Oral history interview with Sue Scott for the Reanimating Data Project

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Key:

**I: Interviewer – Ester McGeeney**

R: Respondent – Sue Scott

**I: My first question is biographical, really. I suppose it’s about where you were when that came along, so what were you doing in 1988, 1989?**

R: I was a temporary lecturer at Manchester in sociology, started there in the autumn of ’86, having…shall I go back a bit?

**I: Yes.**

R: Just quickly, so I… I’d done a number of research jobs so after I graduated, I did a stint in Newcastle Library as I wanted to do research, right?

**I: Did you do sociology?**

R: Yes, I did sociology at Newcastle. I got a job in London as a researcher with the Health Education Council. Then I went from there to Lancaster to do postgrad and a PhD I never finished. That’s a whole other story, but it is kind of relevant…it will be a bit relevant. So that gets us to ’82. I had a temporary teaching in Lancaster for a while. ’82… Thatcher, no jobs, I mean, really no jobs, and I moved to Nottinghamshire and did three years, I think, as a researcher for social services in community health, which I hated. Absolutely hated. My comments last night about community work and stuff probably come from that period.

Anyway, never mind, it sort of colours some things, and then ridiculous to the ridiculous, I got not an independent fellowship but a fellowship attached to a research project on women doctors at Cambridge, Lucy Cavendish Women’s College at Cambridge. So I did that for almost two years and then got the temporary lectureship at Manchester, which is where I wanted to be, so that was sort of my…I already knew David Morgan and Liz Stanley and that was the height of my ambition in terms of being in a sociology department at that point. But it was a research leave cover, and in the end, I think I had either five or six years of temporary contracts, one or two years. So under that scheme you had to be interviewed every year. So when WRAP started, I think I was on a two-year contract. I think I must have had just enough to cover, but it was very precarious. It was very precarious and in the end, I got a permanent contract there in ’92 to start in September ’92. This is quite funny, in a way, but it explains why I moved at that point, and that is relevant…

So it was what they called a new blood lectureship, which meant somebody had to be retiring, and they were doing a step-down, you know, percentages, and the department got a lectureship and I would have dropped £4,000 a year from where I was as a temporary lecturer to this fixed level. That felt terrible but I would have done it, but then I got a senior lectureship at Stirling and a £9,000 increase. It was a no-brainer, really, for me at that point having had all of that insecurity and then, you know, feeling that I was almost going backwards.

Anyway, so that was ’92. We’re jumping on, but that’s…

**I: So just after WRAP finished, you then left Manchester?**

R: Yes, and that will kick in when we talk about other things.

**I: And at what point would you say you became a feminist?**

R: Oh, God.

**I: Like how did feminism feature in the…?**

R: Oh, my mum made me a feminist, in a way, I mean, not in a very self-conscious way, but she was very much you should be able to do… She was a funny mixture because when I took her rock climbing, she had 50 million pink fits, she wasn’t into me doing things like that as a child, she was very protective, in a way. But you know, adamant that I should be able to do whatever and no pressure in terms of marriage and children. I actually was married and Clive and I split up in 1989, so there was personal stuff in the background, but, you know, blah…it is background.

So I would have said I was a proto-feminist at 16 but there wasn’t any way to articulate that when I was 16 in 1969, and in Middlesbrough, you know, no notion of what was really beginning to happen in London or the States or whatever.

And then when I was a student, I mean, yes, you know, I was saying to somebody yesterday that was incredulous that I used to regularly go into the men’s bar at Newcastle Uni to try to get them to serve me, because I was outraged that there was a men’s bar. So in that sense, yes, but not in the sense of being in anything, and that began to happen in London a bit and absolutely in Lancaster. Yes, that was kind of a baptism of fire. I’ll try to be brief but my PhD supervisor was somebody called Carol Riddell who was a trans woman. This is 1977. The department was somewhat in turmoil. The women’s movement in Lancaster was split right down the middle in terms of whether they would accept her or not, and I sort of walked into this small town, wanting to be part of feminism in Lancaster and it’s like…

So, you know, interesting.

**I: And what was your PhD about?**

R: It was stuff on mothers and daughters at that point. Anyway, that’s a long story about her not wanting to supervise and there not really being anybody else and then, I missed a bit out, I got a research job at Lancaster, a three-year ESRC funded project looking at the PhD process in social science and science. So I did that and that was fieldwork everywhere from Aberdeen to Exeter, and doing the PhD as well, I just couldn’t do it, and I think also I just didn’t have the right sort of confidence at that point. I think that is a kind of theme. I did my degree at a poly in Newcastle, you know? I’d done really badly at school between eleven and O-levels and then did really well. The poly was my insurance place but because I got absolutely shit O-levels, the uni place I got in the end, I either got Cardiff or Bangor, I’d never been to Wales, stupidly kept the Bangor offer, because, you know, you can only keep one, realised between then and getting my A-level results that me and Bangor at 18 was a completely ridiculous idea, didn’t want to stay at school, went to the poly… This is just background in terms of my academic insecurities, I think, really at that point.

**I: But you wanted an academic career?**

R: Doing research, we had a really…have you come across Geoff Payne? I mean, he’s taught me research methods and, you know, he’s done lots of method stuff over the years in sociology, so we had really good research methods of teaching. They had us out doing research for Nacro, [National Association for the Rehabilitation of Offenders] and, yes, that’s what I wanted to do. And also I think there were two or three of us who were thought to have that potential and people talked to us about it, tutors talked to us about it. But I’d got no idea and I’d got no idea about postgraduate courses or whatever at that point. That came through meeting people in London and when I was at Health Education Council I was going to do the methods Master’s at Surrey. They were going to pay for me to do that and I got a place, and then Clive and I got together and he had dropped out in the middle of his first degree in Cambridge and wanted to carry on, and we both got places at Lancaster, me to do postgrad and him to do his undergrad, so I didn’t take up the place at Surrey at the end…you know, blah-blah-blah, the rest is history.

I didn’t buy the motorbike either that I was going to use to get there. (Laughs).

**I: Just checking that’s recording.**

R: Okay, sorry, this is the trouble being old, you know? There’s all this…

**I: No, but it’s…**

R: So where are we? Feminist, yes, you know, absolutely, by this point. I mean, I suppose I’ve never been absolutely in the…I’d been in to see our groups in Lancaster and stuff, but I think there was also such a sort of split between lesbians and heterosexual feminists at the time and I knew I wanted to work around sexuality and stuff, so you’re constantly walking a tightrope, and that’s what bonds Stevi Jackson and I together, and many things do but we’ve walked that tightrope all our careers.

So I’d always felt a little bit on the edge, but, you know, Manchester, Liz Stanley, she has been the most fantastic mentor and support for me, and I wouldn’t have an academic career, I don’t think, without her and maybe partly David Morgan, and, you know, there are others. I just think that she encouraged me to apply for that job at Manchester and supported me through all these hurdles, really, and helped me to learn to write.

So I did a Masters by research in between all of this, just in order to get to the next step, thinking I would then do a different PhD and she basically locked me in her spare room until I’d written it, more or less.

**I: Sounds amazing, like with all that precariousness in that you need something to hold you…**

R: Yes, and people that believe in you, but there was still the, you know, I hadn’t got the PhD and there was no time and space. I did reregister at Manchester to do something, and it was going to be around women and HIV and AIDS. I started teaching, introducing stuff around that into…do you know, I can’t remember which course, but I set up a Sociology of the Body course in 1987, I think, ’88 maybe, and there were only another three in the UK at that point. But I think I’d already done some HIV and AIDS stuff in the methods course. Luxury, we had 16 students on the BSocSc sociology degree. There were huge numbers on the faculty degree in big lecture courses, but that was just a really good way of thinking about how to get into that, and I’d got involved in HIV and AIDS politics in Manchester with people working in health promotion stuff and done some work around that, and I think I’d already done a bit of sort of consultancy stuff around that at this point.

**I: So the research interest in this area, because I was just going to go on to ask you about where WRAP came from really, so for you that came from the activism within the cities around…?**

R: Partly, and from me wanting to work on sexuality. I think I’m going to stick my neck out and say that the idea really did come from me. This is the bit that’s a bit hazy. I can remember conversations with Janet and Caroline, we knew each other from the BSA, Committee on the Equality of the Sexes it was called then, which we’d both been on, I think, different iterations, and the Women’s Caucus and Sexual Divisions Study Group, so we knew each other, you know? I wouldn’t say we were close mates, because we were miles apart and stuff, but we were part of that relatively small feminist network in sociology at that point. I can remember having conversations with them at the BSA conference about doing some work together, and then I remember having a conversation about…and I think it was probably Caroline, because she was just much more savvy about funding and stuff, I think, you know, was there any chance of ESRC funding at that point because of HIV and AIDS, in a way. So I’d already wanted to do something around that. That was that.

At that point, we could just go backwards and forwards, can’t we…at that point I knew Mildred Blaxter quite well. I was on the editorial board for Sociology of Health and Illness and Mildred was asked to lead the ESRC’s line of work. It wasn’t…what do they call them? What was the children thing? It wasn’t a fully-blown…

**I: Like stream?**

R: Yes, whatever the word is, it wasn’t, and they were kind of twitching about it. They knew they needed to have some social science work around HIV and AIDS but I think it was all a bit last minute. It’s a bit like something I’ve been involved with more recently about Scotland and independence. It wasn’t quite…you know, they were a bit on the back foot. So I don’t really know exactly what the politics of that was, but it meant there was less money than there would have been if it had been a whole big thing.

You know, the bit I can’t remember, I know there were conversations with Mildred, I know she talked to me about wanting to have stuff on women…it wasn’t a programme, that’s the word, it wasn’t a fully-blown programme, which meant it didn’t all have to fit together, we didn’t all have to meet together and do all of that stuff then. So she and I had had that conversation and then Janet and Caroline had the conversation, like, maybe we’ve got a chance here, you know? Maybe it’s worth a try, and that was it.

**I: So for you, it came from an interest in understanding women’s sexuality?**

R: Yes.

**I: And was this a kind of new or unusual thing to do at the time?**

R: Oh, god, aye, yes. I mean, when I was at Lancaster and getting more interested in that kind of stuff, I taught…I think towards the end of having the research fellowship there, they changed the first year course so that the third term split into four options, and they were kind of up for grabs and so I offered one around sexuality and reproduction, interesting that back then you could put all of that together. There was so little literature. And all 204 or whatever of the first year students opted for that, so they could take two out of four and I can still see this lecture theatre. I was terrified. I was absolutely terrified. I’d done some lectures before, but to much smaller groups and things that were more mainstream, really. But I can remember talking about stuff around the female orgasm to…they were sitting on the steps, you know, no fire risk then, and I’d got slightly longer hair and I caught myself standing like this… I must have been terrified and I had something like 32 pages of pink paper handwritten. Mad, completely insane, but it was so exciting. It was so exciting.

**I: Because it felt like it was new ground and what, that no one… Was there a conversation going on about sexuality?**

R: Well, there was all of these battles in the women’s movement around it and there was literature coming out, but for me, the first year I was at Lancaster ‘77/’78, I audited Carol’s final year Women In Society course, so, you know, trans woman, but actually one of only three or four Women In Society undergraduate courses at that time in the UK. I mean, the first big one was at Kent, Mary Evans’ stuff at Kent, anyway… And the next year I taught it with her. So that was me getting into thinking about teaching in that way and then I was reading Foucault’s History of Sexuality as it came available in English literally, and Jeffrey Weekes’ stuff was there and then the feminist stuff around that.

I already knew Stevi and we were both in the Sexual Divisions Study Group and, on a Committee together. We didn’t know each other that well but her pamphlet was out, her WRRC pamphlet, and the thing was…I mean, what I was interested in, and part of our common thing, is that I was much more of an interactionist end sociologist in terms of what I felt comfortable with, surrounded by this boys of which my partner, Alan, was one, who were all into Althusser and Poulantzas and neo-Marxist theory, and politically I was a Marxist at that point, but it was like, oh, you can’t do both those things. So I sort of felt like I didn’t fit there but what felt right to me was trying to think about how patriarchy worked in people’s everyday relationships, basically, to put a gloss on it, and that’s what I wanted to do. So that’s where the teaching was going and then once I’d been at Manchester, that sort of got derailed in the way I’ve explained by research jobs that I didn’t particularly want to do, but, you know, wolf on the door. I then got back on track at Manchester where I had to teach the sociology of religion and god knows what, but I could also develop my own courses and that’s where the body stuff came from and teaching methods, qualitative methods with Liz and using feminist stuff and whatever.

**I: And did you have to fill in a funding application?**

R: Yes, and I was going to ask you have you seen a copy of that?

**I: I was going to ask you if you’ve got one.**

R: I know I have somewhere.

**I: Oh, that would be amazing, that would be good.**

R: And I will do everything I can to find it. What I’ve done is everything is now in my house and I’ve done a huge first sift of things that have been in garages and god knows where, and I’m pretty positive it’s in there somewhere but I need now to do a second sift. Because I was just literally trying to get things into new cupboards and stuff, but I wasn’t sure whether Rachel had got it.

**I: I haven't seen one, no.**

R: Janet will have, I’m sure Janet will have.

**I: Okay, I was going to ask her, I was going to ask all of you, actually, so…**

R: Yes, the ESRC funding application…

**I: So did you feel like…what was that process of getting…**

R: That’s what I can’t remember. We must have sat together to do it because there was no track changes, there was nothing of the sort but I really can’t remember. I do genuinely believe that the stuff around sexuality came from me, that was my particular interest and the stuff around…and again I can remember Caroline saying, well, you’ve now got this experience of working around… She was very pragmatic.

**I: I don’t know anything about Caroline.**

R: No, and you’re not going to interview her?

**I: No.**

R: I mean, she was in an established job, she was already a senior lecturer and she’s what, fifteen years older than me, I think? God, yes, she must be 80. I haven’t seen her for a long time. And was probably increasingly under pressure. When I was at Lancaster, this will give you a bit of context, when I got the research job on the PhD student project, it was a big joke in the department. It was a big joke partly because all these Marxist theorists thought that doing research on the PhD process was really a bit tinpot and silly, but also taking the king’s shilling, taking funding from the state was thought to be really not quite nice, I kid you not. I kid you not. It was like… And they’d sort of joke about, have you finished that yet? You know, it was like, that will only take five minutes. It wasn’t nice. I mean, they weren’t all horrible to me personally but there was that thing.

So that gives you a sense of what the funding framework was then as opposed to the pressure now, but I think Caroline was reasonably ambitious. I dare say she thought she ought to be a professor at some point, quite rightly, and thought getting funding was an important thing to be doing, as well as thinking doing feminist research was an important thing to be doing, whereas, I don’t know, I mean, I wanted to do empirical work, I knew I wanted to be out and talking to people and not just doing theory. So I think what Janet had was quite a lot of experience of working with young people around education and stuff, that was her background and Caroline had a more theoretical background, so between us, we’d got some stuff.

But I was very much more junior in experience but I’d got the ideas around sexuality and the knowledge of what was happening in relation to HIV and the link to Mildred and the link with other people who were planning to do research in that field. I think that’s fair to say.

**I: Because I was going to ask about the kind of team and how you came together and the contributions you made, you’ve partly answered some of that. How did Rachel and Sue Sharpe fit in?**

R: Right, well, I supervised Rachel’s undergraduate dissertation and I just thought she was splendid, you know, at that point she just stood out, she really did. I know it’s easy but I’ve said this to her recently, I’ve said this to her mum, I can absolutely see her sitting in my office for the first time in her red sweater all kind of bright and shiny and enthusiastic about doing this dissertation on women and HIV, because that part of my experience of thinking about that issue was working with and supporting Rachel while she did her dissertation. So I was very clear that my thinking had been influenced by her thinking, and that what I was trying to remember before and that was to do with the funding proposal is whether we actually wrote her in as a research assistant. I think we did. I mean, I was very clear that that was what had to happen. I think we named her.

Sue wasn’t formally on that proposal, I don’t think. Sue came in on the young men stuff, she was the…

**I: Ah, okay.**

R: So I don’t think she was formally on the proposal. God, isn’t it terrible what you can’t remember? I mean, we used to meet and Sue would be around sometimes and stuff but I don’t think she was actually… I think she might have been written into it. She did do some of the interviews. She was doing freelance stuff, I just can’t remember whether, you know, she was just employed as a freelancer, honestly, Janet would know that. Sue would know that. That’s terrible that I can’t remember.

**I: And Sue was down in London so it was just you and Rachel…?**

R: Yes, there was just the two of us in Manchester and it was always going to be London and Manchester.

**I: So how did you work as a team, given you were in different cities?**

R: There was no track changes, Google Docs.

**I: Did you have email?**

R: Just about, just about.

**I: What can you remember about how…?**

R: I was quite ahead of the curve because I hated handwriting. When I was in Cambridge, that was quantitative stuff, I did my background in that kind of stuff so I had a computer and was doing things, and then I got an Amstrad the minute you could get an Amstrad computer. I don’t know if you know anything about…? Yes? Anyway…

**I: I’m aware of them.**

R: And then Manchester, there was something called the JANET the Joint Academic Network It was the first email for academics. So I don’t think we had that until about ’88 or ’89. I know we had it by the time I organised the BSA conference a bit later. God, it’s a blur.

Anyway we didn’t do it, no, we didn’t do that. We met.

**I: You did?**

R: In London. So Rachel and I met regularly in Manchester and spent hours talking about this stuff. I mean, a lot of time talking about access, you know? I mean, looking back, she did the most amazing job, she was so tenacious getting access, because I had virtually no time and I think sort of fifteen hours of teaching. I mean, I made time and there were other things, I mean, I didn’t have a big admin job or anything like that, but, you know, she did a huge amount of that.

**I: How did you get access?**

R: You’d need to talk to her about that. Just being very, very tenacious and talking to… I mean, I did have some contacts. One contact was a close friend of mine who would be part of this if she hadn’t died in a plane crash in 1992, a woman called Pam Muttram who you might hear mentioned.

**I: I have, yes.**

R: Well, she was a really close friend of mine, my climbing partner back then. So she facilitated some of the youth work access.

**I: She was a youth worker?**

R: Yes, youth and community worker in North Manchester. You know, through bits of the university, through FE colleges… I can remember Rachel spending ages getting access into FE colleges in the city. Nursing, yes, so lots of gatekeeping stuff.

**I: And union as well, I’m sure there was a union, from reading the interviews…**

R: I think there probably was, yes. I mean it was really fighting on all fronts and I’m sure I facilitated some of it, letters and phone calls, but she just doggedly was out there, doing it. She was absolutely fantastic. My memory is that we just had a lovely time talking about it, and I did some of the interviews, nowhere near as many as I would like to have done, I really, looking back, wish I’d done more, but enough to be able to talk about it a lot and to feel that you’re in it. And then we went to London and sat in Janet’s office. Our meetings were always in Janet’s office in Gordon Square when she was at the Institute of Education.

**I: And that would be, you, Rachel, Janet, Caroline…**

R: Yes.

**I: And sometimes…**

R: And my memory is sometimes Sue, yes. There wasn’t room for that many people. We talked and Janet typed mostly, you know, it was her space. And then…I mean, this is where I suppose it’s quite difficult… I mean, we had lots of good times and we had lots of really good conversations and I have no regrets about all of that, but there was a split in terms of London and Manchester, there’s no doubt about it, and I think theoretically Janet and Caroline had more in common, probably, in terms of…how do I put it? You know, having a stronger, clearer view about how this data needed to fit into a particular sort of feminist theory rather than let’s see what’s the data is telling us. I mean, I was pretty sure it would be a feminist story, but, you know, not… Anywhere, blah…

**I: Well, no, it’s one of the things I’ve definitely found really interesting because obviously I know the WRAP publications really well, and have used them a lot…**

R: Much better than I do.

**I: Yes, and then I read the data and to me, the data tells quite a different story from the publications, of course, because you have to do so much distilling, but I suppose that was one of the things that I was interested in, really, is how you moved from this amazing dataset to the published outputs, like how as a team did you work with all of that material and arrive at where you got.**

R: The book?

**I: The book and the…I mean, I don’t quite know what the process was but I think you did the pamphlets first and then the book later?**

R: We did. Actually the first thing we did was actually an article that didn’t have any data in, it was based on the application, so it was about laying out the ground, really. And then I think…I should have looked at this. The stuff in Sociology of Health and Illness, I think, was next and the pamphlets alongside and they were split in terms of who took responsibility for what, so you know, you could see…I mean, Rachel and I went to the Lake District one weekend, I think, to write the learning about sex one. I think Caroline wrote the methods one pretty well, the team thing, and the others, yes, I mean, drafts did get passed around. I just think I just did not have the confidence that they had about writing. That’s me looking back, and also I remember Caroline saying to me that I wrote like a journalist and that wasn’t really meant to be a compliment.

So if you put those two things together, what I was really good at was presenting the stuff. I’m not saying I couldn’t write, I mean, I could write, but I didn’t take a hold of that except in the context of Rachel and I working together on something separate where I think we both took a hold on it. I mean, she’s always been…she was born able to write. I don’t think she’s ever really had any anxieties about it.

**I: A really confident writer.**

R: Whereas I think with my mouth moving, you know, it comes that way round, and that’s why…I mean, it is kind of relevant, that’s why the writing relationship with Stevi has worked so well for nearly 30 years, because we talk. We sit side by side and we talk and we take turns to type and then we talk and then we take turns to type and make gallons of tea and coffee and stuff, and that’s fine.

I don’t think I really felt like an equal partner quite because, you know, I was younger and less experienced, but I kind of let that…you know, I’m taking responsibility for that, I let that happen as well, and Rachel and I did talk about having different views of things, but it wasn’t like two totally different positions, so there wasn’t something really tangible, I don’t think. It was just, well, you know, does the data really say that? And I think Caroline in particular, she didn’t collect any data, and maybe looking back there was some defensiveness around that, but what she had was this theoretical ambition to engage in a battle with Foucault and their Up Against Foucault stuff, you know, that book, that collection? There’s a book called *Up Against Foucault* that Caroline did. Have a look at that, because that’s where that went. I thought Foucault was fascinating but not sociology, not where, you know…I wanted to read it, I wanted to understand it, wanted to understand the history of ideas, it really helped me to think about all sorts of things, but not as something to put on top of the data. It didn’t really feel comfortable. But yes, that’s how we worked, we sat in Janet’s office and I can remember…and the personal thing is relevant because I was going through a big break-up, we’d been together for thirteen years, never behaved particularly in a married way, but, you know, we’d lived together for thirteen years and it was my decision, but it’s a big turmoil, and I was exhausted. So that’s one of my other memories, at the point we were in the throes of it in ’89, ’90, I was exhausted. I remember going to sleep on a beanbag in Janet’s office one day in the middle of it all.

Okay, let’s skip forward. So if you put all that together with me then moving to Stirling in ’92, at the point that we’d got all the data, we’d written quite a lot, and I think things did get passed around. They must have got passed around in the post.

**I: So you would type things on your computer?**

R: I just can’t remember. I know I had a computer, I had a computer at home, but I think we were writing by hand on typescripts in terms of comments or doing…but there was no track changes.

**I: Yes, you would have posted things or met up and shared…**

R: Yes. So it was a much more awkward process to intervene in, you know, if you get something that feels fairly finished and you’re not very confident, you can’t actually literally open it up and put stuff in, and I think that is all quite interesting in terms of learning to write, and there was this thing about, you know, I thought Caroline thought I couldn’t write, whereas I think now being told you write like a journalist is not a bad thing.

**I: People understand what you’re saying.**

R: I think there was a certain amount of envy that I didn’t quite understand at the time about me being better at presenting stuff at conferences, and how I would see that now I suppose is a privileging of the actual putting words on paper as opposed to a privileging of the whole process and the stages of the process, which is the sharing of ideas is important, the presenting things, being able to present things and therefore get feedback is important, and being a reasonable editor is important. I think those things still are valorised differently or were probably valorised even more differently back then.

**I: Really? I mean, I feel now as I go in and out of academia because I work in and out of it, it feels quite strange, the value is attached to publications in academia, beyond almost all other things other than grant money. Was that the same then that they…?**

R: I think it was the writing, the getting the words on paper. I mean, the pressure to publish, the RAE (REF now) was just beginning, I mean, the very first RAE, the mini, mini, first version was 1986, and then there was another slightly expanded one in ’89 which might have been in Caroline’s head and I was a bit involved with that, because we had a head of department at Manchester who shall be nameless who thought…Jeff Weekes had a visiting fellowship and Jeff Weekes and I actually wrote most of the background to the submission for that because the head of department thought we’d be good at it. Anyway, that’s an aside, but that tells you something about the different…and then the first big one in ’92. So it was changing but then you only… Anyway we won’t go into that but it was changing, but no, it was much more about the importance of the words on paper rather than how many publications, although we were very clear we wanted to publish because this was new stuff, we wanted this stuff out there to be read and I think I thought it was the most important thing. But there was this sort of, oh, Sue can take the lead on the presentation, she’s better at that, but there was a bit of a sting about it, I think. Anyway…

**I: And where did Tufnell Press come from and the idea of doing the pamphlets?**

R: That already existed, yes, so Caroline and Robert had set that up sometime before. I mean, not eons before, but they’d already done stuff connected with Janet’s work on girls and science, maybe… They’d certainly published stuff already.

**I: And so that kind of self-publishing pamphlet mode, that wasn’t an unusual thing to do at the time?**

R: It was quite unusual, yes. It wasn’t that unusual in the context of feminism and the pamphlets that the Women’s Research and Resource did looked quite similar in some ways and I mentioned Stevi’s Social Construction of Female Sexuality was really important and there were a number of others. I can see them all.

So pamphlets that were academic or semi-academic in the feminist context, but publishing academic research or things from academic research, I mean, really the only person that I think we knew of that had got onto the trade side would be on Ann Oakley, the housewife thing, which wasn’t a pamphlet but obviously it was meant for much wider consumption, the Housewife book and The Sociology of Housework. You know what I’m talking about?

**I: Yes.**

R: Which was her PhD and then to do the popular book, so it was sort of in the zeitgeist but, no, I don’t know that anybody else was doing it, really.

**I: I’ve never seen another example of it, not in the fact it was like a set of them as well, not just one…**

R: Yes, and I think that’s…

**I: Where did that come from? Can you remember how the decision was made to do that?**

R: I can’t remember exactly, but, you know, out of discussions about wanting this to be useful for people working in the field, yes, and the kinds of routes we were going through to get access and then, yes…I think it was a discussion fairly…it must have been fairly early on that we wanted to do that. That was a lot of discussion at the time about how to do feminist research and how to make it different, so having conversations about making it accessible wasn’t weird. It was having the facility to publish those things that was unusual, so that Robert and Janet knew how to do that.

**I: What did you do with the pamphlets? Can you remember how did they get to people?**

R: It all seems so basic, doesn’t it? I think we must have written letters and advertised things in… I’ve got a feeling there was an article about it in…what’s the London thing?

**I: Like the Evening Standard?**

R: No, the magazine thing…

**I: Time Out.**

R: Yes, I think there was. I think there was. And I mean, certainly Rachel and I did talks to groups and stuff, and we’d take them. God, that’s really hazy. I mean, I’m terrible, you know, so much going on, but I do remember carting them around, and selling them, and then it was just like…I mean, they got onto the main reading lists for the Family Planning Association. So once they were there, then other people…

But the actual, you know, the sort of organised selling of them and sending them out, I mean, Janet would have to…that was done from there and it wasn’t about making a profit, it just went back into the process. But yes, I did cart them around to places.

**I: I just wondered, I was just thinking about the actual doing of the interviews themselves, and I was wondering if there are any moments that have stuck with you from doing the interviews, so are there moments that are stuck that you can remember about being there with the young women?**

R: I mean, there is one in particular which is the other rape example in the Manchester data, the interview that I did with the young woman who was a nurse. Have you seen that one? Yes. That’s the one that really sticks. I can see her, absolutely clearly see her, and hear her, well, I haven't looked at the transcript again, but I can hear her saying that she’d never talked to anybody about this before and blah-blah-blah. Other things I remember are much more about going to the youth groups in North Manchester and the group of young women, I can’t necessarily…

**I: I think there’s one where you…I think it’s you, you’re interviewing two young women at the same time and then some more come in at the end, and there’s lots of people coming in and I think there’s even a disco going on in the club and at the end you say, oh, you can go back to your disco now or something is the sense that I get from the transcript.**

R: Yes, there was a lot going on. I’d done some girls work in Lancaster so I think I had actually quite realistic expectations of how comfortable they would be and how much they would talk or not, and I think we got much more than I expected because the girls I worked with Lancaster were…I mean, it wasn’t about interviewing them but they were very buttoned up, really, and thought we were very weird. It took a long time to…

**I: And can you remember how…I suppose, thinking about the one example which really stuck with the rape story, can you remember what that was like for you in the experience of doing that interview and I suppose drawing out that story?**

R: I think I just felt I just wanted to be beside her, just to be there with her, but I was also very conscious that I wasn’t the person that could do the support, you know? That was very drummed in, we’d got to give people information and enable them to do that, but I think I just thought just being here was what it was about. You know, I didn’t have an experience like that. I mean, I had some sticky experiences as a single women but it didn’t trigger a whole lot of stuff for me, so it wasn’t difficult in that sense, and I probably…just in terms of survival, I was probably better defended back then than I would be now, actually. But it felt like a privilege. It did feel like you created a space where she could say something she’d not said before.

I mean, that felt… you know, I’m kind of getting a visual of another one of them and I can’t actually… I see locations, I can see where she was sitting and the colour of her hair but that doesn’t help you in terms of who it might be in the data, but I mean, I will read more of the data and think more about it, and, you know, we could always have another conversation post-that, and maybe I should have done it but I wanted to do it this way around. I did want to do it this way around and just see.

**I: How did you agree between the team if there’s four of you doing the interviews, like was consistency something that was important that you were all asking the same questions or was that not the kind of research that you were doing?**

R: We were covering the same issues, yes, it was, but the way that it happened or the order that it happened, no, I think we didn’t want to be boxed into that. Did they seem very different to you?

**I: Yes, I think when I read the interviews I can quite quickly tell if it’s you or Rachel, maybe more that I can tell it’s not Rachel because I guess I know Rachel and I’ve got a sense of, like, 23-year-old Rachel quite quickly and the way that she interviews, and yours is different, and sometimes when I wasn’t sure there are moments in your interviews which I found really interesting where you…I guess particularly around work and careers, you have these really interesting interactions with working class women about their options and possibilities.**

R: Oh, right.

**I: There’s a real feel from you this sense…**

R: Of wanting them to know…

**I: You believe in them and that working class girls can have…**

R: Yes, well, it’s me.

**I: Yes, and that’s what you’re sharing, bits of… Was nursing something that you…or was your mum a nurse?**

R: My mum was a nurse.

**I: That’s it, I think you refer to that, I think you did quite a few of the nursing interviews, actually.**

R: Yes, I did.

**I: And you refer to that and kind of talk about that with them, so there’s bits of you and Rachel coming into the interview in different ways and I think that’s probably one of the ways in which I see you in the interviews and maybe it’s interesting when you were saying last night about being in your early thirties and how they saw you, I don’t get the sense that they see you as old, but that you see yourself as that sort of slightly older…**

R: Having a bit of experience of…

**I: Yes, and maybe that sort of feminist responsibility, care for younger women and wanting them to…**

R: Oh, well, that’s nice.

**I: I don’t know if that’s something that resonates with your experience or not but…**

R: Well, it would have been where I’d wanted to be. I mean, well, I don’t come from an extremely working class background, my dad worked in retail but not much education, my parents left school at, well, my mum was taken away from school at thirteen to look after younger kids and got into nursing by a circuitous route, but, you know, working class women did go into nursing, her generation. So very, very keen on my education and that’s what made the difference to me, having a mother…not that my father was against it but he’d have been a bit clueless, bless him, you know, whereas she was very much…and when I was not working and at school and all over the place, she was just very wise, because she wanted me to be happy and have fun, but she was both wise in that she would think that’s okay as long as it doesn’t go too far, but also she believed in me. She thought it would come good somehow, and you need somebody to believe in you.

**I: Yes, you do, you really do.**

R: So I think that was a very strong thing for me, and that nursing for working class girls can be a route out and it can lead to other things as well, blah-blah-blah. So yes, it would have been…I mean, I wasn’t old enough to be their mother, really, I mean, I’d have had to be a fifteen-year-old, so, you know, it was possible but not very likely. I didn’t have children, I didn’t want to have children so I was in that liminal, you know, sort of they probably don’t quite know how to locate me, really.

**I: Did you have that same experience that Rachel was talking about last night where the process of doing the interviews was also a way of thinking through your own sexuality or sexual relationships? So I think Rachel was talking about also being a young woman and being really close. I suppose I don’t get that sense from reading your interviews that that’s what’s going on for you but…**

R: Not in the same way, although I was just coming out of a long relationship… Yes, I mean, I suppose I’d done thinking and exploring about my sexuality some time earlier, not that it’s a static thing, but I had done that, I had had opportunity to do that and I guess had done a lot of thinking and practice around penetrative and nonpenetrative sex, and that was really interesting for me last night to pull that out because that was something that was very live in the fairness kind of debate and discussion. I’d been through that.

I mean in 1989, I got into a new relationship which was actually very exciting, so I don’t know whether that was there, you know? I really don’t…I can’t join that up somehow with the interviews, partly because I’d need dates.

**I: Yes, most of them have got dates, yes.**

R: Yes…interesting. So I think I felt I was in exploratory mode but probably in a different place in relation to it than they were, which is stupid, because I mean, one of my things is that I think has interesting, the way that if you come out of a long relationship you can get flipped back into where you were before that, which for me was really quite young, you know? That might be there somewhere.

**I: Yes, that’s interesting. Before your relationship was basically the age of the young women you were interviewing, do you reckon? If you’re about fifteen years older…**

R: Yes.

**I: Did you as a team talk about or have a sense of what it meant to be a feminist interviewer or to do an interview in a feminist way?**

R: Yes, it’s interesting because I’d sort of been through that one in trying to walk that tightrope in previous research projects. I’d done a lot of interviewing in other research, both questionnaire stuff and qualitative interviewing, and in the PhD project I’d found it really quite challenging interviewing supervisors, particularly, who I thought were bloody outrageous, and behaving really badly. I remember having a conversation with the lead on the project, and he was a very mild man and probably gave us too much rope, myself and the other researcher, in some ways, but him saying to me, I think maybe you shouldn’t wear your badges when you’re interviewing, because I’d be covered in the, ‘how dare you presume I’m a heterosexual?’ ‘Nuclear Family, no thanks’ whatever… Okay, I won’t wear my badges.

So that sort of background, but then having this opportunity where, you know, you didn’t necessarily want to beat people over the head with it but where actually opening up the conversation was a feminist act was really, really important.

But when you’re in it, Ester, when you’re in it, and you think, and this is sort of what you want to do, you don’t think, you know? You’re not actually thinking every day, wow, this is an amazing thing to be able to do. It’s just this is what you’re doing, somehow. It’s kind of odd. You know, looking back, I think, oh, yes, we really were at the cutting edge of stuff, I believe that now.

**I: But it didn’t feel like you were at the cutting edge then?**

R: Well, it felt like we were very lucky to have got this funding and to be able to do it, but actually, you know, going around thinking, oh, I’m at the cutting edge of feminist research was not… Sorry, not quite, but also although there was more and more empirical stuff, it was a point when theory was really valorised, that was really where it was, so maybe that sort of dampened the sense of being at the cutting edge.

**I: I see, so the theoretical work had more status?**

R: Yes, oh, absolutely and that was a way of competing with the men.

**I: I see.**

R: Yes, and Caroline was absolutely doing that. She absolutely was, and that’s not a criticism, that’s where she was, that was the kind of department that Goldsmiths was at that point. You know, Manchester was much more mixed, there were people that did empirical work.

**I: That so much makes sense to me now you’ve said that. I didn’t know that.**

R: Right, what, that theory was valorised?

**I: Valorised over empirical work at that time and the gender politics around that, I probably did know that but I’ve never thought about that in relation to *The Male In The Head,* and that makes a lot of sense about how that…**

R: Yes, I’m pretty sure Caroline would say that if she was here, that she was in a very theoretical department, some sort of big beast men and I think she only had one real ally in Vic Seidler, I don’t know if you’ve come across his work. You know, I think she really wanted to say I’m as good as you are, you know, I’ve got as much and more of a knowledge of Marxist theory, that was a real badge of honour for her that she really knew her stuff, whereas, you know, I’m like Rachel, I don’t do detail, I do let’s join this up, let’s make some connections, let’s not worry about whether anybody’s joined it up before, blah-blah-blah.

**I: Did you have a sense when you were interviewing of how you were going to create a safe space for those young women to tell their stories? Was that something that was conscious or were you just going out and doing it?**

R: I mean, I think we did talk about that, and I think my memory for me is that I was very clear that I wanted them to believe they could tell me anything and that I wouldn’t undermine it in any way, I wouldn’t take it…I mean, I’m just remembering and Rachel almost got there last night, she’s probably told you this before, but certainly one of the groups of young women in North Manchester youth club, when we were talking to them about confidentiality and anonymity but publishing, they were outraged, and they said, well, if you’re writing a book we want our names in it, yes? I tried to explain that really that wouldn’t be a very good idea, but at that point they hadn’t been interviewed, so they had no conception, I think, of what they might then talk to us about. That was quite a wake-up call that you were getting permission to do these interviews from young women who really didn’t know what they were signing up for in terms of how it would come out.

So I think I was very conscious of being a custodian of their story. Yes, there were tensions, you know? My detailed memory is not good, my embodied memory is very good, so I can now feel myself sitting in Janet’s office feeling this isn’t the story, you know? There are other things here that we’re trying to fit this into…

**I: What wasn’t the story?**

R: That talking about gender power relations was obviously what we were doing. It was kind of obviously what we were doing. But there was just so much else going on and just collapsing it into something that was called gender power relations was not the whole story, but then I would feel, well, how can we tell the whole story, because it’s just too big and too much, and then it would be, like, well, we’re writing an article so we can only say this and this and this, and then Caroline particularly would be very pragmatic, well, you can’t say everything. It’s like, yes, but where are the edges? And I think then my insecurity about not being very good at conceiving of that tight structure and just writing to that would be what would kick in. I feel quite angry with myself now in a way for not being more confident but it’s not that I look at the stuff and think that’s nothing to do with me, I don’t mean that… I mean, there is an issue about the book…

**I: I’m going to ask you about that.**

R: But I do think that we operated some closures, to use the terminology, where we could have left some things more open or…

**I: And did you have a sense then of what those things were? Like was it just a feeling that was really hard to articulate, like things are being missed out, or did you have a sense of the kinds of things, the story that *The Man In The Head*, for example, tells, what gets left out in telling that story?**

R: Well, okay, let me see, I think I was really interested in the interactions between the young women and their partners, and I suppose I wished we could have actually interviewed those young men. I mean, it wasn’t going to happen but, you know, it’s kind of…the proxy of the young men sample is not the same as it would have been if we’d had young men in Manchester or young men that…anyway, but I was really interested in that whole issue which we did talk about and write about, about the difference between a shifting sense of what was possible across relationships, dependent on that relationship or this notion of something that you carry with you. I just think that needed much more unpacking, much, much more unpacking, and the whole thing about, you know, young women that had somebody they could talk to, a significant adult, that sort of stuff, it was actually a really small number. And it was important but I think we probably made too much of it. I think it is important and I think that was perhaps a whole other piece of research, but it wasn’t there for most of them in that sort of way. So we got very excited about that as a way of…

**I: You mean, as like a support?**

R: Yes, I mean, there was one young women who had a much younger aunt, I think, who she talked to a lot about stuff, so it’s that having somebody who’s not your mum or whatever, well, she’s not quite peer support, you know? It’s that kind of thing, and what it meant to have this sense of your own sexuality that went with you everywhere. There wasn’t a great deal of that, really.

**I: And you feel like you talked about that more than it was there in the data?**

R: I think we did, because we wanted it to be there, and I think I felt a bit uncomfortable about that. Yes, possibly.

**I: Did you feel anything…because one of the things I felt reading the data now was that there’s more…well, I suppose I was just wondering about the pleasure and the fun that the girls were having and where that sits in it, but I was going to say there was more of that than is in the publications but there was also more really unpleasant stuff, so I suppose it’s…I mean, that’s just raw data is so much more vivid than a publication, but I suppose I was just wondering whether there was anything around…**

R: Well, I think there was a… Yes, there is more pleasure, isn’t there? I think the pressure, pleasure thing, you know, it’s probably my title, I’m good at titles, I seem to remember that most of the titles were mine…

**I: I suppose not just sexual pleasure, actually, just fun and girlfriends and…**

R: Yes, I don’t think there’s anywhere near enough discussion about friendship and that’s why I said what I said last night, you know? I really don’t. Because I think that maybe that kind of feminist thing that if they weren’t saying that they were talking about really big important things with their friends, maybe it wasn’t quite relevant, whereas there’s all sorts of ways of…you know, I didn’t talk about sex with my friends, you know, we didn’t, I mean, we joked or whatever, but we didn’t really talk about that stuff.

I mean, I can remember so, so clearly at fourteen somebody who wasn’t in my class, but I knew her a bit, actually, someone I’d got out with and then gone out with her so we had a potentially problematic connection, or could have been, but wasn’t, her mother found her diary and she had actually had sex with this guy who I’d gone out with, who I definitely hadn’t had sex with. But she was vilified and I do…I mean, I probably wasn’t, but I remember being the only person who went up to her and talked to her about it, and we did become friends through that. So that sense of ways of expressing friendship that is not necessarily about I’m a feminist and therefore my sisters are important. We just really could have explored that much more.

And also there’s friendship between the girls and their male partners, you know, that is quite important and there’s funny stuff and I’m really not wanting to blame Caroline for stuff, but she was quite a lot older, and she did think that a lot of it was going to be horrible, and that’s the lens that she saw it through, and she was in there, so… It was kind of, well, how okay is it to say, and I’ve got a sense of Rachel saying much more positive things about what was going on and feeling maybe a bit caught in the middle. Yes, interesting.

I talked to a colleague in Helsinki about three weeks ago, she was talking to me about tensions with a colleague in a research project, and wanted advice and stuff, and in that context, I talked about this a bit, in a way that I don’t think I’ve ever talked to anybody apart from Rachel, and Rachel and I talked about it the other week in a way that we haven't really talked about it before, or I hadn’t. She said stuff before and I think I just…forget about that. Which is to do with the book, which is to do with what happened in ’92, really. So shall I get that out of the way?

**I: Yes, I was going to ask you next, let’s talk about the book.**

R: Well, so you’ve got the background in terms of writing and my stupid insecurities and other people’s experience.

**I: It’s not stupid.**

R: Well… And the pattern that had evolved was a lot about Janet and Caroline writing together. They found a way of writing together and Caroline lived in Southsea but worked in London so they could do that, and they just found something that worked, and I think, you know, if you want to get transactional about it, you know, I was the naughty teenager and Rachel was the child, you know? They were the parents. I don’t usually go into things like that…

And then I mean, there was a lot going on, new job, blah-blah, moved to Edinburgh, job at Stirling, my memory is, and this is what I was trying to recover with Rachel, is getting an email that I think was from Caroline, so this is the email thing but would have had everybody in it, at some point not long after I moved to Stirling, so early autumn of ’92, basically about the book. I can’t remember how much we talked about the book before that. I mean, we were going to write the book.

**I: That was always…**

R: Yes, I think, well, certainly latterly there was enough material for a book, but it hadn’t really been planned out. I wish I still had the email, but, you know, there’s no way of accessing that now. My memory of what it said was basically you’ve moved, you won’t have time, we’re all in London because Rachel was moving to London, had moved to London, so, you know, maybe it’s better if you’re not involved, basically. And I just acquiesced to that, not because I didn’t want to be involved in the book, because what I basically read was you’re not up to it. I had a huge new job, and new country, new everything, pressure to get some new research going etc And that quite quickly evolved into the big MRC project with Danny Wight and folk.

But this was definitely the autumn of ’92, so it predated that and I think I just thought, oh, well, you know, if they don’t want me to be involved, I can’t be involved, you know? Rather than saying, you know, my project too, and there are different ways of being involved, and the names don’t have to be alphabetical or whatever but, you know, I think my name should be on that book, and it would have made a real difference, having a book at that point would have been a difference for me as well as it being the culmination of the project.

**I: A difference in career terms?**

R: I mean, it’s not that, but it would have made a difference to me. And it’s interesting, I think how awkward has it been? I mean, not many people have said to me why isn’t your name on the book, and it’s partly it’s a string of names, people get me and Sue mixed up anyway. Anyway there you are.

**I: So does that mean that when you moved to Stirling you stopped working with the WRAP material?**

R: Yes.

**I: So you haven't really gone back to it since then?**

R: I didn’t feel I could. Well, I tell a lie, I went back to it in that it was what informed the MRC application. The initial challenge for that came from a guy called Steve Platt, a professor at Edinburgh, but he was at that point he’d had a dip out of the academy and was heading up the equivalent to the Health Education Council for Scotland, and he basically said to Danny and I, I mean, I knew Danny already slightly and Danny had done work on young men…

**I: Danny Wight**

R: Yes, you know, you’ve done this kind of stuff, and he was interested in the interactionist level of it, I mean, not personally because he’s a big quants person, but in terms of putting things into practice, you know, can that sort of sociology, that theory, that whatever be put into practice into sex education, you know? It wasn’t as clear as that, there would be lots of conversations, but that was basically it, and he got some pilot money. So it was very much about Danny and I wanting to utilise that sociology and feminist sociology and his take on masculinity into this sort of big can we make sex education work in schools stuff? So yes, I did in that sense…

**I: That was your project?**

R: That was my project with Danny and then others – it was quite an interdisciplinary project, that’s how I recuperated all of that, and you can read things in all sorts of different…that was a huge success. We got the biggest amount of money that social scientists have ever got out of the MRC. I could talk to you at length with a different hat on about that, and all the rest of it, and I think part of my engagement with that was total frustration at how much stupid stuff was going on in relation to sex education, how much money was being wasted, the whole thinking you could change people’s behaviour by telling them stuff, and my view was that if we did something like that and it didn’t make a difference, then it wasn’t going to make a bloody difference doing something like that, you know? It was sort of a bit definitive. It wasn’t that I thought, oh, this is definitely going to work, but it was a very interesting process. Anyway…

So…

**I: So what did you do with all the…have you kept the materials? I was just thinking if you haven't looked at it since 1992, have you…?**

R: No, I haven't got it.

**I: Did you carry anything around with you, you’ve moved and moved places…?**

R: Well, I didn’t have the tapes. Rachel had all the tapes.

**I: Did you have transcripts?**

R: I would have had, yes. Do you know, I can’t remember. I would have had. I’ve moved so much. But I don’t think I’ve got transcripts now. I have got stuff from other projects. I think I felt in that sense it just wasn’t mine anymore.

**I: Because like Rachel and Janet have…I mean, all the stuff that we’ve got to do this project has come from them, they have carried it physically and maybe in other ways as well.**

R: I mean, I feel it was a very important thing to have been involved with. I’d talked about it. I mean, I must have had transcripts back then. Yes, I mean, I must have had. I did talks, I can remember going up to Inverness and doing Scottish National Midwives Conference and all sorts of stuff about that research, so it wasn’t that I didn’t do anything, but I didn’t feel it was really mine to do anything new with. No, I didn’t ever try to negotiate that I would write anything different from it at all, which is, you know, my stupidity possibly.

**I: Do you regret that now?**

R: I regret not continuing to be involved. I particularly regret that that somehow stopped Rachel and I carrying on working on it. That’s my regret, really. It’s not that I would have…you know, I wouldn’t have wanted to do it without her, really, in a way. I mean, in other ways it did evolve into the SHARE project, it did evolve into work that I’ve done with Stevi, you know, it’s there.

**I: But you also kept it alive, it didn’t stop in some ways, did it? These things never do, they’re with us once we do a bit of research, particularly something…**

R: And ironically, you know, I am the person that’s carried on working on sexuality, much more directly than anybody else. And maybe that’s because there was unfinished business in part.

**I: What do you think the impact of the study has been over 30 years? Either at the time and since then?**

R: I don’t think I know yet. I think I’m seeing that. I mean, I think at the time, you know, we were really pleased and I was really pleased at the take-up and with these pamphlets that people could read and such, and felt it was important and felt that, you know, our kind of academic network thought it was a really good project, that was nice.

**I: How did those Marxist men…or did they?**

R: I haven't a clue. I wasn’t interested.

**I: Who cares?**

R: I wasn’t interested.

**I: Within the academic community, I mean, I suppose I would describe it now as a landmark study, as a really influential study, I suppose, whether there was a sense at the time that you were forging new ground and that that was exciting to other researchers or academics at the time?**

R: I think people that have gone onto work around young people’s sexuality would say that and I think I kind of knew that, but I don’t think that people who…well, those Marxist men or whatever, they weren’t reading it, it was very…you know, we worry now about how silent things are now, people only look at what they’re actually working on. It was like that. I mean, the Manchester department, there were Marxists, there were development studies for…there were ethno-methodologists and there were feminists, and there was David Morgan who was just generally wonderful. It was like that.

I think…I’m trying to remember… I mean, I suppose it’s also gone into, in terms of my energy, it’s gone into stuff I’ve done with PhD students and thinking about methodology and those sorts of things, I think it’s been influential in ways, you know, not necessarily in relation to young people’s sexuality but in thinking about feminist research and feminist methodology, not that I ever talked to my PhD students so clearly about what didn’t work, probably.

No, I don’t know. You know much better than me.

**I: Yes, it’s hard to see when it’s…**

R: I’m very, very pleased and proud to have done it, and to have been in the right place at the right time and I think I’ve always been quite good at spotting a moment, I do think that, but great, huge thanks to Mildred for making it possible. It wouldn’t have happened without Mildred, it really wouldn’t because, you know, other people in ESRC were a bit iffy and is it really relevant, and shouldn’t it all just be about gay men? And then the whole thing that is a very hazy memory for me about the project that Sue Lees wanted to do and being asked possibly to work together. That was very much about her and Janet and I really can’t remember properly. Rachel will know more because she’ll have talked to Janet about it, but it didn’t happen, we didn’t find a way of working together. I don’t know.

**I: And that was the project that Sue Lees went on to publish as a book?**

R: As…?

**I: A book she published, called [Loosing out]?**

R: She’d already done that, she’d already done some stuff, but this was about… She also put something into the ESRC, so it was, well, we can’t fund both of them.

**I: And what made Mildred different?**

R: She was wonderful, loved her. I mean, she became a good friend. You know, being a lot older than us. I mean, if she was alive, she’d be in her early nineties now. So, you know, a woman of a different generation, but who’d really had to carve a career as a researcher, she understood what that was like. I don’t know if you know it but she was involved in a study of mothers and daughters across three generations in Aberdeen. So I was really interested in that, I suppose. But she knew about that kind of in-depth qualitative interviewing. She thought that was a good thing. And just would have understood that the women-blaming stuff in terms of risk in relation to HIV in heterosexual transmission was just wrong. She wasn’t part of the sisterhood, not because she was hostile, but because she was just different and, you know, she was Lady Mildred Blaxter. She didn’t talk about that very much, but she did live in this great big house in Norfolk. It was just managing those identities.

But I think almost everybody that knew Mildred loved her, but she was formidable, and she was intellectually formidable and for me, I felt that was a kind of counterbalance, I thought if Mildred thinks I’m okay, maybe I’m okay, you know? And she was just determined that there was going to be something about women in this funding round and we were it. We were in the right place at the right time. So I don’t see that as nepotism, I see that as support. But we wouldn’t have it without her. You know, if Tony Coxon had been leading that programme, you know, Tony did great work but I mean, he just wouldn’t have seen it in the same way.

**I: You know NATSAL was first funded at the same time and that that’s obviously been repeated every ten years since, did it ever occur to you to do it again, to repeat the study or to return to it?**

R: I mean, not exactly. I am a terrible butterfly, so it’s not that I…I certainly thought it could be done now and it would be interesting to know what’s changed and what hasn’t, and I did stuff around children and risk and parents, so I did stuff when I was at Stirling with Stevi and Kathryn Milburn and Jenny Harding, which pulled it through in terms of thinking not specifically about sexuality but about those tensions around risk and relationships. And then I did quite a lot of stuff when I was at Durham with the health authorities around teenage pregnancy and a small study where Sue Botcherby did most of the interviews around parents talking to children about sex education.

My problem is I moved such a lot then increasingly taking on leadership, management roles and I’m not a completer/finisher, I’m just not. I mean, it doesn’t mean I don’t, but there are things that just fall off the end because I’m juggling too many things, and that’s both my weakness and my strength. So I think again right place, right time, yes, I would have been delighted to do it and maybe if Rachel and I had been more in the same place and hadn’t both had so much going on, we might have done.

**I: So how does it feel now that the transcripts will be made publicly available?**

R: I think it’s great. I have all the usual anxieties about…not anxieties actually but about reading things out of context, so I think understanding the background of when they were done, because it’s like I said yesterday, lots of things are the same but they’re differently the same, and I do think that’s really important that we have to, as feminists, sociologists, whatever, that we need to understand the nuances of those differences in continuities. But yes, I’m thrilled to bits.

**I: Is there any vulnerability for you in your…?**

R: No, I don’t think so. No, I don’t think so, I think I’m way past that. I mean, it’s not that I don’t feel…you know, there’s things that I still feel and feel for my younger self, but I don’t think, oh god, you know, maybe I wasn’t a very good interviewer, what does it meant to be a good interviewer? What does it mean, really? So no, the only anxieties I have are about how…it’s not really anxieties but juggling the different versions and what you might be then able to do with that. But I’ve told you my story and I would kind of like it, I don’t know, I don’t want it to be public particularly, I don’t need it to be public but I’m glad to be able to tell you.

**I: You want it to be heard.**

R: Yes.

**I: And when you say things might be taken out of context, is there anything about how future users might…? I suppose do you have any wishes and hopes for how people might reuse the stuff or…?**

R: I kind of want people to understand enough of what it was like to be a working class young woman in North Manchester, which is what many of them were. You know, what it was like to…because being in 1989 in North Manchester wasn’t the same as being in 1989 in North London, and I’ve been very struck by that, actually, reading those different…that time is not connected directly. I’ve just read Deborah Orr’s Motherwell book.

**I: I’ve not read it, yes.**

R: Journalist, longstanding Guardian journalist, died in the autumn. She grew up in Motherwell but the book is also very much about her mother and how she was mothered, but it’s also about…she’s the same age as my sister, she’s more or less ten years younger than me, but Motherwell, as she describes it, seems in a very working class context not much different than me as a teenager ten years earlier in Middlesbrough in a slightly less working class context. You know, it just makes me think about how those things work in particular places at particular times. So I mean, it just really stays with me, young women in Oldham who’d never been into the centre of Manchester. I mean, that makes a difference to how you feel about what’s possible and what sort of relationships are possible. It doesn’t make them bad but it does make a difference. And I kind of want people to sort of understand that, I suppose.

**I: So I suppose if someone was listening in 30 years’ time, what would you want to tell them so that they would be able to understand and hear what those women have to say or understand their experiences?**

R: That they were in many ways feisty and sassy and confident but also, you know, kind of sadly realistic and that wasn’t because they were dim or unambitious, but you know, they weren’t very likely to go to London, go to university. I mean, obviously there were HE students and nurses, whatever, but 1989, 20 per cent of the age cohort in HE roughly, I think, that’s quite important, you know, in terms of work for the younger ones, in terms of what might be possible. So yes, that kind of thing, so the difference between…it’s not that all the London stuff is completely different from all the Manchester stuff, but there are…

**I: Something about the sense of possibility about…**

R: Yes, and the importance of place and family kinds of networks, kin networks which I think were very important.

**I: Did you have a sense at the time reading…do you remember reading the London data or hearing the interviews? And did it feel different at the time?**

R: Yes, and I think I felt we didn’t make enough of the difference, yes.

**I: Can you say what the difference…? I’ve read a couple of London interviews and they are immediately different to me and in fact when I read the Manchester interviews because some of the young women aren’t from Manchester, they feel different, but I think it’s quite hard to articulate.**

R: Yes, I don’t know, more awareness of the world, more awareness of being in the world? Just more sense of possibility, which could be both a positive and a negative, because it can make you aware of what you’re missing. You know, for a lot of those women in Oldham, they didn’t necessarily feel that they were at a loss in some way. And also, I don’t know, I may be overplaying this, but kind of maybe more of a sense that they were in the same boat, whereas there may be more individuals in the London data. I don’t know. I’d be quite interested to know about that.

**I: So more sense of a kind of collective in Manchester?**

R: Yes, well, I mean, I don’t want to over-cosy it, but, you know, just a sense that they were all growing up in the same place and they had similar sorts of families and similar stuff to deal with, and for some people it was a nightmare, but it was their nightmare.

**I: Yes.**

R: Whereas, you know, for some of the nurses that had come from elsewhere or whatever, there is that sense of dislocation and being on their own and forging new friendships and I think those things are really important to how you then feel about your sexual relationships and what role they play, and I could see that in the play last night, you know? That one relationship becomes much more important, in the sense that working-class girls in a very working-class community, yes, you know, what we might see or hear is they’re absolutely clear they’re going to get married, they’re going to have children and you think, oh, my god, it’s all mapped out and they’ve got no choices, but it’s like, well, okay, that’s what happens, but there’s all this other stuff as well that is my life as well. It’s not like that is the most important thing. It is part of a patchwork or whatever. Whereas I think if you’re more individualised, more isolated, more dislocated, more middle class maybe, it is that this is your life, you know? This romantic relationship and your smaller family, I think?

**I: Yes, that makes a lot of sense. You said earlier about…I think it was when you were talking about Share about your sense that sex education and giving people information isn’t the answer, so I was wondering if when you’d done WRAP and you’d heard these young women’s stories, whether you had a sense of, like, what needed to be done or did anything need to be done?**

R: Well, I think my position would be, like, you know, you need major cultural change, but that’s not going to happen overnight. But, you know, I suppose I had some hope or some notion that actually engaging in an interaction process, something that was a bit more real might make some difference, something that would make the decisions they might have to make more live to them than somebody standing up doing this didactic kind of talk about using condoms, which I’ve just always thought was nonsense. I mean, my first research project for the Health Education Council was on smoking, so I absolutely come from, you know, as a sociologist, but located in that world, in the mid-‘70s where people thought that you could tell people that smoking was bad for them and they’d stop, and my starting point was this is not going to work and I haven't shifted, it doesn’t work, and it drives me absolutely mad that people keep doing it and huge amounts of money keeps being spent. You know, that knowledge changes attitudes, changes behaviour, and it’s not that it can’t ever, but it just isn’t…well, I don’t need to tell you, do I, really? It’s not how it works.

And I suppose now I am much more interested in the nuances of practice, and the embodied ways that things happen, and habitual ways and routinised ways that things happen, which probably now makes me slightly more interested in older people’s sexual relationships and how they get fixed over time. But, you know, whatever it is, whether it’s smoking, eating, sex, doing environmental things, you don’t just change routinised behaviour because somebody says it’s bad for you. It just doesn’t happen.

**I: Absolutely. We should probably stop soon, there’s just the one more last kind of other area I wanted to ask you about was about ethics and whether you had…well, two things, really, one’s a kind of bureaucratic side, did you have to go through a formal ethical…?**

R: No, I was talking about this, you were there, weren’t you, when Liz and I did the thing?

**I: Yes.**

R: No, I mean, I didn’t have to talk to anybody about getting this funding. I think Hugh Beynon was already head of department at that point, he was very pleased. I probably talked to Liz a bit about it, you know, advice and such, but…

**I: But then you, Janet and Caroline would have filled in a form and sent it off?**

R: Yes, and sent it to the ESRC, yes. I mean, I do remember spending an hour or so sitting beside a very nice woman in the finance office at Manchester Uni doing the budget, and she was really helpful, I can see her really clearly, she must have been very close to retirement at that point, she was really sweet. But that was all. I mean, I may have shown it to Hugh but it wouldn’t have been about permission.

**I: How long would the application have taken to fill in?**

R: God, when did we do it? I mean, it went in in ’88, didn’t it? Do you know, I just don’t know.

**I: You don’t remember sitting down with Janet and Caroline to do it?**

R: Not really. See, I can really clearly remember writing the CARA Research Proposal, the children and parents and, risk one, in my office in Stirling with Stevi and Kathryn wandering about, and talking to Kathryn then about how we would manage the issue of Stevi and I being so used to writing together. But I can remember I did the typing then. I can’t remember, I really, really can’t remember. Maybe Janet can remember, but I don’t think it took long, I really don’t, and then we wrote the paper quite quickly afterwards. Where is it? Where’s that paper? Is that in Sociology of Health and Illness? I’d need my CV, I can’t remember.

**I: Yes, I’m not sure, either. The three of you wrote that together?**

R: The very first paper that just came out of the application. Do you want me to tell you? Do you want me to check and tell you?

**I: Well, I’ll have a look later.**

R: Yes, you’ve got them, I take it?

**I: Yes, I’ve got them, I’ll have a look and if you could look for the grant application that would be amazing. So you didn’t have to do any formal ethical…?**

R: No.

**I: So then how…**

R: I didn’t anyway, whether Janet did any in London, maybe in the Instutute.

**I: So then how did you ensure that the study was ethical, how did you deal with ethics as a team?**

R: We were just very clear that these young women should have the support that they needed, that we should be clear we weren’t just trying to take things away from them and use it just to further our careers. We did have…I mean, there was a whole discussion about feminist methodology and feminist…ethics…I mean, I’m a bit of a rogue about ethics, some of it really does drive me insane. I mean, I think it’s getting to the point where we’re not going to be able to do this kind of research at all. It’s getting silly.

I mean, there wasn’t all of that discussion about co-esearchers and such back then, but I think we were very clear and we had lots of leaflets and pamphlets and things that we gave them, and back-up. The thing that pops up in relation to that is that at some point during the project, giving a presentation somewhere, I can’t remember where, but somebody saying to us that we ought to have counselling qualifications in order to do research on this kind of topic, that it was wrong to be interviewing young women about this highly sensitive stuff if we weren’t qualified counsellors, and it made me furious. It made me absolutely furious that, you know, the idea that everything has to be turned into a therapeutic discourse, and that that wasn’t…you know, that wasn’t the way that these young women were going to be talking about it. And yes, there may be sticky moments like, you know…and of course there would be other things they chose not to tell us. I mean, I’d be hugely surprised if more of them hadn’t had some experience of sexual abuse that they didn’t talk to us about.

But we didn’t think it was our place, it would have been inappropriate and in my line with people…that person, I can’t remember who it was, and others, has been, you know, we couldn’t do that follow-up, it wouldn’t have been right to behave as if we could, and in any case sociology and therapy are not the same thing, and of course that was a very live debate in feminism at the time, you know, that kind of feminist therapy thing. So I suppose that’s an ethical debate.

But no, different world.

**I: And so the last thing was just whether there’s anything else that you wanted to say about WRAP or whether there’s anything else that you think if a future archive user is coming and wants to explore these interviews, is there anything else that they need to know or understand about the study?**

R: I just think they’re hugely lucky to have access to that but to kind of know what we know now and to be able to think, well, okay, that was actually quite an amazing project for its time, and there are lots of things you might do the same, but there are things you might do differently and to have the opportunity to use that to think with, really. I don’t think it makes me want to do it again but it does make me very pleased to have as much involvement as I’ve had and to want to keep that thread of involvement and I feel like a sort of parent to it, I suppose, in a funny sort of way.

I think I’ll think more about it now having talked to you, Ester. I think I’ve been a bit…sort of because of the things we’ve talked about, I’ve not been reluctant, exactly, but haven't quite known how to put myself back into it.

**I: What’s your place in it all?**

R: Yes. I mean, Rachel’s been so clear about me having a place in it and that’s been very good. I suppose I feel, yes, I do feel like I’d let her down a bit, at the end of the research you know? I just thought she was amazing and she was going off to London, but I think I could have looked after that transition better than I did. I think I’ve always felt that Rachel was the custodian of the work we did in Manchester. I have been very pleased that our friendship has grown over the years and, was delighted that this project happened and, that I could be involved, as it seems to square the circle.

**I: Yes, a difficult moment, it sounds like it was a difficult moment?**

R: Yes. But you do just get caught up in the rush of the moment sometimes, don’t you? And that sense of just thinking other people are all right and it wasn’t that I thought she’d taken sides, it wasn’t that I thought she’d gone, absolutely not, but I didn’t want to make things difficult for her.

**I: And you trusted in her brilliance as well.**

R: Absolutely and that she would make sure that some of the things were included that needed to be said, yes. But she needed to manage her relationships with the rest of the team.

R: Anyway… Yes, it was a really good thing for me to have done, I think. And yes, an absolute career turning point, in that sense, and also…

**I: In what sense was it a turning point?**

R: Oh, just having got funding, I mean, in that career sense, but also, you know, a turning point in terms of for all its difficulties, working in a team, having a researcher to work with, and really I’ve been very lucky in my researchers but Rachel set a very high bar. Yes, so just that process, but also being a bit adventurous about the kind of research I wanted to do. I wish I’d done more. I mean, that’s a sort of sadness that I haven't done more empirical research but that’s because, you know, the other branch of my life which I don’t actually regret and there’s a limit to how much time there is. Anyway, enough blethering on.

**I: I’m going to stop the recorder, yes?**

R: Yes, stop the recorder.