

Gendered double standards

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

It was clear across both transcripts that the theme *gendered double standards* underpinned young women's perceptions and experiences of sex education in the 1980s. *Gendered double standards* were evident in that there were different pressures for boys and girls in relation to sex, with girls being fearful about being labelled and acquiring a negative reputation. Girls were labelled as 'slags' or 'loose' if they engaged in sexual behaviour, e.g. 'Q: Was it seen as a good thing to lose your virginity? A: Depends, if it was a one-night stand, no way. Then you were a slag' (Simone). This even extended to having lots of boyfriends, 'But if a girl went out with too many lads, not even if she'd slept with any of them, she could still get labelled' (Simone) and talk about sex, 'Q: Did girls talk about it amongst themselves? A: only what we call the loose girls' (Simone), and 'There was just one [slag] that I really remember...And she'd sort of talk about anything....There was some photos of her that got passed round the sixth form' (Stacey). In contrast, for boys, sexual behaviour was viewed positively, 'For a lad, definitely, you've to get rid of it as soon as possible' (Simone), and, 'I remember there was lads that always sort of talked about it, it was always the lads, never the girls. You know, they'd say, I wouldn't mind having her tonight, and that sort of thing' (Stacey).

Fear of being labelled as a 'slag' or 'loose girl', and subsequently damage to one's reputation contributed to girls avoidance in discussing sex: 'Because the thing was, in our school, if you talked too much about sex, you always got someone who picked up on it and thought – Oh, she looks a right one' (Simone). However, what was particularly interesting was the trajectory of this labelling. For example, initially it was the boys that started the labelling: 'Q: Do you think that the girls started it? A: 'I think they picked it up off the lads; they carried it out' (Simone), but this was exacerbated by the girls who labelled more: 'Q: Who does the labelling? A: 'Well, a lot of the girls did. But, then again, I've always thought that more girls did it than lads did' (Simone).

Subsequently, discussions about sex were reserved until the girls were older, once they had left school: 'It's only later that you can talk about things like that: not in the school situation' (Stacey). Closely related to the fear was the issue of trust, which could be dangerous: 'you'd got to start knowing who you can trust' (Simone). For girls who suffered this fate and were labelled as a 'slag' the young women discussed how they no longer needed to self-preserve and try to prove to their peers otherwise as they wouldn't be believed and instead lived up to the label. 'Q: Were people scared of getting a reputation? A: Loads of people, yeah. But a lot of the ones that got a name, just lived up to it then because they thought-Well everyone thinks this and that, and I may as well...they won't believe me' (Simone). This demonstrates the dangers of *gendered double standards*.

In sum, pressure to conform to *gendered double standards* and avoid labelling shaped young women's perceptions and experiences of sex education in the 1980s. This appeared to impact young women's social relationships, behaviours and image perceptions.