

LJH17 (short - see notes)

Hannah

Q: ... thanks for agreeing to talk to me. What we're trying to do in this piece of research, one of the things that we're doing, is asking young women what they think and feel about relationships. So I mean what's the most important relationship to you?

A: At the present time my most important relationship is my relationship between myself and my sister, I think, she's so close to me that there couldn't really be anything more important to me than that.

Q: Yeah. How old is your sister?

A: She's fourteen, she'll be fifteen in ten days - she's only a year and a half younger than me so we really get on.

Q: ... year and a half.

A: I'm sixteen.

Q: Sixteen. I've got in on your questionnaire but I haven't... How many - is that your only brother or sister...?

A: Well, I've got a half-brother that I never see at all, so really my sister is like the only person I get to talk to in the house. I can - I can talk to my mum but it's not the same because she hasn't come through the same things as me, because she's quite old and things were different in those days and, you know, they developed a lot later, so my sister - I'm with her so much of the time and she does the same things that I do now at her age, 'cos, you know, like we're kind of together all the time, she's like - I suppose as well as my sister she's like a best friend, someone I can confide in, and she tells me things, I tell her things, we like trust, mutual trust, so it's really easy to talk to her, she's like my best friend.

Q: That's good to have that. Do you have any other friends or is it pretty exclusive -

A: Yeah, I have. I've got a lot of friends. I've got a lot of special friends, I've got someone I know that I always hang around with in school, I've known her for twelve years, and then there's my sister, and then there's about two or three other friends that I know really well, they're really special to me, and everyone else I know -I've got lots of friends but about four, five really special friends, you know, that I'm always with, and just a few others in school.

Q: Mm. What sorts of things do you do with your friends?

A: Most of the time we just talk, just talk about things we've done, people we're seeing like, you know what I mean, just things -things that we do, places we've been, films we've seen on TV, and we go out together like to the cinema and walking around Hyde Park, Leicester Square shopping, and all sorts of things like that.

Q: Yeah. Do you go around as a group or do you go around as individual -

A: Yeah, we go around in a group, there's like a big gang of us, me and my sister and there's three other girls and two or three other boys that we hang around with as well. They're a bit detached, they don't know what we're talking about, girls' talk, oh not them again, they're having one of their private conversations, and go and walk off and leave us to it. But they're - they're pretty special to me as well, I do have like a couple of boys that are just, you know, really good friends of mine, not boyfriends, just like someone I socialise with, same as the girls. But I haven't known them for very long.

Q: ...

A: Yeah, so they're kind of semi-special I'd say.

Q: Have you - have you had a close relationship with a boy?

A: Yeah, several. About five boys - four boys and one man. Boys I'd say around seventeen years old and the man was twenty-seven. So... boys...

Q: Yeah. Have those relationships included sex?

A: Yeah.

Q: When...was the first?

A: The first one was with - I think it was just before - just before last Christmas, and that was the first time I'd ever had sex ever before, and he was my first boyfriend and I was quite serious about him at the time. But after - after the sexual experiences it kind of ebbed away, he was probably after one thing, which my mum is always talking to me about, they're after one thing and after they've had it they're off. I think she was right with him actually.

Q: Yeah, yeah. What about the others, had you had sex with...?

A: Not all of them, 'cos some of them - only the ones that really mean something to me, I mean I wouldn't - I wouldn't just have sex with any old person, I mean the oldest - the older man, I should say, he was - I went out with him for quite a long time, he was really special to me and so I did with him, one - I think there was one other, but not with any of the others 'cos I thought, well, you know, just something to pass the time. One I really really did love at the time, I wouldn't do it with anyone else, not anyone I didn't love.

Q: Mm, yeah. What about now, is there anybody now?

A: There is someone now but I - I haven't really been seeing him for very long and I think you have to really get to know a person before you would do something like that, and know - to know and love them, 'cos there's no point any - you know, another way, 'cos well it's just an expression of how much you love a person to do something like that. I mean to like give them - to give yourself to them, it's not really something you do with someone you don't really care about. That's why I don't understand how prostitutes can do it.

Q: Yeah.

A: ... money but it seems really awful, it's like a violation of your body, you know, it's horrible.

Q: Well I suppose they just think differently about it from the way you do.

A: Mm, yeah, I suppose so.

Q: When - in the relationships which have included sex, have - have you used any form of contraception?

A: Yeah. I wouldn't do it any other way, yeah. Used a condom, and I, you know - didn't - well - with one he really discussed and discussed it before we actually even had sex, kind of talked over and should we do it and should we not do it and what will happen afterwards, and we talked about contraceptives then, he said, well, I don't think your mum would be very pleased - 'cos see, I was under sixteen then, you're not allowed to go and get the pill anyway then, and so he said I don't think your mum would be very pleased if, you know, she finds out that her daughter is having sex with someone, so the pill was out of the question, so we thought the best thing is a condom, especially with all the AIDS scare going round, even though he was a virgin as well, it still - it still worries me, even though I know there isn't - there doesn't seem to be any way that - I know you can get blood transfusions and things but there doesn't really seem to me that there would be any other way of getting AIDS apart from through sexual contact, although, even when I was a virgin I was still scared of AIDS. It still worried me, although I didn't - I thought well God, he can't have AIDS, I know him too well, he's not the type, but I

kind of thought that and thought about - lay awake at night thinking about it, maybe he does, you know, maybe there's things he hasn't told me in the past.

Q: Yeah. What - what made you get so worried about AIDS, what time did it...?

A: It's because there's so much hype going round about this, in-house education, we've been told about AIDS and things like that. It's not just AIDS, it's like all other kind of sexually transmitted diseases as well, 'cos my mum talks to me all the time, she says - well, she knows that - she knows I'm not a virgin any more, I told her, I can really talk to my mum - and she was always telling me you should always examine them first, and, you know, always use protection, she said keep using the condoms, I mean... go on the pill and things like that, she was always telling me about AIDS and VD and gonorrhoea and syphilis and all things like that and she says, well, she doesn't mind me having sex as long as I am protected, and - you had like the leaflet come through the door about AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases and there's - there's like the adverts on the telly and there's newspapers and - and the radio, there's even some on the radio now, it's everywhere, you can't possibly ignore it -

Q: Yeah.

A: - you just think about it, sometimes - I know some people don't really take much notice of it, they just think, well AIDS, it won't happen to me, but - both me and my sister like talk about it at night, at night-time when everyone's gone to bed, you can really talk because you know - we know no one's gonna listen, brought up the subject of AIDS, and talking about how we wouldn't like to get it and who would be the most likely one of us to - to get it and all this. It does worry me, and most people that have a brain in their heads it should worry.

Q: Should worry, yeah, yeah. Do you think it worries your friends, I mean the group of friends you go around with?

A: I - we don't - it doesn't crop up in conversation, it's never cropped up in conversation ever, but I know both of - both of the girls that I mix with have both had sex but they don't talk about that side of things. One of them - one of them's the unmarried teenage mother I was talking about -

Q: Yeah.

A: - and like she obviously didn't use any contraception, and the other girl, she - she did sleep around a bit, but she never - I think I think she's aware of the risks but she just doesn't - she doesn't air her views about it much, we don't - we don't usually talk about things like that, it seems to be kind of morbid and something you don't really want to go into, like that, associated with death and disease and it's just not very nice to talk about. And I think people do think about it in their heads at night or when they're on their own, and like in discussion groups at school and things like that, but it's not really a conversational topic that you could bring up at a dinner party or something like that.

Q: Yeah. But all - from all those different sources that you've got information about AIDS, what do you - what do you understand it to be, what - what do you know about AIDS?

A: Well, we've had it drummed into us so much that... very comprehensive exam piece on it, you know, you had to answer all the questions 'cos it seems - it's not, it's not anything very complicated, it's just that you know that you can get it through sexual contact, penetrable sex, and then there's - there's bodily fluids like blood transfusions and things like that, you know that's the way you get it, and you know what the symptoms are, you get skin cancer and in the end it's fatal. Know all

about HIV, the virus, and it takes five or six years to develop and things like that, but I mean I think I know pretty much a lot about it.

Q: Mm, yeah, you seem well informed. And a lot of that you learned at school -

A: Yeah. Well there was like the leaflets and things but I didn't really understand much of that, but like we talked about it in health education and we talked - we really went into it a lot and we watched a video and - like when - when - I watched this thing on television that they had ages and ages ago with (?) Bruno Brooks and someone woman, I can't remember who she was, but they showed that amount - I thought that was really informative and it was really good, 'cos lots of people can understand it like - it's a lot of people, really young kids, are having sex nowadays and I think some of the things they put on the telly are really difficult and that, I don't think they'd really be able to understand. This thing I watched was really good. They showed - I saw it - they taped it and put it on at school as well, so everyone's seen it and - I think I learnt most about AIDS from school because they really went into it in depth with us, they really wanted to drum it into our heads 'cos it's like something that young people are gonna have to put up with now, people of my age, because, you know, it's only just recently kind of gone... and really come about. So with us, we're just gonna have to put up with it. Be very safe, with young people, like you know, youngsters of old in the sixties, didn't have anything to worry about, a very promiscuous era, so they didn't have anything to worry about and it's now on our shoulders, so -

Q: Yeah... Do you resent that somehow?

A: Yeah, I do, I do, I really do because - it's not fair, it's like when you see these movies from the sixties you think oh, why can't it be like that now without like the fear of AIDS and the fear of being mugged on the streets and lots of crime and everything, and it just seems so happy and carefree, be as mad as you want to, people say oh they were only young, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: It's not like that anymore, you think, oh my God, what is she doing?

Q: Yeah...

A: People grow up a lot - I think people grow up a lot quicker now than they did in those days. There's so much - there's so many worries, there's so much to think about that you have to really, that you can't be young forever, you have to grow up very quickly to be able to live in this world.

Q: Yeah, I think you're probably right. When you were just saying just now about you have to be safe, what do you understand by safe sex?

A: Safe sex to me is using a condom at all times, but there's so much bother about it - all talk about it splitting and everything that, like one of my friends... one of my friends was saying that several times that she's used a condom it's split, and I thought, well isn't it meant to be ninety-eight or ninety-nine per cent safe -oh God, you know, you can't use anything now, the only really really safe form is totally abstaining from sex 'cos it - there's even the threat from oral sex, I mean if you swallow any of the body fluids then there's that as well, you can't do anything really.

Q: Yeah.

A: Just have to kind of - really go through the person's past history making sure that they've not been in one of the high risk groups and all the rest of it, it's such a bother. It really is such a bother and it shouldn't have to bother us doing all these things, I mean it kind of spoils the romance in it and kind of... think this is really romantic, this is some - some sordid dirty thing that you want, it seems really awful.

Q: Yeah.

A: ... relationships that we've had... not really now because...