

LSFS37 2.3.1990**Sarah**

Q: ... start by just saying something about - you're living in a flat with friends -

A: Yeah, that's right.

Q: From college.

A: Yeah. All girls at the moment. There was two guys moved in. One of them - both of them are going to COUNTRY to do their second years, so for various reasons they moved out, basically to earn the money elsewhere to - so that they can go to COUNTRY. 'Cos they found it too expensive to live in London. And... so there's four girls at the moment.

Q: Right. Is that quite nice?

A: No, I think the atmosphere was better when the guys were there, definitely. I think - it's okay now, but like three of us - three of the girls lived - we lived together in halls last year, and I think we just had a bit too much of each other altogether. And like I said, two of them are on my course as well.

Q: Yeah. So you never get away from -

A: Yeah, that's right. Yeah. The other girl who's doing biology, she's got a friend living with her; and they're very close, they're like always together now, so the atmosphere's not very good.

Q: But do you think you'll stay there till the end of the course?

A: I'm not even thinking of staying there that much longer actually, I'm actually thinking of moving out, as soon as possible, to another polytechnic house.

Q: Because - are they provided by the college?

A: Yes, they are, there - there's a sort of arrangement with the landlady and the poly, where we pay our rent to the poly and then they give her the money -

Q: Right.

A: But - but things like, we didn't have a Hoover at first. She actually sorted that out herself. It was much quicker than us going to the poly, then going to her. That's just like a diversion. So she did that straight away. But - and this other house that I'm thinking of moving into, she actually owns it as well, so I don't think it'll be a problem; and they've got a spare room, so... myself out as quickly as possible. Yeah, yeah. I'm not saying that having the boys there would - even if they'd still been there now, I think the atmosphere still would have been bad. It's the fact that we've been together too long and we know each other so well.

Q: Right.

A: But they sort of livened it up a bit, I suppose. They were quite mad... COUNTRY.

Q: I mean, were they just friends of yours or were they anybody's kind of relationship?

A: No... no, not at all. No, one of them we knew from the halls and the other - his friend CRAIG, we didn't - we hadn't met before, but he just moved in - you know, just like an arrangement at the beginning of the year. It was fine. It was really good. I was quite sad to see them go actually. "Go to COUNTRY, what d'you wanna go there for?"

Q: ...

A: Yes.

Q: So do you have a boyfriend at the moment?

A: I do, at the moment, yeah. Things aren't going too well, though, at the moment, actually. And another thing that is bad, I think, because he's Asian, the other girls - I don't think they really approve. They - they knew him from - he lived in halls last year as well, and I think - it's not - I don't think it's so much his colour or that, I just - they just don't like him that much. And so they put quite a lot of pressure on me. I don't - they think - they think it should end. I'm not quite sure why.

Q: Because of his - because he's Asian, not because of anything else about him?

A: Not - I think that's probably a factor, but I think they also think he - like they knew him from last year, and they know - like, he talks a lot about his family and his religion, and I think they think that comes first with him. And I think it does as well, but that doesn't bother me, because I don't want it to be - I don't want to marry him or anything. So I'm not thinking long-term about it, but they - I don't know, they just don't like it. I'm not quite sure why, I think it's probably a combination of reasons, and they just don't really approve.

Q: And so do they make it obvious or is it rather subtle?

A: It's not obvious when he's there but when he goes they make it obvious to me. Which I think is a bit unfair -

Q: Yes.

A: - I wish they'd - if they wanted to say something, I wish they'd say it in front of him as well, so that he has - because I tell him about it and he gets really uptight, but he can't really say anything because, as far as he's concerned, in front of - in front of him, they're fine. They don't really say anything, they just talk to him as a friend. Like he was last year. But - and I never realised that they didn't - I know that one of them in particular didn't like him, she just thinks he's a bit silly and is a bit irresponsible towards life generally, his course and so on; but no, that's - it's one of the main things actually, that's getting me down in the house.

Q: Yes...

A: Yeah, it really is. Because I don't really think - although we're friends, I don't think that it's really their business that much, they're sort of imposing their opinions on me and I don't - I just - it makes me feel uncomfortable.

Q: Does he stay there with you?

A: Yeah, he does come over, yeah, and he stays sometimes for a few days, and they don't like it. They wrote me this letter actually; one of the guys who used to live there, before he went to COUNTRY he came back, and they wrote a really sort of silly letter saying "you're spending too much time in your room and we don't see enough of you" - it was very kind of - it was very sort of -

Q: ...

A: Yeah, it was silly, but I think the way - I mean, the guy wrote it, CRAIG, and I think he meant it in a very joking way, but - I know how they feel, there's a very sort of underlying thing with the way they feel, you see, so ... probably their idea to write it. I don't know, it makes me feel a bit - I mean, I know that a lot of people don't approve of mixed relationships and so sometimes I think - especially when things go badly between him and I, I think oh, perhaps they're right, you know, and you sort of think - you've got this whole thing about society being - looking in on you, like they're reflecting the attitudes of -

Q: Yeah.

A: - how many people do feel. I know my mother would have a fit if she knew.

Q: Your parents don't know?

A: They don't, no, they haven't got an idea at all. No. I mean, he - they have met him. He came to my party last year but so did about eighty other people. It was a twenty-first -

Q: Right, so he was just a friend to them.

A: That's right, exactly, he was just another person. They probably didn't - didn't actually be introduced to him. But they wouldn't like it at all. They wouldn't approve.

Q: Because of his race?

A: Yeah, that's it. 'Cos they're - I wouldn't say they're racist, but I think they're of the age group where they feel their country's been taken over, this sort of thing; you know, I mean when my mother came - she came from this small place in NORTHWEST ENGLAND, and she didn't see anybody who wasn't white until she was about twenty-five, and then when she came to London and there wasn't that - she said like there wasn't that many then, you know, at that time, and now there seems to be - yeah, a lot of different races, and so she can't really cope with it. And - although my father's Irish, I mean he's an immigrant as well, but -

Q: Yeah, but it's still - it doesn't necessarily mean the attitudes are any different -

Q: No, he doesn't see himself - yeah, I think - I mean, in some ways I think he's actually more prejudiced than she is. I think if she was living in like a leafy suburb where it was mostly white middle class people, she'd have a different attitude. It's only 'cos she feels swamped, as she puts it - you know, Brent, we live in - they live in Brent -

Q: Right.

A: So - and Brent is quite multi-racial.

Q: It is, yes.

A: But they feel that they haven't chosen to live in a multi-racial area. They came to it when it was all white and it's - since then it's changed, and they resent it. And I think what even more they resent, is their inability to move out because of their financial situation. They - you know, selling a house in Brent is very difficult anyway, it has been for about five years. So... they wouldn't be able to afford to move to the sort of place they'd like to, so I think they think, "better the devil you know".

Q: No, it sounds - that's like my parents... except they never wanted to move, but that's in Stanmore, which is -

A: Right, Stanmore's not very far from us. Is it Harrow -

Q: Yeah.

A: - about here -

Q: ... Harrow...

A: Yeah.

Q: ... similar thing as...

A: Right. Yeah, that's it. Yeah, Stanmore's quite - I think Stanmore's more Asian than black.

Q: Yes, it is.

A: Yeah. But our road is - everybody who lives in our road - I mean I'm - I'm quite, you know, I don't mind it at all, and I've grown up with it, 'cos it's - I think people started to move in the early seventies when I was very young, and so I've

got used to it. I don't really even notice it. But my parents do and I think they don't like the fact that I don't notice it, the fact that I don't make derogatory comments; I think they - they sort of - sometimes they kind of push me to, you know, like - my mother wouldn't approve at all, of my relationship.

Q: What about your boyfriend's parents?

A: They live in WEST MIDLANDS, and they don't know anything about me.

Q: Right.

A: And I don't think they're going to even.

Q: How long have you known him?

A: I've known him since I started NAME OF UNIVERSITY in '88 - September '88. He lived in the halls as well actually. And we were - we were quite good friends last year. He was seeing somebody then and he was having problems with her and he used to talk to - I was like his agony aunt at the time. And then we started going out in December just gone. So it hasn't been that long. But I think he worries more about his parents - even though they're further away, I think his family is more of an influence on him as a person, generally. He often makes reference to what they would think about something and what they do and so on, than I do. I think I'm more of an individual, definitely. And he lives with five friends who are all Sikh like himself, and all from WEST MIDLANDS, and they're very - quite close-knit and they tell each other a lot, and they seem to think they'll always be together as a group of friends throughout their life, 'cos they've known each other since they were about five. So it's a bit like going out with all of them in a way. If one of them has an opinion about something I'm bound to hear it, you know, if you know what I mean. "Go and see this film" - you know, it's a very sort of... very influential anyway. But I think they've got - they don't seem to be bothered.

Q: They're not bothered about you?

A: No, they seem to quite like me so - not - in a way they're less - although they give their opinions more than my friends do, like my friends don't really - I suppose they do try and influence me in a way but not in the same way that his do; I mean his really do influence him, whereas mine, I try to ignore them as much as possible.

Q: Right.

A: But - no, I think they're quite happy about it actually, they seem to be.

Q: So you can go and stay with him.

A: Yeah, that's right, I do sometimes. And a couple of them have got girlfriends as well, so -

Q: What, white girlfriends?

A: No, they're Asian as well. Yeah, one of them thinks he's actually going to marry this girl, so I think they're - they... about that quite a lot. You know, they're quite good fun though.

Q: Do their Asian girlfriends stay or is that a bit -

A: Yeah, they do, yeah. I haven't actually met them - I just don't happen to have been there when they've been there; but they do.

Q: No, I was just thinking, because often it's more difficult for - like for Asian girls to have any kind of sexual relationship -

A: That's right.

Q: - because of the whole family thing, reputation and everything, makes it very taboo.

A: That's it. I think if - I think... one of them, her mother and her brother and sisters know about this guy who lives with my boyfriend, and - but the only way that she can have a relationship with him is if - she's told them that she's going to marry him, you see, I think she's sort of hoping, but I don't know if they definitely will. So that's the only way that her mother will allow it. Her father doesn't know. Because I think it's the sort of situation where if she's slept with somebody, that's it, she's got to marry them 'cos no one else'll want to marry her.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, I find that really strange but -

Q: No, I've heard that -

A: - sort of cultural thing, yeah. This is the sort of thing my mother's always saying, you see, that their culture's totally different, and she doesn't understand how people can - two people from different cultures can have a relationship. I think - what's her phrase that she said? - "a bird and a fish can fall in love but where are they going to live?", that's her -

Q: Really?

A: Yes. That's her symbolic thing about it.

Q: And how long was it before you and he started having a sexual relationship?

A: About a month and a half.

Q: So you'd been out together quite a lot before -

A: Yeah, quite a bit, yeah. And, like I said, I knew him fairly well last year.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. We weren't - I wouldn't say we were really close friends, but we were more than acquaintances. Quite good friends.

Q: And was that something that you talked about or -

A: Yes, it was actually, because that's one of the things that he found really frustrating with the girl that he was seeing last year, is that she was Muslim, so he could hardly even see her, let alone anything else happen. ... he really found that annoying, you know. And I - I mean, I didn't really know what to say because I didn't think of him in boyfriend terms last year at all, especially as he was seeing someone else. I wouldn't have thought that at all, so I mean I used to - I didn't really used to advise him, I just used to listen really. I didn't really give any advice. I used to phone her up for him 'cos he couldn't phone her at home. She knew me quite well (laugh). But he - he sort of thinks that if you're in love with somebody then that's natural, and he couldn't understand why she was always so worried about her parents. Because she used to come and visit him in halls but, you know, nothing would happen so - didn't understand it. Well, he should have been able to understand it really.

Q: Well, yes.

A: Because if -

Q: - same sort of -

A: Yeah. Because he hasn't got any sisters, I suppose that's what it is. But he should know how his parents would react.

Q: And were you using contraception?

A: I'm on the pill. I've been on the pill for quite a while actually, about two years I think. 'Cos originally I went on it because of my periods were so irregular and

heavy and I was - just everything that could have happened, happened to me. Not every month but too often to be, you know, convenient, like I was sick and things like that. So I went to see a doctor and immediately he just said, you know, "you've got to go on the pill". And I said... that's a bit drastic, I said, isn't there anything else? And they said they didn't seem to think so. 'Cos it was so bad.

Q: How old were you then?

A: Let me think. I'm nearly nineteen, and - no, it was nearly three years ago I've been on it now... sixteen. Just before I was nineteen(?). But I was a bit worried about going on it because, not only the side-effects, the physical side-effects, but because I'm Catholic and I think - I thought my parents would disapprove. I mean, my mother doesn't actually, she's quite happy about it. But I don't know whether she still knows that I'm on it actually. If she knew I was on it and I was seeing somebody, she wouldn't like it.

Q: Really?

A: She likes it from a - because she thinks -

Q: A medical problem.

A: Yes, medical point of view, yeah. That's it - that's what it was originally.

Q: Right.

A: You know.

Q: And do you think you'll stay on it?

A: Probably, yeah. What worries me is that I don't want to go back to a situation where, you know, I don't know when it's going to come, and I'm sick and this sort of thing, it's very inconvenient. But I must admit it's tempting for me not to want to use condoms in that situation, because I know that I'm not going to get pregnant. But I still think obviously, with the AIDS business, that it's quite sensible to use them, so I have been using them with my current man.

Q: What, all the time or just -

A: Yeah, all the time, yeah. But sometimes I think don't bother, but then I think no. But also he doesn't know that I'm on the pill, because I don't think - he'd probably think that, if I'd been on it for that long, that I'd been sleeping with a lot of other people, and I don't really think he'd approve. That sounds a bit - I know I shouldn't really be bothered, I shouldn't think whether he approves or not, but I think he would disapprove. So I just don't really want to tell him. I can't really explain exactly why I don't want to tell him, but he's quite old-fashioned in some ways.

Q: What, so he'd be quite disapproving or hurt or something if he thought you'd -

A: Yeah.

Q: ... had other boyfriends and slept with other...

A: That's it, right. Because he's never asked me, you see, if I've slept with other people, but I think - I mean - I mean, we used to talk about his girlfriend last year, but we also used to talk about my ex-boyfriend. Not in detail, but I mean he knows - he knows that I've been out with other people. And at that time it probably wouldn't have bothered him one way or the other, whether I slept with them. But now I think it would, and so - something really holds me back from telling him about it... I really think he'd disapprove. I don't think he'd think - I think he thinks that anything contraceptive is only for one reason. He wouldn't have thought it was for a medical reason...

Q: What, it was for sex?

A: Yeah. He'd think it was just for that, yeah. Probably think of me as being quite loose, I think, which would upset me a bit.

Q: But had he had sexual relationships with other girls?

A: He says that he's had relationships but not - not sexual. He hasn't actually gone the whole way, as he puts it, before. But I don't know whether to believe him actually, 'cos he seems very streetwise in some ways. He's very sort of contradictory actually.

Q: What, he seemed to know what he was doing?

A: Yes. Exactly, yeah. Very much so. Yeah. So that's what makes me suspicious, definitely.

Q: What, no fumbling around or -

A: No, that's it. Very - very confident. Yeah, very confident. No, I mean it - maybe not with (name), the girl he was seeing last year, but before that; I mean, he'd been out with other English girls before, so - it's possible that he didn't 'cos I mean that - he was very young then. But I just find it hard to believe. You know.

Q: How old is he now?

A: He's twenty-one. But I mean his friends are very sort of - they might have calmed down a bit now, but I think probably in the past they've been very sort of "the lads", you know, and so I just find it very difficult to believe that he hasn't had a sexual relationship before. Even if it was only a one-night stand.

Q: Yes.

A: Yeah. But I think he'd got this kind of sort of fantasy image about a relationship, that it has to be really - it should be really special and almost perfect, you know. He keeps saying things like when - like a friend of mine who he's met, and he met her boyfriend - he's actually married, her boyfriend's married - and, you know, he was quite shocked afterwards. When - when he said "oh, DARREN seemed very much older than TERRI", and I said "yes, well, you know, and he's married", and he was like really shocked and very sort of... say things, "oh, why can't people just have perfect relationships?". So I think he's got this sort of fantasy image about our relationship. That's probably why he's never asked me if I've slept with anyone before, 'cos he probably knows what the answer is but he doesn't want to hear it.

Q: Yeah. So he puts the picture as he wants it.

A: That's it. That's right, exactly. Yeah. That's why I think that it won't - the relationship won't last very long, because I think that's very unrealistic. You know, I'm a real person, so's he -

Q: Yeah.

A: - and it - this sort of fantasy business won't go on much longer. And when the bubble bursts as it were, it won't - I don't know if there'll be enough left, especially for him, for it to last any longer. That worries me a bit; it's certainly not - it's not a stable relationship, I don't think. It's a very sort of "of the moment" thing, which I don't really want it to be but I don't seem to be able to stop it somehow. I don't really want it to end. But I know that it will.

Q: Is that because of him being Asian you think it'll end?

A: I - yeah.

Q: You know, if he was, say if he was white and you felt the same way about him

-

A: No, it probably wouldn't end, no; because I don't think he'd have these - these - not fantasies but, you know, he wouldn't have this idealistic approach, he'd be more down to earth. I think he's very down to earth in a lot of ways, about his course and so on, but - and money, he wants to earn a lot of money and that's why he's doing computers; and so he's very sort of logical about that. But about women I don't think he's very logical at all. And he keeps - he says he's going to have an arranged marriage and do as his family wishes. This is one of the main things that one of my friends keeps saying to me -

Q: Right.

A: She keeps saying - I - she says - she says, "he's using you. Because he's going - he's definitely going to get an arranged marriage". And I keep saying to her, "but I don't want to get married, so it doesn't really bother me". Just - you know, I wouldn't say it's convenient, that's a bit crude, but in a way it is, at the moment. I'm enjoying it. So that's one of the main reasons that my friends are saying it's a waste of time. He'll say - he's going to get an arranged marriage, he says, but then he'll see a film where a man just goes off with a woman and they just, you know, they sort of live together very quickly, and he says "oh, I wish I could do that", and things like that, and he says - he really gives the impression at times that he wouldn't - that he's not - he wouldn't be able to cope with an arranged marriage because it's like imposed on him.

Q: Yes, by his family.

A: It'd be like, "this is the girl that we think is correct for you" - you know, you've done the same sort of - you're the same level of intelligence and so on, so you should be able to live together. But I don't think that he'll - I think if he does it, he'll always regret it. Because he's got enough of his own mind and his own spirit to want to do something else. And even to travel. But his family seem very set in their ways from what I've heard; like his mother can't even speak English and she's been here for about twenty-five years. I find that really strange.

Q: Yeah. 'Cos it must mean that the whole kind of community is so cohesive in a way, that they don't have to speak -

A: No, that's right.

Q: Do you know what I mean...

A: - get away with it, yeah. That's it.

Q: So would he ever consider living with you or would that be too - I mean, on a temporary basis -

A: He talks about - because his contract on his house only lasts until Easter, he has mentioned living with us in the summer term, but I mean, hopefully, I won't even be there in this house in the summer term, because it's really making me unhappy. I don't really think it's entirely to do with him. The thing that I mentioned to him the other day actually, that I was thinking of moving out, and he was really against it. He said, "oh, no, no, you must stay there, don't move out"; I think he thinks it's just because of him, you see - flattering himself a bit there, I think. But he thinks that - he knows that they don't approve but he won't - he won't say anything to them unless they say something to him, and then he will respond. But he's not a sort of trouble maker at all, and he wouldn't want to see himself as that. So - but I don't know why. I think he thinks because - although they don't accept it, I think he thinks that other people that I'm living with might accept it even less. That's probably what's on his mind, I think. 'Cos he's quite - he's very

aware of - when we're out together, he keeps saying "people are staring at us, why are they staring at us?", you know, and I don't even notice. I don't know whether they are or not, but I don't really care. I'm never going to see them again so it doesn't really matter what they think.

Q: Quite.

A: I am aware that people disapprove but what can you do? You can't actually change society's views.

Q: No, just get on with your own life.

A: Yeah. That's it, yeah. That's right. But I do often think - when things are going badly, it's like an escape route to think oh well, this isn't meant to be because my parents wouldn't approve and my friends don't approve and people generally don't approve in society. You know, it's not an acceptable thing. But I think that's just me giving myself an escape route. Because sometimes it is probably just what's wrong between us as individuals that is the problem. It has nothing to do with him being a different culture, from a different culture.

Q: But often things get hooked around that.

A: What do you mean, in what way?

Q: Well, sometimes things that are to do with maybe just you and him as personalities -

A: Yeah.

Q: - get hooked onto -

A: - more general things -

Q: - things like the racial thing or whatever.

A: Yeah. That's right.

Q: ... because of that -

A: - when it's just - yeah.

Q: - personal, or both. Had you been out with an Asian person, any other - before?

A: Yeah, I had before, yeah, yeah. He was like - that was my long - I've had a two year relationship, that was - and he was Asian. And my parents knew about that. And they weren't at all happy. Not at all. But eventually my mother came round to it. Because he was - he was a very nice person, and he was older than me, and very mature.

Q: How old was he?

A: He's now twenty-seven, so when I met him - I was eighteen and he was twenty-four, yeah, yeah. But it was a long time before we got very involved. It was very much like - he was my Svengali kind of thing. He was like - he wanted to look after me, rather than - it wasn't sexual at all, for quite a while. But we used to see quite a lot of each other.

Q: How did you meet him?

A: I went to a twenty-first party with a friend - it was his brother's twenty-first, and that's where I met him, there. I did actually know his brother - I didn't know that I did until I got there, but I did, and then - and he... me, we spent the whole evening together, he was really - I think I was very flattered that he was so much older. But I think it did worry me - it did worry me a bit, the fact that he was Asian, but he was Christian and he was very much - he was very much more westernised than the guy I'm seeing now, AVI. He had an English - his name was THOMAS. He was very westernised. The only difference, I think, between

him and me was the food; he ate Indian food. But apart from that, very westernised - all his friends were white. Very westernised. And he lived - when I met him he was living alone, he wasn't living with his family. He wasn't - he - he had a lot of respect for his family but he wasn't that influenced by them at all. His parents were SOUTH ASIAN originally, and his family - his brothers and sisters just did their own thing to a great extent, so he was quite, you know -

Q: - sounds quite independent.

A: Independent, yeah, that's right. I think I got lost in that relationship 'cos he was older than me. But in fact the way it ended was quite sad because it wasn't anything had gone wrong, it was just that he wanted to get married.

Q: To you?

A: Yeah. And I didn't want to get married. I was only twenty, I thought it was much too young.

Q: And he wouldn't go on just seeing you without that?

A: No, no, it got - it came to the point, after two years, and he was like twenty-five or six, yeah, twenty-six - I get very confused actually about what age he was; I know that he's twenty-seven now, so he must have been nearly twenty-six or already twenty-six. But he really thought that it was time for him to get married. I think he thought it had come to a conclusion kind of thing, it had to - that part of our relationship, come to a conclusion, like the just - the going out -

Q: Right.

A: - he wanted me to make a commitment, even if it wasn't to get married, it was to get engaged. And I just didn't feel right about it. Everything about getting engaged at that age, and to him, felt wrong. Because I know that he would expect a lot of commitment. I don't blame him for that but I just wasn't ready to give it.

Q: Right.

A: So there was nothing else we could do. It was like really very mutual. But it was very sad -

Q: Yes.

A: - in a way, and I have seen him since as a friend, but it's just really painful, really painful, because I just think - often when I do see him I think I made the wrong decision. He is the right person for me, or was the right person for me, because he's so understanding. He really - he was a very nice person. But I just think - I really think age twenty is much too young.

Q: Yes.

A: To get married.

Q: And all the commitment that it sounds like he would expect.

A: Exactly, yeah. And at twenty-seven I don't blame him, I think - twenty-seven I think is probably about the right age to settle down. But seven years is a long time to give up as it were. Because I would be giving it up, I wouldn't be my own person anymore. I just can't imagine thinking for two all the time, I can't imagine it at all. And he wanted to have children as well. He adored children, in a big way. We were just walking down the road and like I wouldn't even notice some children walking past, he'd be like looking at them, you know, holding their hands and things like this, and I'd be "oh, no, what's he doing that for?", you know, I'd find it a bit embarrassing. But it shows how sweet he was, you know -

Q: Yeah, yes.

A: - a very sweet person. You know.

Q: And you - I mean, do you want to get married and have children one day or -

A: One day, but not at the moment. Yeah. In fact, children I'm not that bothered about. I think to me, to have a good relationship is more important even than being married. But children, no, I don't really like children that much to be honest. It sounds a bit unmaternal but -

Q: Well, not an uncommon feeling.

A: No, no, I just - I really don't feel sort of affectionate towards them. Even my relations, little cousins and so on, you know, I can bear them for about a day, but then I'm quite glad to give them back -

Q: Right.

A: - or for them to leave, you know, because they make so much noise. They're okay but I'm not really into them. I think probably if they're your own it's different. I'm sure that's the case.

Q: Yeah, I'm sure that's right.

A: Yeah, but - not at the moment. And if I did have them - even if I did get married, I would really want it to work. I want it to be successful. And so I'd want to put a lot into it. And I don't feel that I'm ready to do that at the moment really.

Q: And does your current boyfriend - I mean, he obviously knew you were going out with THOMAS before - or not?

A: He knows he existed, yeah. It was just like a vague person in the background, you know, sort of thing. But you see, I didn't actually tell him that he was SOUTH ASIAN. When I said "THOMAS" he probably presumed that he was -

Q: What, just -

A: - white.

Q: Yeah.

A: ... English guy, yeah.

Q: Right, so there was never any overlap - kind of he never - you never met -

A: No, no. I finished - we - THOMAS and I finished before I went to NAME OF UNIVERSITY.

Q: Right.

A: So no, he never met him. No. Funnily enough he could have met him because THOMAS has come - visited me in the halls about three times, but he never - they never happened to bump into each other. But THOMAS was - he was very suitable as a person, but - 'cos even my mother actually got to like him, when she - after she got over her initial fit at the fact he was a different colour, but when she found out he was Catholic, that - things like that changed her mind a bit.

Q: Right.

A: Yes, I think - I think if I'd married him she would have accepted it. She wouldn't have been over the moon about it and she - it would have hurt her. She thinks I could do a lot better, that's the way she put it. I don't know what she - I think she means just more eminent. Because THOMAS had a fairly good job, he was an engineer, but I suppose he wasn't ultra - ultra-successful. But my dad would never have accepted it at all.

Q: So did he - he met THOMAS?

A: He met THOMAS - he met him but he wouldn't really speak to him. If - if THOMAS came to my house - because I was living at home a lot, you know,

most of the time then, he wouldn't really talk to him. He'd just go out the room. It was a bit awkward, he wouldn't really accept it at all.

Q: So it was a bit uncomfortable for both of you.

A: Yeah, it was, very, yeah. But I mean his family were really nice to me, very nice, because they were - they didn't expect, just because of the fact they were a different colour, brown, you know, they didn't expect THOMAS to necessarily go out with an Asian girl. Not at all. That was - that wasn't a problem. They were very Catholic as well actually, very Catholic. I think the fact that I was Catholic helped a lot, even though I'm a very lapsed one (laugh), I don't really go to church that often or anything -

Q: ... roots or whatever if you're Catholic -

A: Yeah, that's right. Yeah, so that - that was quite impressive, yeah... religion, I find it quite amusing.

Q: And what - in terms of - you - you say you had a friendship with THOMAS for a long time before you got involved, before you had a sexual relationship -

A: Yes.

Q: ... time...

A: Nearly a year.

Q: And then was that something that - that had been planned or did it just happen or -

A: It didn't just happen, no. We talked about it quite a lot first. Because he - he was very anxious for me not to get involved in something I couldn't cope with, you know. Because that would have been my first time.

Q: Right. So you were a virgin before -

A: Yes, that's right, yeah. That's what he was very worried about. He wasn't the type of person that wanted to - for that to happen too soon, and then for it to break up and me to be left really thinking "what happened?", you know, being really confused. He didn't want that to happen. He was very thoughtful.

Q: Yeah, sounds very protective.

A: Mm, very, yeah. But when it did happen I think it brought us closer together, and it lasted another year after that. We went on holiday together. But I think that was - for me, that was kind of the beginning of the end, when we went away together, because, although the holiday was very kind of nice and very idyllic, it was on a Greek island, it was really nice; but there was no one else, it was just us, the two of us, there was no - no family, no friends, nothing else. There was just - there wasn't really much to do either, it was just the beach really. And we hadn't hired a car or anything. So - and for me, I found he wasn't enough, it wasn't enough for me just to be with him. I did really care about him a lot but I don't think he stimulated me enough. You know, I think - I don't - this sounds a bit nasty, but I think I was more intelligent, am more intelligent in many ways, so it really - I thought to myself, no, this is not, he's not the right person for me long-term. But then you see, I'm - I'm the sort of person that becomes very - I become very fond of people, I'd become very fond of him at that point. I couldn't just say when we got back, "right, that's it, oh sorry, you know, you're not interesting enough for me - goodbye", you know, I just couldn't do that.

Q: Well, no, you couldn't.

A: No. I suppose it would have been better if I had because after that it did go downhill a bit, but - you see, another thing was we had a lot of mutual friends by

then. I'd met a lot of his friends and vice versa. And we were very much a couple. A lot of people still ask me how he is, even though they know I'm seeing someone else, which is a bit - I think -

Q: - a bit...

A: Yeah, it is a bit. But I think - especially from the outside, even on the inside a lot of the time, it just seemed so right. That's why people saw us, you know, together very much. I must admit it irritates me now because I like to think I'm quite independent. It does irritate me - especially when - I met his sister recently, and she introduced me to her new man as THOMAS's ex-girlfriend, not like -

Q: ... person -

A: No, "my name's SARAH, by the way". Yes, that was very...

Q: Quite, yes.

A: I don't think she meant it.

Q: No.

A: But it's just the way it sounded -

Q: ...

A: - like that was my status on earth was THOMAS's ex-girlfriend.

Q: Right.

A: But anyway, I think for a long time they didn't believe it was going to end. They thought - even though we had split up and we both knew that it - we weren't going to get back together, his family wouldn't believe it. You know, I think they really - they'd become very fond of me.

Q: Especially if - you know, it wasn't like - you weren't particularly having great rows or anything like that.

A: No, that's it, you see, even when we ended we weren't rowing, we just couldn't reach a point where we could go on together, you know. And it wasn't any - neither of us were really angry with each other. I suppose in a way he was more angry with me, because he wanted me to settle down, as he put it; you see, and he didn't think - although - although he didn't get a degree himself, he just did exams through his work - although he thought a degree was worthwhile, he didn't think social science was that worthwhile. And so he said to me, "don't bother to go to NAME OF UNIVERSITY, get a job and study with your job, you know, like I've done"; and I said I thought that's exactly the opposite of what you want - what you think I should do, really, I said - you said that you'd rather have got your degree before you started work. He said "yes, I would, but that's different, engineering's more vocational," and so on. ... "what are you going to do when you finish?" and all this sort of thing. A lot of people say that and it irritates me because I enjoy what I'm doing for the sake of it. I think a lot of that has gone out of the window now.

Q: Yes.

A: Think you should do something with a view to -

Q: Absolutely.

A: - something else.

Q: Channeling... something -

A: That's right, yeah.

Q: - instead of just doing it and then -

A: Yeah, yeah, and then deciding.

Q: - going almost outwards and -

A: Mm, that's it. I think that an arts degree is very good because it gives you a very broad spectrum of a lot of things, it gives you like a wide - it gives you a chance to read more widely than just accounts or law or, you know, whatever.

Q: Which are quite specialised and therefore you cut out a lot of other things.

A: Mm, exactly. Are we going off the point?

Q: Slightly.

A: Yes.(laugh)

Q: But - but before THOMAS, were there relationships you had -

A: Not serious ones, no, no. I did actually go out with this guy for a few months and I think it nearly got to the point where it could have been sexual, but we were both very young. I mean, I - how old was I, sixteen, seventeen, and he was seventeen. I don't think either of us were really ready for it. We were like too immature for it I think really. Anyway I'm quite glad it didn't happen. I don't think I'd - we wouldn't have been able to cope with it, I don't think. And he was English, very English, and very eminent. My mother was very impressed. I think she was - she was really distressed when we broke up. 'Cos I think she - although she didn't want me to get married then, I think she would have liked me to have stayed with him.

Q: What did he do?

A: He was doing his A-levels then and then he went to PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITY -

Q: Right.

A: - to do history, and he wanted to be - he wanted to go into politics and become Prime Minister (laugh). So, you know, she was very impressed indeed. She - he was like my escape route out of the gutter; not that she thinks I'm right in the gutter, but, you know, out of - to be - I would become middle class, totally middle class, if I'd stayed with him. Because he was - he had a double-barreled name and his parents were very wealthy and so on. He was very - very, very academic, very bright.

Q: And did he sort of pressure you to have a sexual relationship...?

A: First - at first he did, but then I think he realised that it wouldn't - we were too young. I think in a way it even frightened him, to become that involved with somebody, because he hadn't been out with anybody before.

Q: Had he had a sexual relationship?

A: No, no, not at all. He - I think he'd only been on dates, like here and there, before and so - we were sort of swept up in the emotion of a first relationship and I think - I really think it was a good idea, a good thing that it didn't happen. I think it would have - we wouldn't have been able to cope with it, that's the only way I can put it really. ... split up or not...

Q: So did you do kind of anything sexual or was it that that was rather taboo?

A: Yeah, we did, but we didn't actually have intercourse. But we did - we were quite close.

Q: Mm. What do you mean by "quite close"?

A: Well, I suppose every - a lot of other things happened. It wasn't unsexual, but we were - I think I was really afraid of sex at first, I really thought that it would be, you know, painful, and this sort of thing. With THOMAS it was different because he was older, he made me - generally, he made me feel more - more assured and more confident, so - and also we'd been going out for that much longer. The

reason that ALEX and I split up was because he went to PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITY.

Q: And went away?

A: Yeah, and went away, exactly. And I knew that he was almost definitely going to. So that made me feel a bit - like I was definitely going to be left at a certain point, you know, as it were -

Q: Right, yeah.

A: - not - not dramatically, but, you know, I knew it couldn't go on that much longer. And also I didn't - I was very acutely aware of my mother's feelings about him, how suitable he was and how she would really like me to stay with him for a long time.

Q: Did you want to resist that, or -

A: Yeah, I did a bit. It used to annoy me quite a lot, because I really - even now I thought that she was getting too involved in it. It wasn't really to do with her. And I think if she found out that we were having sex she would have tried to make it more definite between us. Not because she thinks that - she's not ultra-moral, in the fact that the first person you have sex with you have to marry, but because of his - where he was going to be, where he was going to end up - you know, successfully, she would have tried to make sure that it was more definite. And that would have been in the back of my mind as well. I didn't want that to happen.

Q: Right. So you didn't mind that much when it split up really.

A: No, not really, no. I think it was really strange because I thought then that I was more secure than I - no, hang on a moment - I think that now I should be more rounded, you know, more secure than I was when I was seventeen, and yet if AVI was to say to me tomorrow "it's over, I don't want to see you again", I think I would - to some extent I would fall apart. I would be very upset. But when ALEX and I split up - I suppose because it was more - it was more mutual; if he'd said the same thing to me I probably would have been upset. But I still think that I would have coped with it better when I was seventeen, and yet I think that's strange. I think that it should be the opposite really, to have gained more by now, if you know what I mean.

Q: Yeah. Although it's often the case that you - you do gain more, but you can still be... temporarily devastated by something -

A: Yeah.

Q: - and still feel - you know... maybe you recover better or there's a different sort of basis on which you understand what's going on -

A: Yeah.

Q: - by a sort of build-up of experience and...

A: Yeah, that's right.

Q: Things like that.

A: I suppose it - I think it's because - when I was seventeen I hadn't - when ALEX and I split up, I hadn't even got my A-level results. There was so much to look forward to, so many things that were going to definitely happen - well, I thought they were going to definitely happen but I didn't do very well in my A-levels in the end; so I did a HND first before I did this course, but - which I enjoy - but now - you see, at the moment I'm having problems with my house, and this - a lot of people seem to be finding a lull, 'cos it's the second year, and especially

'cos we haven't got exams there's no sort of goal in mind so there's a bit of a lull; I think that's a lot got to do with it. That - that's why I'm - I think I'm clinging to this relationship more than I should, but not for the right reasons.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. I think that's what it is. That's why I'd be more devastated, definitely. No, but when I split up with ALEX - that was the guy who went to PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITY - and THOMAS, it was both quite - it was quite amicable. I didn't feel devastated. And yet they were both for longer than I've been seeing my present boyfriend -

Q: Yeah.

A: - it's really strange.

Q: ... involvement.

A: Yeah, that's right.

Q: So when you actually - the first time you had sex, was it like you might have expected?

A: It wasn't as bad - it wasn't as bad painful-wise as I thought it would be. No, no, it was quite a nice experience actually. I think because we'd known each other for a year, it was - it was nice. I wouldn't say it was a mind-blowingly passionate - but - that's one thing actually that AVI and I have got, is passion. But I think in a way it's passion that makes up for other things. It's trying to compensate for other problems, like the fact that we won't be together that long, I don't think, and, you know, problems in my house and so on, things like that.

Tape change.

Q: ... at one point it's got to end.

A: Yes.

Q: Rather than it -

A: And it will probably rather be sooner rather than later, you know. That's right, yeah. I think the longer you stay with somebody - not just from my point of view, generally, I think complacency might tend to set in, and then that doesn't really go hand in hand with passion, I don't think. That's probably what it is. And I always - I always feel with him that when we're together it's the last time we're going to be together for some reason. And then - it's really - it's a bit strange to think that because it probably won't be, but I always think, you know, this is, this is it sort of thing.

Q: Could be it.

A: That's it. I never felt that with THOMAS. That's why I felt so safe when I went out with him the first time. I didn't feel used or anything, it was really nice.

Q: And were you - you were on the pill then?

A: No, I wasn't, no, he was using a condom. And then - when was it that I went on the pill, when I was - it wasn't - it wasn't... quite soon after that I went on the pill actually. So I mean it was quite convenient that I went on it at that point, but - he didn't mention it at all. He never mentioned me going on the pill. I went to the doctor completely independently about my periods. But I suppose in the back of my mind I had that in mind, that it would be convenient. Because I don't really - condoms are - I find them a bit of an intrusion really. They're a bit -

Q: What, you don't like them?

A: Not really, no, no. Not - I think they're a good idea from - especially from the AIDS point of view. But then I think when - when I first had sex, AIDS wasn't really an issue, it hadn't been - it hadn't really hit the media. I can't remember when it did - when did it hit the media, it was about a year - two years ago?

Q: Yeah, about two years.

A: Yeah, it was before that, yeah, so it wasn't really an issue. But - so the only reason we used them was for - just so that I wouldn't become pregnant. But I don't really like them actually. I think -

Q: What don't you like about them?

A: I think sex is much better without them. I think you feel closer, and, you know, you get more stimulation without them. I just think they're... they're not that bad, they're not awful, but they're just a bit of an intrusion, I think.

Q: What, stimulation for both of you or -

A: Yeah, definitely, yeah.

Q: And so for you as well.

A: Yes, I think so. Yeah, I know some people - some men think it's just their pleasure that's being stopped, but no, no, for me, I prefer it without. I think they feel a bit sort of sterile really, a bit like a glove. Do you know what I mean, it doesn't - doesn't feel normal. Like eating a Mars bar with the wrapper on, as somebody said to me once (laugh).

Q: And did you tell - presumably you told THOMAS that you were going on the pill?

A: Yes, after I'd gone on it I told him. And he - I thought that he would just take it quite matter-of-factly, but I think he was worried - he thought I was too young to go on it actually. I think men tend to have a very - that it's only for sex, the pill; they don't seem - I said to him, look, the main reason I went on it is because I can't cope with this being sick every month and backache and everything. I mean - I had my periods since I was eleven, so it's not as if I'd only just started in the last few years, you know; from eleven to about fifteen I hardly ever had it and it was very light, but then after that it started to get worse. No, he was quite worried actually, I think he'd prefer it if I hadn't been on it. And because he was Catholic he didn't really -

Q: Right, yes...

A: - think... Yeah, that's it. Yeah, he was - that - in fact that was always quite a bone of contention actually, that he was the sort of person that was sort of a bit old-fashioned in the fact that - I think he thought sex was more to produce children, specially in the long term. I think that my - the problem was that he always thought, from the moment he met me, that we would get married, you see; which I didn't - wasn't aware of. At eighteen, marriage was like, you know, somewhere else for other people. It was totally different to what I was thinking of, you know. I definitely - I knew I wanted to do the degree, and so - and I knew that leads to other things. I didn't want to walk up the aisle straightaway after it.

Q: Right, yeah.

A: You know. But I think that was the problem. That I thought we were very honest with each other, but about that - well, I suppose it wasn't dishonesty, it was just misunderstanding, I suppose. I think, because his sister was the type of girl - I mean, she was a year older than him and really desperate to get married, really desperate, and so he thought that I would be - he thought I'd probably be

more like her. I think she was his main experience of women, young women, and he thought I'd want to get married, you know, after three – two, three years. And I didn't.

Q: Quite.

A: Yeah. So - but that's why I think - that's why I think using contraception didn't bother him that much, because he thought eventually we would have children together.

Q: Right, so it wouldn't...

A: Yeah, that's right, so it - so what happened in the past was - was really irrelevant... He was quite upset about me being on the pill actually, at first, a bit worried about it.

Q: And did you stop using condoms?

A: Yes, yeah. But I never - I knew that he'd had two main relationships before, but I never - I can't imagine him being promiscuous at all, so it didn't really bother me.

Q: So - what, you didn't think about kind of sexually transmitted diseases and things -

A: No, I didn't, not at all, but perhaps that was a bit naive of me but, touch wood, nothing's happened, so, you know, nothing... okay. I just can't - I just can't imagine him sleeping around at all. You know, he's not - he wasn't a sort of sexual person really, he was quite - very placid and like a calming influence. That's what I felt he was for me. He gave me a lot of security.

Q: But not so much passion.

A: No, that's right, no, that's it. But then I - I - when I think about it, I think that passion and long-term relationships don't always go together. I know they should ideally but I can't - I find it difficult to think of that really.

Q: Was he - THOMAS... I mean, did he - when you were making love - I mean what was it that stimulated you most?

A: I know that a lot of women say that they like foreplay quite a lot, but I actually like intercourse more, I think. That's what - that's what I enjoy most. Definitely with him - well, generally, actually. But he was quite conservative really, I think compared to - not compared to other guys that I've known, but what I've heard from my friends, he was very conservative... the missionary position or whatever they call it.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah, that was what we usually did. But I mean I enjoyed it, that was - I actually like that.

Q: And was that - kind of, you can get orgasms from that -

A: Yeah, I can, yeah, I don't - I do -

Q: Some people tend to either not get orgasms or -

A: Yeah.

Q: - or get them through other sorts of sexual activity.

A: Yeah, yeah. No, I mean I'm not saying I don't like foreplay at all, but it's not - I probably couldn't - I probably couldn't orgasm just - just going straight into sex, but I'm not - I don't have to have that much foreplay to be, you know, stimulated, I don't think. And that's quite different to what I've read and heard, it's the opposite.

Q: And things like oral sex - would he be too conservative for that?

A: Yes, he was. The thing is, he's quite male chauvinist in that way because he liked it for himself, but he didn't seem to like to do it to me. Which I thought was a bit strange. But I quite like - I quite like being the giver but I'm not - I don't - I don't dislike it but it doesn't really do that much for me, I must say. I don't know why.

Q: Is that different with your current - ?

A: Yeah, I think it is, yeah. 'Cos he likes to do that to me and I - I quite - with him I like it, for some reason. I don't know why that is. I think he's - he's the guy that I've been most physically attracted to, definitely. Because we like started having a sexual relationship quicker than I did with THOMAS, much quicker, so - in fact, I sometimes think it was a bit too quick; but then I always think it's not going to last that long, so -

Q: It's going to end any minute?

A: Not any minute, but like every time we're together I think this might be the last time. I tend to sort of - like after we've had sex, I really sort of cling to him a lot. I think that's when we're - it hits me that we might not be together again. He probably thinks I'm a bit mad. Bit clingy. But it's only because I don't feel secure and like the people in my house, they - especially one of them, she... yeah, doesn't really approve.

Q: And who initiates, is it one or the other?

A: No, not really, it's both of us really. I think - it's really strange that whenever we're - whenever we're in - in a - my house, my room, or his, it just happens straight away. It just - sometimes it worries me because I think there isn't really much else between us. You know, like - I mean, we used to talk last year but we talked - we didn't talk about general things, life generally; he usually came to me to talk about this girl because he was so uptight about it, you know, or something - or something in particular. It was usually like a definite thing. It wasn't like we were - like to my other friends, we talk about - especially girls, my girlfriends, we talk about just really general things. But no, it - it's - it does frighten me because I feel that - I don't know, it's just, like an animal-like attraction, and it's more frightening than any of my other relationships. They were more sort of calm and natural and - not natural, just more calm, I suppose. There was more substance to them, I think.

Q: And were you more in control?

A: Yeah, definitely. My life wasn't - my life was unfettered by the relationship if you like, they were separate things. But this - when - if AVI and I have an argument, it's like I can't think about anything else. Even though - I try to think about something else and I'm not - I might be doing something, some work, but it's in the back of my mind, you know, and I get headaches - if we have an argument I get headaches and things like that, really unexplainable things that's - the only explanation could be that we've argued. Really. Because I'm not prone to being ill, being stressed.

Q: No. Yes, no, it's psychological.

A: Yes, it is. It's affecting me, definitely. And my mother's noticed actually, she keeps saying - well, she doesn't keep saying to me are you... "is there someone in your life?", but she keeps saying "what's the matter?", you know, "you don't look well and you seem stressed", and I can't disagree with her but I - all I do is just stress the business about the house - "oh, mum, it's so awful in the house, I

really want to get out, I want to move", all this sort of thing. So she's pacified, she believes that, I think, it's just that. You know. But I really don't - I think that's her - she can't know me that well, because if it was just that, I don't think I'd actually be physically feeling unwell, and be so drained of energy. I just don't - the only thing I can think about a lot of the time after we've had an argument is just being with him again and making it up, forgetting about it. And it really - it makes me angry because I think, you know, this isn't - I don't wanna be like this.

Q: Yes, yes, makes you feel you're dependent.

A: Yeah, it does. I am feeling that I'm dependent. I'm thinking this is ridiculous, I've only been seeing him for a couple of months, you know. It'll probably end quite soon. But I just hope that it's not going to be a fatal attraction sort of affair, a big drama.

Q: Would your mother - have you been able to talk to her at all? Has she talked to you at all about like sex or things like that?

A: Yes, she's quite good. You see, before - she talked - when I was about fourteen, fifteen she used to talk to me about it. She sort of told me about, you know, the birds and the bees as they say -

Q: Yeah.

A: - and she was quite honest. And, because she'd been a CARING ROLE, she explained things really well; but I think she found it easier to talk about it in isolation as a topic, but when it came to me and, especially THOMAS, she didn't want to know really. She didn't want to talk about it. I think she couldn't - because she doesn't approve of mixed relationships so she couldn't - she kept thinking that it was just like a very good friendship.

Q: Right.

A: She never wanted to admit that it was sexual. Even though she must - when we went on holiday together she must have known that it was, and she did know it was, because - she said to me the night before we went, "I hope you've got your tablets with you", 'cos she knew that I was on the pill, because of like - she thought - when I originally went on it it was more for my period problems. My father never knew about it. He wouldn't approve at all.

Q: So could you ever talk to him about personal things?

A: No, definitely not, no. We're not very close actually. At all. He's quite a difficult person to relate to really, 'cos he's - there's only sort of certain things that I feel I can talk to him about really, very - and they're very practical things. Not - he's not very good at talking about feelings at all, because he doesn't show his feelings very much. I don't talk to him that much at all. About money - money and my education -

Q: Right.

A: That's about it.

Q: So - and your mum you can't really talk to that much?

A: She doesn't know anything about this guy, no. No. I mean if I did tell her that I was unhappy, then I suppose she would listen, but she'd be very - if she knew more about him she'd be very disapproving. And I think she - she'd guess that he was not white because otherwise she'd probably know that I'd have told her before.

Q: Yes. You'd have brought him home.

A: Yeah, that's it, probably yeah, that's it. So if I mentioned it at all it would be on a slippery slope down to her finding out everything, you know, really. And I don't think I - I couldn't cope with her acting the way she did about THOMAS at first, she just went - she just used to cry. She used to sit and cry and not - I'd ask her something and she'd just snap. She really did go a bit over the top. So - I don't think - I don't know whether she'd do that again, but she certainly wouldn't be over the moon. She wouldn't be happy about it.

Q: Have you got brothers and sisters?

A: No, I haven't, no. So she concentrates very much on me.

Q: Right.

A: Also she's got JOINT PAIN, so she's not very well. So - yeah, she does concentrate too much on me I think. It's not entirely her fault though. Before she was ill she was very independent but now she can't really go out that much, and, like I say about my dad, he doesn't really talk that much about things. Just very general things. I'm like her interest point if you like.

Q: Right. So she puts a lot on - invests a lot in you.

A: Definitely, yeah. She'd like me to marry somebody who's white, middle class and very well off, basically.

Q: You're going off with somebody who's -

A: - the opposite. Yeah. Yes. A bit. That's right, she wouldn't approve at all. Sometimes I feel like saying to her that - perhaps if I could tell her about this then I could say this is only short term, and perhaps it's just a phase, and perhaps this will help me to get over it, and then when I do eventually decide that I want to marry, it will be a simple person. But I think in telling her that I'd be trying to convince myself of it as well, in a way. You know.

Q: Yes,... justification.

A: Yeah, that's right. Because I don't - I mean I shouldn't really feel guilty about it because it's just the way I feel, but in a way I do because - when I do see mixed couples it's usually black, as in West Indian, guy and a white girl. It doesn't seem to be that people - white or black people, go out with Asian people that much. And so sometimes I think, "is there something wrong with me?", you know. But I never - it doesn't - it doesn't - I don't sit for hours thinking about it. Sometimes it just crosses my mind. But I don't think about it that much. "Is there something wrong with me? Why am I attracted to these sort of people?" (laugh), you know. But then I think THOMAS and AVI are so different; the only thing they've got in common is their colour, that's the only thing; different religion, different way of looking at life, you know, totally different. So then I think no, maybe not. Just a coincidence.

Q: Yeah. No, it probably is.

A: Maybe, yeah.

Q: Can I - you know when you mentioned AIDS before... Can you remember when you first kind of heard -

A: About AIDS?

Q: - about AIDS and sort of thought anything about it.

A: I think it was - they had this like marathon programme about AIDS, I think it was on a Friday night, it was on for about two hours; and they had - what was this girl - this man was like blowing up a condom. They were really trying to make sex very acceptable to talk about, especially on TV; I was like - I just

couldn't believe it: "what's he doing?", you know. And they had MAGAZINE EDITOR, is it, from Cosmopolitan -

Q: ...

A: - she was on, and she was talking about it very matter of factly, as she does in her articles; that was the first time that it really - I mean I'd heard that - I'd heard the words in the paper, the word, but no, that's the first time I really thought about it, when I watched that programme. Because I was thinking "THOMAS - who's he slept with?", this sort of thing.

Q: Did it mean that you could talk about it to him or -

A: No. Even him, I think there was this - there was a slight bit of - no, we never talked about it actually, never mentioned. I mean we might have mentioned the word to each other but not in relation to our - our relationship, if you know what I mean. I still think there was this element of maintaining - I can't think of a better word than mystery, but I think he knew that I hadn't slept with anybody before; but I knew - well, I didn't - he hadn't actually - yes, he did say that he'd slept with one of the girls that he'd been out with. But - but that was - he'd been out - he'd had long-term relationships, you see, and I don't think he would be - he's not the type to be unfaithful. So no, I wasn't - still wasn't that worried. It did cross my mind, as I said, when I watched this programme, but I wasn't - it wasn't something that I was bothered about. I think I trusted him. Which is something I don't do with AVI definitely not (laugh).

Q: So have you thought about AIDS with him?

A: Well, because he's been using condoms all the time -

Q: Yeah.

A: - then I think no problem.

Q: Right.

A: Totally safe.

Q: And is it something you and he ever talk about?

A: No, no.

Q: ...

A: Never mention it at all, no. No. There's still this - this thing in his mind that it's - he's probably like my first boyfriend, you know.

Q: Yes...

A: He knows I'm not but I think he kids himself -

Q: So he feels safe.

A: Yeah, that's it. Yeah, I think it's a psychological thing, definitely. Because he knows - he must know that he's not. He knows that I've been out with other guys as well.

Q: And do you know how AIDS is transmitted?

A: To be honest I don't know that much about it, no. No. I think it's through semen, isn't it -

Q: Yes.

A: Yeah. Or blood. Is that it? Through saliva?

Q: Well, saliva's fairly dubious but you'd need such a lot of it.

A: Not definite. Yeah. Right. But I don't really know much about it. I don't know why but I haven't really - even when I was given - at the freshers' fair this year, I was given an information pack, sort of thrust into everybody's hands, you know; but I didn't even read it. I don't know why. I think maybe that's another

psychological thing, I don't really want to know. You know, because if it came to it I could - it's possible that if THOMAS had slept around, or even if one of the girls he'd slept - you know, been going out with, had it, then I could have it as well, which is a bit worrying. But I did have - I was giving blood about a year and a half ago, and they test it - test your blood now, before you give blood. And they said it was fine.

Q: Right.

A: That was quite - yeah (laugh).

Q: So it's like having a bit of an AIDS test without really having to have an AIDS test.

A: That's it, without admitting you're having one. Yeah, that's right, yeah. 'Cos I don't know if I'd actually have gone for one for definite. No, that was quite relieving. I didn't really think that - it sounds awful to say that THOMAS wouldn't have been with the sort of girl that would have had - would get it, but I know that you wouldn't have to be the sort of girl or anything to get it. I could have easily have got it from him but I know that I haven't now. But I still think there's a stigma attached to AIDS about - well, I know in the homosexual community, yeah, that's - a lot of people still think of it as being that, don't they?

Q: Yes.

A: ... that. But obviously a bisexual could pass it on to women. But no, I don't - I think that it's very bad that it's got this sort of stigma about you have to sleep around to get it. Because you wouldn't - I could have got it from THOMAS, definitely. He's the only person I could have got it from but - because of the sort of person he was he just - he was the last person in the world you'd think would sleep around. He was sort of good, a good person, inverted commas, you know.

Q: Yeah, I know what you mean. Do you know the difference between AIDS and HIV?

A: No, no. Is there a big difference?

Q: Well, HIV is - is like being either HIV positive or negative, either you've actually got the virus or you haven't got the virus -

A: Right, yes, I've heard that. That -

Q: ... in your system. Whereas AIDS is actually getting the - the full-blown disease as it were.

A: Right.

Q: So you can have HIV -

A: - without -

Q: - HIV positive -

A: - without having actual AIDS.

Q: Without, you know, having any symptoms or anything like that. And it may possibly, who knows, never develop at all.

A: Oh, I see. So if you are HIV-positive you have the -

Q: Yes.

A: - you have the disease but you don't have the symptoms.

Q: Yes.

A: And so you - I thought that if you had HIV, eventually, even if it took ten years -

Q: Well, that's what they think, yeah.

A: - it would show itself.

Q: Yeah, I mean - I think that's probably true.

A: Right. But you can have it for quite a long time... dormant -

Q: ... for a long time without it. 'Cos they keep disputing -

A: - it's quite frightening -

Q: - the number of years. First of all it was a few, then it was seven then it was ten, twelve, so -

A: But they haven't actually decided that you could definitely have HIV without having symptoms?

Q: I think actually probably they haven't said that you never get them -

A: Right.

Q: - but it's not always clear how long it's going to take for them to -

A: Right, yeah.

Q: ... for it to develop into AIDS.

A: Right. So when I had the - the - when I gave blood, before I had - when I had the test beforehand, that was a year and a half ago, so presumably if - oh, I see, I should still have the virus, HIV -

Q: No, it would have showed up if you -

A: It would have showed up. Right, okay. I've got it. In your blood. Right. Right. I - oh, yeah, I see. No, I had heard that but I was under the impression that if you had the - HIV, if you were HIV-positive, then eventually, no matter how long it took, it would definitely show, symptoms-wise. But that hasn't been definitely decided.

Q: I don't think that's been definitely decided.

A: No, right.

Q: But I mean obviously quite a high proportion of people with the HIV virus do develop -

A: Do - will develop, eventually, yeah. I suppose it depends on your health as well. A bit frightening.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. I think any future relationships I have, whether or not I'm on the pill, I will use condoms. I still - I still feel awkward about carrying condoms, though, myself.

Q: Would you?

A: Definitely. I think that - I - I think that's something that society imposes on people, I really do, that for a girl - for a man to carry them is very very acceptable, it goes back a long way, to the fifties, you know, they always used to carry a pack -

Q: Right, yeah.

A: - and even quite honourable for him to carry them, in case he gets into a situation where he needs to use them. But for a woman to carry them I still think it's very - she's on the lookout kind of thing. I really think that's just a gender thing. I think - I mean, women should be able to carry them.

Q: Yeah...

A: As well as men. Because women should be able to enjoy sex as much as men do. But - but I also think that it's - I really think it's unacceptable for a woman to go to any - any public place, meeting social place, and meet a man, and then have sex with him on the first night, and her produce the condoms. I

still think that most people would look on that, even - however broadminded they think they are, they would still think that was bad.

Q: What, as though she was looking for it?

A: Yeah. Yeah, as if she was a slut, basically. Yeah. I don't think that's how it should be but that's how it is, you know. In an ideal world it wouldn't be, but so many people think that. Women think that as well. They really do. I often find that women can be more damning about other women than men about women, definitely.

Q: Could you ask, do you think, a man to use one if you were in a relationship where it arose and maybe you did both want to?

A: Yes, but it'd have to be - I'd have to have been seeing him for quite a while. It would be - I mean, I don't think I could sleep with someone I'd just met, I really don't. I think I'd be really - I wouldn't feel comfortable enough, definitely not. I think it's only - it's only because I've known AVI for quite a long time as a friend, that it's happened so quickly. And the fact that I feel very physically attracted to him. That's the two reasons, I think.

Q: Yeah.

A: If I'd only met him in December, then I think I'd still be - wouldn't feel right about it. No, I think I could - yeah, I could ask a guy to use one but I'd have to - it would be after a while -... time had elapsed. Yeah.

Q: Yeah. And you'd feel you knew him quite well.

A: Yeah. That's it. But I don't think it's - I think if he's got any sense he should wanna use one as well really.

Q: Sure.

A: Definitely. But I do think all this business about AIDS and - and condoms, it does contradict the thing about mystery and this fancy thing, 'cos I really think that's prevalent in a lot of relationships. Even if people aren't always aware of it. I think they - especially men, I still think they like to put the woman on a pedestal, and think that she's basically what they want her to be. And most men don't like to think that the girl they're seeing has been to bed with very many men. So -

Q: Although it doesn't matter so much for them.

A: No, that's right, exactly. I know. Very sickening. No it doesn't, there's a lot of double standards about that. And yet - and yet the guy can be so liberal in so many other ways, but still not about that.

Q: Do you think - it seems to me that you don't in general take risks -

A: No.

Q: - about things. Is that general? I mean, it seems to be in terms of contraception and sort of doubling up with condoms and the pill for protection -

A: Yeah.

Q: I mean, do you think other areas of your life are like that as well?

A: Just generally?

Q: Yeah.

A: No, I suppose - no, I'm not - no, I'm not really that spontaneous actually. I do usually, before I make a decision I sort of calculate what's going to happen, one way or the other, and I try to, you know, make sure that it's going to work out well as much as I can before I make it. No, no, I'm quite - and yet from my star sign I'm supposed to be impulsive. And in some ways about money I'm very extravagant for a student; it's awful, I'm always broke. I'm always having to ask

the bank for overdrafts and they always keep saying "yes", which - I wish they wouldn't (laugh), 'cos I'd have to cut down if I had no money. But yeah, that's the only thing I think I'm impulsive about, is money. Other things I'm more - yes, more careful about, I suppose.

Q: And things like drugs or drink and things like that?

A: I've never - never taken drugs at all. No. And I'm not - it sounds... I mean, I know people that do. A couple of my friends smoke dope regularly and it doesn't bother me; because I think - I think they can cope with it. You know, like one of them was actually brought up in Africa and I think - she's given me the impression that it's very much the norm there, in AFRICA. And she really - she doesn't... affect - she does, she's affected by it at the time; but generally her life's in control, she's got a very good job and everything, she's, you know, quite in control of it. And she's often said to me, "would you like to try some?" and I said no, and she respects that. So - drink - when I was about fifteen, sixteen I used to get drunk quite a lot, like if I did drink anything I usually used to go a bit mad and drink too many mixtures and stuff like that -

Q: Yeah.

A: - and I think I got it out of my system actually, 'cos I was sick a couple of times and it put me off, in a big way. It put me off drinking a lot. And so if I go out for a drink with somebody now, you know, very - sometimes I do have a little bit too much but it's never enough to be sick, never. I really know my limit, definitely. No. And I'm not that into drinking. I'd much rather go out for a meal with somebody or go to the theatre than - than go to a pub, you know, to drink; I mean, I don't mind going to a pub but I don't have to - feel that I have to have a certain amount of drink to enjoy myself. Like - a lot of students do, that I know, actually. They really - they - they - they consider an evening to be good if they can't remember what happened; you know, if they were so drunk they just can't think where they were or where they ended up for the night or whatever.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know.

Q: Yeah.

A: I just think, why are they doing this when they're twenty, twenty-one? They should have got over it when I got over it -

Q: - ... years ago.

A: Yeah.

Q: What do you see yourself doing with your degree or with anything in like a few years' time or ... years' time or -

A: I think straight after my degree I don't really want to do anything full-time straight away, but I would like to do a Master's and I think that I want to work in this country, probably in London, but not straight away. So I'd like to go to Australia for a year - you can get a visa to go for a year. I'd like to do that. A friend of mine - in fact, a few friends of mine just happen to be going the same time I want to go, or the same year, so hopefully I'll be able to arrange something with them. 'Cos I wouldn't really like to go on my own.

Q: Right...

A: Yeah, a bit... nervous about that. If it wasn't so far away it wouldn't be so bad, but it is so - try and go with them for a year. And then really take it from there. You know, see what happens when I'm there.

Q: Right.

A: Yeah. If I really liked it I might try and apply to stay a bit longer and work for a bit longer there. And then I'd like to travel back - either that way to America or another way, yeah... But I think - and then I'd like to work in personnel if they'd take me on, with my... call it, left-wing degree (laugh). Subversive. I don't think it is - I don't think it is, but... no, some - I think some private firms might... So I'd like to do that. So if I do come back here that's what I'd like to do. Personnel. How old am I, I'm nearly twenty-two - I suppose when I'm thirty-two, I think I probably would like to be married. Thirty-two. Definitely. I've only really thought that really recently actually, before that I'd never really - marriage was like a taboo word for me. But no, I would like to - no - well I'd like - as I said, a relationship, a good relationship is really more important than actually making it official. But I think probably when I'm about thirtyish, making it official might be more important to me.

Q: Right.

A: You know, and I think - if - I still think if I did have - want to have any children I'd like to be married. I don't know why. I suppose that's probably quite to do with my religion quite a lot.

Q: Does your religion affect the way you felt about kind of having sex or - I mean I know you said a bit about it before, but I mean that kind of morality of having sex anyway, ... Catholic...?

A: No, not really. As I said, it did cross my mind, but it wasn't really an issue that I felt strongly about really. Even though I went to a Catholic school - but you see the school I went to was quite - it wasn't very very Catholic. I mean, okay, we had a mass at the beginning of the term and the end, and we had - in our assemblies prayers featured quite a lot, but ultimately we didn't have nuns teaching. All our teachers were just, you know, normal teachers. And the religious element didn't come across strongly to me, on an everyday basis. I think if it had - if I'd gone to a convent I think things might have been very different. But I didn't and it was quite a relaxed school, comprehensive school, mixed school, so - and also I was used to boys as well. I think, not having any brothers, that was quite good for me, to meet them quite early on.

Q: And did they give you much sex education at school?

A: We had some in the fourth year, but it wasn't very in-depth, it was quite general. We had some in the first year as well actually, the first year of secondary school, and that was - it was very - I felt very sorry for the teacher because the guys... made a joke of it and they made it very - they made it very embarrassing actually for the girls, and the teacher. Like everything she pointed out they were, you know, being rude about it. So I felt very sorry for her actually, even then. That was the first year.

Q: So did you feel you learnt anything?

A: No. I think I learnt more from my mother actually. Because she told me more about the feelings that go with the actual act -

Q: Yeah.

A: - and she told me all about periods

Q: Yeah, 'cos that's something they tend not to tell you at school, is anything to do with what your emotions -

A: No, it's all very sort of "this is the body" and "this is what this thing does", and, you know, it's very sort of - the anatomy really, isn't it? It's quite, you know, scientific. Yeah. But then I suppose it's very difficult for them to tell perhaps first year in secondary school about emotions because - especially in a Catholic school, because there's all that thing about "they're too young to know. If you tell them now it'll only lead to complications, they'll only start going out with each other too young, and, you know, the parents will blame us", and this sort of thing, you know. A lot of the teachers - parents of the children at our school, were - were - they were quite against people going out together, and yet they weren't - they didn't encourage - it was quite an unacademic school. They didn't encourage the children to be very academic, they didn't encourage them to aim for university. And so I - to me, that didn't quite go together with being so anti relationships. I presume it's because they were Catholic.

Q: Presumably.

A: Yeah, that they didn't want them to, you know, do anything before they were a certain age.

Q: Did they tell you about contraceptive methods?

A: No, they didn't, no, no. I certainly don't remember if they did. I think they might have mentioned it in the first year but they didn't actually say what the different things were -

Q: - or show you them or -

A: No. No, definitely not. I remember the first time I did see a picture of what a condom was and a coil and this sort of thing, was in Claire Raynor's "Life Guide". My mother bought it for me, she bought it as a Christmas present, when I was about fourteen. I found that quite interesting actually, generally, 'cos not only did it talk about sex, it talked about other things, money matters and all sorts of things. That was the first time I saw a diagram of all these different - and fourteen's quite late, I think.

Q: Yes.

A: - to see - see - not to hold them, but to see them, actually what they look like, how they are fitted and all this sort of thing. I think that's very late. But I do think that's because I went to Catholic school, you know, and they had all these strange taboos about things.

Q: Presumably they never mentioned things like masturbation -

A: No. Good God, no. I didn't know what that meant actually till I read that book either. No. I'd heard the word but - well, I'd heard the more derogatory phrases of it at school, I mean I heard a lot of things at school, you know, from - I mean, the parents of the boys at our school must be really stupid if they think their sons are really goody-goody, because they were awful, and the things they used to say about girls they'd been out with just made me sick. 'Cos you could - even if you didn't know what they meant, you could guess.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know, they were so sort of crude about it. I'm sure they didn't do anything, hardly anything; all the things they said they just exaggerated, they just heard things on television or elsewhere from their elder brothers and sisters - who'd also been to our school probably - and then just repeated them. Just - just unbelievable. It would really put you off going out with anybody at school. I never went out with - that's one of the reasons I never went out with anybody at school.

Apart from the fact that for my school I was quite - fairly studious. I did do my homework... a bit more, most of them didn't even do the homework; it was quite an uphill struggle really, academically, that school.

Q: But you made it.

A: I made it, yes. Yes. Not quite - with quite a struggle. I didn't enjoy school that much, that's why, when I went to college to do my A-levels I really let my hair down too much. It was the wrong time to do it. It would have been better to study harder for the A-levels and go straight onto the degree. But - instead of doing a HND. But still I've made it, yeah. I've got there. Most of the girls in my year at school are either engaged or living with somebody or got children or married, or a combination, you know. But they're - they're not independent. I don't consider them to be independent. They might be financially but they're not emotionally, no. You see I think at least - at least - okay, now I don't feel very emotionally independent because of this present relationship, but eventually that will end and I'll probably go back to being okay on my own. But I don't think they could. Because they became too attached too soon.

Q: Right.

A: Like straight after leaving school, or even while they were at school, they were probably involved with the same guy as they're with now. And how could - how could they cope without him? Because they've grown up with him, they don't - they didn't really develop on their own. So I think from that point of view I've done - even if I wasn't to get the degree, I think that's better -

Q: Yes, yes.

A: - that I've done that. It's built my character more.

Q: ...

A: Definitely, yeah. I mean, I just don't know why they want to be married, have children now, I just can't understand it. And when I meet them, if I do ever meet them when I go home, we don't really have much to say to each other. 'Cos they say to me, "oh, are you still at college?" like it was - like I'm a bit unfortunate that I'm still at college, but the fact that I really enjoy it, you know -

Q: - doesn't count.

A: No, doesn't seem to. They especially don't - they - obviously to college to them would be to go to learn to type: do something really vocational, not even business studies, which I think is quite vocational, but to do something really like just a short course to lead to another grade at work or whatever, you know. That's what they would think of as college. I just don't know what to say... And then they say to me, "what is social science?", and I just think "you don't really want to know, why are you asking me?". It's very difficult to explain sometimes.

Q: Yes, and they - if they don't really want to know...

A: No, if they haven't - they don't know anything about higher education, it's very difficult to explain it. I usually say politics 'cos that sounds quite sort of concrete, rather than sociology, 'cos sociology's got a very sort of "hey, man" reputation, I think.

Q: Yes...

A: Yeah, that's right, it has.

Q: Can I just ask when you first felt of yourself as a sort of sexual person?

A: It wasn't at school.

Q: ...

A: Yeah, definitely not at school. No. I suppose with ALEX, my first boyfriend, I did feel - he made me feel attractive, I think, even though we never actually went the whole way. But yeah, that was the first time I think, definitely. At school - I mean a lot of girls at school were very sexual, and very aware of themselves, but I didn't really relate to that at all when I was at school... They were like women inside a child's body, if you like, I think.

Q: And you were, what, eighteen when you...

A: Yeah, that's right, eighteen, yeah. No, well when I met ALEX I was seventeen. So that's when - yeah, I suppose, seventeen, eighteen, that's when I really felt more sexual.

Q: And I forgot to ask you - in terms of when we were talking about condoms and you not really liking them, whether like THOMAS or - what's he called?

A: AVI.

Q: AVI.

A: Yeah.

Q: - whether they like them or don't like them, in the same way or a different way.

A: No, AVI doesn't really like them. No. He keeps saying he'd like to leave it - leave it off sort of thing. But I keep saying no - no, no, no, no. Not unless you want to let - me to be the mother of your child. And that put him off enough... (laugh). No, THOMAS didn't mind actually; no, he didn't seem to - but I think that's - there again, AVI's more sexual. THOMAS was more into our general relationship and us being friends and going out together more. You see, because I think the main thing about my present relationship is sex, which I don't really like to admit 'cos I don't think it's very good; it's not very - it's not very healthy.

Q: It's not that the sex isn't very good...?

A: ... the sex is good but -