

MAN09 RT 25/5/89

QU: What courses are you doing at University?

AN: Maths and Physics. I was doing only Maths last year, and I changed to Maths and Physics this year.

QU: Did you find it difficult doing Sciences? Is that what you wanted to do?

AN: It's just I naturally sort of went into it. I just did Science 'O' levels and Science 'A' levels. I would have done Biology, but in the first term of the sixth form I didn't like Biology, so I changed.

QU: What were your ambitions for the future when you were at school?

AN: I can't remember now; it just changed so often really. I took a year off before I came up here, and I wrote software, computer design. So I thought I'd like to go into something technical but not with computing as the main outcome of it. I don't actually mind computing, it's just when you're doing something which is just (?)bolstering (?)voluntary records and, you know..(020)..you're not really interested in it. But I'd quite like to use it as part of my work, you know. I think sometimes you enjoy it, it's just I wouldn't want it to be the main part of my job.

QU: What sort of thing could the degree you're doing lead on to?

AN: Well, most scientific and technical jobs it would qualify me for. If you were just doing Maths you could do a lot of stuff, but doing Maths and Physics it means that there's virtually nothing really, not unless it really demands specialised training, like Biology or something like that. But..(030)..technical stuff, I mean there's things like (?)Accounts, which I really don't want to go into at all. But what I'm interested in at the moment is stuff like meteorology.

QU: So would you have to do a further degree?

AN: I don't think so because there are not many courses around for it so.. ...(034)..work at (?)Warm Spring which is, they do sort of environmental...Department of Trade and Industry work. It's very interesting and it's actually got some purpose as well.

QU: Are you in the minority being female on the course that you're doing?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Is there any problem with that?

AN: In Maths it's about 40%, so it's the same as the other University courses in general anyway. It's the same as the general average. But in Physics, well people doing Maths and Physics there's about 12 of us, there's only, well there's four of us actually that are women on it, but I didn't realise that (?)she was on it until she came into the exam for it! But, I found that last year when I wanted to change from Maths to Maths and Physics, like you could have changed either when you came here, or at the end of the first term, and when I first came here I wasn't really sure; I thought I don't really want to do Maths, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. And so I sort of left it, and then at Christmas I thought well, I'll leave it a bit, and then at the exams I realised I really didn't like doing Maths. So at the end of January, beginning of February I went to see someone about changing. And they said - You can't change, can't change, it's too late to change - and so I was just, the last thing I wanted to do was to do another set of exams in Maths, and I was really fed up with everything. And then I went to see someone in the Physics department and they said, basically - 'Don't come to see us until you've done your

summer exams. You can't possibly change now, and don't even think about it. And make sure you get a good mark in your summer exams'. So I was really worried. And then he said as well – 'Do you really consider yourself a Physicist? Or do you just want to meddle in Physics? We could offer you a couple of.. .' Because like if you do Maths you can do one or two external courses. So he said well, you can do.. we have one course which is Relativity and Quantum Physics, like a sort of introduction, it's very... And there's been so many complaints about it, and no one who does it likes it. And he was saying you can do that, you know, unless you consider yourself a serious Physicist, or you can just do two courses. Which would be very very difficult and not many people do it, and it would be taking on a lot of course-work, a lot of effort. And I said I want to do Maths and Physics, I don't want to just do two courses. And he said - Well, make sure you get a 2:1 in your summer exam, and then come and see us then.

QU: What do you think he thinks a serious Physicist is then?

AN: I don't know, it was just like really condescending the way he said it really. I'm sure it would have made a difference if I was a man gone along and said I want to do Physics. I know that AARON changed just before Christmas, and I don't think he had any problems whereas I would have done. I mean it was later on. The thing is at school I'd changed from, I was doing Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and I changed to do Maths, Chemistry, Physics. And I wanted to do further Maths as well. Because I didn't just want to do Maths. So I went to the Maths teacher and said - I want to change to Maths, this was in my final year, and he said - You're going to lose a grade, you know, your final degree, only if you're really seriously interested in doing it, do it, because you'll drop a grade. Like say if you'll get an A in Biology, you'll get a B in Maths. Or if you'd get an A in Maths, you'll only get a B now. And I said - Well, and I'd like to do further Maths as well. And he sort of laughed and said - Well, come along to the lessons and see how you do. So I ended up doing that. So I was used to changing; you know, he wouldn't even listen to what I was saying - I know it's hard work changing, but I want to do it and I'm quite serious about it.

QU: You weren't treated very well..

AN: The worst I had was when this term, you only do one term of lab. And I thought of all the people that do Maths/Physics, the one person that I wouldn't want to work with is PATRICIA because I have tutorials with her, and she's really horrible. I just don't get on with her at all. And so of course the only person who didn't have a partner at the beginning of the year was Sharon. So I had to work with her. And then about the fourth week, we just got to the stage where we weren't talking to each other. She was taking experiment measurements and not even telling me what they were. So when I was doing the measurements I would say them really loud...So it just wasn't working out, so I went to see the lab tutor. And you think you could go along to see the lab tutor and say - Yes, I've got a problem with a lab partner, I don't know what to do about it, what do you suggest I should do? - Because it was really getting me down, and I felt like going on to everyone, just about. I really hated going on Mondays because I had a whole day of her. And I went along and I asked if I could speak to him in private, because he was in a sort of open-plan bit where AMY was right behind me anyway. And I waited two hours to see him and he hadn't turned up. So he said alright, so he walked half-way up the corridor, into the middle of another experimental lab, and said - Yeah, and what do you want? And I said I've come to talk to you privately. And I explained that we just weren't

getting on and I didn't know what to do about it. Could I change partners or work with someone else. What should I do? What's the best way to sort it out? I didn't say - Listen, we just can't work together, I don't want to speak to her ever again. And I want to work with someone else. I wanted him to actually help me, because it was really upsetting me. And he walked back to the table, sat down next to two of PATRICIA'S friends. And she was right behind me, and she knew that we were supposed to be having lab together at that time. She was waiting for me to do an experiment. And then he just said - Well, what's your name? - and took down some details. And then he said - Oh, I'll go over and see her - and he went straight over to PATRICIA before he'd even said anything. And he went up to her and said - Your lab partner says she doesn't get on with you, what do you say? And what he said to me as well was - Oh, we're quite used to doing marriage guidance counselling in these sessions. And I thought - God! If he does marriage guidance counselling, it's just like.. It would just be suicide. And it doesn't seem possible to go up to someone and say - So and so doesn't get on with you - and you're stood right there. And PATRICIA just like went bright red, and just looked at his shoes, you know. I felt so shit then. And then he went off, after he'd done his bit of counselling, basically telling PATRICIA that I hated her guts, and what did she think of it; then went off leaving us to work together. And then she just wouldn't talk to me for the rest of the afternoon, and I said - Come on, we're gonna obviously have to work together. We've got this lab work to do, it's part of the course. We're gonna have to just get on with it, and we'll just have to do it. And she said - Well, I'm not going to tell the teacher. I just couldn't believe that someone could be that inconsiderate. Then I really felt that he was treating it as just girls squabbling. Because if I went, and I was a lad and said - Listen, this guy just really isn't co-operating... Because, the worst thing was as well, because I said...(135)...doing Maths/Physics... But I said - I was interested in what I was doing; I hadn't done lab before, and I needed someone to help me who was good at it, who'd actually make up for me not being very good at it, or could actually show me what to do. And talk to me. And not only could PATRICIA not talk to me, she wasn't very good either. And there was no way you could actually discuss any results.

QU: Was it just a working problem?

AN: Well yeah, personally she's not the sort of person I get on with. But it was a working problem.

QU: But they treated it as..

AN: ..a personal thing, yeah. What I said was - I don't think I'm getting anything out of lab doing it as it is, and if I actually struggle through it at least...(145).. Well, (?)he said - You're not expected to get anything out of it. And I said - Well, why are we doing lab if we're not expected to get anything out of it? He said - Well, you only do four experiments so... But it's a compulsory part of our course, so why aren't we expected to get anything out of it?

QU: Did you go to a mixed school?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Did you find any pressure on you not to do Science?

AN: I found it the opposite way really. Because I'd always been sort of scientific and pondering from quite early on. I think it's mostly my dad's influence really. My mum as well, but mostly it was my dad that got me interested in it. So when I went to middle school, we started doing Science, I was like way ahead of everyone else.

QU: So you tend to carry on what you're good at?

AN: Yeah. The reason I changed, why I got so annoyed with doing Biology was, because in our school you could either do, if you did Biology, you had to do Chemistry and Physics, and if you did Maths, you had to do Physics and Chemistry. And there was no other, well, you could do Maths and two halves, but it was very difficult to do it. So like the people who did Biology were the people who couldn't really do Physics usually. So just me and (?)ERIN sat in these lessons were the only people that knew anything about Physics really. Everyone else was just bored out of their minds. And we just either answered all the questions or just sat there not doing anything, so it was just really boring because there was no competition at all. There was no actual feeling of anything really...

QU: It wasn't very stimulating?

AN: Yeah. It was just a bit dead.

QU: Did you enjoy school?

AN: Some of it. I enjoyed high school more.

QU: What was it like?

AN: I don't know!

QU: What sort of area was it in?

AN: Well it's in...(177)..it's quite a large one, it's 1300 people. [REDACTED INFORMATION ABOUT LOCATION].

QU: Did it continue being like that?

AN: No, it changed, I think 30 years before I got there, it changed to be a comprehensive. But at the same time the headmaster stayed on, now we've got a new headmaster and he's like really good. Well, he was in Hong Kong when the comprehensive system was first brought in there. So he was one of the head teachers with some of the most experience of comprehensives...(187).. And he wanted to bring in a system of tertiary education in Leeds. Because at the moment it's part of middle and high. So he wanted to change it to primary, secondary and tertiary. And there was just this big...(190)..because it's quite a sort of right-off area, and people didn't want any of this progressive nonsense, you know. But it would have been really good, because especially as it had quite a good catchment area.

QU: Do you think it was a good school?

AN: Yeah, I think it had quite, some sort of...(196)...having been a grammar school before, like there was very strict rules for uniform. [REDACTED INFORMATION ABOUT LOCATION].

QU: Were you at all rebellious at school? Did you go against rules like that? Were you able to?

AN: At my middle school we split up, when we were in the third year, 11, 12, we had I think it was...(223).. And then we had, we were supposed to have half a year of woodwork and half a year of Home Economics. And we had a whole year of needlework, something like that, which is unbelievable. And we run out of wood; and have you seen [TV SHOW]?

QU: No.

AN: It's based in .. [NAME OF SCHOOL], but it's similar. The school just runs out of wood. And it happened to us, like we had one piece of wood each, like this big! To make a ship out of, and a pencil-case out of and everything. So we just sat there not

doing anything for half a year. And people that had done it first, of course they'd made loads of stuff, so I just wouldn't do any woodwork. And then in the next year I didn't have any choice; I think it was only the lads that did woodwork. At school, in the first year, automatically girls did sewing and Home Economics, cookery. And the boys automatically did woodwork and metal work. And before my brother came up, he's two years younger than me, my mum went for an Open Day and said - My son's coming along and he's interested in Cookery, he likes doing it. And he was getting quite good; he was only 12 and he was quite interested. And the Home Economics teacher said - Huh, we don't have lads doing Cookery. The last time we had lads doing Cookery they went home and put buns in their pockets to carry them home.

QU: They were unhappy about it?

AN: Yeah, I think there were two girls who managed to do metal work, but they had a lot of hassle to do it.

QU: So even though it was comprehensive...

AN: I think the problem more now like, they just didn't think about it. We had segregated Games as well. And the Middle school used to join up when it was outside because there's only one Gym. And then we used to play mixed hockey and stuff like that; but at High school we just never ever..

QU: Did you have a streaming system at your school?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Were there big class differences with that?

AN: Yeah, definitely. Because when I got...(256)..it was strictly streamed into 11 different classes. Because it took in about 300 a year. So it was very strict. And also it was all based on your school report. And I had exams in October and exams in February, because they used to stream people and in October you'd have an exam. And then they'd remix everyone round, and it really messed people up. Like one of my mum's friends, her daughter's black, and she went to a Christian Middle school, and she came to our school. And she got a really bad report from her middle school, and her mum was really upset about it, because she was bright and she wasn't messing around, and she was, you know, getting on. And she got to.... and she was moved up like a whole grade, like it was banded then. And it seemed quite...(270)..that this middle school where she'd been discriminated against...

QU: Tell me about the sort of sex education you had.

AN: I think there was something vaguely mentioned at middle school; but I can't remember what it was.

QU: What about secondary school?

AN: It came up as third year Biology. I think (?)I put a question there, but it was mostly sort of biological function really.

QU: They didn't deal with it as a social issue? Did you have sex education classes?

AN: Well, in the sixth form it was part of general studies where we had one ...(285)..or something which was just really nothing. You just sit in a ring, then just discussing things, and nothing really major came up. When it could have been a really good way of exploring things; no one bothered about it at all.

QU: So before sixth form there was nothing mandatory about contraception and pregnancy and STDs?

AN: No. the thing that, like Biology; everyone did Biology, unless you got a note saying, you know, about the sex education. I think you had to get a something signed. But all that was, was.. Well, I think there was some sex education; like, you know, contraception was mentioned, and there was a thing about pregnancy and childbirth. Like there was a member.. because one of the lads in our class....(303)..... Because we were taught by a Biology teacher who was, she's very fat and like we got on with her really well. But she would just talk about, just the biological side of it really; about how wonderfully designed our bodies are really. But no social stuff.

QU: Were people given space to ask questions? Like asking what sort of contraception worked best, or questions about masturbation.

AN: There was a little bit about contraception; but I don't think anyone really spoke... (316).. And in a Biology lesson it's not like you can start asking those sort of questions. I know that she would have been prepared to talk to people, she was the director of the year we were in, so she was the sort of person you could go up to talk to.

QU: Was sex talked about outside the classroom, in the playground amongst the students?

AN: Not really, no.

QU: Did you have much discussion about it amongst your female friends?

AN: No.

QU: What about your parents, did they give you any sex education at home, or any advice?

AN: No, I think my mum just talked to me once about menstruation, that sort of thing.

QU: This is when you started your periods?

AN: Yeah. I can't remember her saying anything about sex education though.

QU: She didn't even say - Keep away from boys?

AN: No, she's not like that, no. Still I don't really talk to them all that much, like they wouldn't know about.. I mean I don't even talk to them about my boyfriends and that sort of thing so.. It's different with my sister, my big sister, because she's always been really extrovert and just sort of over the top. She's getting married at the end of July.

QU: How old is she?

AN: She's 24. But like she's lived with GREG for about six months. She did have a lot of boyfriends from like the age of 14, whereas I didn't at all. And I was very tomboyish when I was younger, so I always got mocked for not going out with boys..

QU: Who by?

AN: By my mum. She'd say things like, there was this boy that she knew in my class, and she'd go - Oh, you know MARK.. and she used to go on about him. My sister was sort of saying about her escapades behind the sheds at school and stuff like that.

QU: Was this to you or to your mum?

AN: To everybody. And because I wasn't broadcasting myself, it was assumed that I wasn't interested basically.

QU: How did it make you feel, your mum taking the mickey? Did it hurt you at the time?

AN: Yeah, and it affected me quite a lot as well because when I was going out with someone in the sixth form, my mum just really hated him. Like she knew him before anyway, and she used to meet his mother shopping and stuff like that. And she used to go - Oh, MRS(?)WILSON, she's just so awful. She was going on about her son, how wonderful her son is -

QU: And she knew you were going out with him at the time?

AN: Yeah. I mean she did it with SANDRA quite a bit, they didn't like some of the boyfriends she chose, and would be quite against it or they'd just not be...(375)..they wouldn't say some things but..

QU: Do you think that undermined your confidence in yourself?

AN: Yeah, quite a lot.

QU: I don't suppose your mum intended to do that, it just had that effect.

AN: I don't really know what she means.

QU: That's the problem, not having talked to her about it. Did you feel that you had a difficult time over that?

AN: Yes. Because I think in our class especially, it was quite...(388)..compared to the.. (389)..were quite sort of strange really. You didn't go round with lads as much until the sixth form.

QU: But the year below you did?

AN: Yeah, the year below did, a lot. And I don't really know why it happened like that... (393)..So it made you feel quite separate, and everyone was going out with everyone else, and it was sort of spread right round...(395)...so it wasn't like a sort of really good atmosphere anyway.

QU: So there wasn't much discussion about sex. Was there peer pressure to make you feel you should be having relationships, or if you weren't, that you were odd?

AN: Yeah, yeah. Especially like in the sixth form, because the atmosphere had changed quite a lot. Everyone was just, like if you weren't going out with someone, it was...God, what are you doing? And like when I was going out with someone who did the same lessons as me, like we were only at school one day a week then, the next day at school, just everyone knew; I just couldn't believe it. How fast.. I mean even my brother knew about it, like straight away.

QU: How did that make you feel?

AN: It was.. they were really really mocking as well, it was just really horrible. And I had direct..from one of his friends was really rude to me so..

QU: Did you feel that what had happened between you and him had been told to other people?

AN: No, because we'd met some other people in town so.. we just sort of bumped into them, so they knew anyway. It just got round everywhere. The way it was, it was just...

QU: In what sort of ways did people mock?

AN: Just sort of - You're going out with MARK!

QU: Like he's horrible?

AN: Like, because we both, we were doing further Maths and there were just three of us. So they knew that we'd been going round together a lot. But they just hadn't expected it at all. Everyone said they didn't.. It seemed to be that we were put into a group where you're not expected to go out with someone. And we were both in the group where you're not expected to go out with someone. And then all of a sudden you go out with someone, so it's really..

QU: Did you feel quite strongly that you'd been defined as a person who didn't have relationships or boyfriends?

AN: Yeah, yeah.

QU: Were there big divides between the sort of girls who had boyfriends and the sort of girls who didn't?

AN: Yeah, because there was a sort of, I think a lot of it stayed over from like people in our class, because we were the top stream. And people tended to be quite hostile to us because of that. Because it was so elitist, the whole system. I think that was the main division really. And so people assumed that none of us had been out with a lad before..

QU: So if the girl is intelligent, then she's not sexy, pretty, fanciable?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Did any of the girls in the top stream go out with boys not in the top stream or vice versa?

AN: Yeah, in the year below us and stuff like that. You didn't used to get that in our.. Also as well, there was the Science stream, because a lot of us who had been pushing to do Sciences and we were all encouraged to do some, so that sort of further..

QU: The boyfriend you were going out with in the sixth form, was that your first boyfriend?

AN: Yeah. Well, there was like someone I went to school with.. school, then crammer school, then when we were at middle school we went to separate schools then. Me and him, and his sister, my brother all used to go round together. But we split up, we stopped seeing each other just before we went to high school which was at the age of 13. And then he was in my class at high school. And it was really uncomfortable because we'd got on really well, right from the age of four. And then all of a sudden you're thrown together, and it was just really quite difficult at that time.

QU: Did you have a sexual relationship with the boy you saw in the sixth form?

AN: No, I didn't.

QU: Was sex a trauma or a problem, something that you talked about?

AN: No, it didn't really go on for very long so..

QU: Had you wanted to have a sexual relationship?

AN: Yeah, I was thinking about it.

QU: What is the motivation behind that? What did you think at the time, what were the reasons for you wanting to have a sexual relationship?

AN: I think a lot of it was peer pressure really. Because I hadn't gone out with anyone before as well it was, you just get mocked by your family and people you know for not going out with anyone. I don't know; I suppose I had to prove something to myself as well really. There was a ...(513)..at our middle school, when we were choosing our high schools, someone said that every girl in the sixth form had to sleep with someone; they just had to.

QU: Had to lose their virginity?

AN: Yeah.

QU: How did you feel hearing that?

AN: I thought it was really funny. And my sister was there at the time, so I knew it was a total load of rubbish basically.

QU: But did you feel that there was pressure on you not to be a virgin?

AN: Yeah, I think so.

QU: Was virginity seen as a stigma? At my school you lost it as soon as possible.

AN: Well, it wasn't sort of discussed very much, but there was always the weird feeling about it. And it helped cultivate this feeling that I said before about the division. Because people would just look at you and just think - Well, you know...(540)..

QU: Was it more likely that girls in lower streams to you were sexually active?

AN: Yeah, I think, because it was sort of the way it grew up, and I don't know how much of it was actually real, and how much of it was just imposed, and how much people just went along with it anyway. And the pressures people got off each other. I'm fairly sure there wasn't much basis for it because I know now about people who were going out with lads at the time and didn't really say much about it, and kept quite quiet about things, and stuff like that.

QU: How long were you in that relationship?

AN: Not long really. A few weeks.

QUY: Was it a physical relationship in any way?

AN: No. It was just really difficult because I actually asked him out and he was quite embarrassed about it.

QU: That you'd made the first move?

AN: Yeah.

QU: What made you ask him out?

AN: Because I'd liked him since we got into high school, and then we ended up doing the same lessons together; there were just three of us. I got on with him; we used to walk back from school together, and I just thought - Why not? - you know. I quite liked him. I thought, it's stupid for me to wait for him to ask me out, because he might never do it, and I might as well make the move. But afterwards I sort of regretted having made the move anyway.

QU: Do you think he felt threatened by it?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Do you think that put a strain on the relationship from his point of view?

AN: Yeah, because I don't think he had really been expecting it all that much. I thought he was, he had been. Because it was quite overt on my part, he couldn't..because he hadn't really made a decision about having a relationship or not...then it was quite easy for him to get out of it. It was just really strange, because we had been getting on really well, and then he just ended it.

QU: Were you very hurt by this?

AN: Yeah. I didn't feel guilty, I just felt that it was stupid to have done it really.

QU: Did you have any more relationships while you were in the sixth form?

AN: No.

QU: You said you took a year off?

AN: Yeah.

QU: What did you do during that year off?

AN: When I was doing my 'A' levels I was looking after this three year old on Saturday; a baby and a three year old and a seven year old. And I went to SPAIN in April and then in the summer; and I was a nanny for the summer. For nine weeks. Then I spent September with my friend, because they were all going off to University. And then in October I went down and had an interview in London, and then I went down for that, and then I stayed there. First of all I was working at [FASHION SHOP].

QU: Did you move away from home?

AN: Yeah. I just sort of walked in and got the job. And the day that I was offered this computing job, because I went for an interview for that, I totally messed up the whole system in [FASHION SHOP], and they were like so relieved to see the back of me! It was really funny because I was thinking of computing as well, and there was a computer with a really bad system...(640).. What I was doing was inventory control, in the end, and I totally messed it up in the shop. And everyone thought it was really funny that I was doing that.

QU: Was that a big move for you moving away from home?

AN: Yeah. Well, it was quite long overdue, because I wasn't really happy for a long time.

QU: Why was that?

AN: I didn't get on with my mum basically.

QU: Was it just underlying tension or..?

AN: Oh, there was a lot of...(654)..time that we went through. Quite a few years where we were arguing every single day.

QU: What would you argue about?

AN: Well, a lot of it was about food, because I was a really faddy eater. I was really bad.

QU: In what way?

AN: I didn't like meat at all, I didn't like fish at all. It was mostly sort of the texture of foods I was really particular about. And she just got really annoyed about it.

QU: Have you got any ideas why that was?

AN: No.

QU: Did you ever go through the phase of binge eating?

AN: Not then, but sometimes I'll feel a bit...(674)..but I haven't really done at all. I don't know why; I became vegetarian when I was 15, because I didn't like it anyway. And it just solved a whole loads of problems, because there'd be no more arguments at dinner time about eating meat and fish. My mum was saying first of all that I had to eat fish. Fish, I hated even more than meat. And the last time I had fish, my mum and I had been having an argument and she ended up throwing the fish at me. And stuff like that, you know, it was just like, we just had really bad arguments; and then once it was settled that I was a vegan-vegetarian, and that would be it, those arguments sort of finished. I can't really remember what we argued about. A lot of it's because I didn't get on with my brother very much. There was quite a lot of rivalry between us because me and my brother are closest, and my two older sisters are close.

QU: So there wasn't a supportive relationship between you and your brother?

AN: No, in phases it was, you know. Sometimes, like when we were going round with .. (698)..sister, like we'd just go round in a group, you know, his friends with mine, and we'd all go out together. But that would sort of go on for about a year, and then we'd have another year of like, really not getting on.

QU: So it was an escape for you, leaving home?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Tell me how your life changed. Were you living on your own?

AN: Yeah. I was living in hostel first of all. And then, they only have you for a really short stay there, so I went into this..I was really desperate, I hadn't realised when I'd started at [CENTRAL LONDON] that you're only allowed four days stay there; I found out on the fourth night. I had to leave the next day. And I had to find somewhere really..and I ended up in a real old dive of a place in (?)[PLACE]. And it was just basically a sort of

worker's hostel, but it was like the most disgusting place imaginable; it really was bad. I mean I went to India in my year out, and just nothing compares with this place. Most rooms were like ordinary bedroom size, but you couldn't actually stand on the floor for the beds. You (?)could actually get into the rooms. I was in the doctor's surgery. And then another girl came back as well and so we were both.. I would sleep on the doctor's couch. It was just terrible.

QU: Did you find somewhere else?

AN: Yes. After a month I got the job up in [NORTH LONDON] anyway so I moved up there.

QU: Were you very lonely when you went down to London?

AN: No, because the first.. I went down for the interview on the Friday, and the next day there was a meeting which I knew about through one of my friends in Leeds, that they'd told me about. So I went to that.

QU: What was it about?

AN: I was interested in going to Sri Lanka at the time, so I went along to that. And I think I knew...(752)..And then I met people from VMDC, you know the Viraj Mendis Campaign,

(End side 1: 756)

AN: After about a month when I was up in [NORTH LONDON], I'd go into the centre on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. And for the rest of the week I was doing sort of flexi-time, but we were expected to do a project, and if you got behind, you were expected to catch it up. So I was working til eight o'clock quite a lot of days, because I wouldn't get in til ten. So I was so shattered when I got back, I wouldn't really be interested in going out.

QU: Did you start having relationships when you were in London? With men?

AN: I had a sort of brief relationship but I didn't go out with anyone..(011).

QU: Tell me about your first sexual relationship.

AN: Umm..

QU: Or the first one that seemed sexual to you.

AN: Well, when I was at this hostel I met this really dishy man. And it was just really.. anyway.. Like I knew that if he'd stayed longer we'd probably have slept together. But he was just..(019)..anyway so he'd probably worked out..

QU: That you'd wanted it?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Was that the first time that you'd felt strongly attracted to someone in that way?

AN: No, I'd sort of liked people before, but he was the first one that I was really strongly attracted to, and who interested me as well.

QU: And after that who was the first one that you had what you would call a sexual relationship with?

AN: The first was when I was in India. I was in ..(027)..and I went round with this man, we got on really well. I was going to Darjeeling so I came back to ..(028)..

QU: Was it a momentous thing for you?

AN: It wasn't all that momentous, I don't think; it was sort of.. it was quite nice really because there was no pressure on it really, at all. Because for him it was a quite massive..

QU: Was it his first time as well?

AN: Yeah, so it was more sort of like just a fun thing to do really.

QU: So you felt relaxed about it?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Did it feel different that there weren't loads of people that you knew looking on?

AN: Yeah, it was just nice because I was able to just make up my own mind really. I mean there was absolutely no pressure because I was just travelling round on my own. Just doing my own thing. I didn't really know whether to go back or not, and I decided to go back, so it was totally...

QU: Do you think that changed you, travelling on your own round India?

AN: Yes, definitely. I just showed some photographs to a friend in my house, and she said - Oh my God, you've changed so much from when before I went to India, and after I came back. It was just unbelievable.

QU: What, physically?

AN: Yeah. I lost loads of weight while I was there.

QU: Were you overweight before you went?

AN: Probably quite similar to how I am now, but slightly more sort of like chubby on the cheeks. But when I came back I was really sort of gaunt looking and my hands were going quite.. not really skinny, but you could just tell I was quite.. before I went that I was teenager looking and when I got back..

QU: You were a woman?

AN: Yeah. It was just the experience of having to..I went for four and a half months, just having to go through everything on your own. ...(057)..I'd meet very few people except when I was in Calcutta, and I stayed with quite a lot of Indian people when I was there, but I didn't tend to mix with Western travelers. Well, every now and then I'd meet up with them. So all the experiences would be on my own. And I wouldn't be able to discuss them with anyone else. So if things were like really good or really bad...(069)..

QU: So were you glad that you hadn't had sex before this? That when you did do it, you did it of your own volition?

AN: I'm not sure really.

QU: I wonder if it seemed important that it was your (?)decision?

AN: I think it worked quite well in the end. Because at the time I felt a lot of pressure like not to be a virgin when I came up to university; it was just really awful like now thinking about it. But I felt it quite strongly at the time. I think I would have preferred to go out with someone when I was at school; but not in terms of slept with them.

QU: To have had more experience with relationships?

AN: Yeah. Just because I was quite shy...(080)..(?)women as well..(081)..

QU: This is developing social skills as well?

AN: Yeah.

QU: When you had this relationship with this bloke in Calcutta, did you use any contraception?

AN: Yes.

QU: What?

AN: Condoms.

QU: Was that a choice or a necessity?

AN: Necessity really. There wasn't really anything else to use there.

QU: Were you happy using condoms?

AN: Umm, yeah, yeah.

QU: Did you find the intercourse a fulfilling experience?

AN: I don't think it was very fulfilling. It was just sort of an experience really, for both of us. It wasn't.. I don't feel it was massively fulfilling.

QU: Has your idea of sex and your own sexuality changed since then?

AN: I don't think it has, no.

QU: So you came to university, was that a big change for you?

AN: Not really because I felt sort of different from everybody else, because it's very unusual to take a year out to do Maths. I'm the only person who actually chose to take a year out of the people who are older. There are 150 people on the course; I don't know every one of them, but I don't think anyone else did. Because most people are like straight from school and just done 'A' levels and talk about their 'A' levels. And I thought - I can't really remember my 'A' levels. It was just so strange; and they just seemed so young..people doing Maths are quite immature really. People are quite introvert..It was just really strange with everything that I'd done in my year out; I'd worked and gone to India and stuff like that. All those people straight from school.

QU: Were you treated as a bit of an oddity by people?

AN: Not really, no. I didn't really mix with people on my course; I tend to mix with people outside it anyway. Mostly I just don't want to go round with mathematicians all the time.

QU: So someone like you coming to university was probably a step backwards?

AN: Yeah, definitely. I lived in [HALLS] in the first year. I mean it's quite relaxed compared to most halls, but it's still..(121).. All the students and everything.

QU: How did you start creating a life that you wanted? Was that a difficult process?

AN: Well in the first year I went to a lot of different clubs and things like that. I just thought I'd really make the most of it while I'm here. And I just went to different things every night. And apart from the VMDC..

QU: You were still involved when you came up here?

AN: Yeah. I saw quite a lot of people from university but not from lectures.

QU: So you weren't just tied to your course?

AN: Not really because with Maths you only have lectures in the morning, so all the afternoons are free.

QU: You said your idea of your own sexuality has changed a lot since coming here. How?

AN: Well, in January last year I started going out with this man from, well actually doing Maths and Philosophy but I didn't meet him through the course anyway. And I was the first person he'd had sex with, which was quite strange for me having only had one sexual partner before. Suddenly to be more experienced than someone seemed really strange.

QU: Was that nice?

AN: Well, because he was a year younger than me, he felt really sort of.. put down a bit. Because I was older than him and he was having a lot of problems with the courses, and I could actually do it, and he couldn't. He felt uncomfortable because of that. He felt

uncomfortable because he was younger. But in some ways it was really nice because again I was sort of more in control.

QU: Is that something you hadn't really expected out of relationships before then?

AN: Yeah. I was..(157)..and I wouldn't really expect it.

QU: Did you enjoy feeling in control?

AN: Yeah, yeah. Not, not..! I didn't like having control because it meant that he held back a lot, because he was really insecure. So that wasn't so good really, but.. It was quite nice to be just in control and being able to do what I wanted.

QU: So in that relationship did your ideas about your sexuality change?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Why?

AN: Well, we were able to be more..because he hadn't had a sexual partner before; it meant I could anything I wanted basically.

QU: You could have the sex you liked?

AN: Yeah. So it was quite a good relationship although, because he was totally inexperienced, it meant I had to really sort of encourage him all the time, which is a bit..

QU: ..of a responsibility..

AN: Yeah. But in some ways it was quite interesting.

QU: Do you mean you experimented with things like oral sex, things you might not have been able to do in another relationship?

AN: Yeah, yeah. We didn't actually have penetration for a few weeks, because he was quite insecure really.

QU: What do you feel about penetration? How important is it for you?

AN: Sometimes I really want it, but the boyfriend I've got at the moment, he isn't really interested in foreplay at all and it's really annoying.

QU: I bet it is.

AN: And it's just really frustrating. And because he's older he tends to think that he knows best.

QU: And he's in control?

AN: Yeah, and which I really don't like at all.

QU: And how do you work that one out?

AN: Well, we had a bit of a stormy time where we'd just like not see each other and then go back and see each other.

QU: Do you feel confident to demand what you want in sex?

AN: No.

QU: Why? Is it to do with age?

AN: It's to do with his age, but also he can be quite condescending as well sometimes.

QU: So your experience hasn't been much use with someone who asserts authority over you?

AN: Yeah. Because when we started with each other I said I knew he'd been sleeping with women before, so obviously he's had a lot more sexual experience than me. And I said that to him, and I meant, you know - So I want you to be considerate and be open. But he just doesn't, because he thinks that he knows what's right..

QU: He knows what women like. Do you think he knows what women like? Do you think he understands a woman's body?

AN: Not at all, no.

QU: Have you said that to him?

AN: I haven't actually been with him to talk to very much.

QU: Do you find it frightening to be able to say what you want?

AN: Not frightening, it's just that I don't have very much control. Or I don't have very much...no, it's not equality, it's like...(209).. It's very difficult being assertive with him.

QU: Does this hold true in your wider relationship?

AN: Sometimes he does..(217)..because we were going through a stage about a month ago where I was just seeing him all the time. And he wanted that because he was quite depressed really. So that was really..him. But at the moment, I just said, I've got exams on and stuff and I didn't really want to see very much of him. Because he had an exam on Monday and that was..his exams were over. So he was just like, you know.....(224).. Yeah, he's got no pressure anymore. He's got a little bit of course work to catch up on but he's not got much demand on his time, so he's alright. I've got all these exams so..

QU: From what you wrote on your questionnaire, I presume that you see yourself as a feminist?

AN: Mmm. In some ways, yeah. To me it isn't the most important issue to work around, but it is, it has to be..(235)..I mean I'm a communist so it has to be..(235).

QU: But in terms of your own life, you being fulfilled, the personal is important.

AN: I mean I find it quite important to a certain extent which is why I don't know what I'm doing at the moment.

QU: Do you find this relationship frustrating, that things that are important to you, that you believe in, you're not able to put into practice?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Do you think that you're going to be able to overcome that in this relationship?

AN: I'm not sure because it keeps changing all the time. And it's difficult really to know where it's going at all. We had a really bad argument last week, and I just didn't want to see him anymore. And then I just called up and said...(250).. I just really don't know what's going to happen at all.

QU: Do you feel vulnerable in this relationship?

AN: Yeah, I think I do.

QU: It's frustrating if you've got ideas about what women should be able to do in relationships; you should be able to discuss them. You fall for someone who's a complete bastard, and even though you recognise all those things, you're still attracted to them. Is there an element of that in this relationship, that you know you shouldn't?

AN: I wouldn't like to think that I was attracted to him not being considerate; I don't think I am at all. I mean, I can't understand myself, why I'm not standing up to him more. Especially as he's not giving me what I want. And now, I'm sort of seeing him on my own basis, when I want to see him I go round. There's got to be some reason really, why I'm not asserting myself more.

QU: The main problem is with him, because however strong you want to be in a relationship, women can't just be liberated on their own. Women's oppression is so much tied to the way that men treat them. So a feminist can be in an exploitative situation.

AN: Yeah, yeah.

QU: Where did you find out about contraception?

AN: Some of it we had at school: Just sort of the mechanics of it. Some of it's discussing with my sister; but most of it is reading in books and that sort of thing.

QU: What sort of contraception have you used?

AN: I've used condoms and diaphragm.

QU: So you've never been on the pill?

AN: No.

QU: Did you ever want to go on the pill?

AN: Sometimes I think about it, but I'm not very sure whether I want to go on it really. Because I don't take any medications at all if I can help it. I just don't really want to subject myself to that.

QU: Why did you get a cap? Did you go to a family planning clinic?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Did they try to put you on the pill there?

AN: (?)Yeah. I just went down to [HEALTH CENTRE], that's where my doctor is anyway. No, I think first of all I went to a doctor and then she said come along Wednesday nights. And I just went in and said I want the cap, and the nurse...

QU: Are you happy using it?

AN: Yeah, I think it's better than a condom because it's more..you don't have to mess around so much. I think as well you're able to be in control.

QU: Yeah, I think so too. You said that you use either condoms or the cap in your relationship, how does that work?

AN: A lot of it depends on whether I was thinking before whether I'd sleep with him or not; because it's so erratic you can't really tell. And I don't carry it around with me usually so.. So on that basis really. It's not very well planned at all.

QU: So is he happy about using a condom?

AN: No, he doesn't really like them very much.

QU: He doesn't refuse to use it though?

AN: No.

QU: Do you find it better without or with? Does it bother you?

AN: It only bothers me because of the mess really. Just getting the...(335)... It doesn't really make much difference to it, the amount of sensation from it.

QU: Does he say it makes a difference to the amount of sensation he gets?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Do you believe that?

AN: I don't know because if he thinks it, believes it, then it would affect it anyway wouldn't it?

QU: When was the first time you heard about AIDS? Did you get anything at school about it?

AN: No, we didn't because it wasn't... I can't work out when I first heard about it because, I remember I watched a programme like really early on. And it said - In five years' time this will be absolutely massive and everyone'll be talking about it, and now is the time to...(350). They'd just found out in America; they'd just been linking all these different cases. And realised that it was some syndrome. So it was really quite early on. But then I didn't hear about it for a long time until all the stuff on the news.

QU: So the first time you took real notice of it would be...(356)?

AN: Yeah.

QU: What was your reaction to it?

AN: I knew from the programme I saw before a lot about what people were like when they had it; I knew it was pretty horrific. But also that it was being used to (?)bolster family values and, you know, heterosexual relationships, and things like that.

QU: Do you think that you realised that because you had a critical mind or because any of the coverage presented it like that?

AN: I think a lot of it was acknowledged anyway at the time, but also it was just after I'd been to India, it started having leaflets round. So it was when I was just beginning to criticise a lot. I sort of thought about it at home, but it was when I was really sort of starting to discuss things. It was quite officially a lot of what we were up to.

QU: So you thought about this in terms of a political issue. How much do you think about in terms of a personal issue for you?

AN: I mean I've thought about things like using condoms. I mean at first I think it had a lot more affect on me than it does now. Because I just don't like using condoms.

QU: So when you heard about it, and you first had sex you thought - I'd better use a condom to protect myself against AIDS?

AN: Yeah.

QU: Has that worn off? The immediacy?

AN: Yeah.

QU: In the last year have you considered AIDS in your relationships?

AN: I've thought about it, but I've not usually acted much on it.

QU: Would you discuss it with your partners?

AN: I think we've discussed the contraception but not AIDS, I don't think.

QU: I'm interested in how the knowledge of AIDS affects people's ideas of what sex is. A lot of the girls I've talked to said it's made them feel they should have less partners, or try and get into long term relationships where there's less risk. Has it affected you in that way, altering what kind of sex you might have in the future?

AN: I think about it, but I don't know how much it does affect how I act really.

QU: For instance, would you be concerned about your partners' sexual history, would you ask them about it?

AN: Well, I wouldn't be concerned; the boyfriend I've got now, I know he has had a lot of sexual partners before. But also I know that in the past five years he's been quite settled so.. If he'd been sleeping around in the past five years I'd be a lot more worried about it.

QU: Did you talk about this to him, that he was more of a risk than you were?

AN: No, I think...(437).

QU: Have those concerns ever been enough to make you say, 'I want to use a condom'? Do you think the risk is enough to make you change your behaviour?

AN: No, I think when I was first sexually active it was; it was the most important thing really. But now I think I'd prefer to take the risk really rather than...(447).

QU: How much of a risk would you take?

AN: We've been discussing with other people, because I was going out with someone from a different, from the RCP. And they had this massive thing in Marxism about AIDS; saying it was absolutely no risk whatsoever. And it was just total government propaganda, and it was basically to get, if more women came off the pill and used a condom, or if you get pregnant from it, they just won't give you the money...(460).. this is about three pages; that was it. And so...(462)..the bloke I was going out with before, you

see. And I just told him about it, I said - I couldn't believe it; it was just so unbelievable. And he said - Oh, you're far more likely to get killed crossing the street than dying from AIDS. And I said - I know but it doesn't really..(467)..you don't go round jumping in front of red buses.. Oh well, you might die crossing the road anyway so you might as well try it out anyway, see what it's like. So I know it's more important than that; but I don't know how important it is. Because you get conflicting sort of stories, like a woman in the house where I live, she's really concerned about it. She talks all the time about it because she's a drama student, she did a play about AIDS. In the first term she was raped by someone who was bisexual, so she went through a massive.. she was really ill; she thought she had AIDS, things like that. So she's really concerned about it. So she talks quite a lot about it. So you have conflicting things. One minute it doesn't matter at all; and the other that it's the most important thing.

QU: Do you feel resentful of it? It is being used to say that women should have less sexual partners. Do you resent it cutting down what you want to do? Is sexual freedom important to you, is it part of being a strong woman?

AN: Yeah, I think so because also like now, you just don't sleep around; it's a general atmosphere, isn't it? So in terms of like if you do start to go out with a new boyfriend, then people are more against it now. you know, I went out with this guy in the first year; I went out with this man in the summer. People were like - Oh God, what are you doing! What're you doing? I found it quite..

QU: It's confusing isn't it? Because on the one hand women should have as many sexual choices as men do, but on the other it is a real threat of infection and disease. It is important that people are practicing safe-sex. But it's not how many people you sleep with, it's using condoms and actually what you do. Do you think the issues of AIDS and safe-sex are taken seriously within left-wing politics?

AN: I think it depends on the political group really. I'm in the RCG myself. And in London they went along to, do you know ACT-UP?

QU: Yes.

AN: Well, he went along this meeting because he's gay, and he was interested in going along anyway. And he was sent along as a delegate as well. And there was a meeting recently, because two people from, City group Anti-Apartheid as well went, they used to be members. So basically there was one of us from the RCG and two support people there. And in 'Capital Gay' last week there was a massive thing...(554)...you know and it was a third of a page, about how we'd tried to stop the others.. Because PATRICK had gone along and argued for a committee system, because it was just basically you went along and discussed it; it wasn't very efficient. There wasn't like two spokespersons, so anyone could say anything they wanted about the campaign, rather than having a more tightly organised thing. So he'd gone along and argued for a committee structure; and everybody said - No, that's too much bureaucracy, and we don't want it, and you're just trying to take us over. - And there's only three people out of thirty. So in terms of my own political group we do take it quite seriously. We discuss it as a political issue..

QU: Do you discuss it as a personal issue?

AN: Yeah, I discussed the article about the RCP had written with people.

QU: But do you discuss it in terms of asking people if they practice safe-sex?

AN: Not at all, no.

QU: It's quite easy to talk about AIDS as a political issue; it's quite obviously a political issue. Would you know if people in the RCG use safe-sex regularly?

AN: No, but most of them are settled down to one steady partner.

QU: Do you think you personally are at risk?

AN: (?)Yeah.

QU: Do you think there's anything you can do about that?

AN: Yeah, I think that in terms of using condoms you're safe. I know SEAN doesn't.. (595). And things like limiting sexual partners is.. you know, practice what you do really.

QU: Have you ever thought of safe-sex in terms of having sex which doesn't include penetration?

AN: Umm, not with any of the boyfriends that I've gone out with.

QU: Have you heard of safe-sex being used in that way?

AN: Yeah, yeah.

QU: How easy do you think it would be to have a relationship in which you did practice that type of sex?

AN: I think it would depend a lot on the person I was seeing at the time. Because (?)most men just think penetration is everything about sex; whereas if we had quite an open and supportive relationship then that would be quite a.. I mean with NATHAN, I think it could have stayed that way anyway.

QU: So with the relationship you're in at the moment, it wouldn't be on. Is the fact that someone isn't prepared to have safe-sex with you important enough to doubt the relationship?

AN: Yeah. I think that if we split up and he slept with someone else, I'd really think twice before getting back together again. You know, it's like really put me off.

QU: Do you find these issues quite confusing? Because there isn't just one answer, one way to deal with them.

AN: Yeah, yeah. Because also he's like, because well, quite often the political and the personal are quite different really. Because they're different things really, different... (669).

QU: Do you think left-wing politics takes the personal seriously enough? About 90% of the people I know are having unsafe sex and putting themselves at risk. For me that shows a real contradiction. Do you feel that there's a problem with that?

AN: Yeah, because I mean I do it myself so.. We've not discussed it massively ourselves. We discuss things like..(695).. We were discussing whether we were going to have a meeting on ACTUP. And somebody said - Oh it's happening in London, and you can't have a meeting in Manchester about a group that's based in London. ..(703)..

QU: But would you think of having a meeting on safe-sex?

AN: No. It would be more about AIDS in relation to homosexuality.

QU: It shows how complicated it is. You have to make a choice, a decision in your relationships and with your health. You might have to make sacrifices and use condoms which you hate! It's a bit more difficult than making political statements. Do you think the risk has been overestimated?

AN: I'm not really sure myself because there are such conflicting things. It all depends on who you believe most.

QU: What sort of information will you take seriously?

AN: At the moment I tend to be (?)suspicious of it from whatever source it comes from.

QU: Would you trust scientific information?

AN: Well, the way it was presented in Marxism, I wouldn't trust it anyway; I mean it was just.. and it was all there, like there was three pages of scientific research. And I didn't believe it.

(end tape:758)