

LJH15 21.4.1989

Toni

Q: Have you talked to any of the others that I've spoken to?

A: No.

Q: What we're interested in, one of the things that we're interested in, in the piece of research I'm doing, is to find out what young women think and feel about relationships: any kind of relationship that they're having, not necessarily just relationships with men or boys or whatever. So I was wondering, what's the most important relationship for you, do you think, at the moment?

A: Mother and daughter relationship... I think it's good to let your mum know everything and not lie to her and... well it's the best friend that you could have is your mum.

Q: Yeah. You have a very close relationship with your mum.

A: Yes. Yeah. Secondly, I'd say friendship with people my own age. It's nice to have friends like in school, people that you can talk to. And thirdly I would say a relationship with the opposite sex.

Q: But in that order. Have you got a relationship with -

A: Yeah.

Q: - with someone of the opposite sex.

A: Yeah.

Q: What's that like?

A: It's alright. Can't really describe it. You know, I enjoy being with him. And he helps me with things, like 'cos he's older than me - discuss things like what's happening at school, what I should do in the following year like go into college or to stay on. It's quite helpful.

Q: Mm. How long have you known him?

A: Almost a year.

Q: A year?

A: Yeah.

Q: How did you meet him?

A: Through my sister.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah.

Q: She's a friend of yours?

A: Yeah.

Q: And what sorts of things do you do together?

A: Well we listen to music, go to the cinema, go to parties, things like that.

Q: Do you find you're spending most of your spare time with him now rather than -

A: It was like that before, in the beginning, but now that I've got my exams coming up, I prefer to buckle down and do those.

Q: Yeah.

A: There'll be plenty of time for him later.

Q: Yeah... that's been coming up from everybody, they've got their heads down right now. It seems that all the sort of coursework is accumulating with the exams coming up.

A: Yeah.

Q: What sorts of things are you doing?

A: At school? I'm doing GCSE Art, English and Politics.

Q:

A: After that I want to go on to either college or stay here and do some A-levels.

Q: Yeah?

A: Maths, English and Law.

Q: Yeah. It's an interesting mix really. What made you choose those?

A: I enjoy Maths and I hear that English is a good grade to get -well it's a good A-level to get if you want to go to university. 'Cos I want to go to university and get a degree in Law.

Q: Yeah.

A: And I'm interested in Law because -

Q: You want to go to university and get a degree in it. So what would you like to be ultimately?

A: A solicitor.

Q: A solicitor? Not a barrister or a judge, there's a lot of them... about judges...

A: Hopefully if I work my way up from the bottom maybe, I don't know yet. I won't know which one suits me....

Q: So you ultimately hope to be a solicitor. What do you see as the like - as happening in the relationship that you're having, I mean do you envisage that you might get married or -

A: Well, hopefully, should be getting engaged before my birthday, or maybe after, I'm going on holiday in January, so either before that or after...

Q: So that's sort of the relationship that you want to continue with in future.

A: Yeah.

Q: What do you think about children?

A: I don't know. Right now, they're the last thing on my mind. Well in fact they're not even on my mind.

Q: Right, yeah.

A: But maybe as I grow up and things start to progress, maybe I'll start thinking about it, but right now -

Q: ... There's a lot of things that people say "ugh" about to me, but this is the first time anybody's said it about children. I mean a lot of people don't want them but that's - that sort of strong reaction. Well, that's the way it is. (laughter) What do you think makes you feel that? I mean there's a lot of pressure on people to -

A: Well I've got a lot of nephews and nieces you see. Well I've got quite a big family and I've got a sister that - well she just moved out of home and she's got a little boy; he's a handful, and her being her age, 'cos she's older than me, she's twenty - twenty-one actually - she really can't cope so, I think no.

Q: It could certainly put you off.

A: Well, for now anyway.

Q: Yeah. Who lives at home now?

A: Only me.

Q: And your mum?

A: Yeah.

Q: And you're getting on very well with her.

A: Yeah.

Q: That's good -

A: Yeah.

Q: I think a lot of people have a lot of problems -

A: When it's a large family it's quite difficult 'cos you've just got a lot to look after and that. I'm the last one 'cos I'm the youngest.

Q: How many before you?

A: There's six before me - yeah, six.

Q: Gosh, and they've all gradually gone off. What do they all do?

A: VARIETY OF JOB ROLES.

Q: What's the age range, what's the oldest one? Just tell me what -

A: The oldest is 38.

Q: Oh right - so you're the last one. Do you get on okay with them?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you see much of them?

A: Yeah. Usually I go, I spend a weekend with one of them, a weekend with the other.

Q: So you keep in good contact.

A: Contact, yeah.

Q: That's quite nice. What about your boyfriend, does he get on with your family?

A: Yeah. All apart from one he does. One of my elder sisters. 'Cos she's - she's got this funny rude - she's quite rude most of the time. But then that's just the way she is. 'Cos he doesn't really know her all that much. I suppose in time they'll get used to one another.

Q: One of the things that we're interested in asking about in this study as well is what - about the sex education that you've had at school, you saw that from what we were saying on the questionnaire. It looks as if you didn't get much sex education, or just about sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS. Is that all you can remember -

A: Contraception. That was about it.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah.

Q: So what did you think of it?

A: Well I knew most of it already, 'cos I've always been quite inquisitive, I like to know these things.

Q: Yeah.

A: But then when they started talking about the sexual transmitted diseases, I learnt more about - more on the various kinds of it, and about AIDS, I understood it better from school than what I did in the newspapers or on the news because they had it in a complicated way.

Q: Yeah.

A: ... in school I learnt a lot about it.

Q: Yeah, so it was - that was a good source of information, at school.

A: Yeah.

Q: 'Cos a lot of people thought - they didn't hear much in school about AIDS at all. So what do you understand as AIDS, what do you know about it?

A: I know about - it can be transmitted through the sperm or the vaginal fluids, and from blood, and - there's one more. I've forgotten it already.

Q: ... getting one of those things across. (unclear - something about needles?)

A: ... blood transfusions...

Q: What about HIV and AIDS?

A: I don't understand anything at all about HIV.

Q: No?

A: No.

Q: Yeah. Well how would you describe AIDS by itself, then?

A: At first I thought it was just a disease that homosexuals got but then when I came to school and they started telling us things and I watched the programmes like (?) Daytime and that, and there were women on there that had got the disease so -

Q: Mm.

A: It wasn't only homosexuals that got it.

Q: Did that have a bit impact on you?

A: Yeah, it makes you wary.....

Q: So you think it would make you change your behaviour?

A: Yeah.

Q: What would it make you do?

A: Hopefully stick with the relationship that I've got, work at it as much as I can 'cos that is one thing I wouldn't like to get it at all.

Q: Mm. Yeah. What kind of things do you think people can do to protect themselves, apart from sticking with the one relationship?

A: Use a sheath. Use a condom. I think that's about it that they can use to prevent it, isn't it?

Q: Mm. Well the other thing they've been talking about is safe sex, isn't it? Have you thought about what that might mean?

A: No.

Q: Most people think of it as maybe just using a condom, but they've been suggesting all sorts of other things that you can do apart from sex. Well I was gonna ask you about that actually, I mean what do you... when you think of sex, what do you think of, what does it mean for you?

A: (Pause) Oh. It's the first time anybody's asked me that question. I don't know, I really can't answer that. It's difficult. Takes a lot of thinking.

Q: Yeah.

A: I suppose it's one way of expressing your feelings. In some cases, it might bring you closer together with your partner, in other cases it might bring you further away. I can't really answer.

Q: It's interesting what you say, because a lot of people - when I say what do you think of sex, they think of just penetrative sex, they don't think of the other things that are around it, and you think first of the other things that are around it like the relationship and this sort of thing.

A: Yeah.

Q: Well what I was thinking about with safe sex, I mean - the general idea is that you, I mean you either protect yourself with a condom, or you do other things, which don't necessarily include sort of penetrative sex. So I mean they've just been suggesting that... they have little lists... you can get little brochures from the family planning and this sort of thing, they've probably got them in the sex education department... they've probably got them as well, yeah. So I was just wondering what you'd heard about that from the various sort of sources of information about AIDS. The things that you saw on television, did you see any of the ads or sort of -

A: I saw that one about "don't die of ignorance".

Q: Oh yeah, what did you think of that one?

A: That they put it on often.

Q: Did it mean anything to you?

A: Yeah, well it showed me that -that they were taking it serious for one, and that it is a danger as well, not only to people who's got it but to the people around them as well. And the way that

it affects other people -the family... close friends. There was a big warning that advised everybody to take heed of it.

Q: Yeah. And you took note?

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you think that your friends, do you think the sort of people that you spend most time with, do you think they took note, that it affected them?

A: I can't really - I don't know. Well my closest friend, I know she's taking heed to it. When the adverts started coming, she couldn't stop talking about it.

Q: Yes.

A: I think it's - that advert, it affected everybody, and it made them wary. I think it made them a lot warier.

Q: What about the sort of information content of some of the things? Have you learned much from them? I mean it was like a warning for you, but did it warn you what about really?

A: Not really at all.

Q: Yes.

A: They sent the leaflet, but I couldn't really understand it really... the leaflet was just too advanced for me to understand. 'Cos they should do things like - if they done a pamphlet that was more simpler that other people could understand, then maybe they could put it in schools.

Q: Mm, right. Make special pamphlets for schools. You think that would be important to do -

A: Yeah, especially when a teenager and you reach puberty, I think it's very important.

Q: Yeah... so you think it's really changed the way that things are.

A: Yeah.

Q: Do you think that young people are being more careful in general, I mean you say about your friend and you are, but do you think in general?

A: Before, not really, not at all. People weren't being careful, they were just jumping from one relationship to another. But now it's quietened down a lot. Like you said, everybody's buckling down to do their work -

Q: And they're also buckling down... not to jump into relationships.

A: Yeah.

Q: When you're thinking about having a sexual relationship, you're obviously concerned about AIDS and stuff and clearly, because you say you don't want children, you're concerned about pregnancy as well. So do you think of sex as maybe being a bit risky?

A: If you go in with your eyes open and you know all the dangers, then I don't think of it as being risky at all. But if you don't know much about it then it can be very risky.

Q: ...What about other areas of your life, is there any other area of your life in which you do anything that's a bit risky? Or take chances?

A: No...

Q: No?

A: Things frighten me. I stick to what I know. Yeah. I don't like taking risks.

Q: No chances at all?

A: No.

Q: Or just doing things that might be a bit risky, I mean some people think drinking and smoking is risky.

A: Smoking is one thing I wish I didn't start.

Q: You're hooked on it are you?

A: Yeah.

Q: How long have you been smoking?

A: Since I was eleven.

Q: What about drinking?

A: I used to drink. I don't drink any more. I stopped that ages ago.

Q: Why was that?

A: Well, when you drink sometimes you can't taste the fluids that you're drinking, specially when you drink a lot, and I was drinking a lot; as I've started drinking already, what if I get to that stage where I can't taste what I'm drinking, it's just like a soft drink?

Q: Mm.

A: But what's it doing to my insides.

Q: Right, yeah.

A: I was thinking things like that...

Q: You just drink soft drinks?

A: Yeah.

Q: Well that's good. What about drugs? Any drugs interest you?

A: Not at all. Them things frighten me as well.

Q: Yeah.

A: Since I started off trying to give up smoking... well supposing I need one and I start smoking (?) kind of with something, I start doing the heavy drugs... I don't take any risks.

Q: Any of your friends?

A: No. Well my best friend says, you know - she's my only friend really I talk to and that - she doesn't smoke at all.

Q: Not even ordinary cigarettes.

A: Not even ordinary cigarettes.

Q: Right. So you're not mixing with the risky, the risk-taking crowd, or you're not mixing with a crowd at all, just one -

A: - just my best friend -

Q: - and your boyfriend as well.

A: Yeah.

Q: What about him, does he smoke, drink or take drugs?

A: He used to drink but he had to stop 'cos of [REDACTED].

Q: Ah.

A: It serves him right 'cos I warned him about it already. He does do drugs but not heavy drugs, only cannabis. Some people think that it's - you're better off smoking the cannabis than what you are with cigarettes because -

Q: ...

A: 'Cos in the West Indies they use it as a herbal tea, kind of medicine over there. It doesn't really do you much harm... hopefully I'll stop.

Q: Do you think - when you think about relationships, do you think there's a sort of double standard, a different standard for men and women, boys and girls?

A: It depends on what level you're on. If you've got a close relationship where you share things and you do things together and you talk about things, then I don't think there's a double standard. But if it's just, say you're boyfriend and girlfriend and you don't really do things

together and you don't share things then there is -he'll see it differently and she'll see it differently, in that case there is.

Q: How will they see it differently?

A: Most boys, they've only got the intentions, if... they've got a girlfriend, they're going out with this girl, they just think about the sexual side of the relationship, they don't think about anything else. Some girls, they think just the same way the boys do, but most girls that I know of, they wanna see the different side of it, the other side, the non-sexual side.

Q: Mm.

A: But most boys, that's just the way - it's like it gives them a boost in their ego to think like that. That's why I think there's a double standard.

Q: Mm. Yeah... there's all these girls going round wanting, you know, caring warm relationships -

A: Yeah.

Q: - and all these boys going round wanting sex.

A: I think it's got a lot to do with - well the olden days, you know like the tradition where boys are seen as the breadwinners and things like that - it's still taking effect now, it hasn't changed that much at all. Maybe that's why they think, well, to show their feelings they're being soppy. Because they've been brought up like that.

Q: Yeah. What do you think can be done about it, if anything?

A: Like when they're at a young age, like two or something and they start playing with their toys, don't give them toys like guns and that. Or give the girls guns and that and the boys guns and that, and the boys dolls as well. It would help them to understand more about what's going on as well, I think.

Q: Well it's incredibly interesting you should say that 'cos that was exactly in my mind as you spoke - because I've been doing some work with young, younger women in the schools, first years and third years and - on anti-sexist sort of stuff, and we had exactly asked them those kinds of questions, about would you give a boy a doll... and they wanted, they certainly wanted relationships to be more equal and everything between men and women and boys and girls to be more equal; but they shied off the idea of giving a doll to a boy. Some of them would say, Action Man is a doll as well after all... - but I mean Action Man is putting rather different sorts of ideas, I mean once you say that Action Man is a doll to boys then they start to get really worried.... Cindy. Different kind of aggressive gear or whatever. No, I mean I think you're right, that they are - it's very early that that kind of training goes on.

A: Yeah.

Q: And if you just switched it round or reversed it all, gave everybody the same... And other sorts of aspects, not just the toys but the sorts of ways in which kids are brought up as well. What sorts of things do you do - back onto the track... - outside in your spare time?

A: Well I used to play basketball, but I stopped that because with schoolwork and that, it was taking up too much of my free time.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: I used (?) to have this ... friend, my friend, and I usually visit her. Visit my boyfriend and my sisters...

Q: Yes, you said ... round the family. Let me ask you another question then that people find a bit difficult: what's your image of yourself?

A: Well before I used to be very loud, seen as a bully, and I had the ability to learn but because I wanted to give my friends this image that I was tough, there was times when I wouldn't do it, I

wouldn't do my work. But now that I've come up here, into the upper school, and I've seen how it operates and that you have to learn in order to gain qualifications, I had to quieten down. I had no choice.

Q: Mm.

A: So I just quietened myself down and so I broke off from the crowd that I had - that I used to go round with, I've only got one friend now, that helps a lot. And just - I think of myself, I'm quiet, and I enjoy learning now.

Q: You do?

A: Yeah. And I'm glad that they've got a sixth form as well 'cos I wouldn't have had this chance to come back and do my exams again, if... quite quiet.

Q: Did you leave then and come back or -

A: Well it was that, and then this year I took my exams and I passed them but I didn't get the grades that I wanted to get, I only passed two at O-level standard. So I thought if I come back and can do some more and work hard at those it means that I can get the O-level grades... and go to college and go on to do what I want to do after. I can go to college or stay here and do the A-levels.

Q: Mm. When did you make the dramatic change, was it as soon as you came here or was it after the exams?

A: It was after the exams 'cos I was thinking, before the exams I'd say, oh well I'm not coming back, I'll go straight on to college, I've had enough of school and everything... but now I've come back everything's changed. The teachers are not how they used to be, they're not hard on you anymore, they're more sympathetic and they reason with you. You can see now that there's the help there, all you have to do is just ask and you'll get their help. Their attitudes has changed just as much, but our attitudes has changed even more.

Q: Yeah.

A: Yeah. That's the way I see it.

Q: Yeah... I mean... how did the teachers react to you when you were part of this tough crowd?

A: They gave me hell. Well it was like they'd been warned about me already, about -

Q: Yeah

A: - the reputation - and they were just really hard. There was times when I would be quiet and I would think, well why are they treating me like that? And then I'd go back and I'd switch again and I'll give them just as good as they've given me.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: And that's completely - it made me see that it was me that was doing the wrong and not them. So it made me change.

Q: Mm. And how - they've been reacting much better to you -

A: Yeah. They can see the change as well.

Q: One of the problems with changing is you have to keep it up for quite a while before people notice, because they're still responding -

A: Yeah

Q: - to the old image sort of thing, and then you get fed up, you think oh... so they're reinforcing what they think, so you really have to hold out and then they start thinking, what has happened here? Yeah. So you get on well with the teachers here that you're seeing at the moment?

A: Yeah. My English teacher, before everybody was warning me, saying how she's really horrible, and she don't like you and that's it, but she was completely the opposite.

Q: Yeah?

A: Yeah. She used to write to me - she used to write to most of the girls, well, all of them really, she's - she helps us with our work, if we've got any problems and that, we just go to her and say, Miss, we haven't done our homework today because of such and such, and she'll say, oh, and she'll sit down and she'll help us and she'll talk it out with us and she'll explain things to us properly. She's not horrible at all.

Q: Yeah. Not the impression that you had before when you get to know them, I suppose. Do you think there are still any, like, kind of loud tough groups in school at the moment, in the upper school?

A: Only the - well not in the sixth form. I'd say in the fifth year. 'Cos when you reach the fifth year it's like your - your year is the head of the year 'cos we're not really connected to -

Q: The sixth form's separate -

A: Yeah. So you can get quite a few. In time they'll realise they're - where they're going wrong. Well if they can be loud and still get good grades then that's quite good. (laugh)

Q: That's alright. Yeah... young women who were like that who the teachers didn't know how to handle because they weren't just naughty, they were naughty and worked very well as well.

A: - really confusing.

Q: Yeah. So when you were talking about yourself you were actually talking about the image that other people had of you as well. And their image has now changed.

A: Yeah. They've seen me now for my real self. What they see now is me. What they saw before wasn't me, it was like a put-on just to impress people, and I found out that with people that thought - well that I thought were my friends then, they weren't because they were just scared of me. They're not genuine friends, then, are they? But now they can see the real me, now I know that they're genuine friends.

Q: How did your mum react when you were having such a hard time at school?

A: Well, the second time I got suspended I couldn't tell her. So I hid that from her. When I got suspended the third time, I told her about the second time.

Q: Yeah. What do they do when they suspend you, just for a few days or -

A: Yeah, for - if you get suspended for three days, they put you down in this book they've got, that you are officially suspended. If you get suspended for about a day, then they don't put you down in the book... At first she was furious and she knew that I could learn if I put my mind to it and she was trying and encouraging me to work, and I didn't wanna see it like that, 'cos I thought, if I have my fun now, when I get to upper school I'll put my head down and work.

Q: Mm.

A: By then it was too late really 'cos I could have passed my exams if I wanted to, if I'd put my mind to it I could have done it, but all that mucking about, it wasn't worth it at all, I didn't benefit from it at all.

Q: Yeah. Mm. Well it's good you caught it so soon because sometimes people go right the way through the school... and it's only years later they think, why didn't I do this, why didn't I do that. Mm. Yeah. Is there anything that you'd be interested to ask or talk about?

A: Yeah, HIV.

Q: Yeah... HIV is like a virus that you can catch, that's in fact what you catch, you become infected with this virus through the various methods that you were talking about, either through sperm or through blood, which can come, you know, through transfusions or get into your skin or whatever, or through needles, and then you get that virus and maybe nothing will happen for years, that virus will just lurk in your body. So what it does is it gradually weakens your immune

system and at a certain point you will be infected with some other, probably quite ordinary thing, a cold, or pneumonia is quite often what people get, and you'll have this disease that your body won't have the immune system to reject the disease. And that's when you've got AIDS itself, when you actually get ill from various different kinds of diseases. And there are quite a lot that you can catch, I mean it's not just one thing that you catch for AIDS; some kinds of cancer, some sorts of bronchial things and pneumonia and these sorts of things. And that's what people actually die of, they don't die of AIDS itself, they die of one of these infections that they've caught as a result of having had, first of all the virus, and then it moved on to the AIDS where they're more vulnerable to these kinds of things. So in fact it can take ages and it's not absolutely certain, I mean with the state of knowledge as it is, they're not certain that everybody who gets the virus will progress onto AIDS itself, because it takes a long time. And some people have gone through it and don't appear to have it, they appear to be infected for ages and they haven't gone on to AIDS. But they keep revising, you know, the proportions, because the lack of knowledge about it really, since it's a relatively new - new area that they're looking -recognising the disease and looking at it. And the other thing is that - which did you say, I mean did you know that they don't - I mean they don't have a cure for AIDS -

A: Yeah, I know that, yeah.

Q: - but what they're - I mean there are certain things that they've found which might - if they work on it for a few years, just might be something which could protect you, but it's all quite complicated medically. So this is why it's such a - such a threat really, because they - since they haven't got a cure for it, and since you don't know when you've got it, whether you're gonna progress on, the idea is to try to avoid as many things as possible that could make you infected at all. So that's why it's important, what we're trying to do with this work is find out what young people think about it, and what they think could be done to, you know, help more information get around. What do you think? What do you think would be helpful?

A: As I said about before -

Q: Special leaflets for schools and this kind of stuff, yeah.

A: Have people that specialise in doing research as you said, come in and talk to us.

Q: Mm.

A: From now it would just have to be talk, 'cos that's all that can be done at the moment.

Q: Mm.

A: But I think it's important that they come and do it now in secondary schools because there's a lot of people, they can't wait to get in a relationship.

Q: Mm, yeah.

A: So I think it's important to do it now, while you...

Q: Yeah, mm, I think you're right.

A: People think just because you're young you don't need to know about these things, but I think everybody needs to know.

Q: Mm. Well, sometimes people object, I mean they don't want their children to know too much about sex and stuff, it might encourage them to take - take part in it sort of thing.

A: Most of the time it's the opposite, I mean if they knew about it then maybe they wouldn't get themselves into trouble in the first place. I think it's important to talk about.

Q: Mm. Yes, certainly. I think you're right. I think it's a good idea what you said about having people doing research work, we could do that once we've finished the first stage of the research, we could go back and tell people in schools -

A: Yeah.

Q: - what people in schools think about it. Yeah, right.

A: Be a help.

Q: Okay. Well the other thing that we're gonna do with this research is maybe come back in a year's time and talk to some of the people that we talked to this year, would you be interested in -

A: Yeah.

Q: - in doing that. Did you give me your - on the questionnaire that you filled in, did you give me your name and address?... sheet of paper, 'cos I keep it separate anyway... And the other thing we were thinking about was diaries, asking people to keep diaries about their thoughts and feelings about relationships, just for a short while, maybe a couple of months or something like that. Would you be interested in that?

A: Yeah, I wouldn't mind...

End of interview.