

Group discussion between Rachel Thomson and the members of the University of Manchester's Women's Theatre Society for the Reanimating Data Project

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Group discussion conducted and audio recorded on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2019 at the University of Manchester.

Transcribed by Type out transcription services and edited by Reanimating data project team. Photos of the objects discussed have also been added.

**Key:**

**Text in Bold:** Interviewers / Women's Theatre Society members

Text not in bold: Rachel Thomson

[ ]: Content has been added to provide further information / context.

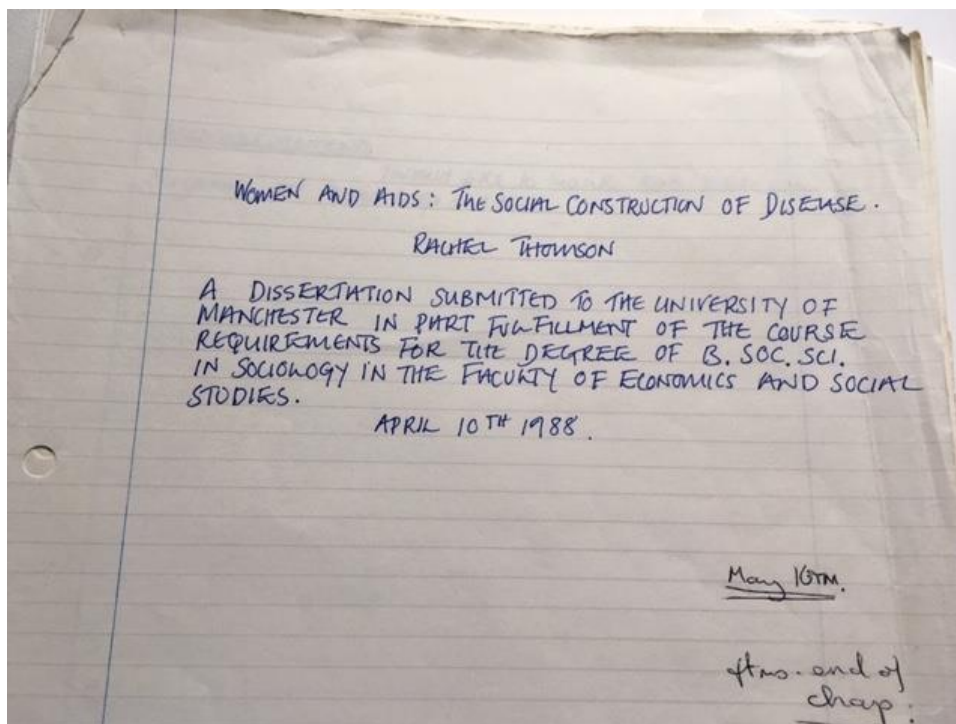
1 **Can we just start off and ask you why did you do it?**

2 Why did we do the study in the first place?

3 **How did you get involved in it?**

4 I was thinking about that on my way up and I thought maybe I would just show you, so you know  
5 what 30 years looks like for yourselves, I'll pass you round some pictures of who I was 30 years ago,  
6 to get the mood right. Maybe I'll say about myself and then I'll explain with the study because the  
7 things are mixed up. I was a student here in the sociology department, I came in 1985 and graduated  
8 in 1988 and I was really lucky and if you think about it now the idea that when you finish your degree  
9 you just get a job in the department, someone says, "Would you like to be a researcher on this  
10 project?" So in retrospect I was really lucky that Sue Scott who had been my dissertation supervisor  
11 asked me if I was interested on working on a funded research project and the reason for that probably  
12 is that I did a dissertation about women and Aids and the reason I was interested in that was that my  
13 sister was HIV positive, which I guess in 1988 there were very few women who were HIV positive;  
14 not only was HIV incurable but they didn't know what it was, they literally didn't know what AIDS  
15 was there was no understanding of the cause, so it was something I was really interested in and  
16 motivated about.

17 I actually found, because I'm a hoarder, I don't throw things away, I actually found my old  
18 dissertation, I thought you would find this interesting when you could handwrite a dissertation; we did  
19 have photocopiers but I thought you might just want to pass that round to have a look at it, so there's  
20 bits that are photocopied and we did have Tippex, so there are bits that are Tippexed over and I was  
21 looking at this I was thinking this must be a draft, there's no way this could be the final thing and then  
22 you realise because there's marks on it so it's not.



23

24 **Is it carbon paper?**

25 No; there's photocopying going on there because you can see there are bits that have been  
26 photocopied and cut up and stuck on. Anyway, I was interested in this kind of thing and motivated  
27 around it, so I was employed on the project and the project was a sociology project, they were  
28 feminist sociologists and always with getting funding for any project it has to, particularly if it's  
29 sociology it has to be seen as a problem like an official public problem in order to be fundable and at  
30 that moment there was a real concern about the heterosexual spread of AIDS because up to that point  
31 people understood that it was affecting gay men they didn't know why, they didn't actually know how  
32 it was transmitted which is amazing now to think and it was just at that point where they started  
33 becoming aware that it was a blood-borne disease and there was absolutely nothing that was stopping  
34 it from being spread much more widely; there was a big programme or public research funded into, it  
35 was called the social aspects of AIDS, there was lots of studies about sexual behaviour and until that  
36 time really there hadn't been very much social research on sexual behaviour it had been something  
37 that was seen as very private outside of the orbit of research really and public knowledge.

38 I don't know if people remember, well they won't remember Margaret Thatcher but Thatcherism a lot  
39 of it was a bit odd, it was very contradictory, part of it was about asserting the family and the rights of  
40 parents but the other side of it was actually about being quite public about things and public about sex,  
41 so Thatcher infamously both commissioned this research and then banned quite a lot of it afterwards  
42 which was a very Thatcherite thing to do.

43 The research was a feminist research project so all of the leaders of the projects which was Janet  
44 Holland, Sue Scott, who worked here [at the University of Manchester] and Caroline Ramazanoglu  
45 who worked at Goldsmiths in London, they were feminist socialists and they wanted to do a piece of  
46 research which was feminist and in a sense critiqued the assumptions about heterosexuality, so the  
47 idea that there was just that moment in sexual politics where feminists were getting really interested in  
48 naming heterosexuality as a thing and so the project was about sort of troubling and complicate  
49 heterosexuality so that's kind of how it began. I was probably much more interested as an activist I  
50 think, as a member of a younger generation I was kind of more about trying to stop AIDS but also I  
51 guess I was a young feminist but of a different generation.



53 That's a photograph from Section 28 March; Manchester was a really important, in fact the biggest  
54 demonstration around Section 28 was in Manchester and it began a really big kind of explosion of  
55 activism around [sex]. Manchester was a real hot bed of activism around sexual politics at that time in  
56 the 80s, people were really interested, it was really important to people to talk about it, we had endless  
57 conversations about sex. I was thinking about it when I was reading the interviews about how much  
58 people liked to talk about sex at that time it was sort of like a full time job to work it out.

59 **Do you think it was Manchester and other places?**

60 The reason I came to Manchester, I've just been asking actually guys here why you came to  
61 Manchester, I came to Manchester for the music completely and I was the only person that I knew  
62 who went to university so that was quite a big thing anyway and then I lived in a little small town in  
63 the south of England and someone had been to Manchester and they had gone to Hacienda as it was  
64 then, this was pre the Hacienda being the Hacienda, actually maybe they hadn't, they'd been to a club  
65 in Hulme and they had come back and the club was called the Kitchen, it was like a flat club and they  
66 came back and we put this thing on at the Park Road Community Centre in Chichester called The  
67 Kitchen and everyone was wearing Mackintosh coats and pretending to be in Manchester, so  
68 Manchester at that point it was completely the place we wanted to be. So when I went to university I  
69 just went to Manchester, I decided that's where I wanted to go - I had been thinking about this, we  
70 didn't even have a prospectus, this is pre-internet, so there was no prospectus, I had no idea what or  
71 where Manchester was and the first time I ever came to Manchester was the day that I was dropped  
72 off to be at university, I had been once before from Liverpool actually, so it was quite a shock to come  
73 here. But when I came I was like I completely fell in love with it and if you had grown up in the south  
74 of England and the south coast which is very chocolate boxy and very Conservative, literally in terms  
75 of politicians, I don't think there was anything other than a Conservative MP and coming to a city  
76 which was mostly Labour was amazing, mostly Catholic, which I had never really experienced before,  
77 or maybe Manchester is less Catholic now that it was then but it was a new experience and industrial  
78 kind of beautiful buildings.

79 I remember the first time seeing those big buildings in the centre of town and just being in love really  
80 thinking this was just great. And then when I started doing the research because I don't know what  
81 you find as students but there's always a bit of a tension between being a student and people who live  
82 locally in a city and how do you get to be part of the city and I guess maybe because none of my  
83 friends had gone to university, when I came to university I was a bit disappointed with everybody else  
84 that I met and quite quickly I moved out of university and moved into more of a neighbourhood and  
85 met friends locally. But for me the research was really important as a way of being allowed to have  
86 conversations with people, all sorts of different people, so being able to go all round Manchester and  
87 into neighbourhoods I had never been to, never heard of, meeting young people, having conversations  
88 and finding out how unlike me they were. They hadn't come from my kind of background and didn't  
89 have my kind of beliefs so that was really exciting.

90 **What was disappointing about the people that you met who were studying?**

91 I'll pass you this around; I think I was a bit of a rebel girl. This is one of my most precious objects,  
92 this is something one of my best friends made for me when I was just finishing my A-levels. You've  
93 got to remember in those days only about 9% of young people went to university so it was a much  
94 smaller group. That's one of the big social changes, between 5% and 9% over a short period of time  
95 so it was just beginning to grow so most people didn't go to university and the people who did go to  
96 university were maybe those who were on their ways to being lawyers and very much more of the

97 professional education and I think I was just being quite politically active, got really active over the  
98 miners' strike as a lot of young people did, and my friends were all punk rockers, we weren't really  
99 naughty at all we just looked really flamboyant I think that's the thing! We looked terrifying and we  
100 were actually really shy and you know we would just sit around drinking cider which of course causes  
101 a lot of trouble but is not actually that bad.



102  
103 When I came to Manchester I was really surprised with the other people I met because I didn't stay on  
104 at school, I didn't go to sixth form, I went to the local tech and I was very surprised [that the people] I  
105 had met were the people that had stayed on in the sixth form. I also met nice people eventually. Is it  
106 still difficult to meet people who are from Manchester of if you're a student, is there still that tension?

107 **I think so.**

108 **I know quite a few people from Manchester it's not like the majority but there are quite a few.**

109 **A lot of people I know are from Manchester.**

110 **Do you get to meet people from like outside the uni like in the area?**

111 **There are projects usually a lot of charity projects with the uni which then branch out into the**  
112 **community and that's quite fun.**

113 **I've been volunteering at a school; we teach English to immigrant parents that can't speak**  
114 **English so that's quite a nice way to meet the community.**

115 I suppose in my day we would just go out raving together, it was much less a philanthropic, "I'm a  
116 student, I will go and do good and be with the community." It was more like, "Where are the fun  
117 people? Where are the good parties?" Also people in Manchester, students were a laughing stock in a  
118 way but people also took pity on you and were friends with you. I lived in a house in Moss Side and  
119 within I guess about a month we knew everybody in the street and we were laughed at a lot by our  
120 neighbours and stuff like that but then we knew everybody and in fact I met my partner who is still

121 my partner, 3 streets down who was the same age as me but unemployed and just one of the young  
122 people in the area. The reason I asked you the question was my son is at university at the moment in  
123 Bristol and I keep on saying to him, “When are you going to meet someone who is from Bristol?”  
124 And he says, “It’s really hard to break out the bubble,” and the difference oddly I think between being  
125 uni and not uni is ... yeah, because there’s more university students so you get housed together, I  
126 don’t know what it is but there’s something isn’t there, something is going on?

127 **(Inaudible; over-talking 00:14:52) if you wanted to have a choice you had to search out but**  
128 **there’s just so many of us.**

129 Exactly. And the young people in the neighbourhood and one of the things that came out of the study  
130 is big differences in Manchester between neighbourhoods. So south Manchester and the area around  
131 the university was always much more bohemian and liberal and mixed and mixing, whereas areas out  
132 in different parts of Manchester could be much more Conservative but also wouldn’t necessarily go to  
133 south Manchester, I don’t know if that’s still the case, I wouldn’t be surprised, it probably is, so if you  
134 grew up somewhere like Droylsden that you wouldn’t necessarily come to Didsbury or Chorlton they  
135 would be seen to be sort of places outside of your orbit.

136 In the research there’s lots of really interesting stuff with young women talking about the differences  
137 between different neighbourhoods in Manchester and how the area around the students is where some  
138 of the interesting mixing would go on but a lot of young people wouldn’t go into that. They would see  
139 it as too weird, at the time it was seen as weird.

140 **And how did you get into the [the WRAP project]?**

141 I was just offered a job; I think probably very non-equal opportunities, I think I did have to have an  
142 interview after they decided I would do it then I had to go down to London and meet the rest of the  
143 team and then they said, “I think we should interview you.” So Sue Scott was my dissertation  
144 supervisor and she was one of the ones who got the money from the Research Council for the study  
145 and she just asked me if I wanted to do it so I thought that would be great; but now you would have to  
146 advertise the job I think.

147 **Oh, so you just got it through people you know?**

148 Networks yeah. To be honest we still do when we do research. So with someone like Ester who  
149 started research from being a student we still do roughly the same thing that we find someone we  
150 know that they’re really interested in something and they’re really good and we might then invite  
151 them to apply for a job but now we would do it properly and advertise the job and let other people  
152 apply for it as well so things move on.

153 **How did you find people [to] interview?**

154 It’s quite hard to honestly remember. One of the things I did when I was starting this project was I put  
155 together this kind of log of all the interviews in order, like chronological order. [And then I tried to]  
156 use the date, saying okay so I did this one and try to remember and tried to remember where I had  
157 interviewed them. Because we treated the material anonymously then we didn’t have that much on  
158 record about where we had found people but we have kind of been able to piece some of it back  
159 together, so one way was through youth clubs, so we did work in Moston youth club, in Ardwick  
160 youth club, Middleton youth club so different youth clubs around the city and actually what’s good is



161 we can still connect to those people so going back we've met some of the old youth workers who we  
162 worked with originally.

163 We also sent a letter and questionnaires out through the Education Department of Manchester City  
164 Council so they sent it to everyone; we went through unions. Interestingly, British Telecom was one  
165 of the organisations, so if you think only 9% of young people went to university then that's because  
166 most of them were at work and there were jobs, so most people your age [would have been] working  
167 and often in quite good jobs. So a lot of the young people in this study are in fulltime work and  
168 earning enough to get their own place and move away from home things that now just seem to be  
169 completely impossible.

170 **What was the age range?**

171 16-21.

172 **When you were selecting people or I suppose a lot of people responded you picked out a few I**  
173 **guess, is that what happened?**

174 Yes, we had a questionnaire. Often, we do in a study, we'll have a questionnaire and ask lots of  
175 questions and then in the last page say, "Would you be interested in taking part in more of the  
176 research?" So we selected people from that.

177 **And did you specifically seek out diversity and background and class and sexual orientation?**

178 Yes. It's interesting about sexual orientation because I don't think we really sought out diversity and  
179 sexual orientation partly because it was supposed to be a study of heterosexuality but actually there  
180 was diversity in sexual orientation anyway within the project just because people's experience is  
181 diverse even though you're sort of accessing them in that way. I think in the 80s it would have been  
182 almost impossible. It would not have been impossible to find lesbian and gay young people but  
183 nothing was badged as 'heterosexual young people' if you see what I mean, so it's a different kind of  
184 politics to now. So there was some diversity in that respect. I would say there was probably a lot less  
185 ethnic diversity in the city 30 years ago than there is now. Part of this study happened in London  
186 where there was much more ethnic diversity in the sample, but in Manchester there was ethnic  
187 diversity. There were young people who were non-white but it was predominantly white young  
188 people. But I think then religion was as important, so whether people were Catholic or Protestant 30  
189 years ago was kind of like ethnicity, if you see what I mean, it was an ethnic marker to be Catholic  
190 and from an Irish heritage in a way that now might not be visible in the same kind of way, I think it  
191 was more then.

192 So then the ethnic diversity of Manchester has really changed and particularly some of the  
193 neighbourhoods that we worked in. So we've been going back to some of the parts of Manchester that  
194 we did research in previously which were very much white working-class and they are not anymore at  
195 all. They're really diverse in the areas where there has been a lot of immigration in recent years, so  
196 going to the youth clubs and those neighbourhoods is a completely different experience than it was 30  
197 years ago – it's interesting.

198 **I wanted to ask you because when I read the interview a lot of the questions seemed really**  
199 **personal. When you were interviewing people did they ever seem tense or defensive?**

200 It's interesting; everything I'm saying you can disregard because quite frankly I can't remember but I  
201 can read my field notes that I wrote at the time and I can read the interviews and I can try and get

202 there. I think I ended up having the conversation that I could have with that person and they would be  
203 different with different young people. So some of them, for instance the one I've been reading on the  
204 way up here with the young woman who was a drama student, it's quite explicit in terms of what we  
205 talk about around sex and there's quite a lot of being very specific about different sexual practices  
206 because one of the things about HIV and AIDS was suddenly it wasn't just sleeping with someone, it  
207 became the naming of the acts and the parts. But there were things that would be really difficult to  
208 talk about so I've just been looking at some interviews that I did at a young mothers' group in Blakely  
209 which is in east Manchester and I clearly found it really hard to talk to these young women about sex  
210 because some of them were married and for me I felt like I couldn't have that conversation about  
211 whether you're at risk, they were only like 16-17 but married. It's like what was difficult with  
212 different people really depended on who they were and who I was.

213 I think now listening to some of the questions they just seem so bold but I don't think I would have  
214 asked a question that felt wrong, I would have always probably pushed it because that was the nature  
215 of trying to do research but I would not have really over-stepped a line because I've seen examples  
216 where I can't do it, where I really find it hard to ask a question so I guess it's a kind of barometer  
217 really between me and that person but what is it possible to talk about? Looking back at it, it can be  
218 surprising.

219 **When you first approached the people you potentially wanted to interview were they quite**  
220 **shocked, because I know the project was about umbrellas under HIV but it was a lot about sex;**  
221 **how many people did you have to find before someone was like, "Yeah, shocking."?**

222 Again, I find it hard to remember. Everyone got a leaflet which explained it would be about sex and  
223 they would have filled in a questionnaire which asked quite detailed information about sexual  
224 practice, so there's lot of opportunity for people to say, "Oh no, this is not for me." So usually by the  
225 time had said yes at the end of that then they wanted to talk. And some of the interviews were really  
226 long, like people wanted to talk a lot. I think about this period as being really interesting because it's  
227 almost like the end of something and the beginning of something new and at one level we have this  
228 very explicit sexual culture now where things are just in the public realm and that wasn't the case then  
229 but most of these young people had parents for whom just to say anything sexual would be terrible  
230 and they felt that they were a new generation who didn't have the same feelings of shame or same  
231 feelings of embarrassment as their parents so it was like something new was happening and it was  
232 happening in music and things like 'Desperately Seeking Susan' and movies like that where you had  
233 to watch it again, it is as bad as you thought. But there was something happening that was new, things  
234 like *Just 17* all those magazines were new. It was a new groovy thing to talk about sex but no-one  
235 quite knew how to do it and you could get out of your depth quite quickly by starting to talk, but also  
236 we didn't know what each other did or what was normal because it hadn't really been talked about.

237 So there was a lot of calling girls 'slags' and older generations sort of having certain kinds of phrases;  
238 we often hear in the interviews these sort of phrases which sound like they're coming from somebody  
239 else's mouth, a grandmother or a mother's phrase, there's a really awful one something like, 'A man  
240 won't look at the mantelpiece whilst he's poking the fire.' And you're thinking what does that mean?  
241 It's like a horrible warning that might have been used to girls which doesn't tell them anything about  
242 what risks are but tells them about don't trust men and it alludes to something without telling them, so  
243 there will be quite a lot of those kind of phrases, and I think people are quite up for talking about sex  
244 and finding out whether what they had said had synergies. The other thing I had to remember is I was  
245 23 when I was doing these interviews and I was only 2 years older than the oldest ones, so it was quite  
246 ... I mean I wouldn't necessarily have anything in common with many of them, I would have



247 something different in common with everybody, it's almost like a Venn diagram isn't it and what's in  
248 the Venn diagram is different.

249 And with this young woman who was a drama student there was things we had in common and things  
250 we didn't have in common but it was quite possible to talk quite explicitly with her; with other young  
251 people it was much more difficult to do that and you can see that in the interviews.

252 **With the women that were open about it did you sense they were almost grateful for the**  
253 **opportunity?**

254 Yeah and also there was a lot of disclosure, what we now call disclosure. So in this interview there's a  
255 disclosure of rape which when I was reading it on the train coming up I was thinking I clearly am  
256 avoiding her telling the story, it's like odd. But there was quite a lot of not very nice stuff talked about  
257 in these interviews, sexual abuse, a whole range of things which [for some] people often it would be  
258 the first time they had spoken about it to anybody and it's one of the reasons why the interviews were  
259 so long because you talk for a long time when something like that is disclosed. There are also  
260 interviews which were about 15 minutes, not many of them but ones where it was really tight and it's  
261 not really possible to talk; sometimes the field notes are the really interesting thing on those ones  
262 because you have the interviewer explaining why it felt so difficult to talk.

263 **Do you remember (inaudible 00:31:18)?**

264 I think now if I was doing the study now and I was the grownup we would have probably put a lot  
265 more in place to support the interviewer and done a lot more debriefing. I think we know much more  
266 now about that so it was probably quite a heavy-duty thing to do at 23 - do all those interviews, and be  
267 worried about people. I remember very clearly taking one young woman to the family planning clinic  
268 at the end of the interview because I was so worried about her and then other young people meeting  
269 them again and again after the interviews because they clearly continued to want to talk and things  
270 like that.

271 **And you kept the conversation going-**

272 It was obvious it wasn't finished and then people told me things after the interview that they hadn't  
273 told me on the tape, sometimes about abusive experiences and things like that. I think it was quite a  
274 big responsibility as a young woman to do that.

275 **Did you get some support or not?**

276 We were a research collective and we met regularly and talked about things so I didn't feel isolated  
277 but now we would probably put supervision in place. I think we're just more professional about that  
278 side of things whereas this was very much more a time of consciousness-raising and that's how  
279 feminism did it really. You sat around and you told the truth and supported each other, but there  
280 wasn't a sense in which - we didn't have words like 'safeguarding'.

281 **Do you think there wasn't as much emphasis on mental health?**

282 I think that's really interesting because I think now we would see a study like this through the prism  
283 of mental health and it absolutely wasn't how we looked at it. So, we would now ... I don't know, tell  
284 me what you think, I think we would think about triggers things like that, is it triggering? Could you  
285 ask that because that might...? Whereas in a way this was the stuff that happened before that whole  
286 way of looking at the world came about, this was much more political I think in a straightforward

287 way, well nothing is straightforward is it? But it was much more about trying to say, “That’s not fair.”  
288 Or, “Put that into words; what words does that...?” Because we didn’t really have any vocabulary to  
289 talk about sex, people didn’t know what to call bits of their body, they didn’t know how to name  
290 power, and I say ‘they’ I would speak of myself as well, you know, like we didn’t really have a  
291 vocabulary to describe any of these things so it was the basic work.

292 We’ve just been doing a piece of work down at Sussex where I work with some of the young men’s  
293 interviews and the response from the young men who are listening in the way that you are listening to  
294 these is very much: how could you be so intrusive? They have a much stronger sense of the fragility  
295 of the young people than we had. What do you think, do you think that is a change or have people  
296 changed?

297 **Just hearing how what you were just talking about the fact that there wasn’t that much support**  
298 **for you; just the fact there wasn’t thought given into that which is people weren’t thinking**  
299 **about it because it wasn’t something that was-**

300 I don’t think it wasn’t thought, people did think about that a lot or care but it just wasn’t seen as  
301 psychological. I think we have a much more psychological framework now whereas I think it was  
302 much more seen in a right space political framework.

303 **Where it’s ingrained in us to be like trigger warning, people feel uncomfortable (inaudible;**  
304 **over-talking 00:36:02)-**

305 **I think your interviews would have been super-different now, even though we’re more generally**  
306 **open to talk about sex on a larger scale, like you said, you would have been given support, also**  
307 **to see signs, like when to flag. I think actually when people know that you would have probably**  
308 **as a professional had to be like this person is sexually abused, because you would have had to**  
309 **go, “I can’t tell anyone about this but I will have to say if I see a warning sign,” it just makes**  
310 **people more closed.**

311 I think also you’ve got to think about this, we know now that people are being sexually abused,  
312 there’s no argument that it’s quite an ordinary experience. I’m not saying it’s not an important and  
313 terrible experience but statistically it’s not that unusual, sexual violence. But at this time we hadn’t  
314 established that as a fact about the world. It was feminist research which revealed the extent of  
315 ordinary everyday kind of power in sexual relations and intimate relationships and our mantra was to  
316 make the personal political, so the real project was to not just capture people’s voices but to bring  
317 those voices in to public domain. This whole project then led into all this lobbying around sex  
318 education, so my job when I finish doing this I went and worked in London for the Sex Education  
319 Forum which was this new organisation and it was all about lobbying to give young people education  
320 about sex but also about giving space to talk about inequalities and talk about power, talk about  
321 consent and things like that.

322 You can’t really imagine when there isn’t certain kinds of possibilities or certain facts aren’t known  
323 but there wasn’t a widespread understanding of sexual abuse before the 1980s. That’s when that big  
324 ‘speaking out’, ‘breaking the silence’, all those phrases, that’s when it happened.

325 **Was there an understanding between friends and stuff? What were the conversations?**

326 Yeah, how did people talk? I think that’s really interesting. When I read the interviews I think that’s  
327 what I’m trying to find out from people is: who do you talk to; what kind of conversations do you

328 have? Because I think that's what I didn't know as a curious person and I think some people did have  
329 little groups that they talked to but most people didn't and many people, I mean one of the things we  
330 discovered in the research was that most people learn about sex from their sexual partner, so most  
331 women in the end, most heterosexual women were taught about sex by their sexual partner, which we  
332 thought was a bit of a problem in the sense that it would be good to learn about sex from women but  
333 most mothers didn't ... there were mothers who did and that was really seen to make a difference,  
334 mothers who were open with their daughters about sex but generally young people didn't get it from  
335 school, often what they learn from their peers was a lot of nasty stuff about not to appear that you  
336 know things and be fearful about being judged, rather than learning much about sex. It was generally  
337 by doing it that people learnt about it, or pornography which wasn't widespread, well it was as  
338 important then I think as it is now but totally delivered in a different kind of way so people would just  
339 see it in certain places.

340 **Can I ask how it was distributed?**

341 We wrote one thing on learning about sex and one of the things we asked was: what were the sources  
342 that people learnt from. So some of them were things like man and woman manuals, these awful  
343 horrible things, dictionaries, lots of people talked about looking up words in dictionaries but also  
344 people talked about - because these were the days of video - video in a sense was a new media and a  
345 lot of the young men, because we did a study of young men afterwards, talked about watching pornos  
346 with their dads or young people watching in groups and girls feeling really uncomfortable because a  
347 porno had been put on, so lots of very difficult situations where girls felt like they had to leave  
348 somewhere or felt threatened and then also magazines sort of found down the canal, that's always a  
349 nasty place to find nasty things. It's almost like you'd find porno mags in dark little corners really or  
350 you would have somebody whose brother had some and they brought them to school and then they  
351 showed their friends, these are all little moments of like, "Eurgh." And it would be boys looking at  
352 women's bodies going, "Eurgh." Like horrible depictions of women's bodies or girls looking at  
353 horrible depictions of women's bodies and going, "Eurgh."

354 **So it was mostly women's bodies?**

355 Yes.

356 **Were there like cinemas?**

357 There were. Actually you know where the Corner House is that one that's just slightly up, there's the  
358 Corner House and there's a station behind it and is there a little kind of cinema with a round-?

359 **It's gone now.**

360 That was the dirty picture house and it still was a dirty picture house in the 80s. So you've got the  
361 Corner House here on the corner and then here you've got like a train station-

362 **It's on Oxford Road, it's across from the Palace and the Principle, it's like a media studies  
363 building.**

364 So as part of this project I've been going to the archive in the library to look at City Life magazines  
365 because that was the groovy magazine at the time, City Life, and that's a fantastic thing to look at if  
366 you're interested in the history of Manchester looking at the small ads, so any like Wednesday night  
367 there would be about 10 different feminist groups meeting in Manchester talking about different kinds  
368 of things and ecological groups and whatever; it was a real hotbed of this kind of thing at this time,

369 lots of people meeting up and doing consciousness raising, but also there were lots of controversy  
370 about pornography; James Anderton was the Chief of Police at the time and he was a well-known  
371 evangelical, part of the whole Thatcher thing and he would have the police go to record shops and  
372 remove records that were seen as pornographic so there was quite a lot about censorship, censorship  
373 was a really big issue, there would be public meetings about censorships, young people were really up  
374 in arms about censorship and sex education and the censoring of sex education like what was porn and  
375 what was education was a really big controversial popular issue amongst students and lefties.

376 **How can a record be pornographic?**

377 I'll send an image of the ... it was a band called Flux of Pink Indians, very indie, I'm not sure what  
378 was on the front of the record but they went into Eastern Block which was like the indie record shop  
379 and confiscated them all and there was an outrage and people loved it because it was outrage! But  
380 there was also lots about AIDS education as well and James Anderton was famous for being quoted in  
381 the Manchester News as saying some terrible phrase like, 'Gays would die in a sewer of their own  
382 making' or something; AIDS he saw as divine retribution.

383 **Who was that, sorry?**

384 James Anderton, he was the Chief of Police and I think it's why Manchester was the place where  
385 Section 28 was opposed in the most kind of vociferous and activist ways because James Anderton had  
386 made it such a big issue and people just were not having it. The anti-Section 28 March there were  
387 200,000 people came together in the City.

388 **Can you explain Section 28?**

389 This was during high Thatcherism, so Margaret Thatcher had a very kind of family values approach to  
390 politics, even though at the same time she was a real radical and she was privatising everything and  
391 she was a very contradictory figure in many ways but she used the idea of family values as a vehicle  
392 for mobilising people, a bit like Brexit's being used at the moment to mobilise people with Boris  
393 Johnson. And one of the targets was local authorities, so Manchester local authority or Hackney local  
394 authority which at the time local government had quite a lot of power, lots of people worked for local  
395 government, there were really good jobs in local government and you could be the advisor for equal  
396 opportunities or the advisor for refugee matters or whatever in a local government. So they targeted  
397 the local governments by saying that local government, equal opportunities officers were promoting  
398 homosexuality and they used the example of a book that was being available to primary schools  
399 which was [*Jenny Lives with ] Eric and Martin*. Anyway, it's not far off actually the thing that's  
400 happening at the moment with the *no-outsiders* campaign – I don't know if people know about that  
401 but it's about teaching about LGBT equalities in primary schools and it was like a huge thing in The  
402 Sun and the tabloid press, making a lot of publicity about something that probably only existed in  
403 about 2 situations but became this very big public battle where there was an argument that children  
404 were being forced to be gay and lots of 'stuffing things down people's throats' is another phrase that  
405 would get used.

406 So there was a piece of legislation brought in on the Local Government Bill that prohibited a local  
407 authority from promoting homosexuality as a 'pretended family relationship' that was the terminology  
408 and I think this was seen as another bit of trying to make a much more conservative environment but  
409 of course what happened was it backfired entirely and resulted in huge social movements to celebrate  
410 and promote diversity and LGBTQ, feminists, alliances etc. so it had a totally opposite effect than it  
411 was intended to have and Manchester was one of the really important places for that happening, so a

412 very volatile time in terms of politics really; a strong right but also a very creative sort of response  
413 from progressive sexual politics.

414 **Can I ask what was it that initially sparked the desire to reanimate this project and what started**  
415 **it, why now?**

416 Well we done a bit of work, I suppose in some ways as a researcher one of my real interests is  
417 thinking about and understanding social change and I've done a lot of work about young people and  
418 social change so thinking about what it means to be a young person, a university student, how that's  
419 changed over the 40-50 year period, about motherhood and how motherhood has changed, what it  
420 means and we were interested in doing a piece a of work thinking about what it means to be a sexual  
421 subject or what does sexuality mean to people how that might have changed over time and how  
422 technology might be involved in that and politics might be involved in that and a whole range of  
423 things. Rather than just going out and interviewing people about what's it like to be you now, what we  
424 wanted to do was kind of use an archive as a way of engaging people to try and find out how do you  
425 react to what you see there. It's very difficult to talk about social change you can't really talk about it;  
426 we've tried different ways of doing it like interviewing different generations or following people over  
427 time, but this is like a new way that we thought it might be really interesting for people to experience  
428 and to be able to talk about what history feels like I guess; we talk about history in very dry terms but  
429 how do we live history? Because we do live history in families and communities we do live it so what  
430 does it feel like to live history? How do mothers warn daughters now, or do they warn daughters? And  
431 how will you talk to your children? How does that happen?

432 The idea by inviting people into the archive and this is partly inspired by some work that Ester did  
433 with her PhD where she got young people to re-voice and then interview and then think about what is  
434 it like to inhabit that persona that we could find a way of reanimating it like bringing it back to life but  
435 giving it a proper life so that you can start thinking about what it means.

436 **Was it you that decided that you wanted to do it again in a different way?**

437 Yes, so I'm the one who got the money, I'm the one like Sue was back in the day.

438 **How did you get the money this time?**

439 It was really hard; actually we nearly got the money 3 times, it's a bit like a fairy tale, once from the  
440 European Research Council, we got to the very end, we nearly got £2 million, we didn't get it. We  
441 nearly got it from the Arts & Humanities Research Council, we got to the very end of it and we didn't  
442 get it. And this time we got it from the Economic & Social Research Council for a much smaller  
443 funding, almost like an experiment, a methodological experiment. So what they're funding really is  
444 the methodology rather than the topic but and so we've kind of framed the study as a series of  
445 experiments so you guys are joining in really with one of our experiments, we've made sound  
446 installation and we're doing work with different youth clubs. It might be when this project has  
447 finished that we might be able to go for more research to do something as a result of this.

448 **Why drama?**

449 Well I think it's that notion of stepping into somebody else's shoes, because even when I'm going  
450 back and looking at these interviews it's not me, it's a leap of imagination. So I guess that's what we  
451 would all be doing in entering these kind of materials really, what was it like to bring it back to life  
452 and what does that phrase feel like now? All the different ways you could say that. It's almost like

453 understanding how rich this material actually is like it's endlessly rich. We've just been doing some  
454 work using some of the sound from the study and a lot of artists came to see it and they were like,  
455 "What, you've got all this stuff?" It's like, "Yeah, we've got all this stuff." I don't think people quite  
456 understand how rich the material is and all the sorts of things you could do with it, so I suppose we're  
457 trying to encourage and think about who might be interested in this and encourage them to get into it,  
458 because the archive at the end of the project will be available publicly.

459 **Did the original interviews have to give consent for that?**

460 We had a quandary at the beginning of this study whether we should work with the original consent  
461 which was to make the material public in an anonymised form or whether we should go back to the  
462 original people and we took advice from people who are specialists in ethics around this and we kind  
463 of worked out, (and we may not be right) that it was less defensible to ask people to read an  
464 interview that they had given 30 years ago and to consent to it, than it was to anonymise it and to  
465 make it available. It maybe and it will be that there are some people who were original interviewees  
466 who then find the material but we're not asking people to go back to the material themselves, so  
467 we've taken that other path, so it will be made available but in an anonymised form. But the original  
468 consents were to make the material public and at that time it meant in books which is what we did, so  
469 the world changes so there are new ways of making it public but things like re-voicing it is a way of  
470 doing that ethically without, obviously we don't have the audio for the young women's material, we  
471 were only just working with the young men's material with the audio.

472 **Do you have any questions?**

473 Is the interview you've looked at, have you looked at several?

474 **We had (inaudible; over-talking 00:57:19)-**

475 There was only one that I thought was the woman who was a drama student.

476 **Yeah, all 3 that we have I accidentally renamed it so we have it as MAG.**

477 Yeah, MAG50 I think it is but we call her MAG.

478 **We have Katrina and I can't remember the other one.**

479 I suppose when I was looking at that I was really the one that's about drama and the drama circles I  
480 was really interested in whether you thought that was still, cos that really struck me as almost like a  
481 'me too' interview, about this really pressurised environment around something that now probably  
482 doesn't exist anymore in drama circles and in drama clubs and training, or that she talks about this  
483 forced intimacy or that young actresses have to do what's necessary to get a part or be available and  
484 so I was interested in whether you feel that the world has changed those of you who are involved in  
485 sort of theatre, or is it still like that, or is that familiar?

486 **I don't think it's maybe as prominent but I don't think it's gone away at all.**

487 Explain?

488 **I think like definitely in the professional world women are still confronted with that pressure**  
489 **but even in youth groups I remember always as a kid being like, "I'm not going to audition for**  
490 **the main part because I'm not the pretty petite little girl," going for Wizard of Oz. I think there**  
491 **is still this pressure of being that certain female stereotype.**



492 **I don't think it hasn't left from society so it's probably going to increase.**

493 **It's so prominent in mainstream like mainstream arts if you look at Hollywood it just**  
494 **completely still-**

495 Well that was the thing about, 'Me Too' it's not almost like Hollywood or the entertainment business  
496 is worse than anywhere else, not it's just as bad but it's a real epicentre or it's really strong there so  
497 I'm interested in why that's the case actually.

498 **I think because in drama the role of the director or the leader of a project has so much power**  
499 **and often like for actresses/actors, like women acting like they're playing roles, when you're**  
500 **acting you're being vulnerable and a lot of times it's like encounters are maybe a bit sexual or**  
501 **they have these intimate romantic scenes, even in amateur dramatic societies I have experienced**  
502 **men being so creepy towards me or like to other people just because there's that power dynamic**  
503 **and that maybe need for validation that you have when you're acting you're insecure about**  
504 **what you're doing maybe, I don't know, I think that's a field where that kind of power dynamic**  
505 **can like-**

506 **Do you mean like forced, like you were mentioning the physical exercises like fake intimacy?**

507 **I've experienced that but that was in the US when I was younger and older directors being a bit**  
508 **weird. But at uni I haven't experienced that but I think there's definitely power dynamics,**  
509 **maybe I've observed that but haven't been part of female/male sexual relationships and also the**  
510 **creative work, I don't know, maybe.**

511 **Not to say that all men are creepy but the fact that there is such an imbalance in those power**  
512 **roles in the industry just means we have less agency in those fields because it is so dominated by**  
513 **men, I feel like they naturally assume figures of power in that space because it's assumed that**  
514 **they would be in that role in a lot of places.**

515 It's like the Harvey Weinstein you just see it as it is part of the ... the reason they want that power is  
516 to be able to get that kind of-

517 **I also think the reason that it's so bad in the film industry because there's I think black-holing**  
518 **people, like if you're a lawyer, I'm not saying it wouldn't be your reputation but directors can**  
519 **call up other directors and be like, "Do not hire this actress she's difficult to work with." And**  
520 **even if you're not a creepy director, was it Peter Jackson that said he listened to Harvey**  
521 **Weinstein when he came forward and was like, "Fair enough I did do that, I listened to him**  
522 **when he was like don't hire this girl I don't like her," he just did it and it was because she**  
523 **refused to let him sexually assault her.**

524 **I think it stems from that power thing because there's no-one that will go against it, like you've**  
525 **got actresses who need work and it's that, do I work/do I not work? My friend got an agent and**  
526 **he was just like, "Keep your sex appeal, because you're blonde and pretty this is the role you're**  
527 **going to get." No actress can go against it because they're in this really weak position. And then**  
528 **it's all men at the top.**

529 **If the roles that are being created are that type of, they're not expanding the breadth of people**  
530 **they're looking for or the roles they're being put them in or represent them as.**

531 It's almost like all these other fields move on like the law or journalism or academia where you see  
532 women in the senior positions but then the entertainment industry is kind of like it always was  
533 weirdly; I don't understand why it changes.

534 **I don't know if other fields move on; in Italy where I come from the sexism is more overt and**  
535 **my ex-boyfriend's mother was complaining to him that she's a doctor and she's 50-60 and she**  
536 **was complaining that none of the male doctors seem to take her seriously just because she was a**  
537 **woman and being an older woman she was even disregarded as a centre of attention sort of**  
538 **thing, just because she was surrounded by males she did not have a space to voice her opinion,**  
539 **her medical professional opinions.**

540 **I think also the women that do get to the top have to portray quite masculine associated**  
541 **tendencies and also give up what usually other women get like they can't devote their life to**  
542 **their kids and it's like the whole pregnancy (inaudible 01:06:02) which we associate more with**  
543 **men and we shouldn't.**

544 **I went to the Sheffield Documentary Festival over the summer and there was a panel of**  
545 **documentary makers and they were actually saying that there's actually so many women**  
546 **making documentary films and making work, so I don't know that was quite positive.**

547 I think one thing that happens is that women go into particular kinds of areas, often areas where there  
548 maybe isn't such extreme sexism or you're not so exposed and they make it more female and it  
549 becomes more attractive for other women. So the sort of thing I do in academia, where I work pretty  
550 much everyone is a woman, so we're all women professors but then you'll just go over to the physics  
551 department and there's no women, so you get pockets of women. And I think what's happened like  
552 this last week where all these women MPs are resigning en-masse it seems like where it's obviously  
553 getting too hard and too exposing to be an MP as a woman, you've got to have a panic button in your  
554 house; your children are going on the radio critiquing what it's like to have a mother who is an MP,  
555 you realise that maybe women will ... still it's just too hard in some areas and some areas get harder  
556 and harder rather than easier and easier; see that's really helpful for me because what you're saying is  
557 change is really uneven so things might seem better here but actually they might be much worse over  
558 there.

559 **I think it's a harder decision to make to put yourself in that position as a woman, like you said**  
560 **using a politician as an example because whatever you do you're making a statement, like if you**  
561 **choose to adopt those masculine tendencies and statement if you don't you're so exposed, it's a**  
562 **more difficult environment to be in and I think that's why less people make that bold choice to**  
563 **do it and to get there in the first place is really hard.**

564 But then the politics gets more macho. One of the reasons they're stepping out isn't it is because it's  
565 getting more macho so it's how you respond to that. I suppose there are always the issues about you  
566 feel that there is solidarity between women MPs actually you get a real sense of that and with all the  
567 whole awful stuff around Jo Cox there was a real sense in which women gathered together to protect  
568 each other but what is the cost? You saw what happened to Jo Cox, would any woman, sane woman  
569 put herself in that situation and her family?

570 **I think it's also difficult because no matter how far you can push if you want to adopt the**  
571 **masculine stereotype stuff, you've still got within the life of family women are still**  
572 **predominantly the carers, whether they make half the money too, like my mum and dad both**  
573 **work but I was predominantly raised by my mum she had to come back and work almost like 4**

574 **jobs. So it's just really hard for a woman because although we're progressing professionally**  
575 **there's still not that thing where men can also, it's obviously getting better but I think generally-**

576 That to me is really interesting if we think about in this research 30 years ago the thing that was being  
577 argued between men and women was sex in some ways or that's at least what the research frames that  
578 there is an argument between men and women about pleasure and about sex, like whose pleasure and  
579 sexual agency. Would you say that that's actually not where the action is now it's somewhere else? It  
580 feels to me in some ways that sex is less of a big deal now in odd ways; the evidence seems to be that  
581 people are having less sex and it's more mediated sex.

582 **That's probably a symptom that it's more of a big deal because you put a lot more weight the**  
583 **way I see it on that choice to have sex or to not have sex.**

584 So it's dealt with less casually? It becomes more important.

585 **It's not much of a big deal, people are like it's not worth it.**

586 That woman predicts it doesn't she in that interview, MAG, she talks about delay, "It's too  
587 complicated, I'm just going to put it off." I was thinking I think a whole generation did that in a way.  
588 She's like really typical of something that happened en-masse where people just say, "It's too  
589 complicated." And you feel that in a way that's where people have got to now.

590 **I feel like we like to pretend it's really casual and that might be part of the problem why 1) it's**  
591 **happening less and 2) people are actually suffering but because there's this consciousness, I**  
592 **don't know if it's global but large consciousness that it's a really casual thing and we need to be**  
593 **really open about it and we're actually so liberal the problems are more hidden I think now.**  
594 **Whereas it sounds like in the time that you were conducting the interviews people were really**  
595 **open and just wanted to talk about it.**

596 I think it was new to talk about.

597 **Yeah but now it's like, "Oh, we've been there."**

598 **There's no shock factor that is no less important; I feel like because there's not the shock factor**  
599 **it's getting brushed under the carpet, especially where girls loads of time don't want orgasms-**

600 It's too complicated, "Don't worry about me it's fine, it's too complicated," yeah. I think there's the  
601 thing about the psychological that it could easily be seen as someone's own problem as well. If  
602 someone for example, if someone was not having an example at this time I think it would be seen as  
603 the sex was not good enough, whereas I feel maybe now everything is getting kind of made into a  
604 syndrome isn't it, so it would be somebody's syndrome that they had a particular anxiety condition or  
605 they had a particular almost medical syndrome which meant they couldn't have pleasure as opposed  
606 to there's something wrong, you're not trying hard enough.

607 **You know like the psychological awareness or people thinking, I don't know maybe you think a**  
608 **lot more about how you're feeling when you can articulate it better and then I think I have**  
609 **experienced that people blaming it on themselves a bit more, it's because, "It's because I was**  
610 **being this."**

611 One thing we have been really picking up on or thinking about is because I think culture is much  
612 diverse now and public spaces are much more diverse now that we know that we can't make

613 assumptions that there's one set of values about sex in a way that I think you kind of feel in these  
614 interviews that there is assumptions. I think now we would understand that there would be different  
615 cultural/religious sensitivities involved that for some people sex outside marriage would just be not  
616 okay and that is something to respect as opposed to just ride rough shod over it, which I think is what  
617 happens in these interviews. That is not in the same way possible or desirable and that feels to me in  
618 some ways that's a real progress that's happened that there's more awareness, I don't know exactly  
619 what it is, but that awareness is a sign of sensitivity and it shows how un-sensitive maybe we were.

620 **I feel like that had to happen though to get here because they were so (inaudible; background**  
621 **noise 01:14:45) one way and not talking that it needed to totally the other way like just putting**  
622 **all these things out there so that we can from that learn and then refine it as we go along.**

623 That's why it's good to have the archive because you can kind of get back into it and just because it's  
624 past doesn't mean you can't do something with it maybe.

625 **Thank you.**