are in control, well more in control, because with a condom it is still your responsibility in a way, but then you are not wholly in control of it.

Q: Yes. You have actually had the test to see for aids?

A: Yes.

Q: Why did you think you might be, or did you think you might be?

A: Well, because I went to America, and I slept with somebody in America without any contraception or any condoms or anything and it was just such a big mistake that I decided it was time to put a stop to things like that and I should become more aware of the risks I was taking, and so then I decided that I should go on the pill before do manage(?) to have an AIDS test because I wanted to not be thinking that I would be passing it on and it was a long time after that, it was longer than 6 months that I had the test done.

Q: Yes. Do you feel confident about it now?

A: I don't know whether I feel confident, but I think I have done what I could do not to be passing it on.

Q: Yes. But that was at the time you actually slept with a person in the States, you hadn't thought about AIDS.

A: Well I had thought about aids, but at the time, but I had thought about AIDS and was nervous about is, but at the time, when it came to it, I did not use a condom or anything, and it was just irresponsible, I knew at the time I was just being irresponsible, so then I said it just could not happen anymore, because I let myself get into a situation where I wasn't in control and I was in a sexual relationship which was a complete mistake and now it is like that I should have ever done it and I thought I am never doing it again, I'm never doing it again, I'm going to sort it all out now for good.

Q: Yes, but it sounds as if it was a sort of salutary experience for you and it wasn't terribly pleasant for you at the time.

A: Because I got pregnant from that experience, which is why I had such a turnaround afterwards and decided I should take control of what was going on as opposed to, I mean it is alright to think in advance as well to use a condom all the time, but when it then comes to it down to it either you won't or maybe you will, and that is what happened then, I didn't, and it was a complete mistake, so I decided I would never let that happen again.

Q: That is more about the fears of pregnancy.

A: Not only the fear of pregnancy, really because it was a nightmare time, this was, but I also found out I had pre-cervical cancer as well you see, at the time and the whole thing was just linked to the fact that I had been having sex irresponsibly and it was time to change it. It wasn't just linked to pregnancy it was linked to mistakes, and that was a mistake. It was a big mistake, I knew at the time it was, but I thought, well you know you just forget about it, but then I thought you cannot forget about it, and then someone said to me, a Doctor said to me, every time you sleep with a partner, you are sleeping with all the partners

they have ever slept with and I started imagining these figures in my head and that was going into thousands. I decided to change it then.

Q: How long ago was that?

A: That was last October.

Q: So you felt you had had rather a lot of sexual partners before that.

A: Well I think that in the first year of college, and before I went to college I had three sexual partners I think, it was two and then at beginning of college, I slept with other people, in that year I slept with, I don't know, more people than I had before and I thought yes OK, the number is getting larger and I shouldn't have quite so many, and I kept thinking it is too many and most of them were relationships that may have meant something to me but didn't necessarily mean anything at the first time of sleeping with. So I did think I had had too many that I hadn't considered sex enough, at the time it did seem like though I did know a lot of other people who were sleeping with far more people than I was and it seemed OK and then I became aware that it wasn't OK really, that it was OK on the surface for those people and I wonder if it was ever OK for them either to have some importance.

Q: When you say it wasn't OK it was.....

A: Well it was, I know there is a girl, who is a friend at college who has a lot of one night stands, and the reason she has these one night stands, is because it just makes her feel better at the time, but then, it is not better afterwards, you know and that is why I felt that at the time I perhaps needed somebody and it wasn't a balanced thing it was very insecure relationship, there was one particular relationship where I was sleeping with someone and I thought I was having a relationship, but they didn't know that they were having a relationship, like that type of thing. It kept getting worse, I would make one mistake, then another and, this mistake in America was just one too many, but I haven't considered properly that it hasn't been some sort of equal thing, not that I was involved more than they were, but that it wasn't kind of a joint thing.

Q: It is difficult to judge that though, isn't it, I mean you seem to find it difficult to judge.

A: Well I think..

Q: To make assumptions about

A: Well I know why it is, because my sister was the same, she also at the age of 20, which is the same age as me, developed pre-cervical cancer and genital warts, and she says, and I think it is the same for me, whatever affection we have lacked at home, then if it has been offered to us somewhere else, we have just taken it and it hasn't really mattered what was involved, it was someone to hold you and that was OK at the time. It was only later that you thought it was not right, it was alright to be held at the time but afterwards, in retrospect, if that is all they wanted was to have sex, it is not exactly what you wanted.

Q: How do you feel about the relationship you have got now?

A: Well, that is completely different, a so much more equal thing, I think our feelings are the same on both sides. I also didn't start seeing him for a long time you know for it was just after I had had an abortion and things like that, I didn't want to see anybody, and I didn't want to just fall into the thing you know, if he

likes me it will do, it doesn't matter you know what feel, so I left it for a long time, about 4 months or something and didn't see him, and I actually decided to go into the relationship, not just sort of went along with it, I decided, and it is an active decision making relationship instead of just jogging along.

Q: So much different to the other relationships.

A: Well because I have played a more active part in it I think.

Q: Yes.

A: I haven't just been willing because this person likes me so I will go along with it, you know, and I will persuade myself that I like them, whereas in fact I don't really, it is just a fact that it is somebody there you know.

Q: Yes. It is interesting that your sister had a similar sort of pattern as well, isn't it.

A: Yes it is, it was only when I talked to her about this, this was the first thing I had talked to her about, because I had had the abortion before but I hadn't told her about that, but I told her about this, and we were discussing it, perhaps my younger sister would fall into the same pattern as well.

Q: Yes.

A: We are not really sure is what is going to happen, but it is strange that we have gone through the same things, that she has slept with people because they were there, because you know it is somebody to touch you that would be OK and it is only afterwards that you realise that it isn't enough just to have that, if you're not really involved with them, if you're not taking part, if it isn't really a relationship you are taking part in, it's just something that you are going along with.

Q: Yes. It's sort of complicated isn't it, because it is related to how you feel that your parents felt about you and behaved with you, and how you feel about yourself as a result.

A: Yes.

Q: As if you were not able to take control over anything in those earlier days, it was a reaction to whatever was appearing in front of you.

A: I think that the first boyfriend I had was different to that, I know I started seeing him in a way, just gone along with it at first, but then it was quite a good relationship.

Q: Yes. It was longer and you were friends for a long time before.

A: Yes. But it was the other relationships where, I started the relationships because I was just going along with what was going on at the time, I think it was the series of relationships I had when I was in my first year at college, it wasn't that I wanted to take control over the other person, I just wanted to take an active part, I wasn't, I would be constantly doing things I didn't want to and afterwards I would be chastising myself at the time. I know what it is, at the time I didn't realise why but it was that, you know, if there was someone there who would say, yes come out with me, I could say no, but then if there was some physical contact then I couldn't say no. That is what happened. It took me a long time to work out that those were the situations where I had a lack of power.

Q: But, you feel now that you have worked through that traumatic experience really I suppose, but is there something else that helped you to.

A: Well I think I have learned what it was that I was doing before and I know what it is to avoid in the future. So I am still in the learning process.

Q: Yes. But obviously, the kind of relationship you are having now is helpful, I mean the two people in the relationship, if you feel you're not taking control of it, I mean it leaves a space for the other person to take control.

A: It is much more well balanced this time, we're both taking part rather than just jogging along.

Q: Yes. But you say you know about the future in respect of this relationship because you say you think you may go abroad with this person.

A: Yes, I'm not really sure what will happen at the end of college but my boyfriend is not really sure whether he wants to go abroad or what, or whether he wants to do a job here or not, we both do not know what we want to do, you see, we will have to make some sort of compromise. I don't know, I'm not sure. Wait until the time.

Q: Have you got any idea at all about what you want to do, haven't you thought about it at all.

A: I have thought about it in great length, but I just cannot come up with anything, I know that I would like to go abroad again because I like just to keep going abroad and having a change. I know that I have to pay off my overdraft and I have to do a job here and I cannot keep running off every now and again, I feel I cannot do that all the time, it's sort of like a way of escaping, I would go away for say 2 months or 6 months or something and I keep wondering, because before there was always college, and I would be coming back to go to college, but now there is nothing to come back for, so I am waiting to see what all the options are really, discover what options are open to me, before I decide I am going to be a brain surgeon or something.

Q: Yes. What kind of things are open to you with your degree?

A: I had thought I would take a year off and do an MA, you know and decide on an MA, because I am not very sure what I want to do and I'm not sure what degree I will get, so I am going to wait and see, and just work in between and think about some sort of job later, but I am trying to avoid employment for as long as possible.

Q: Yes, I know how you feel. What other places have you been to apart from the States?

A: After I left school I went to SCANDINAVIA, then I went to France this summer, I just sort of said to myself, I took a year off and went away and I said, each summer after college I would go away again, whether I had the money or not I would go anyway, and I did I went to America, then I went to France this summer, I'm just thinking what shall I do next, shall I go away or shall I stay, I don't know I haven't yet decided, I think I will wait until after the exams and see how I feel.

Q: You're taking exams this summer?

A: Yes this year, because I finish then.

Q: When are they exactly?

A: June. I have a lot of work to get in before then.

Q: How do you think it is going, your work?

A: Well I have a lot to do, I have a dissertation to do, have to get that done.

Q: I suppose it is a bit pressured.

A: Yes. there is a lot of pressure building up now, I'm always working under pressure, it's the only way I ever work.

Q: I sympathise with that as well. When you were talking before about risk, that you began to realise that you were taking risks with yourself in these relationships. Do you think you have taken risks in any other areas of your life?

A: I think I have, I think that I have in a way because I sort of, when I left school I was supposed to be going to do a degree in something and I just decided not to do it and said I haven't got a place to go and do not want to do anything else so I'll just not do it, and I will have a year and I will decide to do something else, and I will leave my home and leave everybody that I know and go somewhere else. So I think I took quite a risk then because I did not know what I would be getting into, also I knew what I would be getting away from. So it was a risk, not that it couldn't be any worse than it was at home, but at least it would be different even if it was bad wherever I went. I think I took risks in that way.

Q: Yes.

A: I'm not sure if I took risks anywhere else.

Q: The other things might be drinking and smoking, drugs, this sort of stuff.

A: I don't really consider those being a risk, well they are becoming common place now.

Q: Well do you for example, would you take drugs, or do you take drugs?

A: Well I don't very often, but I don't really consider that as a risk, just that it becomes especially for a student at college.

Q: Lots of your friends?

A: It is difficult to know the people that don't take drugs. They are very few and far between. It is quite frightening I can tell you. But most people that I know don't take drugs very often, very occasional.

Q: So it's not particular getting into a private hold sub culture of drug taking and seeing at as a way of life or anything.

A: No, also my boyfriend when he was very young used to take a lot of drugs, I think he just stopped because he saw what was happening to all his friends, so he doesn't take drugs at all and that is why I don't really, because it is something that he doesn't like at all anymore, because he has seen what it does to his friends.

Q: Would any of that drug taking that you know of be, I mean people be injecting at all?

A: No, I don't know anything about injecting.

Q: Just going back now to the AIDS.

A: Yes. I think that most people that I know, I don't know whether it would lead on to that in the future, you see because I always think of it as some sort of developing process that they will either stop or move onto something else.

Q: But it is interesting what you say about sort of being amongst a group of people who do it or influence others who or doing it or not doing it which is, but that was applying to what you were saying about...

A: Yes, because it becomes very normal, like the girl I know that has one night stands all the time, she makes you feel it is very normal and there are a lot of

other people, it's very normal to have relationships like that, but then you see the adverts on the media all the time telling you that it's bad to have so many sexual partners, this is why you have got all these diseases, AIDS, and this is why there is an increase in cervical cancer, in people under 25 and all this. I mean I think at the beginning I was thinking it was normal, then I suddenly had this backlash when I thought it was a really bad thing that I had done by sleeping with these people, but I thought no, but it may not have been a great choice I have made but I mean I did sort of choose to do it, but you shouldn't have other people telling you you're bad for doing this. OK you took the risk and that, I don't know I'm not sure what I'm going to say here, but you take these risks and you don't need some sort of moralising media to tell you this when.....

Q: I was thinking, I was wondering how you felt about these AIDS messages that have been coming out through the media.

A: I think they are quite good because they have changed my way of thinking, they have made me aware, and I think it was also a thing the doctor had said to me about all these people that I have slept with, having slept with all their partners, and I think that was probably the best way to think about it, because then it does, it could go into thousands.

Q: I remember one of the ads where they had the two people in bed, and then all the people that they had slept with.

A: And all the things on the programme where a man had slept with 30 women and he had infected about 25 of them, and all the ones they had slept with. I think they are good the ads, in a way, they make you aware that it exists, but it is so far away it's on the TV and in the newspapers and it is difficult to relate things that are so far away to your own life, when they say always use a condom when you sleep with someone. It is not so much for me anymore, but I imagine that some people would be embarrassed to say I want to use a condom, and it isn't really, I know, perhaps you would like a way to get round that embarrassment and it is really the fault of the other person I suppose if you cannot say to them, it's your fault as well for not being close enough, but if you cannot say I'm going to use a condom, how do I know if you have AIDS and how do you know that I haven't. But I find that that is the problem, that the media is so far away, and it doesn't really relate on a personal level.

Q: Through your own experience really. But what you say about this problem of being able to ask the other person for what you want, I think a lot of people would have that difficulty.

A: I think that especially if the relationship is perhaps a one night stand or something like that, that you may not even know the person very well, it is very difficult to say. Unless you are quite strong and assertive I don't think that it's easy if they are going to completely ignore the fact.

Q: You think that is a likely response that they would just ignore the fact?

A: Well, a friend of mine last week slept with someone without a condom, without anything, and you know it doesn't seem to have occurred to her that he could have AIDS and it didn't occur to him that she could have AIDS, it was a spur of the moment thing, and I think that is what happens too often. Some people will

not say, well I haven't got a condom so we won't do it, but if they haven't gone one they will do it anyway. It just won't occur to some people.

Q: That was another thing I was thinking about, I mean, all that is said about safe sex, it has mainly been around condom use, have you thought about any of the other things that might be involved in safe sex.

A: Yes I have, but I think that most people would ignore that if they were to think they had used a condom, well that is it, they have made a confession at least. But I think it does happen like that, it's difficult because, all these adverts don't really take into account the spur of the moment things.

Q: Yes. I suppose the other thing I was thinking of as well, I mean taking you back to when you first started to think about having sex and so forth, at what point, before you actually had sexual intercourse for example, you probably had some other sort of sexual activity with your boyfriend, and at what point did you decide to move on to sexual intercourse and whether that sort of, well I suppose what I was thinking was, before you actually had done that, those other sexual activities, were sexual activities.

A: Yes.

Q: But once you have done that, those other sexual activities..

A: I mean, I think at the time then I wasn't even noticing that, that was about 5 years ago and I wasn't even aware of AIDS then, whereas it was around, it was rife in America then, but it hadn't really hit anything here, and I wasn't aware of it at all you know, I wasn't aware of AIDS, I wasn't aware of any of the risks. I was aware of them in the back of my mind, but it was you know the sort of thing, oh I will be alright you know, but it was different by the fact that my boyfriend also hadn't had any sexual activities before either, so I suppose a moderate safeguard.

Q: Yes.

A: But I think a lot of people take the attitude that in cold blood they would say, yes I would never have sex without contraception, never have this, never have that, but at the time, it is very difficult to consider all this, well you forget, not forget but you decide to overlook these things. I'm not really sure how you can ever educate anybody to think otherwise. I think that in the relationships I have been in, it has all been left to me, you know in the relationships, in the interim when they weren't particularly successful, that contraception or anything was just left to me, it wasn't even mentioned, it would be just up to me to make sure I had it, and if I didn't well, you know, it was my fault.

Q: That was your problem.

A: I think that that happens quite a lot, I mean there are people, and there are men who are very very conscious of this, the fact that you need condoms and contraception or whatever else. There are also a lot of men who are completely selfish, and that's the thing, you would have to be twice as strong as they were, you would have had to have prepared yourself for this, you would have to say you know, I want to use a condom, and you know, tell them, whereas it shouldn't be up to you to say it, tell them, it should be a joint thing where you agree together.

Q: I suppose if it was a situation where it wasn't somebody you knew particularly well, that you would have the confidence to be able to say.

A: Yes. Because you have to be far more assertive. I know I have been in situations where I haven't, I have simply thought to myself well look well when I got pregnant, I thought to myself, I'm not using a condom here, I'm not using anything, but I just couldn't say, I just couldn't force myself to say look, you know, and then the consequences were disastrous, but I knew at the time what I was doing, and I knew that I just couldn't say it, and I knew that it was wrong, I couldn't be able to say it, that the whole thing was wrong.

Q: That the relationship was wrong.

A: Yes

Q: Do you feel now, supposing your relationship with your current boyfriend comes to an end and you get into another one, do you feel confident that you would be able to be assertive this time?

A: I don't know how I would be, because I was telling myself, if this relationship comes to an end, I'm never falling in the same trap as before, that I won't, I'll make sure that I'm sort of thinking that, Oh God, I bet I will, I don't want to, but I don't know whether I am really trying you know to say look if all these things happen, you should learn from it, I'm more than 50% confident that it won't, but not a full 100%.

Q: Yes. Complicated though. You seem to be developing a whole lot of self-awareness.

A: I think that I had self-awareness on paper for a long time, then I have a lot of things on paper and theories that I find difficult to apply to myself if I don't have the confidence, and it is like my friend, as though she is the same, that we have all these things on paper and all these theories that we say yes, yes we do this, but when it comes down to it, would we do it, have we done it. I think it takes quite a long time to develop, you can't just suddenly discover things and say yes, I will behave like that in future, that you can't do that, you have got to work towards it.

Q: Are there other areas you are thinking of, not just sexual behavior?

A: Well I'm just thinking of it in terms of feminism, I have always sort of been in search of equality, but I think since I went to a polytech, I have sort of learnt much more about feminism and always saying yes, I wouldn't let anybody do that to me and I wouldn't let them do that and other things, but then you know, those are the sort of areas I am talking about.

Q: I think that is often a difficulty, I find it difficult myself to put a theory into practice sort of thing, and what you think should be happening and what you think you should do.

A: What makes it worse, it makes you think that you wish you had never heard of feminism, because then at least you would just be in the situation, you may not be happy but you would not be tormenting yourself for not having done that as well, done what you thought you should have done, but you weren't able to do, but I've not quite reverted yet.

Q: Yes. Also I suppose, in a sense, if it is not necessarily going to get easier, but you will get more used to it because having done it before in a different situation.

It is always as well to, when you are talking about those friends of yours who do things which make it seem like the norm to you because they acted as if it was normal, but there seem to be quite a few of them doing it. I mean, it's also the norm that people have this problem between what they think they should do and what they are actually doing.

A: I know there are a lot of people around that just make you think, how can you get over it, how can you break the barrier between what you think and what you actually do. Because you actually may feel the same as you think, but then you just can't put it into practice, but it is going much better.

Q: I suppose as well, I'm sometimes criticised for surrounding myself with likeminded people, so that you have got that back up of support. In fact you just might get attacked for doing the opposite. You have this group behind you that would be shocked and horrified if you were to behave in a different way.

A: Well, I have got both, I mean I've got friends who, I think in the first year I had a different group of friends, because I was living in halls, and there were people I didn't get on with at all really, but they made me feel like it was the norm and I really doubt that because I didn't get on with them particularly well and I moved away to different groups, and now it's all a mixture of people in there who it is the norm, but then it isn't the norm, so it is a bit different. I think it is not just your friends, it just seems to be sort of, in society, in general use, I've watched TV and there always seems to be so many people sleeping with so many different people, and even in sitcoms with your family unit, I think at that age I thought, when I was about 19 or 20 I thought it was that you had more choice, but I really wasn't having any choice in the matter, I was just going along with it, it's like the whole thing of the sixties that sex is free for all. More of it's available for more men, there was no risk with it and at the time I hadn't realised that that was the case, that you had to actually decide, not to just go along because it seems to be alright.

Q: Yes. That was what I was thinking of you getting much more self-awareness, I think the way you were talking about yourself as you were, and indeed some of your friends, I think a lot of young women are like that, that they feel themselves to be, you know relatively helpless, but not having very much control over the situation.

A: I'm not a particularly passive person, but it's just that I, no I shouldn't say, I was really thinking why am I doing this, I think it took a shock in my life for me to say well, I'm not doing it anymore. But I think there are probably a lot of people who may go all their entire life taking risks and not come off any worse for it, who can perhaps continue in that way. In a way I was glad that these things happened to me because I got something positive out of them.

Q: Yes. It certainly sounds like that. It must have been dreadful at the time.

A: Well, it's just that they both came so close together, you know, it just made me feel like I deserved them, because I had sex with this person, I knew at the time it was a complete mistake and it was like, 'ha, ha', it is all your own fault. I really did feel like that, I got this leaflet from the doctor about cervical cancer saying, you know the media is putting it down to people having more sexual partners, and that just stayed in my mind, nothing else in the entire thing stayed in my mind, it's

like I've got this because it's my own fault. I don't know whether you know, my sister has already had the same thing, but I hadn't been able to learn from her, I think because she hadn't discussed it with me, because I was younger at the time, but then we both discussed it very intensely with my other younger sister at the time. She will probably rebel against us.

Q: That is a problem, the problem you said yourself that in a sense you know exactly, well you have got pretty clear what it is what you are going to do, but then you cannot actually do it, because she might decide well I'm mean I'm not going to following in your footsteps.

A: I was thinking while we were talking, it's all very easy to tell her you know, don't fall into the traps we have fallen into, but her needs will be the same, that she will want somebody, she will fall into unsuitable relationships, but she will have to develop some self-awareness. I don't know how it will happen.

Q: How old is she now?

A: She is 19. So she is quite close.

Q: How old is your other sister.

A: My younger sister, there is 3 years between us and I have another older sister who is 9 years older than me. I think she has done the same thing. She has always had much, much older men, she has always had relationships, long relationships with older men, instead of a lot of fleeting relationships. That is sort of how she has done it I suppose better than me, though I don't know whether it is. It is not quite so easy to talk to her, because I'm very close to her, but I'm not sure that she admits that the reasons why she has these relationships, I'm not sure that she admits the reason in the way that we..

Q: Recognises it, it is sorted of rooted in the family.

A: Because my Mum and Dad are very unpopular with everybody, you see, I've got, [COMPLEX FAMILY DETAILS].

Q: Where do they fit in?

A: [COMPLEX FAMILY DETAILS]. I'm not very close to them, because there is a very sort of sexist division in my family, the boys didn't do anything, the girls did everything. The boys are very mechanically minded, you know they are AGRICULTURAL AND MULTI-SKILLED TRADE, and all this sort of thing and whereas my sisters are sort of geared towards education, have all gone to college, except for my younger sister, well she is in a technical college or something, and that is because my elder sister has set the pattern and in a way she performed the role of model for me and my other sisters in a way that my Mother is nothing really to do with us. Well she does, she thinks she does, she has no bearing on my life really, I don't take her in to consideration when I make any decisions. I feel it is my elder sister I have to measure up to, not her.

Q: Where does your mother live in relation to you, I mean is it far away?

A: She lives in North WALES, it is quite far away yes. My brothers, it is amazing the division, that they stayed at home having the cooking and cleaning done for them until they found a wife and then they moved away and it is terrible, it is just horrendous that the only way, I think they wanted to leave as well, they were unhappy, but they didn't feel, they were not tempted by any education, although I think they are both quite intelligent, that they just squandered it, they were not

interested in that, but they stayed at home and the only way to leave was to get married to somebody. I am sure they chose quite carefully who they married. One of my brothers has got 2 children the other one hasn't, but their wives seem the same as one another to me. All the cooking, all the cleaning all of this and it's just. The division is so large between the boys and the girls, in the family, it's amazing, it's laughable to think about it, that it can exist in the same family, such differences. It's quite dramatic.

Q: Also, it is a strange sort of reversal, the boys stayed at home until they found a wife, quite often it is girls, and the girls went in for education and left home.

A: That is all because of my sister, because she set the pattern, I think she is a quite strong person, because she had to look after us all, from when she was big enough, she was always looking after other children. She was very clever, she didn't get any encouragement from my parents, but I think it was my grandmother who, it was a teacher who had encouraged her to sort of get herself educated, and I think she set the pattern.

Q: But the boys they...

A: But it is strange they stayed at home and waited for a substitute housekeeper to come along, then they got married. It makes me laugh when I think about it that it exists like that. My parents, I don't know what they think about it, they're quite often saying, 'now why don't they do anything', but they sort, but it doesn't go home to them, it doesn't make any difference at all. But it makes me laugh when I think about it, that it exists. And my parents, I don't know what they think about it, they're quite often saying now why aren't they doing anything, it doesn't go home, it doesn't make any difference.

Q: And your elder sister and the one immediately above you, are they in Wales as well?

A: [REDACTED FAMILY DETAIL]. My mother never learns, she goes through the same stage with all of the girls anyway, in that you are growing up, so that there is a certain amount of tension, and she has been through it 4 times, and I suppose with the boys as well, and she never learns. She does the same thing you know, she is terrible and she is always arguing with you, she has always got such a bad mood on, I don't think she works out that the same thing has happened so many times.

Q: I suppose it is quite difficult to tell your mother something like that, what you can suggest that that this might be happening.

A: Well you can suggest it, but it doesn't seem to make any difference, I mean I am not particularly fond of them, when I lived at home I actually despised them, since I moved away and she is not, now she is further away, I don't mind her so much. But you can tell her something, but it doesn't make any difference anyway. She doesn't have any complex on some things.

Q: What about your Father, what kind of relationship do you have with him.

A: I prefer my Father to my Mother, I think I prefer him as he has got moderately more of a brain than my Mother, which is very unfair I know, but I can't help it. But he is very unapproachable as well, you know, he is just sort of there, you just sort of talk to him and that is it. He is very - what she says goes, supposedly, and it never does, because when I was younger I didn't need to rebel against my

parents, because I could always get away with what I wanted, because they would never know, because they would never really sort of check up on me, I could just get away with it all the time, I didn't have to rebel against them in the way my friends did. I mean, I prefer him, but I am not very close to him either.

Q: So it sounds like a combination of things, and one they were not very sort of loving.

A: They weren't very loving, and they hate each other as well. They argue all the time, they have been like this for, I don't know, 30 years or something. It makes you think why they are staying together, but they would be helpless apart, because they have to stay together because there is nothing else for them to do, I don't think they could exist on their own. I don't think that gives me particularly a great amount of confidence in long lasting relationships.

Q: But one of the things I have noticed was, and I think that sometimes in young women think in terms of romance and love or something like that, this isn't world

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A: But I do think in terms like that, I'm really torn, because I always seem to think that romance is constructed by men to lure people into certain roles, because you have to fulfil a certain role. It does occur to us but I haven't mentioned it, it is something that does matter to me, the first person I had was the most unromantic person in the world, and I always wanted to do things for him and him, to do things for me, it just didn't happen, he was just so unromantic. But I think that the boyfriend I have now is very romantic and it makes me feel much better, because I feel that I can do the things I wanted to do you know, I can give him a bunch of flowers, whereas if I gave the other boyfriends they would wonder what it was and what do I do with this, plant it or something. It does occur to me, that perhaps not in relation to the other relationships that I had. Not when I am talking about them in hard terms.

Q: Yes, that's right. When enmeshed with them it hasn't occurred to you. And it is sometimes conflict and sounds, I don't know, I don't know. Would have been odd for you to bring it up in the context of a conversation in a way.

A: Yes. maybe, got swept off my feet by a man with a bunch of flowers.

Q: Let's backtrack a little bit to thinking about when you were back at school, about the sex education, you said you veered away from all that, that in the questionnaire you were saying it seemed that you did have a certain amount of sex education, but it's not actually..

A: It's very difficult, because I was trying to think where I found out about these things, I think that you find it out from other people more than you get taught it, and that's what I found in the questionnaire you were asking me, where did you find about this, I found I ticked mass media a lot because magazines, I'm always reading magazines, I found out a lot of things there and it is also from friends, but a lot of other things like, it hadn't occurred to me that in school nobody has ever mentioned homosexuality, except if you had read about it in a book. Which makes you think that there are people will never read about them. I found out about periods when I was 11, I knew about them before vaguely that they had a woman come in to tell you all about them, and she came back 2 years later to tell you about, tampons and venereal diseases, it was like that you were 2 years

older you get to know about these things. Most of it was very biological, because I did biology 'O' and 'A' level. It was just drawing diagrams, this is what it looks like and this is what happens, but I do remember in the 3rd year, when I was 13 or 14 having sort of, we had got to the stage of biology where it was reproduction, and we had started with animals, we saw a lot of films about animals and then it came to human beings, but it was more about the biological aspect, it wasn't sort of about relationships. You didn't really learn anything about relationships at all. It was more how sperms swim up and this is what happens rather than anything that would be that useful to you.

Q: So you didn't think it was really adequate to you.

A: No not, really because biology is so technical that it didn't really tell you anything that you wanted to know. I remember watching a programme on TV when I was older, it was about education, some drama about school that was going to pieces or something, and a man there was really radical and when it came to sex education he said, write down any questions and any words that you don't understand on paper and we will put them in the box and discuss them. And the things they discussed were the things that nobody ever asked, about masturbation, nobody ever mentions that in school. Masturbation they never mention it, the same as homosexuality, or orgasms they never mention that, that is why I say it is so technical. This is what happens, it is not how it would happen to you or anybody else, just a body, bodily functions that go on, it doesn't tell you anything else. I suppose that magazines, young girl's magazines fulfil that well mainly, things like that, at the time you think they are terrible magazines, but I suppose they are really quite useful, because they do discuss quite a lot of things. They never mention them at school. It made me laugh that nobody ever mentioned homosexuality and what goes on there, I suppose there is no biological thing they can tell you, so they didn't bother, like diagrams they did for the other.

Q: Now it's problematic, sex education is Section 28, but it is still called that. One thing we are hoping to do with the results from the study, to find out what people felt out about sex education and what the analyses were and what the figures produce, and to try to improve sex education. Yes, that is one of the things we are hoping to do and the other thing on the AIDS education, is to ask you a bit more about that. You say that most of the stuff you had seen was on the mass media?

A: I had never heard about AIDS at school, I'm sure, I don't know how long ago that AIDS became a big thing, I know that it was earlier in America, but how long ago was it that AIDS was actually recognised as spreading fast. Because nobody ever mentioned it to me in school at all. I remember seeing a programme about it, I think I was about 16 or 17, and how it was spreading fast in the gay community in America. But that is it, nobody ever mentioned it in school. I think it was after I left school they sent all those leaflets, but nobody mentioned it, and they didn't really mention venereal disease, I only just remember learning about it at biology 'A' level, and we learnt about syphilis, but we learnt about it as a disease, not how you catch it really, that you should take precautions, we learnt about how this happens, these cells do this, these are the symptoms, and we

didn't learn about it there, but a woman that came in told us about it. But she was so very moral about sex anyway, that she was quite old and she was retiring when she came to us in the 3rd year. But venereal disease seems to be a thing that bad people got, I suppose we thought if we weren't bad you wouldn't get it. It doesn't really help you, does it.

Q: That has sort of moral overtones to it. What about abortion? Did you learn about that at school?

A: I don't remember anybody mentioning abortion, the thing that perhaps maybe she mentioned it. The young girls got pregnant, and lots of people had come to her, they had got pregnant in their 4th year or something. She just told you how not to get pregnant, she didn't really mention abortion, and the effect it could have on you or anything. It was there and there wasn't a choice really, it was just how not to get pregnant, you might have to have an abortion, you might have to adopt it or something, we didn't really talk about abortion at all, it was just what you might have to have if you got pregnant.

Q: It's all sort of a bit distant, as you say, lots of things you have been through in terms of what you learned, the distance from your own experience, in a way it only becomes real to you when it becomes part of you.

A: Yes. I think especially teaching the biological way makes you think that it is something happening somewhere else, it isn't really happening to you, or it wouldn't happen to you.

Q: You think that there are ways in which it could be taught which would be much more help to people. Actually you were thinking before weren't you, that it would be hard to get it across to people without experience.

A: Yes I think it is difficult, but I am sure there must be a way in which you could teach sex education without making it such a faraway thing. I know there is a lot of embarrassment when they teach it, everybody is really embarrassed, including the teacher, I don't know, I think when I saw this man in the film, ask questions and all the questions they asked were about masturbation and things like that. Maybe you could do something like that.

Q: What about single sex or mixed, it is more embarrassing if there are both sexes present. You might be able to talk about things more easily if there was just one sex present.

A: I don't know about that, it is quite embarrassing because there was always a lot of boys making sexual inuendoes. There would be silence during sex education, but it would be afterwards. I don't know whether it would be better or not, I know we learnt about periods, that was just all girls. Maybe it is better just single sex, but then it is influencing a strange divide.

Q: I suppose you could do it both ways, because you could have it single sex, then all come together to talk about it for the kind of issues, sort of approach.

A: I think people will never ask questions, children will never ask anything because they are so embarrassed. They think that everybody knows about this and it is only them that doesn't know, that is why the anonymous questions are quite good.

Q: The teacher could even slip a few in, other questions which other people might be too embarrassed even to put on paper.

A: It always seems to be that everyone else seems to know and you are the only that doesn't know, it's probably not like that at all. You think they know a lot and they know nothing at all.

Q: I always remember not knowing at all, and being completely confused when people made sexual innuendoes or made comments to that affect.

A: Yes, you mean indirect things like, she doesn't know, he doesn't know. What sort of things will you be doing with this afterwards, you know, with the results of the cassette.

Q: There will be quite a lot of information at various times, as you can tell from the sort of various area that we have covered. We are putting it all together and the program is financed by the Income and Social Research Council, with money from the government, sort of feeding it into various things like the Health Education Authority, for setting up sex education programs and for the AIDS education programs particularly as well. I mean all this stuff, people having difficulty in, I mean it's no good government telling young people to use condoms, when they find it completely impossible to do so. Another solution has to be found, or you have to understand why it is that young women find it difficult to take control in that kind of situation. If we can find out why and can see some kind of reason why.

A: That's one of the things why it was quite interesting to take part in it to see what sort of questions you asked and what you were going to do with them afterwards, that is quite interesting.

Q: The other thing is, I am generally interested in how young women understand other sexuality, where it is coming from and the sort of things that influences in that area, the period when it was developing, that sort of thing. So some of the questions are more directed towards that and some of them obviously relevant to all of it. Anything else that you would like to mention to me, is there anything we haven't covered that you think might be important?

A: I don't know. I think that going to the doctor and asking to go on the pill is probably quite daunting for a lot of people, including me. I mean although I was about 20, I thought, my god, I'm always going to the doctor asking him things about sex, and it was the college doctor and I kept getting the same person, like I got a woman first who was very cruel to me, she was very sort of, you know, don't know how you all watch what you are doing, how do you think you got pregnant, don't you know about contraception, I said, well yes, of course I know about it. Then she took me into reception and said to the nurse, will there be a nurse here to do a pregnancy test tomorrow, and it was like, couldn't you have got a megaphone, you know and told a few more people. I thought great, I've got a woman doctor, she might be quite understanding, but she was terrible. Not like getting the same sort of male doctor, next time I go back for something it will be like the same man, they must think I'm a nymphomaniac or something, I keep going back for these same things. Also I went to the Family Planning clinic and they're just so bad, you know you can go on the pill, a friend of mine was on the pill, she is now 25, and she has never had a smear test ever. She has been on the pill for a year and a half, and they hadn't mentioned a smear to her, I suppose you don't sort of go all out and get one, you don't say I'd like a smear test please,

it's the sort of thing you have if you have to have. I think that that is quite a bad thing, now I go for a smear test every year. I think that maybe in school they should mention things like that, because, you know cervical cancer is increasing and increasing in younger people, you could perhaps have it for a long time and never know, because you never go for a smear test. I mean, I wouldn't have found out if I hadn't had a smear test because I was having an abortion, I mean the whole thing is all linked, that was the thing I was thinking about a lot, because it is on the news, I mean they should start it in schools, even if they hadn't had sexual activity, at least if they have a smear test, it is started then, you know, and they can make some program that you go say every 5 years or 3 years and then the program would be implemented in schools, that people would realise that you have to have these.

Q: Yes, that is a good idea, you start off then and there.

A: Yes, whether you have had any sexual activity or not I don't suppose it matters, I know you don't need one if you haven't, but at least you would know that smears are important things, like an inoculation, nobody shirks that anymore, because it's sort of natural in schools. I have thought about it a lot, because even though I knew my sister had had this, you know, I never went for a smear test, I suppose I was 20 and I hadn't been anyway, and maybe it wouldn't have been necessary, but then there are lots of people who never have smear tests, I mean like I go to the Family Planning clinic, and they are just not interested in you at all, you are just another body there to get wheeled through and they never tell you anything about the pill, you have to find out by yourself. You know how to use it, and I say, well yes vaguely, and it was like nothing concrete, it was nothing instructive, it was very, you know, oh just have it and go away. I found that some patients would think it would be quite a useful place to go, and they weren't at all. I have seen quite a few doctors there and they were just terrible, so useless.

Q: That is rather worrying isn't it. I think they could do with a bit of advice as well.

A: Because I was thinking, I will go to the Family Planning Clinic, not the doctors, because I am sick of going to the same doctor all the time, but I went and I was just amazed at the clinic, they check your weight every time and your blood pressure, fair enough, then sort of give you this pill, no instructions with it, nothing at all. It was lucky I had been to the doctors, for when I keep on picking up all these leaflets and I picked up something else that was talking about the pill, and then I had been on one pill for 6 months or something and had read that there was some sort of pill that had supposedly been in the Lancet, that it was more dangerous than other ones. I asked the doctor there and she said, oh well I don't know and they are always saying these things aren't they and you can't keep up with it, but you can have a different one if you like. Well what will the different one be, you know, will it be the same type of thing, she said, oh we just don't know do we, I mean if you're a doctor you should know. That just amazed me that my friend had been on the pill, and the only reason why she had a smear test was because I made her go. I took her to the doctor and said, you're having one now. I think the people won't go out, she would say she wants to take control

of her own body, but it is all very good saying that, but you don't sort of think I must get down the road to the doctor and have a smear test.

Q: Well the other thing is that people don't realise that they can ask, and sometimes you get on a program, your doctor is one that believes that you have one every 3 years, I think the government it was every 5 years or something, and they did bring it down a bit more.

A: But they also say we can't really afford..

Q: That's right, but people can demand it though, I mean you can have it every 6 months. I have had treatment for dodgy smears, and I'm in favour of having them giving it to me every 6 months if I wanted it, or if I felt I needed one.

A: Yes. I have a friend and when I say, when was your last one, and she says, oh I have never had one, and she has them all the time, she has about 5 a year. Because she just has them when she goes and she says I will have another one please. Which is a good way to be, when there are lots of people, who are perhaps 30 who have never had a smear.

Q: I think at the moment there is a big campaign because they had realised that there were large numbers of, especially older women who had never had a smear test, and they are trying to pull them all in, and get them on one of these cycles, like you get automatically called back every time period they decide to give you another one. Because that one is such a catchable one, that if you could only get rid of that one, it is so easily treatable.

A: It is just that there needs to be a bit more education around about it then I think people would go.

Q: That is certainly something that can be sort of, once they get sex education in schools organised, I suppose these are the elements that should be in it, definitely should be there.

A: I don't know whether anyone mentioned to me about cervical cancer either, it is like what's that, nobody mentioned it, or no more of this cancer business, you know, it's another word that is bandied around. It was only through my sister saying that people should go when they were in school, they should have a big program, because of her doctor saying that she had been campaigning to get it started, but it hadn't because they hadn't enough money to do it.

Q: But at least you can enforce it even if you don't start on the actual program, especially for those who wouldn't be sexually activate, they'd probably feel that they didn't need it, people would be informed, you would have a little ticket, you know that was like your symbolic first one, that you didn't actually have but you had to go back to the doctor in 5 years, to get called back to have one. So I think there are a lot of things that could be done to improve the situation.

A: Yes, I think there are, especially if they are carrying out surveys like this, everyone always thinks of sex education in schools, I didn't learn anything from it, I suppose you learn a few basic things, but that is not where you really learn it. I suppose it could be used to give much better results.

Q: Well I suppose it is when problems arise because people just do not know, like you say, the general feeling is, everybody knows, and they don't reveal their ignorance, but then they can act on that ignorance and be rather disastrous. Let

me ask you another thing about the AIDS - when you first started hearing about it was in the context of it being mainly something applied to gays?

A: Well, that was the first programme that I saw, but then I went away and I went to SCANDINAVIA, and I went to this town and two people had AIDS, and they had started their campaign much earlier there, and they had started it for heterosexuals as well, it wasn't really in connection with homosexuals there so much as, I think they had a really blatant campaign, that they had like AIDS and they had an A and an I trying to penetrate the A and the A say mm mm, you couldn't get more blatant than that, you wouldn't need any language to go with that. I did learn about it for heterosexuals at the same time, it's rife for homosexuals, but you are just as much at risk.

Q: So you had knowledge of that. It is only in recent months that the campaign in England has been pointed at heterosexuals spreading it, and that is part..

A: Yes I can imagine it is.

Q: But it being sort of a blind spot, it being safely over there, being different categories of people.

A: I don't think I had ever looked at it in that way, because I can't remember if these 2 people who had AIDS were homosexuals, they were female anyway, I had never thought of it as just being confined to homosexuals, because I knew it wasn't. I must have known through that but I must have also thought, because I said well look people are prejudiced against homosexuals so they say it is their disease, but I think I had already realised it was going to be the same for everybody else.

Q: Well a lot of homosexuals who are gay and they have sexual intercourse with women..

A: I know it is amazing that people say that they are homosexuals, they won't bother with any other, anyone of the female sex. I don't know how I had realised that, maybe the campaign was for heterosexual.

Q: What do you think about that one of last week's ads, the one with the beautiful young woman, say this woman got AIDS..

A: I think that is very clever, it is good, saying that you can look at someone and you never know. I think I have always known that anyway, I have always known it in my head and when I have taken risks it has been, god how do I know I have never expected to have some outward sign of anybody, I've never expected that at all, but I have taken the risks that I haven't been able to implement myself with the decision and that is why. I think a lot of people, it is different for people who live in London that you are more aware of AIDS anyway, but I suppose the people who would live, say in WALES in the village that my Mum and Dad live in, that sort of attitudes haven't got there in that there is nothing if you are a feminist, you're a sort of a strange person, if you're a homosexual well you are even worse. You know the categories are level, the feminists scrape by the homosexuals are worse, if you had AIDS I don't know what you would do, I suppose you would be ostracised. I think it is easier living in London, you become aware of these things.

Q: We are doing the other piece of research between London and Manchester, mainly Manchester, we are doing actually 2 inner city areas.

A: I always think that when you crosscheck other city areas that they are virtually more educated than people who are in the Outer Hebrides or somewhere like that. I think that there is so much more around you and so much going on in the city, and especially in Manchester as well, that there are so many more things that like you see on TV, like National Aids Day, or something, it's not sort of very close to you, that if you see it on TV you may feel you don't encounter anyone that has AIDS, you don't encounter homosexuals, and so it is a very difficult thing again. I don't think it reaches people.

Q: I read in the paper the other day that one of the characters in the Archers was suffering some strange sort of complaint, whether it was building up to be AIDS. I don't actually listen to it myself, but I was following it in the newspaper and it was saying how people were ringing in and writing in and complaining that how could this person be, in the end the script writers backed down, but it turned out to be something entirely different, I don't know what they made it in the end, but it wasn't AIDS, but it looked like it was building up to being AIDS.

A: I think that maybe a lot of middle aged people, I don't know what is middle age, but people who are 40, bet they think they are not inside the risk area as well, it is quite geared to the younger people, but there is nothing to say that they wouldn't get AIDS, because whoever they sleep with, could have slept with somebody younger who has got AIDS. I wonder if they think they are included in the rating.

Q: I suppose it would depend on how sexually active they were.

A: It is always decided that young people are always sexually active and older people will be married and settled down. But most of the affairs that go on, and divorces, singles bars, all this type of thing, that they might not be quite as sexual active, there is nothing to say they won't be. Having more and more partners.

Q: It can sweep through the suburbs. Surbiton, or somewhere like that. Somebody the other day was trying to tell me an AIDS joke, it's not a joking matter. OK well thank you very much for sitting, it's been absolutely fascinating.

A: Oh I don't know about that. I think one of the names I gave you, she said she had put her name down for the interview as well.

Q: Yes I know the one you mean, I have written to her, she has not got a telephone number, so I wrote to her and suggested a couple of times.

A: She said she would like and wondered what kind of questions they ask.

Q: Well don't tell her, in any case they will probably be different because it maybe a different person.