

LJH22 19.6.1989

Lauren

Q. ... Okay, well one of the main things that we're interested in talking about and finding out about from young women is how they feel and what they think about their relationships, and so can I ask you which - what is the most important thing about relationships to you, and which is the most important relationship that you have at the moment?

A. I think I have one special relationship really, because people I'm close to I'm close to in lots of different ways. Like with my mum we have a really sort of unique relationship, well how I see it, it's not - it's more sisterly than it is mother to daughter. And with LISA we're very close, I'm also close to another friend and my boyfriend. I know it's not - it's not who's more special or anything, it's just each relationship has its special value. And I don't count one better than the other really, obviously you're closer to a certain group of people or one person, but I don't think I feel that one person's particularly special to me rather than the others, I just value them all independently in their own way.

Q. Yeah.

A. 'Cos obviously they're not the same, each relationship you have.

Q. What about the relationship with your boyfriend, how long has that been going on?

A. Eight and a half months.

Q. ...

A. Well I met him here and I knew some of his friends before, you know, just from parties and whatever, and - I don't know, I think in a way we're fairly young to be having such a mature relationship, I mean eight and a half months we've been together, we're going away together in the summer, but I know we're friends as well as boyfriend and girlfriend because we were friends before we met, I mean before we went out together, and I consider that relationship to be special because, like the other people I've been out with I've just sort of thought, oh this is boring, I might as well go out with them, you know, a sort of lack of enthusiasm, and they were pretty wet people anyway, or to me they were, and - I don't know, with MARK it just sort of happened, it's really weird, and it's really nice as well. Because we go to the same college and whatever, it's not like just seeing someone just at the weekend where you get all dressed up and put a great amount of emphasis on, you know, that one evening or whatever; 'cos I see him a lot, we see each other in - with friends, without friends, in lots of varying moods, so you get to know each other really well. And you take, you know, the bad with the good and whatever. No - as boyfriends go, he's definitely the closest I've ever been to anyone, he knows me very well, which I don't think any of my other boyfriends ever have, it's just been sort of the usual flirting and... get dressed up and not very much really.

Q. This relationship includes a sexual relationship, does it?

A. Yeah.

Q. And is that the first one that has, or -

A. No, I mean I was - when I was, I think, fourteen, I was really really stupid because - me and my friend went away on holiday with her family on a huge campsite, you know really English away from home, and we met this group of boys who were about two years older than us, and she was thirteen, I was fourteen; it was complete infatuation, you know, like amazement these people like us or whatever, and I slept with this boy

then. I just didn't feel anything, I didn't think oh it's really... or whatever, I just sort of thought, oh great, and I sort of felt - I wasn't very happy about it afterwards, I mean he didn't force me or anything, you know, he said and I agreed, but afterwards I sort of felt dirty, I think partly because I was so young and I was infatuated with this person and he turned out to be just so ordinary, you know, you build up this image in your mind. I think that was a really stupid thing to do, just to get so wrapped up in someone that you'll do anything for them because it doesn't help either way, and I got home and I never spoke to him or anything ever again, and I sort of... six months later... I thought oh, I was so stupid. It wasn't thought out, it wasn't even a relationship with nothing valuable, you know, if you really care about someone and you sleep with them and it doesn't work, you don't feel worried about it, you can sort it out, because there was no closeness or anything. It was really weird. But it was quite educational at the time really, you know, you sort of learn from these silly things.

Q. Did you use any contraception?

A. No. What a stupid thing.

Q. You - you weren't worried about it or - you didn't think of it?

A. No, I did think of it. But - you've probably heard this so many times before, I felt too embarrassed. I mean partly because I mean I was so young, for some reason at that age you think oh, it won't happen to me. I mean, you know, of course it might, you know, ... in any way special kind of thing. No, but I wasn't particularly worried because it happened straight after my period or straight before or something, and I thought, well if something happens then I'm gonna have to sort it out, you know, it's my fault. But it turned out to be okay.

Q. Mm. Was it just the one event or did you -

A. Oh, only once, yeah.

Q. What about the other relationships in between, since then?

A. Well they were just really sort of fringe relationships and it was - I don't know, with them it was all so sort of open, do you know what I mean, there's nothing like hidden away that's special just between you and your boyfriend or anything, it's all, you know his friends know everything about you and your friends are going, ah, what d'you do at the weekend and whatever, and there's - there's nothing private so you don't feel particularly linked to that person or anything special for them. And because the people I went out with were so sort of drippy, I mean they really were -

Q. Did you think that at the time or -

A. Not when I first started going out with them, I thought oh this is good for a novelty and then a week later I'd be going (?yawn), why am I going out with this person, but in the usual way you say, oh, I'll plod on, you know. That was also really educational 'cos it - it taught me that, however complicated I am, it shouldn't mean that I should compromise and go out with someone who's weak who I think will, like, accommodate my needs and whatever, and I learned that - that isn't true at all, you have to be attracted to someone because of their personality and - I don't know, all sort of little bits and pieces, you have to be fairly fussy, and I learnt from that.

Q. Did you feel that you were the one who was in control in those relationships?

A. Oh, yeah. I mean at first like - some of the people used to say, oh you're so nice and so gorgeous, you look so nice all the time, and at first I thought oh, my God, it's so amazing, and then after a while it meant nothing. Like, yeah, you see this, but what am I

really like, you know, who cares, you don't care, and I was very much in control, it was always me saying oh, goodbye, sort of thing. And I always sort of felt sort of slightly idolised by some of these boys because they were - I never sort of - most of them went to public school, and they were just looking for someone to hang off their arm and something to talk about, do you know what I mean?

Q. Yeah.

A. Well, that's the impression I got anyway.

Q. Yeah.

A. And I just sort of got fed up with like the same relationship over and over again.

Q. ... too hot... Yeah. So where were you meeting them?

A. Hampstead... ultra trendy places, all full of exactly the same people... I don't know, they - in Highgate, and just because I was close with LISA, and she lives in Highgate boys' school, so she knew a lot of people anyway, and - at first she was introducing me to them and then I'd sort of go off with them or get to know them better, and then I'd get introduced through them, you know, sort of cycle really. But LISA knew a lot of people and a lot of people who were really really shitty too, and that sort of gave me a bad impression of them as well. 'Cos - her living in a [REDACTED] is pretty difficult anyway.

Q. ...

A. And I don't know, it was just sort of really annoying seeing that, having -

Q. Mm. You got it.

A. And so I got really protective over her and, you know, started fighting her fights for her, which I think is a pretty bad idea, but she just - I think it gave her time to breathe and sit back from it... And so generally it was like conquering in the end, like we'd go out and we'd just laugh at all these people who really sort of always said, you know, I care about you so much, but when it came down to it they really didn't give a shit, and especially to LISA, a lot of people really weren't very nice, or they were all sort of really sweet but only when it suited them, you know. But no - I don't know, it was real - we learnt a lot, but -

Q. How did it affect your relationship with them, I mean that kind of experience?

A. I think it made me realise that you have to sort of give a lot to get a lot, do you see what I mean? - that you can't just expect someone to turn up on your doorstep and say well, I love you, whatever, you have to work at it, and also you have to find someone who fits with your personality. I know I'm fairly complicated when it comes down to relationships, and I've also learnt that, and I think - with MARK, because he's so different from anyone else I've ever been out with, I sort of mentally gave him a chance, whereas if he'd been - had any of the characteristics of the other people I went out with I would have immediately have said in my mind, no, thanks. But because he's so different to them we both sort of gave each other a chance and it's worked out really well, I'm really glad.

Q. And what about the sexual relationship, did that work out alright?

A. Yeah. Because I mean we - at first we were using condoms and then one split and... and I was thinking about going on the pill anyway 'cos I wasn't really too happy about using condoms, I don't know, they really don't appear to me as being particularly safe, and he sort of plonked me on the pill, and he was so sweet about that, I was absolutely amazed, I mean he was... so he put me on the morning after pill, wonderful, on Christmas Eve, absolutely amazingly good, and he was really really lovely. I mean I was

actually quite surprised because some of my friends, not necessarily boyfriends but male friends from Highgate, I've heard them say on numerous - various times that if their girlfriend got pregnant they'd assume for her to have an abortion immediately. Me and LISA sort of began to think about it, it's disgusting, you know,... that mentality, if there's any way that was my sort of - that's how I thought that quite a lot of men felt, about pregnancies or whatever - but I mean MARK was just so sweet, he was really really lovely. And he was really supportive as well, he sort of said, right come on, off we go, we're going, you know, I don't care what you say. We went and then it was just really nice, the people there were really nice too. So it was alright but - it probably would be - I probably would have felt a lot more different about it if it had been someone else with less sort of common sense, you know. I think a lot of men would have come round and said, oh, just forget it, you know, you're alright, they assume that just because he says you're not gonna get pregnant you're not, or whatever. MARK was really really sweet and it really took me aback at first, sort of thought, wow, it's amazing. And I think that's why it's so good, because we're friends as well, we don't have to be wrapped around each other all the time. And he's really - I don't know, he knows me well enough now, like if I'm in a bad mood he knows what to do to get me out of it, and you know, you sort of learn, it's really nice, you learn how to sort of complement each other and help each other out, as a friend would, you know, someone who really cares about you and you care about them... the same thing. Whereas I think with other boyfriends, I think LISA found this as well, is that they like you when you're sweet and you're beautiful and, you know, whatever, you've got a new outfit on or whatever, whatever reason, but as soon as you feel depressed or down in the dumps or - I don't know, you've got a sudden rush of acne or something, they just don't want to know. It's really, sort of, pick and choose relationships, whereas with MARK I feel that he's really consistent - well, luckily, not sort of boring. Because I went out with one boy for, what, five months, and in the end he was just so boring, just so shallow, and MARK isn't, which is really nice.

Q. ... a more interesting sort of person.

A. Yeah. I think he's more mature as well. Because my parents split up a year ago, and his about seven years ago, and he's got a sister who's only about two years - two years younger than him, and his mum, so he's been brought up in a pretty female environment anyway, so he's fairly sensitive to - knows sort of the sort of ins and outs and petty little things, but it's really nice because he's quite knowledgeable, you don't feel like you have to patronise him, to tell him things. You know, some people you sort of have to... but he already knows everything, it's really sweet. And he's always prepared to listen as well, which a lot of people aren't, sort of sit there, and I don't know, he will just talk about really petty little things, you know, make you feel better or whatever, but a lot of people won't...

Q. Well he sounds quite satisfactory as you describe him.

A. Yeah.

Q. But - but can I ask you again about the sexual relationship, I mean it's good in the sense that he's understanding and supportive, is it good in the sense of giving pleasure, satisfaction, those sort of things?

A. Yeah. Because I don't think either of us dominate the relationship generally, so if I get into bed and think I'm going to sleep tonight, you know, goodnight sort of thing, then alright he may be a bit sort of pissed off but - fine, and the other way, well, that's fine,

and I think we sort of - I don't know, he was fairly nervous at first, I think because he was quite shocked about how close he was to me, and I just really enjoyed it so it didn't bother me at all, and then like he was the first... slept with, he was so nervous, it took - it took a little while for that to pass; no, I really enjoy having sex with him. I know it sort of - supports how I feel about him for some reason. It - it's not even actually having sex with him, it's like sometimes it's just being that close and not having to say anything or, you know, just - I don't know, lots of physical contact which is really nice. 'Cos like some boys are really sort of stand-offish about it, especially like... friends... absolutely love it 'cos it's like really exhibitionist, but - I don't know, I don't feel that, like, I have to be standing next to him all the time, but like when we're on our own it's just - everything's really spontaneous, nothing's planned, which I think going out with someone who's so stereotyped, even how your evening goes, like kissing goodnight on the doorstep sort of thing, once you've gone through that, if it's spontaneous I think it's really healthy.

Q. Mm. One of the things that's been going round in connection with the AIDS scare, the idea of safe sex, what - what would you - what do you describe as safe sex?

A. Well if you don't - if you don't know someone, or you don't know their sexual background, ... use a condom, and if you do know them, and say you're both virgins or something, then using a reliable form of contraception. But condoms I think, with anyone you've got the slightest doubt about, even then if you're still not sure, definitely use a condom.

Q. Mm. When you were talking about the sort of physical closeness that you have with MARK, I was wondering whether - I mean when you think of sex what do you think of, what - what does sex mean to you?

A. I know - it means a number of things, I mean sometimes it's really sort of genital and - I don't know, sort of emotional more than physical, and then sometimes it's like selfish sex and you're just like lying in bed with this person just for your own satisfaction, which is sort of fairly normal. It varies, you know, with love, just depending what mood you're in and all sorts of things.

Q. I was wondering about sort of non-penetrative sex, I mean does sex always include the idea of penetration for you?

A. No, not necessarily. It's just whatever happens. It's just, sort of, whatever happens, you know. It's the only way I can put it.

Q. Yeah.

A. It's really weird. I mean it's like foreplay and then sex and then goodnight sort of thing, it doesn't have to be like that, it can only just be a kiss and a cuddle goodnight, or it can be full sex, or whatever. And anything in between, I don't think it should be like set things that you do.

Q. Yeah.

A. And it's also so personal, that whatever you've done, you know, however many other people that you've slept with, it's not gonna be the same I'm sure, because like something as personal as that, just between two people - well I hope - no, you - you can't predict it at all, so -

Q. Mm, it's something very specific to the two of you.

A. Yeah, and also learning what each other likes, and how you feel comfortable, and, you know, if you don't like something you - you say or - I don't know - it's just, it's just

part of the learning process where you learn about each other and being close and everything...

Q. Are there things that you don't like in terms of sexual activity?

A. It changes. It really does. Sometimes if I'm feeling really sort of vulnerable, just being held is just nice, I don't want anything else, you know, I just feel like lying there and enjoying being with him, but no, it's really sort of changeable, I don't know, generally it's alright. It's really really - it's really closely connected with my mood... I mean say like we have an argument, then we go to bed, we might each be fairly violent to each other, we will be aggressive but not nasty but... and other times we like being gentle really. It really - it's so close to moods, I mean it's really weird.

Q. Yeah, yeah.

A. I didn't notice it at first but...

Q. Do you envisage this relationship continuing?

A. In the immediate future, yes. And even if we did split up at the end of A-levels or before, I can't really see us losing touch - well not within, like, the foreseeable future, if you see what I mean, at university or whatever, and I think that's because we're too close, once you've got over the bitter stage... admit your error... I think we've gone past that, I think our relationship is too mature for petty things and if we broke up it would be on our own terms. And neither of us are particularly spiteful - I mean, alright, in an argument we'll say a load of things that we don't mean, but you always know you'll come back and say oh I'm sorry, I didn't mean that and whatever. And we both know that, so there'd be no reason to sort of start up unnecessary bitching or whatever. No, I would really like it to continue, it's very mature, it's just that the circumstance, like whether we take a year off after A-levels or whether we go to university or to art school or whatever - anyway that's quite nice but then it's really intimidating to think about. You just don't know what's gonna happen. Just as well.

Q. Mm, yeah. So would that - that's your plan, is it, to go on to art school do you think?

A. Well, I mean I've already got an art A-level and I'm doing English and art now, so I'll sort of hopefully have two art A-levels. I either want to take a year off and travel, especially in Europe, so I knew Europe fairly well, or just go straight into art school and get a degree in graphic design or graphics generally. I don't know really.

Q. That sounds fairly clear. What sort of thing do you hope to do in work, be a graphic designer?

A. Yeah, or something along - along those lines, I mean something like photography or that side of art, not sort of sitting down and painting sort of bowls of fruit or anything but the more sort of realistic side, advertising or interior design or something along those lines. But I haven't decided specifically yet, I think it's far too early,... sort of looking round at art colleges and see...

Q. You said that your parents split up - was it a couple of years ago?

A. No, a year ago. Yeah, just after I was sixteen.

Q. That must have been difficult.

A. I don't know, it was - it was really - when it happens to someone else you can picture it all, you can say yes, she was upset... two months, whatever; when it comes to yourself everything's just so jumbled up and you think why isn't my life as simple as everyone else's. But I don't know, it was really weird, because things had never really been right - I don't know, it was my - my dad's, like, a [DEATH CARE INDUSTRY], and

he'd come home and be in an absolutely foul mood, you know, I mean like [JOB DETAILS REDACTED] and what have you and all this, very upsetting, but he used to never mention it ever, and he'd really separate himself from it and he'd go - go to the pub or go betting or something and mum would say, come and talk to me or whatever. We always seemed to be broke, which really strained everything, and we'd move into these big houses, do them up and then sell them sort of the next day, you know, the only reason we'd finish the house off was 'cos we were selling it, which was pretty depressing but - and then the Christmas before they split up mum just decided that she couldn't take it anymore, I mean he - I'd been on so many holidays alone with mum, with some friends or whatever, and although he was living with us it really didn't seem like he was really there. So mum said, right, well, there's no point, you know, you're upsetting me, I'm upsetting you, we don't seem to get anywhere, so they decided to split up. I've got a younger sister who was seven then, or coming up to seven... oh yeah, and I went away on a skiing trip, it was before my GCSEs, and I was at school and LISA went as well, and I came back and mum or dad was supposed to meet me from the school, it was just mum and SALLY, and he was like in the pub or something, typical, you know... this happened. Like he'd always take me to like my riding lessons and pick me up late 'cos he'd been in the pub or betting or whatever, and mum just said I'm sorry, but your father's moving out this weekend. So mum actually went away with LISA, I think just 'cos she couldn't take it, I mean, and I said I wanted to stay, because at the time I felt very guilty about leaving dad on his own, God knows why now, when I look back at it I was really stupid, but I don't know, just that week - I mean I grew up so quickly, really really quickly, and he - he was - would always like go out for meals 'cos neither of us could cook, and he'd just sit there crying in the restaurant. God, I mean what do you say, it was really difficult, and I just sort of - LISA was brilliant then, I mean she was just so sweet. We had a student living with us, 'cos we had like a fairly large house, and she like came home one night and said, oh I'm sorry, your father's moved out... sometime during the week, and I sort of went - and LISA took over and sorted it all out, which - I mean she was absolutely marvelous,... and my other friend EMMA as well, 'cos her parents split up. And my mum came back and we moved out of this beautiful big old Edwardian house, absolutely beautiful... worth a fair amount of money, and like moved into a purpose-built flat where we still live, absolutely tiny, and - the only problem at the moment is lack of space because we're - we're all so used to having so much space and now we're suddenly confined to like low ceilings and, like, real sort of cell rooms.

Q. Yeah.

A. But I mean the only thing I really remember about my parents splitting was that like I took a fairly adult role. I mean like dad moved out, he took a grotty sort of attic room in this woman's house he used to play tennis with, 'cos she was a widow or something, and I, like, used to see old men walking down the street and think, oh my God, my dad's gonna be like that, so I - I, you know, see him as much as possible, it's not that I enjoy seeing him... (interruption)

Q. ... one day last week...

A. Oh, yeah, I took over a really adult role which I didn't realise until afterwards, pushed my dad along and made sure I'd see him, and took my sister along and sort of catered to her and her friends, not that my mum never did any of it, but I took a lot more on than I should of, and I was also really worried about mum 'cos she lost a lot of weight and

looked really pale and... and she was obviously really upset by it as it was, and dad sort of coming round being really pathetic, you know, my darling children and, you know, really rubbing salt into the wound, and I just couldn't stand there and watch it happen. I just sort of - so pathetic, you're supposed to be two mature adults and here you are bickering; I mean I once had an argument with my dad for a week about whether I had time to drink a cup of tea... I mean every supper would be an argument, you know, over anything, and ... oh great he's left. In the end I felt worse for a couple of months and preoccupied myself with doing loads and loads of work and going out a lot, and being, like, too social. And I never really realised this until about - I don't know, six months after dad left - now he's gone and met this woman... get on with, and like they've bought this chalet in EUROPEAN COUNTRY, they've bought this big old family house, and like we're the ones - three of us living in a flat, a tiny flat, I mean it's not big, and him living in a family house with this woman and her mother, and they've spent an absolutely huge amount of money doing it up, and it's not far from us, but it's really stupid. I mean he comes round and talks about really aimless things and spends all this money and then turns round to mum and says, oh I'm sorry, I can't give you your maintenance because I'm hard up. It's alright for him, he'd just got back from EUROPEAN COUNTRY, from this place they bought, and, like, SALLY asked for some money yesterday, he said no. And it's just really unreasonable, it's inhumane, that he's going on and on and on playing the real martyr... children anymore and I'm on my own, but it's absolute rubbish because he chooses not to see my sister, I mean he - I don't know, he really puts time, time that you know... see her... time... comes round and plays the hard-done-by father and then goes off and goes out for drinks and... you know, it's just so trivial and boring and it really gets mum so angry -

Q. Mm.

A. - and then that makes me angry with her, 'cos - you're strong and you can do it, you've done - got over the worst of it, come on, sort of, hounding her, and she says leave me alone... SALLY sort of - he absolutely spoils her for about three hours and then she comes back to us where we set down discipline, you know, you have to... a child's gonna be upset for about half a year afterwards, I mean that's how it was with SALLY, and alright, you get the "I hate you, I want to live with daddy", which of course she didn't but - and she really picks on mum and it really gets to her; and then SALLY comes back to us and wonders why she's told off for things that she's allowed to do at dad's. And he just sees her when - it's not whether it's convenient for me or mum or SALLY, it's all an occasion for him, it's so easy for him just to pick up the phone and "I might as well see SALLY today". And my relationship with him - he thinks what a brilliant relation... that's only because I sort of pretend that I'm all sweet and innocent and talk about things he wants to talk about, because when I was younger I sort of tried to revolutionise him and, you know, change and all this... forty-five, he's not gonna change now, and it took me a long time to realise that so now I just - I don't know, every time I see him I get a little bit more blunt and nearer to how I feel, but it will take time. I have so many bad memories of him as well which sort of is still really vivid in my mind so I can't just suddenly turn sweet and nice and... that's the way I feel because I don't feel like that, I feel really angry towards him... I don't know, it's sort of really confusing.

Q. And still fairly recent as well... sorted out.

A. Yeah, I suppose so, it doesn't feel recent, I don't, like, feel bereaved or anything, you know, though quite a few people do. I don't feel I've lost anything, which sounds really sad 'cos I should be feeling, you know, oh, my God, my dad isn't here anymore. But I think the reason for that is that mum told me absolutely everything that was going on when they were splitting up, so I saw I had a role, you know, I thought I was part of it, I was helping mum, and she was just so good, she really treated me like an adult and I haven't - it was really good because before then I'd always been so shy and, well not shy, but never really shown myself, and because mum needed me, I wouldn't say relied on me, but needed me, it made me grow up. I - I can talk to her about absolutely anything and I mean, she's a bit of a do very much as I do person, but I don't know, it's really sort of sisterly. I really enjoy our relationship. And also the relationship with my sister has improved because when my mum's not there, she's got a sort of boyfriend, SALLY knows that she has to listen to me. Now if mum wasn't there, dad would have been there, do you see what I mean, so she never had to listen to me before or do anything I said. But sometimes SALLY goes... got three kids of his own anyway so it's not as if he doesn't understand... whatever... But I think seeing her boyfriend makes mum really happy, I mean I, you know, I sort of - she says can you look after SALLY tonight or shall I phone... not doing anything, I'm perfectly happy doing it. I don't feel begrudged, I don't think, you should be with dad. I mean, I think SALLY does 'cos she's not old enough to really understand. But I'm not bitter towards her, I think 'cos she's always been there, whereas dad hasn't, you know, it's always been her who I ran to if I fell over or her who if I argued with someone I told her, or her who I screamed at when I got annoyed, you know, it's the good and the bad all in one, sort of help each other along. But it sounds as if things are - I mean they are improving... working. And 'course, 'cos we might be moving to a flat, slightly bigger, sort of a converted house, so we sort of have some fireplaces and, you know, cornicing or whatever, and I think that'll help because we're where we are now was never really permanent, it was just sort of waiting ground, just wait for the dust to settle and then we'll move on. And we're all pleased about that so it's not as though anyone's being dragged along. I think it'll improve even more when we move... sorted out.

Q. Can I track onto a different track entirely now and ask you about - some of the purpose of this study which is about AIDS and sex education and so forth, which is to ask you what you think of the sex education that you've had at school - it wasn't here, was it, you were -

A. No, I was at ... comprehensive. I think it was alright for people like me who had parents who aren't embarrassed to say right, is there anything you want to know, or this, this and this happens... but I think like a lot of the girls in my school were Muslim and whatever and obviously they were really highly disciplined at home, and really knew absolutely - had absolutely no social awareness at all, I mean that includes sex education, everything. I think for them it was really difficult but because me and my friends all sort of learnt together beforehand anyway, you know you sort of - I don't know how we learnt, just sort of pick up bits of information along the way. I thought the sex education was pretty average, I wouldn't say it was anything special. The only reason I say that is because I think it would have been worse but we had a really really good teacher, we had one really really good woman, she was really sweet and she was just about to have a baby and everything and like she sort of - "I'm going to blush now but

I'm going to tell you this", you know, she sort of - you know, like a human, not like drawing all these diagrams on the board and being completely detached, you could like associate. And we had this - this other bloke who - he had a really hard time, he was like really young and it was a single sex girls' school, and he - in the end he just announced to the class that he was gay, and it was - I don't know, it was just really sweet, he was ever such a nice man, and - I don't know, those sort of personal experiences sort of improve, I think - you sort of trust the teacher more, you have more respect for them so whatever they say, you obviously pay more attention to it. I think the sex education was pretty text-book, nothing, you know just how babies are made... you know, I mean they'd do all the sort of regular things like periods and abortion and - it was all sort of done in such a text-book way,... text-book and this is it. And also - what, we must have been fourteen when they taught us, I mean at fourteen a lot of people are already going out with boys and whatever, and for some people it might be too late. I mean if you don't have any education out of school then how the hell are you supposed to know? Luckily, we all did but other girls in the school obviously didn't.

Q. So you think it should be sooner and less technical.

A. Mm, I do. And then they hardly said a word, I mean I - I wouldn't say never because it was a long time ago, but they didn't say anything about homosexuality - I think they might have mentioned it because the teacher wanted to, not because it was set, so it was the teacher who was... wouldn't have mentioned it at all. They never mentioned anything about that, they didn't mention anything about AIDS 'cos there wasn't really any awareness about it then... and, I don't know -

Q. Masturbation, did they mention masturbation, it's one of the things we put on the list -

A. I can't remember. I think they - yeah, I think they did, I'm not sure. But nothing was really made a big point of, that's why I can't really remember, you know, nothing was emphasised which - I don't know whether it's good or bad, I don't know whether I'd be any different if I'd learned all my sex education at school and from nowhere else. That's appalling if you do, but a lot of people are in that situation so there should be, you know, people - people should be taught it at school and everything about sex. We weren't taught very much about like venereal disease or anything. It was just sort of the nice things, you know the nasty bits were left to like television programmes and family planning clinics. And (?) rape and then it's sometimes too late.

Q. Yeah. Well the other thing I was gonna ask you about was when - when you first heard about AIDS... didn't do anything about it at school. Can you remember?

A. It was brought up at school but not while they were actually doing set sex education at school, it was brought up in a discussion and the whole class joined in, the teacher and whatever. Probably just after... or during or definitely not before, it was on the television and posters and leaflets - I think some people saw there was some leaflets, but they were really only just touching the subject. Everything - everything was put so nicely, I mean AIDS is appalling, why not say so, you know, and then suddenly there's television programmes which bare everything, you think, my God. I don't know, with AIDS, I don't think - I mean it was mentioned, I remember it being mentioned, but it wasn't like syllabus, it wasn't that they were told to tell us, and also - I don't think I learnt very much about AIDS from the television programmes either. They may tell you that you must use a condom and this is how you use one, otherwise what you'll die - you

know, you'll catch AIDS and die in the not too distant future, I mean it doesn't really tell you very much, and even now I don't think I'm particularly well educated about it.

Q. Mm. What do you - what do you know about it, I mean what do you think of it as being?

A. Well it's transmitted through the bloodstream, intravenous drug use, sex and you - you can't get it from drinking from the same glass or something, it's - it's not that infectious. And being promiscuous is terrible... you know, in terms of AIDS. And you develop the virus I think, which - does it then turn into full-blown AIDS? - the virus you get first, anti-deficient, anti-immune, whatever -

Q. Immune deficient virus, H - human immune deficiency virus.

A. Yeah.

Q. That can lie dormant for quite a number of years... the AIDS develops quite late.

A. Yeah, my friend was saying that she knew two people who have actually got the virus but don't feel any different or anything, they've just been told, you know... sort of... a bit upset 'cos I mean... injecting drugs... but apart from that, it's just a question of time.

Q. Yeah, yeah. What did you think about the original presentation of the ideas about it - I mean the idea that it's a gay plague, did you - did you come across that or -

A. I thought at first it was, because I was so naive, you know, about it - at first I thought, not that it was only gay people and drug users who caught AIDS but I thought it was much more frequent in those sort of groups than in heterosexual couples or whatever. But obviously if -

Q. ...

A. No, but if you think it's you that doesn't mean that you've got absolutely no risk, which, that is the idea I got, sort of they've got it, I haven't, I'm safe... a bit thick perhaps. But then I mean like there - there was some really good advertising, like that advert with a grave or graves and rocks or something, I thought that was really... because it was done really - in a really trendy sort of way that caught your eye and - I don't know, even now I remember it, which shows it worked, you know. And like the AIDS adverts in magazines, girls' magazines or teenage magazines or whatever, it was a really good idea but I think someone somewhere needs to do a complete documentary on it and make it like a subject of curiosity if you see what I mean. So that I mean - I quite enjoy watching documentaries in the news and whatever, and I think anyone with enough intelligence to care about what happens to them and the people they care about, you know - I don't know, I think someone should just set out the facts 'cos I mean there were so many programmes, and alright, they might have been saying the same things, but if you're not enthusiastic about it you don't pay that much attention. I don't know -

Q. You think it's the facts that are missing really, I mean people need to know the facts more?

A. Well, there was like six months of continuous AIDS, AIDS, AIDS, AIDS, all you ever heard, so you immediately switch off to it, and now there's nothing, people are really sort of, hey AIDS, I remember that, is it still around? People need to be, you know, keep on reminding them, and themselves, and - I don't know, it just...

Q. Mm, I think you're probably right, they need another push on it really. They've got this campaign at the moment, they have one where they have the very beautiful young woman, saying she could have - this young woman has HIV, in five years' time she

could look like the picture over the page - turn over the page, she looks exactly the same -

A. - the same -

Q. - sort of thing. And they have one with a young man as well.

A. Oh, right.

Q. But slightly different, then they're sort of pointing - here are the signs of HIV infection, and he looks absolutely perfect -

A. Yeah.

Q. You wouldn't be able to tell at all. So there are, I mean they are trying to warn the sort of heterosexual population.

A. Yeah, but do you think it's really enough. I mean, you know, as well it says... when it all first comes out, oh, we care, you know, we're taking you into the nineties or whatever... but as soon as it's quietened down you don't give a shit, or that's how it appears to me, and I think there's quite a lot of other people as well, and as soon as anyone starts talking again you make another expensive effort. Alright, it may do its job but it's not enough on its own, it needs a support...

Q. Do you think that your friends are worried much about it, do you think that -

A. I don't think "worried" is the word, I think people are sort of aware and concerned, but then again, it's lack of education or communication or whatever that has sort of brought - I mean I don't think really a lot of people's attitudes have changed, a lot of people still... whatever, but I mean people who are socially aware have made changes or have said, right, this is what I can and can't do. No, I think a lot of my friends are aware of it but - I think the girls are more concerned. Isn't it more easier during, in heterosexual sex for women to get it rather than men?

Q. I think it -

A. - than a woman to give it to a man.

Q. Yeah, I think it's slightly - there is - there - some of the research indicates that it's more difficult...

A. ... useful facts like that that make a difference, it's just the whole idea of it, whereas I think men are more likely to be promiscuous anyway, because of like the image, I mean a man who sleeps around is by some people called like a stud or, you know, a macho person, and a girl who does it is a complete slut or a slag, so I think social rules like that - I mean, mean that your activity - I don't know really. Yeah, I think - I think there's an awareness about it but I don't think it's enough at all.

Q. Mm. Would you be worried about it, I mean I realise that you're in a steady relationship at the moment, but would you be worried about it in the future?

A. Oh, yeah.

Q. ...

A. It would - it would cross my mind a lot and if I thought it necessary then I would do something about it. And I would - if I met someone that I didn't know their sexual background, or whether they'd been injecting or whatever, I mean you just don't know, there might be other ways of catching it that no one knows.

Q. Yeah, they do seem to move the goal posts quite frequently, the new things they're finding out about it.

A. Like breathing in twice in a second... I mean you know, it's really silly. No, but I - I wouldn't like be over-concerned and make a big thing of it, I mean 'cos that's being

over-protective, I mean you might as well say why am I born 'cos I'll die, you know, it's - it can get sort of like a phobia sort of thing, why do I get up in the morning when I've got to go to bed, I mean - silly, but - no, I think I would - I'd be concerned about it, I don't know, do some research or whatever, or just talk about it, and if I thought... then I'd do whatever it takes but - I think a lot of people are going a little overboard about it. I think that's just because no one really knows exactly what - what are the implications or -

Q. What's at stake really, yeah. Thinking about risky - risky types of behaviour, do you think that you engage in any risky behaviour, not necessarily in terms of your sexual life but in other areas of your life? Smoking -

A. Definitely. Especially while being on the pill. But I know that it's stupid and, you know, I've made plans - I know when I'm gonna give up as well, and I've set myself a date and MARK's giving up as well and it's, you know, all planned and whatever. I'm not saying that's an excuse... stupid. My mum also smokes, I'm trying to get her to give up. I don't drink a lot. So - I don't know, the idea of getting absolutely legless doesn't really appeal to me unless I'm in a particularly mad mood, but I mean, you know, it's all - it's not like every weekend. I don't drink much anyway. Apart from that, no, really.

Q. Drugs - what about friends, do any of your friends take drugs?

A. Well, I mean, like, we all occasionally smoke dope, I mean, but it's not as harmful as smoking cigarettes really unless you get so stoned out of your head that you go and fall off a bridge, but, you know, I mean that can happen if you're drunk. But I don't think any of the people who I go around with ever consider injecting, or snorting cocaine, or whatever. I mean dope's nice because - it's like getting drunk, you don't have a hangover and it - it's like smoking but it's nicer and whatever. Well, no, apart from that, I don't think so. I think at our age people are beginning to learn to have fun but - not be sensible and sit there sort of doing nothing, you know, being really sort of conservative about it all but - learning to have fun but still caring about actually what you're doing to yourself and other people. It's something I've noticed, I mean I've been to the pub with people who've just been like on the floor absolutely legless and driven their cars up trees, you know, whereas now people are beginning to think, drink and drive, no, all these sort of slogans are going around, and you - it does, if someone points it out or, I don't know, if some advert appears, it does make you think, and hopefully feel better.

Q. One of the things I was thinking was that sometimes I get the impression from young people that there's a slight - there's a slight thrill attached in doing things that are forbidden or, you know -

A. Oh, yeah, I think so, I think that's why, you know, smoking dope is an attraction. But I think if you're that sort of rebell- - well not rebellious but you're attracted to it that much, then I think it's particularly - not mature but I don't - it... - if you do it that often and to a great extent, like you, I don't know, you go... school buildings... your school and you think it's great, then I think there's obviously something missing. But I - no, I can understand it getting... lessons, or telling my mum to shut up, and I'm not coming home tonight, and, you know - it makes you think that you're more adult and you've got more power, which is I mean - it's just you want your independence now, not in four years or whatever. I think everyone gets a thrill out of doing things they're not supposed to do but only to a little extent, not going overboard about it.

Q. Not excessive. Yeah.

A. Yeah. You've got to be sort of -

Q. Yeah.

A. - within limits and whatever. I think people should enjoy themselves but not, you know, sort of hurt themselves or anyone else, and just sort of keep it to an extent that they know that they can control. 'Cos otherwise once it goes out of your control...

Q. And do you think that the sort of friends that you have, the friends that you have, go along with your views about it or do you think any of them are risk-takers?

A. I think if someone has like a - one of my friends started taking poppers... nitrate, something like that, and she took it just 'cos she thought you breathed it in and it made you laugh for a couple of minutes and that's it, but 'course if you drink when you're taking them, they can give you kidney failure there and then... kills an enormous amount of brain cells every time or whatever, and it's bad and - and me and MARK both said, you're really thick... I mean, what can happen, we told her, and she stopped. I think the reason people do do these stupid things when they appear to be incredibly intelligent is just through naivety and not knowing, innocently as well, whereas a lot of people think oh, she's just on the (?) sly, you know, the quiet ones you never know, or whatever. I think usually it's really innocent. No, I don't think anyone really takes unnecessary risks, I think some people are a bit stupid sometimes, but who isn't, you know, I mean you - you don't know, it's like your own sort of limits or anything and... mistakes... you learn a lot. Sort of part of growing up really...

Q. Yeah. What about - let me ask you a question that some people have found is a bit difficult - what's your image of yourself?

A. What's my image of myself? Oh my God. In what - what - how I think -

Q. What do you think - well, I was gonna ask you as well what you think other people's image of you is, and if there's any difference between your own image of yourself -

A. Well, when I look at myself, I mean sort of..., I think I'm very complicated. I think I just put loads and loads of reasons, I mean you know it's... understand... I don't know. I think - I think I'm fairly attractive to a lot of people because I'm right in most situations, I never have such set rules, I mean also knowing LISA, I mean she like really opened up my eyes or whatever, just like sort of silly... boys or what - you know, all those sort of little experiences, I think I've learnt to adapt myself to whatever environment or situation I'm in. I think I can be sort of fairly bubbly and laughing and, you know, which is obviously attractive in someone, or I can just be in a terrible mood and no one wants to know me, I mean - very changeable really. I think I might be a bit of a curiosity to some people, I mean MARK said that when he first met me, first he thought I was a real bitch, 'cos like me and LISA were, I don't know, we were talking about this person, he thought oh my God, what a bitch or whatever, and then he thought I was really quiet and it sort of spurred him on to find out what I was really like. And I think anyone who's changeable, other people find them a curiosity, because if you see someone in more than a couple of moods, you think, what are they really like? I mean it's just natural. You want to find out. I think I'm quite caring, I mean I'm really really - I'm really protective over people I care about 'cos... worry about me... And if I'm close to someone I'm very close to them and if I think they're alright, then they're just alright, there's no in the middle, do you see what I mean, they're sort of fringe friends that are out there and... circle here... mean anything to me. I don't know, I think I must be about as nice and as horrible as everybody else, you know, sort of normal really. But I mean, I don't know. I think it's sort of a really difficult question to answer because you have to think about it for long -

Q. Yeah. Yeah, I do throw it at people. Some people haven't thought about it at all, you know.

A. No.

Q. No idea.

A. I think you sort of naturally think about it because you're always trying to figure yourself out and know yourself as much as other people.

Q. I know, it's complicated, it's like trying to compare it with what others' images are -

A. Yeah.

Q. A difficult question to get - to get to. Well I think I've come to the end of my questions. I've found it extremely interesting talking to you and thank you very much for doing so.

A. Yeah?

Q. Is there anything that you want to ask?

A. No, not really.

Q. One of the things I have been saying to people, I mean to find out more about AIDS and stuff, as you said... get it from leaflets and stuff like that, the libraries always have a lot, the local library...

A. ...

Q. Well you yourself feel that you're not at risk at the moment in the context -

A. Well I don't really have any reason actually to go into an in-depth research about it -

Q. Yes.

A. - so - but if I was in that situation, then I would. As simple as that really. Yeah, I think it's just... if you feel that concerned, then you will.

Q. Mm. The other thing I was gonna ask you as I mentioned before... we were asking people if they'd be interested in being interviewed again next year -

A. Yeah.

Q. - and whether they would keep a diary for us...

A. Yeah, okay. Well, what sort of a diary?

Q. Well it's really about your feelings about your relationships, and what you're actually doing, I mean some detail about what you're doing in your sexual relationships -

A. Every day?

Q. Every day for about two months. What do you think about that?

A. Okay.

Q. Yeah?

A. ... going away...

Q. Oh, right. Good. Well. Where are you gonna go?

A. ...

Q. Oh, nice.

A. Me and LISA and.... Should be interesting.

Q. Yeah...

A. No, I - no, it's just sort of 'cos we're gonna be so vulnerable out there for a start, I mean I've travelled enough to know that English men compared to some of the people out abroad are actually fairly tame and quiet, but you see, JANINE's never been away on her own so she's gonna dive in at the deep end and get a bit of a shock I think. It's only 'cos I'm quite worried about... worried about myself, I've travelled a fair amount on my own... It should be a laugh, yeah.

Q. Whereabouts in EUROPEAN COUNTRY 2 are you going?

A. I don't really know actually, it's a really Englishy beach, a sort of (?)sandy beach...

Q. Oh, yeah, I think I know where you mean. I went there -

A. - (?) very foreign.

Q. - a couple of years ago when there was that incredible heatwave.

A. Oh, yeah, and people were dying.

Q. Yeah. It was so hot. We thought it was pretty hot, 'cos we were staying in this villa and the kitchen was quite enclosed and cool, there was this little temperature thing, it was at thirty- three, about ninety-odd, when we got up in the morning.

A. Oh, my God.

Q. We just used to crawl down the beach and kind of lay on the water to try and stay cool. Seemed ridiculous. Okay, well what I will do is I'm gonna try to send out some diaries to people in a couple of – well, maybe next week.

A. Okay. Well, to my address -

Q. I've got it here.

A. Okay.

Q. Keep it for a couple of months. But I mean we're just gonna send little exercise books so if there's not enough pages just write more.

A. Yeah, sure.

Q. So thank you very much...