

'It feels that's what people do' Manchester tape 1 side 1 (MCTAPE1A) RT

Q: ?...? on the kind of area that sex education and knowledge about things like contraception, AIDS, etc and ask where you first heard anything about AIDS ... that you can remember.

A: I would imagine that it was through the magazines and things that I read when I was at school, lower down at school. I would make it ... Just Seventeen and things like that - that would probably be the first ...

Q: Did they have things at seventeen?

A: Yeah, I think so - as far as I can remember there were lots of things going around and I would imagine that then was when I first heard about it. But it wasn't from a set lesson or anything, it was probably from things like that, you know, the newspapers and things like that.

Q: Did they have sex education classes?

A: That was very strange - you weren't allowed to mention it for the first two years and then, as far as I can remember we had it in the third year and then in the fifth year. And in the third year they sort of say 'Contraception' and then they didn't say anything else about it and then in the fifth year they just sort of threw it at you and you were sick of the sight of the lot of that ... it was a bit peculiar ... And then when my sister went in the first year, practically in the first day she was there they would say 'This is what's all about' ...???? My God!

Q: So there was a big change?

A: It changed a lot actually - it did change a lot.

Q: So who actually gave it to you, what sort of teacher?

A: Biology ... in the Biology lesson. Our teachers were always saying things like 'If you have a problem you can come to us'...???they were the last sort of people you'd go to and they never actually explained anything, they talked around things, but it was in Biology, and as far as I can remember, it was in the third year - it was the first time that they said anything - but even then they didn't say anything about AIDS or anything...so....

Q: Yes, because presumably that would have been about three or four years ago when they weren't aware so much of that ...

A: Yeah, it would have been four years ago, so ... Also it was a very sort of ... a very strange way that they brought it up ... was ... 'You would remember what the inside of a tooth looks like' and then the next thing you know is 'Well, this is how a baby looks like at 8 months or something' ... (laugh) ...'Pardon! Where did this baby come from?'?...? Sort of very casually dropped in ... I think they were trying to do as little fuss about it as possible.

Q: So did they make it easy for you to ask any questions?

A: They did, but there is something that if people stand at the front of the classroom and say 'Does anybody have any questions?' has the opposite effect. Everybody says 'No, no' and if they never say 'Please ask questions' then everybody would be full of these things that never got answered and that wouldn't be as bad ... but I think it has the opposite effect if teachers say 'I'm waiting for your questions' and I can't, I can't ask a question and nobody wants to ask a question and nobody ever did. I can remember that happening several times, you know, and one teacher refused to let us go until somebody asked a question. So...

Q: And in the 5th year, which in fact isn't that long ago....

A: 2, 3 years ago.

Q: Was all that about contraception?

A: Mmmm, we had a completely senile teacher, completely senile. She just kept every lesson producing boxes and boxes of condoms ... and we were going 'Yes Miss ... yes, we know what they look like now', and she would go ... 'Yes, but ...' and we ... 'We know' ...

Q: She was potty...

A: Completely potty.

Q: Did she teach you about other methods?

A: Mmmm, vaguely ... but that was her big public thing ... producing boxes and boxes ... I mean, it would have been different in different classes because I think all the teachers did it differently, but in our class certainly in our class this ?...? old lady just went on and on about all the different colours you can get them ...

Q: Perhaps she worked with ?...?

A: Perhaps.

Q: And so she didn't bring up the subject of AIDS, even though two years ago it must have been surfacing?

A: I don't remember. I think we did once or twice did things, but by then we knew about it anyway. In the 5th year she was going .. she was sort of laying down bare facts that we already knew anyway. I can't imagine where it all got picked up because certainly I never sat down with mum and dad and mother would say 'This is what it is'. That never happened. But it wasn't at school - it must have been from newspapers, it's really strange because I know it hasn't been

around for all that time but I don't remember a time when I first thought 'Oh, that's what it is!' So it's really strange.

Q: What about television programs?

A: Yeah, I do see some of those but they started getting ridiculous.

Q: So what do you actually know about AIDS? How do you get it and things like that.

A: Mmmm, I would say I know the very bare things, you know, that are repeated over and over again. Body fluids and being HIV positive, things like that, but not the details that perhaps is more interesting and more relevant, but they don't advertise so well because I think they will confuse the issue. And I have read a couple of things, you know, a couple of books but it always sort of seems to disappear again. What did I read? ... there was something ?...? the Playgear(?) or something ... I can't remember that, but they always seem to me that they tell people in a series of adverts the things that they think will not ?...? about it and not anything more than that's what I wish it were possible to do (?). ... to be more in depth about it and then perhaps it would seem more serious. If everybody knew more about it than just 'You can get it from needles', you know, and then it would be more real to everybody, I think.

Q: Do you feel it isn't real to you?

A: Well, I don't know about people outside but certainly in a girls schools where there are 1200 people I know that there are people walking up and down the corridor who think that only gay blokes get it and they've never heard of a woman - the potential of a woman, or even somebody their own age developing it. And that's partly to do with ?..? The school I don't think is able to have an effect on everybody because it's too big, but also because the national view of it is more to frighten you into not doing something rather than explaining it - like all those adverts about icebergs and gravestones and things, that was to make you think 'Oh my God!', it wasn't to help you understand it and I'm not sure which way is the best approach. I don't know if everybody feels it's not real but I can see that in this place where there are plenty of girls who ought to know about it, that they think 'It doesn't apply to me' or maybe they think 'Oh, now I know that it could apply to me but it won't because I'm not that stupid.'

Q: Do you and your friends ever talk about it?

A: Mmmm, I think we have done. I mean, I remember conversations when it was first about and there were a lot of misconceptions about how you got it ... things like that ... I remember lots of people saying 'Yeah, like this' and everybody else saying 'No, you don't, that's rubbish'. So I suppose ?...? never we talked about it anymore.

Q: ?...? to think that's it?

A: I don't know. I don't know. I think perhaps people think that there's nothing else left to say. That everybody is sort of sorry that there's such a thing. The possibility is there but I don't think that anybody thinks that there is anything left to say about it. Certainly now that we are in the 6th form and we have lessons with boys ... because ours was a girls' school.... I can't imagine or remember having talked about it to any of them. I don't know why that is. I think it's just accepted as ?...? thing. I can't think of inducing a conversation with somebody in my class 'What do you think about it?' ?...?

Q: It never gets brought up in a context that somebody having relations with somebody else who is ... under?

A: No, not AIDS. I mean half of the time it's that either they are deadly enthusiastic to talk about sex or they don't want to mention it at all. It's always one or the other but it never gets past that.

Q: Do you think that people are worried about contraception and pregnancy?

A: In school, in the last couple of years there has been ... I think all my friends, all my peer group, always have been, but that had always to do with pregnancy. Most of the boys are now, too.

Q: About what ... they worry about contraception?

A: Yeah, most of them do but it's always been ... I haven't really been close friends with people who haven't care about it. It has always been a fairly big decision for most of my friends ... to think about it.

Q: Have many of your friends thought about it and taken up steps?

A: Mmmm (yes) in fact most of them, especially in the last year. So most of them hear about it at seventeen or eighteen now ?...? have it in the last year - decided that that's the best thing to do for them.

Q: What do they usually decide on?

A: The pill. I know very few people who haven't.

Q: ?.....? you?

A: No. I just ... I don't know why. I don't have any opinion about waiting until you are married. I don't believe in that, you know, or anything I just sort of think ... I'll know when that's what I want to do and at the moment I'm ... not want to do it. I'm just not thinking about it, I'm thinking about other things and it's not the biggest part of my life at the moment but some people I know have found it a very difficult decision to take. They thought that it's not

something you can take back once you have done it - and being on the pill is something that sort of says something about you. And I sort of understand that, but I think nobody makes you do anything. You decide what you do. It's up to you and I don't approve or disapprove of anybody inyou ought not to feel anything apart from what you want.

Q: So have you ever met or had a relation with anyone where that might have been

A: Yeah, but it was really strange at first because I didn't know, but after a while I knew that I wasn't going to keep on seeing him for a long time and there was a kind of mutual agreement, but he used to talk about what he really wanted and that when he got married this is what she was going to be like and I remember not being at all offended by it, because I knew that I didn't want to be his wife anyway. And I was just thinking 'Well, that's nice' but that's not what I wanted to do and it sort of dropped out of the question because I felt perfectly happy knowing him and vice versa but neither of us wanted to do anything else. But I know of other people who have had problems with that and I've just always felt, basically, that it's there but you shouldn't do anything unless you want to which goes to absolutely everything and I feel pretty strongly about that I think but ...

Q: And do you feel if you meet somebody whom you felt that way about - sort of assert what you wanted in the relationship?

A: Yes I do but I'm like that, that's what I'm like with my friends around me anyway. I do sort of know what I want and if I don't get it then that's it. I don't carry on with things that don't work and I get upset by it but I feel that if I've tried to do it then that's alright - as long as I tried to do the things that I want, and that's OK. So yes, I would, and if I felt that everything felt right and that's what I wanted to do then I would try and assert that as an established thing.

Q: And if you've got some kind of pressure to have a sexual relationship from the person you are with - that you were sort of unsure about it?

A: I would expect them to wait until I was sure. And I can't imagine just saying that and saying 'Well I'm not ready, you'll have to wait'. I can imagine being upset about it and worried and not knowing what to do but I think, in the long run, I can't imagine doing it and not sort of thinking 'Urrrr' ... and not being sure - and doing it. I can only imagine being upset and not knowing but still not giving in because I'm not sure. I think I'll probably just say ... you know ... it's all to do with me, it's not to do with anybody else. I think that's probably what I'd do.

Q: Yes, because you read some of these ?...? like the problem pages in some magazines and

A: Yeah, ?.....? Issa(?) is her new woman.

Q: What she does ?...?

A: She does the page for her.

?.....? She used to come home and do to LUCY a lot when LUCY was going out somewhere ?...? used to say 'Well, you know about contraception and if you get drunk you do know what to do.'

Q: ?....?

A: Yeah.

Q: I was thinking like some of the problems you see about girls saying, you know, 'I'm in love with my boyfriend and he wants to go all the way or whatever - and I'm not sure, but if I don't I can lose him, blah, blah, blah'..

A: So lose him, you know, who cares, it's not ... that's not what's about and I never felt that that was what it was about - the person that I was going out with I never felt that if I didn't and he would go away and if he had gone I would have thought ... I would have been unhappy but I would have thought - 'Who are you to tell 'me 'Do this or I'll go' - I don't say 'Marry me or I'll go'. It's not just one person's decision and I understand being unhappy about it and I understand ... but I do think that what he thinks of you if you don't do it is worse ... is not as bad as what you will think of yourself if you don't do what you want to do. I mean, if you don't care then maybe that's something different but if you do ... then he can't say anything to you that is worse than knowing that you were trampled all over. I'd much rather stand up for myself. This is always what they say underneath which is that if he really loves you then ... it won't be like that - and if he doesn't then he will go away, but then you are well off out of that, aren't you? And I think that's probably the only thing you can say. I think that's probably the only approach to that. The fact is that most girls take it more seriously anyway, at that kind of age because all the boys are ?...? ruled out(?) just like that or afterwards you know ...

Q: Just like what?

A: Well, you know, sort of ... it was the sex that was the thing and not the relationship and all the girls came ... 'Oh he loves me and ... it's always really funny to mis ?...? talking of the same thing when they are 15, 16, because their idea of it is completely different ?...? the people I know. Every now and then you get to people who are much better at talking to each other than that. Certainly for a long time when I was at school it was two different ideas of what you did when you went out with somebody. The girls' first is the boys and to some extent it's still like that but ... I think it's better than it was. I think that apart from anything else girls have more realistic expectations now, my friends do and I do. You can't tell that about other people.

Q: What sort of a relationship would you consider negotiating having a sexual relationship with him - and would it be like something that ?...? some time?

A: Well, you see, when I was going out with this one person I first thought I really, really, really loved him and that would be it - that would be whatever we did - and we decided to do that would be alright with me as long as that was the nature of things but as it evolved I felt I didn't

care about him enough to decide anything, you know, nothing at all, and that I would just carry on but only because I was very fond of him as a person and he was a really good friend and I think that I can't say 'In the future I will feel like this and so I'll sleep with someone' but if I know how I don't feel like, then I'll know when I feel that. It's about each person I know - 'Oh look, I'm not feeling this' then one day I'll think 'I do feel it' and it's strong enough to make me know that I can do this and feel good about myself afterwards. Because I think that that's pretty important. I really wouldn't want to think that somebody went off and laughed at me behind my back after my having gone about this big decision about whether to sleep with him or not. That would be, I think, for me, that would be one of the worse things because it would so badly demoralize me and I think that when I'm sure about something instead of having gone in and saying 'Oh well, it seems alright' when I feel much more established and confident that the other person understands me and won't do certain things and ... then that would satisfy. I think to some extent you have to be quite realistic that things aren't ever quite what you think they are. It's not as if I'm looking for the ideal man because I don't think anybody's life happens like that.

Q: Not sure that they exist!

A: Yeah, not sure that they exist but I think you can get better than some.

Q: Why do you think that girls, or girls that you know, actually decide to have a sexual relationship, for instance, for the pleasure, for certain kind of commitment to the relationship, pressure from boyfriend or

A: I don't know. I can't explain what they really think, but as far as I can gather for most people they just felt it's the next thing you do. You get to a certain age, you've been out with x-many people and you have done, you know, ... and you've experienced so and so and you know what you feel like about this person and they seem to think 'Well, the next thing you do is sleep with somebody' and that's a progression of what happens and I don't think they just thought 'Find anyone'. I don't think they do - you just think the person is right-ish and so that's the next thing you do. As far as I can gather that's what most people have thought. Nobody I know has said 'This is seriously what I want to do.' It's more like I want to do it because it feels like that's what people do now. I don't necessarily approve or disapprove of that because I think that's a very real situation to be in and I can totally understand that but ...

Q: Would that apply to you?

A: Well, I can imagine it applying to me. I can imagine thinking 'So what's next' - I think so. I think that then, after that, people, friends of mine, have thought that that's next but now I know what's next. Then they decide what they do but after but it has to be after something, after them not knowing and just thinking that perhaps they'll sleep with somebody next and that's the next thing to do. Then after that because they understood what all that is about, all it entails, then they know what they want.

Q: And do they expect to enjoy it?

A: I don't know. I never asked anybody that. I don't think so ... I don't know. I think, on the whole, they haven't known what to expect and then just sort of gone in and ... I don't know. I never thought about that. I haven't really realised what people's expectations are. I've got a friend who talks about it absolutely all the time and she's a nutter - she just won't be quiet about it.

Q: What, having it?

A: Yes, she is too ?...? not in front of people or anything but she is completely obsessed by it and other people I know they just don't talk about it. And it's difficult to say what different people expect because I think some people think ... I know that a popular fear is that what other people think of them, particularly in the school because ... it seems peculiar because I don't really feel very attached to the school and I don't feel that my business has anything to do with them, but having been through it for 5 years I know that everybody talks about everybody else and I remember that as soon as a girl in our year was known to have slept with her boyfriend everybody went beserk!

Q: What, with disapproval, approval or something else?

A: I don't know. Just 'Did you know about (name)?' 'Did you hear that ...?' I think that people's expectations are built up by that kind of thing. That's what makes you think that that's what you do next because somebody else does and you think 'Oh well, you know, maybe that's what I'll do.' It's very strange. I think that you can't tell what people's reaction will be but I know that everybody's afraid of everybody saying because, as I said, school used to be that things got round like wild fire and you couldn't keep anything - the idea of what someone might say about you, I think, must be terrifying.

Q: Do you find it sort of off-putting?

A: I find it off-putting when I know that a girl in the 3rd year whom I know very, very, very little went on the pill last week and said that she could sleep with someone in the upper six(?) and I think why do I know of this, why does somebody tells me this when I'm sitting in the pub and I don't want anybody to know and I'm sure she probably told her best friend in the deepest secrecy and somebody in the upper six knows about it.

Q: Like nothing you do is your own?

A: Is nothing ?...? sacred? So that puts me off a bit. It's different with some people obviously. I can't imagine telling LUCY(?) ?...? But I think to some extent that's your real problem.

Q: Yeah, school must be very specifically like that and presumably when people leave school ?...? going to ?...? or whatever, or even university, there's is more sense ... you are a bit more anonymous.

A: Yes, definitely ... privacy. But I don't know, there is something to do with that here as well, with my sister. She ?...?

Q: What did she do?

A: She said 'Who's in it?' I said, 'Jeremy Iron.' She said 'Where is he in? In the upper six? He's her favourite actor.

?...?

She wants to know everything. I suppose that's different too because I didn't have anybody apart from my friends around me who were doing things and going out with people. She sees me and my friends and that must affect her life which is completely different from mine. I know that she is different from me in that academically I did better than she did. She is in the 3rd year for 3 years running. I did much better than she did academically than she is doing but socially she is incredible compared to me because I didn't know anything apart from ... obviously I knew things but I wasn't adept at behaving and ?...? (name?) she is amazing. We did a drama thing last year at the YMCA with LUCY and there were 7 or 8 of us - all girls - and when we were in the bar afterwards, talking, one of the girls was really very peculiar and she was really distancing herself from us ?...? not hostile but difficult, and it was really very difficult and Anna and I thought after a week that we clicked what it was about her, because she was only 19, she was only about a year and half older than us and when we went home on the bus ?...? 'I know what is the matter with that is ... she is gay.' ?....? 'How do you know?' And when I was 14 I would never had been able to work that out, never. I would have hardly been able to understand that somebody of 19 could be gay but I think that has probably to do with the fact that she knows older people and that the whole time has changed.

Q: So what people discuss at that age and ...

A: And you know, it would have taken us a week to work that out but we had done so - but I was thinking ?...? person. So I think that does show you how things have changed because I would have never known when I was 14.

Q: And also, presumably, from the sound of your sex education and things like that, no one talked to you about being gay?

A: No, they didn't. Not really. I mean they mentioned it as a possibility but I think it was probably in the same ?...? as necrophilia or something, you know, that was not terribly desirable. Which is strange, because there must have been a certain percentage of people who were going to be gay.

Q: You know any? Do you have any friends that ...

A: Not from school, no. But as I said, outside ... Oh, that was amazing. ?...? 'How do you know?' ?...? 'Oh I just know.'

Q: What are the attitudes to gay people at school?

A: I think that the first couple of years everything becomes a term of abuse and certainly [BOYS HIGH SCHOOL], which is the boys' school next door, is much smaller but the first 4 years they are all incredibly violent to each other and they are all busy beating each other up and they are always calling each other, you know, ?...? and things like this and at school they told me that they were all going out with some girl and when she found out what it was all about they were saying she was a lesbian and other things. I think the thing about it is that it doesn't mean anything to them and certainly when I was in the first couple of years it didn't mean anything. But I never called this ?...? It seems to me strange what to choose if you want to insult someone. But they do do it and I think they do do it and they grow out of it. I don't think that that has to do with any feeling they have of their own but more towards the realisation that's more sort of non-insult. It doesn't actually ?...? up.

Q: And has that changed at all with ... like AIDS?

A: Yes, it's got more ... it's increased as far as I can see because it happened when I was that age but it happens sort of more now, I think. I think perhaps it's all to do with not understanding really. I haven't ever heard AIDS being used as an abuse. But certainly using homosexuality against somebody goes on. I don't know whether people are conscious enough to use AIDS as an insult directly ...

Q: Or its connection ...

A: Or its connection ... I don't know.

Q: Because what do you, or other people that you know, think of the sort of people who get AIDS?

A: Well, when we were first finding out about it, it was when people were saying 'Don't worry, it's only gay men.' So for a long time that was what we thought because that was actually what was being said. I think we changed the more the publicity about it changed. I think that people who are younger than we are have had the advantage of never having known what was not true in the sense that they had always all the information. And when we first found out about it, it was only 'Don't worry, you can only get through anal sex and it's only gays, you know ?...?' and actually it turns out that there is more to it than that. I think we had to find that out the more it went along but I think most people did. I can't think of anybody who still thinks that that's the only way you get it. But I think that actually we had to change as the information increased. But most people did. Most people understood ...

Q: So what do people think now about it ... the sort of people who get AIDS?

A: I find that boys joke about it more. And the girls ...

Q: What do they say?

A: They still call people poofers(?) and stuff and with the idea behind it that it's not that they are ?..? but ... that they might get AIDS ... things like that but no one ever says that ... Girls don't do it so much ... I don't. Further down the school they still ... it's increased, that they call each other a lesbian but the more they go up I think the attitudes towards people have changed a lot. Certainly this friend of ours who was terrified that when we found out that she was gay we wouldn't want to talk to her, that we would be afraid of her .. and I was really surprised that none of us felt any different apart from one girl- and one girl in the group. She was very conservative about everything and she just thought that just it wasn't alright and that she ?...? (name) wasn't alright about being gay because she was just 19 and it must be that she was just confused and that she didn't like it because it wasn't the right thing to be doing. All the rest of us just don't mind ?...? It must have been a pretty difficult thing to find out when you were 17 or something because most people are still finding out about sex full stop. So, I think most people are now very tolerant about things like that. I don't know anybody that would really, really take offence against it but I know that some people do find it difficult, I know people who do find it difficult.

Q: Did you get to talk at all about safe sex?

A: Not really. As I said boxes and boxes of condoms but ... I think she mentioned vaguely ... Why babies might (laugh) but never to any great length, I don't know.

Q: Have you found about it by any other means?

A: I think that mostly it was ... I can't remember where I found out that, it's really strange. I'm sure we didn't have lessons on that and I'm sure that none of my friends told me about it and Mum and Dad never told me.

Q: Did your Mum and Dad ever talk to you about sex at all?

A: Oh yeah, yeah, it's not like that. It's just that they thought that they were talking about it so much that they ought to shut up now.