

Basic or limited sex education

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This analysis refers to interviews NCM12 (Simone) and MAG12 (Stacey) from the Manchester WRAP collection.

Another prevalent theme in the transcripts was 'basic or limited sex education'. The young women detailed the amount and depth of the sex education they received within Catholic school in the 1980s. The idea of basic or limited sex education was shown by mentions of few lessons given, e.g. 'we got a lesson once' (Simone) and 'there was no sex education at all' (Stacey). Teachers would rush over lessons, or miss out crucial information. 'She didn't really go into detail; she just went very fast. So we didn't have much time to think' (Simone) and 'she just said – you can't get AIDS from this, you can get it from this' (Simone).

Sex education largely had a biological focus, as opposed to informing students about safe sex. 'Yeah, just like how babies are made, and that's it' (Simone), 'Q: Did they talk about contraception? A: No' (Simone). Students were not informed about the ways to prevent pregnancy or transfer of STIs: 'Q: So did she say that if you use a condom you'll be protected? A: No way' (Simone) and 'Q: Did they talk to you about contraception and STDs at school? A: No, nothing like that' (Stacey). Furthermore, teachers did not explain relationship dynamics, or what emotions may arise when a student became sexually active, e.g. 'nobody ever talked to you about the problems and the entanglements, and what it means to be in a relationship when you start having sex' (Stacey). The girls also noted that any sex education they did receive only involved the teacher giving a short session of 'just the basics' (Simone), with no time allotted for further discussion or an opportunity to ask questions. 'All we did was read from a book. We didn't really discuss it or anything' (Simone).

Sex education for the general student population was described to be a bare minimum. Some further education would be given if students opted to study biology; 'only if you took biology in the fourth or fifth year, we did quite a bit' (Simone). The feelings towards sex education within biology in later school years seemed to be more positive, with more extensive education on how the body works: 'I learnt a lot from biology, you know, about sort of ...and the insides and things' (Stacey). However, this more detailed teaching was reserved only for those who chose to study biology, and was not offered to other students.

The *basic or limited sex education* led to students having to take their education into their own hands. Girls would seek out magazines as a source for better information, namely 'man and woman'. Stacey explained that 'we read them all! I think I learned a lot off that'. School sex education sessions left large gaps that the girls filled independently outside of school.

Overall, the girls explained that they received quite poor sex education. Between teachers rushing lessons, and only providing factual information, to more information being kept back from the wider student body, and only being taught to fulfil the exam curriculum, students' sex education was *basic and limited*.