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Fiona

Q: ...to another part of the country to make sure of that. One of the things that we're interested in in this piece of research is how young women feel about their relationships, what they think is important in relationships - ...what would you say is an important relationship for you ... relationships?

A: What, between boys?

Q: No, well any kind ...

A: Any kind. Well, my most important relationship really is between me and my sister - between like ... my family...

Q: What's important about those relationships for you?

A: Just the fact that I'm close to my sister, you know - we just do everything together really so it's just the closest one I've got, you know ...

Q: Is she older or younger than you?

A: ...(?) fifteen.

Q: How old are you?

A: (?) Eighteen.

Q: Yeah, so a bit younger. Is that your only sister or brother?

A: No, I've got a younger brother...

Q: And you're all living at home?

A: No, my brother lives with my mum and I live with my dad.

Q: Is that recently that you've been living...

A: ... I can't really remember when.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah.

Q: What, you can't remember when they were together?

A: Not properly, sort of bits and pieces.

Q: Yeah. And how does it work out, do you see your mother much or -

A: She lives in NORTHWEST ENGLAND so it's quite a way away, but I'll see her a lot more when I go to university

Q:

A: Yeah, could be ...

Q: And do you have any other girlfriends as well?

A: Yeah, I've got - let's see, I've got three main girlfriends ...

Q: Do you find that your girlfriends ...

A: One of them ... and the other's moved like recently, about a year and a half ago.

Q: ...

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. What sort of things do you do with your friends?

A: Well we spend a lot of money on ... you know, we just go out at the weekends, go to clubs, go concerts sort of thing ...

Q: Have you got any particular favourite band then?

A: Band? No, not really... soul and reggae.

Q: One of the other things we were interested in finding out about is what young women think about their sex education that they have at school. Did you have ...

A: ... I think we had about three lessons in science and that was like - we just like ended up putting condoms ... (?) caps ... and blowing them up and things like that. So, no, I think everything they tried to teach us everyone knew by then anyway. I think in the fourth year - how old are you, fifteen? You know everything by then really.

Q: Yeah.

A: And also, because it was in a science lesson, it was kind of like - like about contraception, it was like the technical side of sex and that was it, you know, it didn't go into anything else.

Q: Yeah. Were you in a mixed school -

A: Yeah.

Q: - or a single sex school? Did you find that difficult to cope with, or did you have it together with boys?

A: Yeah, we had it together. No, not at all really. 'Cos you talk about those things all the time, don't you?

Q: Do you?

A: Well we did anyway. (laugh). No, we was - I mean the boys at that time were like ... (?) immature and it kind of held back the girls ... a bit more; but as I say, we already knew it anyway -

Q: - anyway -

A: - and our parents were quite open about it as well.

Q: Yeah. So you think you learn much from your parents or -

A: No.

Q: No?

A: No. Well I probably ...

Q: Mm. So you think that the - how do you think the sex education could be improved?

A: Well I don't see why it should be taught in a science lesson really although it is - like you can see it from a technical point of view, it's not the way it should be looked at ... I mean learning it in a lesson like - like we had in the social science course where you learn - you learn more about like the world... I don't know, I just think people should be looking more at the relationship side of it and taught not to be embarrassed by it and that and ...

Q: Mm, yeah. Did you - did they do anything about AIDS in that?

A: No, no.

Q: Where did you - where do you think you first heard about AIDS?

A: Newspapers, I think. Yeah.

Q: What was your reaction when you first heard, can you remember?

A: This is about 1981 though, isn't it?

Q: Mm.

A: But I think - I think I thought what everyone else thought at the time, it was gays really and you could catch it by touching people with AIDS and all that kind of crap, you know ... but like I always remember, it was like a big thing, like everyone was talking about it in school...

Q: Yeah, yeah. What do you think of the government campaign ... AIDS?

A: The first one was that one with the slabs, wasn't it?

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah, I thought it was pathetic. I thought it was really - just, I don't know, it's just not the right approach at all. I can't I mean those adverts scared me at the time, you know, they made me kind of like paranoid about the whole thing. They just didn't say nothing at all, I can't

remember what they were saying but they just didn't say anything ... you know, they just like dramatised the whole thing ... and the other advert, the one with like the couples and the subtitles underneath, were better but I think - I think the way that they were aiming them to young people were quite accurate really... I just think the government are trying to take it all back to the dark ages really, make us all, you know like remain virgins until we're married and that.

Q: Mm, yeah. Do you think it ought to have been ... different ages?

A: Yeah, different ages and races, different sexual behaviours -you know, like gays, straights, whatever; they're just reinforcing the idea that it affects only certain types of people, you know, gays ...

Q: What do you feel that you know about AIDS, yourself, now?

A: Myself? Well, I think I know everything that I need to know, you know... I know what it is and what it does to you, you know?

Q: What is it, how would you describe it?

A: I would describe it as a disease that ... any disease at all...

Q: Mm, yeah, right. What distinction would you make between HIV and AIDS?

A: HIV is when you're actually - when you're carrying it but it's not in full-blown stage, where you may develop the full-blown AIDS but you haven't ...

Q: What about - well how do you pass it on, for example, how is it passed on?

A: Well, through body fluids, semen, blood and needles.

Q: Yeah, and what about preventing it...?

A: Well, using clean needles, using a condom and screening blood.

Q: ... One - another thing that government publicity refers to is safe sex. What do you understand by safe sex?

A: Well that's either using a condom or - or not having, not actually penetration or ejaculation, whatever -

Q: Mm

A: - or celibacy.

Q: Yes. Quite a range. What about - when you say not having penetration or ejaculation, what other kind of activities ...?

A: Mutual masturbation or withdrawal ... that's what I know ...

Q: You said - you said you don't have a boyfriend at the moment ... well I mean, have you had in the past?

A: Yes.

Q: And was it a sexual relationship in the past?

A: I've had (?) five sexual relationships.

Q: Yeah...

A: At first I was just turned sixteen and I was on holiday, and we stayed in this, like, small village ... and a guy I really fancied in the local pub.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah ... nothing special really.

Q: Yeah. What actually had you expected ...?

A: Well, I don't know - when I think of it now I didn't really see it then as a big thing, like I was never all that caught up in the first time and all that and getting it all over with ... but I was - I really liked him and he was twenty-one and I thought he'd be really experienced but I don't know, in those countries they're kind of strict, you know, in Spain and that -

Q: Oh yeah.

A: And ... I think he was a virgin as well, so ... but so he was kind of awkward ...

Q: What about contraception, was that an issue then?

A: No, didn't bother ...

Q: Were you worried about that aspect at all?

A: I thought about the possibility of pregnancy and all that, but I just wasn't - I don't know, I just didn't feel... you know, I didn't worry about it much.

Q: Was it just the one occasion or did you -

A: No, twice.

Q: What about the others?

A: The others - after that I think the second one was ... he was twenty-five, I think, and that was a one night stand ... and I didn't use no contraception... and the third one was like the first proper relationship, you know, and that was really ... and I went on the pill, I went on the pill for two months and then I had to come off...

Q: What, you had difficulties?

A: I kept throwing up and... And then that scare came out about breast cancer and that ...

Q: Yeah. So did you use another form of contraception then?

A: No, we split up. (laugh)...

Q: Yeah. You weren't too keen anyway?

A: Well - Oh, I don't know, I thought I was in love and all that but ... was messing me around and that, you know, so ...

Q: What about the others? ... the whole story here ...

A: Right. Err - who was after that... ah, yes, then I went out with a guy I'd known for quite a while, went out about a month and we used condoms then and - like I weren't - like I liked him a lot but I weren't all that bothered about him really ... and it didn't work out at all, and I didn't like condoms at all as well... And then the last one was ... he was twenty-four, five? - and that was like a series of - like we weren't going out or nothing but it was just like a series of one night stands really, about four or five, you know ... but we didn't use anything.

Q: Were you worried about pregnancy each time, on the occasions when you weren't using -

A: Well, I say I didn't use anything but I kind of like - I checked it around the dates of my period ...

Q: ...

A: Yes, that kind of rhythm, and like ... I didn't think it was impossible, but I thought it was unlikely that I would get pregnant. But I was a little bit worried, but not that much.

Q: Yeah. Did you feel in those relationships, did you feel that you had control over what was gonna happen as far as having sex or not having sex was concerned, or did you feel that it was the guy who had -

A: Well I haven't met one guy who was really that concerned about whether I was in any way protected, and - I don't know, most of them have had a really selfish attitude towards it, it's just - you know, as far as they're concerned, getting pregnant they wouldn't have anything to do with it anyway, so really, unless someone actually says no ... So, I don't know, in the heat of the moment sometimes it's really hard to say no, hold on a minute, get organised kind of thing.

Q: Yeah, sure, yeah. Well - I mean you had, a bit worried about pregnancy but it didn't - I mean as you get carried away in the heat of the moment, it didn't really ... What about AIDS, did that cross your mind at all?

A: Well (laugh) yeah.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah it does, but I don't know, I just - I know it's a really stupid thing to say, but kind of like you judge people by the way they look, I think everyone does it, no matter how... but I just find it really hard to look at someone I like and think well, you may have AIDS, you know, and - I don't know, I just - I don't take it as seriously as I should, there's no doubt about it.

Q: Mm, well as you say it's very difficult, I mean it's difficult in that sort of context. I mean I was gonna ask you if you feel okay, you know, saying to somebody use a condom, but if you feel that badly about it yourself -

A: Well I have asked, I have asked before.

Q: Yes.

A: But I usually ask when I wanna get out of having sex ...

Q: Yes. But you said you weren't too keen on condoms yourself anyway.

A: No. No, I think they're horrible...

Q: Yeah. But I read a little while ago ... a sort of female condom, the whole thing that goes inside and covers everything up

A: Ugh.

Q: I read it a few months ago ... but I don't know if that would be any better.

A: I don't know ... I don't know... Condoms are just really uncomfortable things. I don't enjoy sex with...

(large gap - not transcribable)

A: Yeah, definitely, definitely. 'Cos when I was like younger, before ... emerged or anything like that, I always used to ... like life would be really easy, you know you could just like, so long as you weren't gonna get pregnant you could just like screw away...

Q: Mm, it's a bit off putting in that situation as well. What do you think could be done, you know, to make it more meaningful to young people, I mean given the ... about AIDS?

A: What, you mean for the government ...

Q: Any campaign at all.

A: I don't know, it's like ... all of us know the problems and all of us know what has to be done. I think what has to be done is - I think the whole subject of sex has to be brought out in the open and people have to be less ... about talking about it and then when people feel more relaxed about talking about sex then they can start saying, you know, put your condom on kind of thing. Most girls I know wouldn't have the guts to say that or wouldn't have the guts to go in the shop and buy it, you know ... you have to use condoms, you have to use something ... prevention, you know, when you're having sex with someone ... who you don't know...

Q: ... know somebody well. I mean you talk about -

A: No, I mean if they've been - like if you get a screen - like I hope that the next big relationship that I have ... I mean I don't have to worry about anything, it's like, I mean you might as well.

Q: Yeah. You think you'd feel okay having a test? I mean -

A: Well apart from the fact I don't like blood tests -

Q: Yeah.

A: And needles. Yeah, I'd feel okay about it but - I say that now but ...

Q: Mm.

A: But I don't know.

Q: But do you at some level feel that there isn't much chance really that you - that you are positive?

A: I try not to think about it too much really. But sometimes I think that the last guy I slept with, he like, he slept with a lot of girls, like he was really ... like (?) he would make himself kind of get a girl on a Saturday night kind of thing, you know; when I think of him, that's when I think of AIDS.

Q: Yeah.

A: But - I don't know, I haven't really thought about going and getting screened or anything like that. Maybe I will.

Q: I was wondering - I mean it must be a very difficult piece of information to have, I mean to know -

A: Well that's it, I don't know if I'd wanna know.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: I know it's a really selfish thing to say but ... if I have got it then I don't really wanna know... I wanna carry on with my life normally...

Q: Mm. Well, I mean even - I very much doubt that you have myself but, even people who are AIDS positive ... yeah. And now, I mean, they're making discoveries all the time ... although it's pretty problematic at the moment, not having a cure -

A: Yeah.

Q: ... So you - you think that some of your friends say, haven't, I mean they haven't been able to react in a sense to the threat of AIDS in terms of - they'd be too shy -

A: Yeah, it's - I don't know, I think for girls the main problem is pregnancy.

Q: Mm.

A: And - and then AIDS might come along somewhere but ... I don't know. I'm just trying to think of other friends really, like I don't well, let me see, no, I don't really know anyone that's taken it that seriously, apart from one girl, I know she had a test done and that, but I don't know any girl that ... use a condom, and when it comes down to it, you know, you wanna enjoy sex and if condoms wreck that, then people stop using them. It's as simple as that, really.

Q: Yeah ... I mean you were talking just now about - when you think about sex do you think mainly of penetration, of sex as penetration?

A: Yeah.

Q: Yeah. Because there are all those other things that you were referring to before, that you can do which don't necessarily include but you feel that you, maybe your friends, really focus on penetration as being what sex is really -

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Yeah. Well, how do you feel - I mean do you feel here at the sixth form college that you can talk, that there are people you can talk to ...

A: Yes... It's more like friends than that. But well, she's on a counselling course and she - I'm her ...

Q: Oh yes.

A:I think it would be her rather than anyone like family and friends that I talk to.

Q: Mm. That's good. Does that - I mean is that general, are there counsellors for most of the students or is it just - have you just got lucky because she ... or some combination?

A: Well. No, she - she's got - well there's me and my friend and she wanted like a couple of students like ... (large gap) ... It's not a sort of favour for her, it's a favour for us as well, you know, we get a lot out of it as well.

Q: Yeah, sure.

A: ...

Q: Yeah ... I mean it's quite helpful to have that kind of ... self-knowledge isn't it, do you feel that?

A: Oh, definitely, I mean I know a lot more about myself now than I ever did.

Q: Do you think you're changing as a result of that?

A: ...I mean, but I understand what I'm doing a lot more, you know, but acting on it's a different matter, I think I might get onto that later on.

Q: Yeah. That's always a big problem. But it - but it is, it's very useful to have, as you say, understanding why ... get to the point where you change what you do ... You were saying before that you were gonna go to university. What - what are you planning on -

A: For my lifetime?

Q: Well, like doing A-levels.

A: Yeah. I'm finishing A-levels next year.

Q: Which subjects?

A: English and Art and Sociology.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I want to do a Media Studies degree, I'm looking at all different universities at the moment, you know. I mean, there's not that many media studies courses... But I wanna go up north, I wanna get away from London.

Q: Yeah, yeah. And what kind of work do you hope to do after you-

A: Television...

Q: ...

A: ...I don't know, I wanna go into something creative but not artistic, you know, and I'm interested in television, so I'll just try to get a job that I'll enjoy...

Q: Mm, yeah... television producer ... quite varied work, and you do get that kind of creative ...

A: Yeah, I mean I've worked - I was working last year ... college, so I've tried all the nine to five routine and that ...

Q: Mm. It's a little bit difficult - I mean women are having a hard time ... but maybe in a few years' time; there's a lot of pressure at the BBC ...

A: Yeah, I know. What with like satellite as well coming out and ... it's still gonna be hard, but there's a lot more jobs ...

Q: ... Oh, that's what I wanted to ask you about. Risk - risk-taking... Some of the things that you've had in relation to your sex life, for example, have been a bit risky ... What about other areas of your life, do you think you do anything risky in other areas of your life?

A: ... Well I can't think of anything that ...

Q: No?

A: Nothing that would be worth mentioning anyway.

Q: Drinking?

A: No.

Q: Drugs?

A: ...smoke. Nothing hard, no. No, I'm quite ...

Q: What about your friends, do any of your friends do any of the harder drugs?

A: Yeah, they do. I know, I mean I know a few that have gone onto coke and heroin ... who I don't see any more, but no one in my case really. I think a lot more young people come in and like - I don't know, I was thinking in young culture now you're seen more as an idiot if you take hard drugs, apart from in those circles, you know... You only have to listen to like ... and they're all saying, you know, don't touch it, leave it alone, all that kind of thing.

Q: Yeah, yes.

A: So that's a good point. Maybe they should do that for AIDS.

Q: Yeah, yeah, somebody else suggested that to me as well...

A: Yeah, get it out in the open, make it more of a normal subject to talk about...

Q: ...it sort of seeps into your awareness, you know...

A: Yeah, 'cos I've got more - more awareness about drug-taking than - like if someone was to offer me something I'd definitely say no, like it'd be a really big thing for me to take drugs, whereas the fact that I have sex, you know, it could kill me as well.

Q: Yeah.

A: You know. I don't know. Kind of like ...

Q: Mm. And you definitely feel that amongst these young people there is this movement towards, you know, being ... taking drugs. So you think they're all getting herded together into their own little subgroups.

A: Yeah. Definitely. I mean I'm sure the drug problem's still growing. But - I don't know, if I - if we're talking about someone we know who does drugs it's kind of like, like they're an idiot, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: You've just got no respect for people like that, you might sympathise with the problem and that, the cause of taking drugs, but really there's not much of an excuse anymore.

Q: A pretty expensive habit as well... What - there's a question I've been asking people which they've found a lot of difficulty answering, which is, what sort of image do you have of yourself? What's your own image of yourself?

A: Um, well, I think - living in an area where there's like a highly mixed culture, like black and white etcetera, and like young people ... get into two patterns, right, no matter whether you're black or white, you can be put into a category where you're into black culture, you're into white culture, and you can be mixed ...

Q: Yes, yes.

A: ... and just by watching the way people dress ... you can tell what culture they've got into. I would say I'm in black culture myself ... and the way I dress and... and that, and with the culture goes a kind of set of ways, you know kind of the way you act and the way you talk and all that, and I mean that's what I would say I am if I actually ... I don't know, it's really hard to explain something that comes so naturally to you ... part of me, but ... but me myself - I don't know, I really don't. I don't know what to say now.

Q: Yeah, yeah... You were talking about ... are there many whites in the black culture and blacks in the white culture?

A: Yeah, there's more white people in the black culture than there is black people in the white culture. I think it's more accepted, well, whereas for black people to go into the white culture where like they listen to pop music and - and, you know, I mean they listen to pop music... disco ... quite a lot less accepted by their black friends and family. But I know a lot of black people who really don't feel like they fit in with their own black crowd and they get quite a lot of hassle about being different. Whereas I think - I think black people have got quite a lot of respect - no, that's not true actually - put it this way, black - black guys, they have like quite a lot of respect for white girls who are into black men in that way, whereas black girls ... the most harassment I get is from black girls, definitely, and - I don't know, the fixed image of like, you know like black men harassing white girls and that kind of thing, a lot less common than being harassed by black girls. That's where my trouble is.

Q: Yeah, yeah. They're sort of resenting you coming into their ...

A: Yeah, yeah...

Q: ... black boys and stuff like that?

A: Oh, yeah, definitely, I think that's the worst one actually.

Q: Yeah.

A: Black girls that especially go out or are married to white men, just get ... black guys ... it's a really hard situation for them. I think that's why there's a lot less - I mean like there's a lot of mixed relationships going on, but I think it's more between black guys and white women rather than the other way round, you know...

Q: Yeah. Do you meet many of the guys around here through the college, a lot of them are ...?

A: No. Yeah, no, the guys here - well especially next year are gonna be two years younger than me, and ... I think that's a lot of difference, especially between a boy and a girl -

Q: Yeah, mm.

A: And I just don't think I'd have much in common with them, I think - I mean nearly all the guys I've been with to now have been about four, five years older than me, so ... the fact that boys are a lot more immature than girls, you know.

Q: ... And where do you meet the guys that you do ...?

A: Parties, through other friends, perhaps like through social ... you know.

Q: Mm. Do you think there's a lot of mix in here, I mean do you think those cultures that you speak of as operating outside ... in general are operating here ...?

A: In the sixth form there's a really, it's really obvious the amount of simulation, I mean you wouldn't see it now because there's hardly anyone here, but when this place is full you've got like downstairs in the common room - it's so obvious, it makes you laugh, it's like the common room is just full of the black ... right, and it's like they take up the main part of it and there's like one or two white people who they've known a long time and, you know, are accepted kind of thing and everything, and then at the other end you've got a group of Africans, right, and you come up here and you've got everyone else... Turkish and Chinese and that are all up here, and they don't go downstairs at all.

Q: Mm.

A: You know. I think that the only white people that ain't part of their group is us lot, that stay downstairs, you know. It's just obvious what's going on like, so -

Q: Yeah. Then they've set up a very strong body, the black group. Do you think they're excluding the others or it's - or each group is excluding -

A: I think it works both ways but... I think the main problem was, I mean I don't know if this'll go on next year because the way it happens in the first year was we had a lot of intruders at the beginning of the school when it first opened and things were like frenzied, like the black kids were downstairs, and that caused a lot of problems and kind of like everyone sort of like ... apart from their friends, stay downstairs and that's the way the divide happened.

Q: Yeah, I noticed there's a lot of security, I found it very difficult -

A: Yeah

Q: - to find my way in when we arrived. We found the door that said, you know, come in the front door...

A: I know, but we need it though.

Q: Yeah. That's been a problem, has it?

A: Yeah.

Q: Mm. How are you finding your courses?

A: I can't say I enjoy it really all that much. It's as good as any A-level course really, I suppose.

Q: Mm. What made you decide to make that break then and not stay on at school?

A: Well I started at college, a year after school, that was at the sixth form and I just - I just couldn't be bothered any more, I just - I'd worked quite hard at O-levels and I just felt... and I worked a while as well, so I made money... but it weren't enough, not the money, you know, it was just boring work and no holidays or anything.

Q: Yeah, yeah. So it's a lesson to you to get back into education as fast as possible.

A: ...

Q: The other question that I ask everybody, it's just I didn't have your questionnaire, I don't know, is about religion. Do you have any particular religion?

A: Yeah, I have, when I was nine I used to be a born again Christian... extreme... and that lasted like about three years, but that was like a strong influence from my grandma who was in America ... born again Christians, you know, and I just...

Q: You were living in the States?

A: Well only for ten months.

Q: Yeah.

A: ... everyone out there is religious, where I was staying anyway, I was staying in...in [NORTH-WEST STATE] and it's boring, it's just full of - I mean I've got nothing against religious people but this lot took it a bit far, it's like...

Q: Yeah, yeah. So that's another little...that put you off?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: It's quite interesting though.

A: What, the religion?

Q: Well, to have those sorts of experiences.

A: Yeah. I don't regret it or anything like that, I'm just - I just wouldn't carry on with it... learn these things... experience, you know.

Q: Mm. Well, that's about all I was thinking of asking you. Have you got anything that you want to ask at all?

A: Like - what's the whole study really about, what are you trying to find out?

Q: Well, what we're interested in is the way that young women understand their own sexuality, how it develops and what they feel about it, and what... and it's - I mean it's gonna be useful in terms of AIDS education because, as you say, the AIDS education is a bit irrelevant to young people, so if you know more of what (a) they're doing and (b) what they're thinking about it, then you might be able to direct some of the information more directly... so that's the ultimate purpose of it.

A: Is it gonna be turned into a book or -

Q: Yeah, will be, and papers, and reports back to the... and stuff like that. I mean it should - I mean we're only a very short way into it, we've been doing this about six months, so it will probably be about a year before - or maybe sooner than that... that a book will come out. It will get to the young women ... totally anonymous... The other thing we are asking young women if they'd do (a) is whether they'd be interested in being re-interviewed next year, to see what happens in the intervening period, and (b) whether they'd keep a diary for us for a short period, maybe a couple of months.

A: I keep a diary anyway.

Q: You do? Would you be prepared to write it out twice?

A: What, even all the old boring ... that I put in or just the sexual side of it?

Q: We're interested in relationships in particular, how you think and feel about them, and what you actually do in relationships, sexual relationships.

A: Yeah.

Q: Terrific. Well I'm probably gonna be sending out the ... in a couple of weeks' time... I'd be very grateful. Right well, let me take your name and address...