Oral history interview with Sue Sharpe for the Reanimating Data Project

**Linked audio file name: Sue Sharpe 18.02.20 3 COMPLETE**

Interview conducted 18th February 2020 in London.

Transcribed by Type out transcription services in March 2020 and edited by the interviewer in collaboration with the respondent.

Key:

**I: Interviewer – Ester McGeeney**

R: Respondent – Sue Sharpe

**I: The first thing I wanted to know is more about you and what you were doing in 1989 in terms of your career and you then became involved in WRAP.**

R: I was working on various things because I work freelance, which I’ve done since probably 1984ish or something like that. In 1989, as far as I can remember, I was doing a bit of work at the Middlesex Hospital just doing data analysis for someone who I knew who wanted a bit done and it gave me money. I was doing a bit of work with Sue Lees at North London Poly. Sue was a friend and I think we did this and that and I think there was a study on nurseries or the poly nursery. At the same time, I’d been writing books off my own back. They were commissioned by the publishers and not through funding from anywhere else. I did *Just Like a Girl* about girls growing up and I did *Double Identity* about working mothers, and I’d done *Falling for Love* a couple of years before which was about teenage mums.

**I: Using research or …**

R: Yeah, using interviews. It was all interviews.

**I: The publisher would commission you to do a book and then you’d go out and do some interviews and then use that?**

R: Yes.

**I: How nice.**

R: For the one on teenage mothers, it was Virago was setting up something called Virago Upstarts which were for teenagers. I interviewed lots of teenage mums from various parts of the country and wrote it up as a book.

**I: For young women?**

R: For young women.

**I: Nice.**

R: And then they gave me another one about girls and family life, so I was still doing that, or I might have started that in 1989, more or less ‘88 or ‘89.

**I: Did you keep the interviews? Do you still have them?**

R: Yes. We didn’t have the same sort of transcription them. I used to send my tapes which were cassette tapes to somebody in Kent, I think. She would transcribe them on the typewriter and send me back the tapes and the transcription. I’ve got them as hardcopy. I think I’ve got them as hardcopy anyway. Things are in the garage. Where do you store things if you haven’t got an office?

**I: Yeah.**

R: I mean an office like outside office.

**I: Yeah.**

R: I think I had a couple of other … because I did a book. (laughter) I was bit tardy on that, but I’d been commissioned to do a book on teenagers’ rights, young people’s rights, which eventually got done, and one on fathers and daughters which eventually got done into -

**I: And all in that same mode of you’d get commissioned and you’d interview and then you’d write.**

R: Yeah.

**I: How did you get into doing research?**

R: Into doing research? Well, I suppose the first research I did was for a PhD.

**I: Oh no, it’s not been recording. That’s terrible. Why does that happen when I’m with a researcher. Just carry on from where you are about how did you …**

R: I can repeat some if you like?

**I: Yeah, okay.**

R: Is it recording now?

**I: It’s definitely recording. It’s because I’d pressed pause and I hadn’t un-paused it, but it’s definitely recording now. I’m sorry.**

R: (Laughter) Which bit would you like -

**I: I think the question was what were you doing in 1989 and how did you get involved in WRAP.**

R: In 1989 I’d already done quite a lot of research of my own which I wrote up as books, which were commissioned by publishers and I did the research. I did one on girls growing up, one on working mothers and one on teenage mothers. It didn’t give me that much to live on, so I also had some part-time work at the Middlesex Hospital in the department of academic psychiatry just doing data analysis a couple of days a week. Then I had some work with Sue Lees at North London Poly, where we would do bits of research or I helped her with bits of research and some interviewing as well. I got at least another commission for a book that I hadn’t started and probably didn’t start for the next couple of years, which is what happened with books.

 How I got involved with WRAP was that the ESRC wanted to do a project on young people or young women, I don’t know if it was people or women, on AIDS and safe sex and things. Sue Lees asked me to be on her team because she was putting in a project, which I said I would. Janet and Caroline and Sue Scott were putting in a project as well. I think Janet seemed to think, she’d know more than me, that at some point there was a suggestion they might be combined, but it didn’t really gel or something. That wasn’t something I was involved with, I don’t think. It ended up that Janet and Caroline and Sue got the funding and then Janet asked me if I would be on their team. Of course, it was a very attractive proposition because it was about young women and feminism which, obviously, we were all kind of into doing things that had a feminist context and research. That’s how I got involved with WRAP.

**I: Was that all okay, the situation with Sue Lees? Did that cause tensions that there were two projects and then she wasn’t involved?**

R: No, not really. I don’t remember any particular tensions. She was always a good mate.

**I: How did you become a feminist researcher or a researcher who researched girls? Was that something that … were lots of people doing research with girls at that time? Were you unusual in any way?**

R: I don’t think I was that unusual because there were obviously people doing things earlier on like in seventies, which is when I started. The research for *Just Like a Girl* was originally on boys and girls and I got involved with the feminist movement and I chucked the boys out and just concentrated on girls, which I thought was more interesting. Then it evolved from there and through being involved in feminism. The publishers Penguin said do you want to do another book. I wanted to do one on working mothers because as far as I could see, it was kind of motherhood and not having facilities and attitudes towards mothers and everything that was preventing aspects of equality. I did loads and loads of interviews with working mothers to look at the importance for identity and everything, and then, like I said, there was the teenage mums. I suppose I was much more interested in working with girls and women at that point than I was with boys. I did eventually do one about boys.

**I: Why work as a freelancer and not as an academic researcher? Was that a conscious choice or decision?**

R: Yes. I’ve always hated teaching, so I never wanted to teach. I did a bit of teaching. I did a couple of supply terms and didn’t enjoy it, so I just wanted to do research and I didn’t particularly … I wasn’t ambitious in the sense of I never wanted to be a head of department or particularly direct anybody else. As long as I could keep freelance which meant that I didn’t go to so many committee meetings and things like that, which was one very good benefit, I managed to do it. I did it all the way through the projects. It was always freelance.

**I: That’s interesting. I often think that people think of freelancing as a new thing, a new pattern of work practices. But of course, it’s not. People have been doing that sort of work for years, haven’t they?**

R: Yeah. We managed all the projects I was on to put it through as a kind of consultancy, so the funding included a whole number of days paid at a certain amount and it always ended up you could quantify the dates up to a point, but in a way you ended up just doing the work. The work had to be done. You did it, but it somehow felt freer. It always felt free, if you know what I mean?

**I: Yeah, I do. I’m a freelancer as well so I feel the same.**

R: Yeah.

**I: It’s precarious, but it’s -**

R: Oh yes, it’s precarious and obviously you don’t get some of the benefits and things like that, but then a lot of contracts now are not very good, I don’t think.

**I: Yeah, exactly. You were employed as a freelancer to work on the WRAP project. What did you actually do in the WRAP project? You didn’t do any of the Manchester, it was all London-based for you was it?**

R: Yes. I did interviewing and … well, we had questionnaires first. Janet and I did the London-based one. Caroline did lots of writing but not interviewing, and because I was at that time living in Janet’s house, it made it very convenient because we could just work on things together. Obviously, you didn’t work on them all the time, but it made it easy to talk about things and whatever.

**I: Were you living there before WRAP started?**

R: Yes. I was there until ’91, I think it was.

**I: Okay.**

R: That made it quite easy to talk about things, we’d go out and we took questionnaires, which were the demographic background, and then divided up the interviews. We each did loads of interviews.

**I: Was it quite split because I know Sue and Rachel, Rachel did the majority of them and Sue did less, I think? With you and Janet, was it fairly evenly split?**

R: I think it was fairly evenly split. I couldn’t tell you numbers without going through. You’d probably be able to do that more than I can.

**I: I haven’t really looked at the London data yet. We started with the Manchester data and that’s all done. We’re just still in the process of anonymising the London data, so I’ve only read a little bit of it and I don’t know it as well. I got to the point where I could recognise Rachel and Sue’s voices almost immediately in the transcripts, but I haven’t read that much of London to know for you and Janet. What do you remember about how you recruited people or how you got access because you used the questionnaire also as an access tool? Do you remember much about how you did that?**

R: It was partly some schools to get 16 to 18 year olds. I can’t remember where else the exact … I know, because it’s one of the interviews I remember, I know there was something called [NAME OF TRAINING CENTRE] here.

**I: On [NAME OF ROAD IN NORTH LONDON]?**

R: Yes, and we went there. I interviewed people from [TRAINING CENTRE], and I think I interviewed them at [TRAINING CENTRE]. Older ones which I now can’t remember where we got them from. Maybe we advertised somewhere because it was 16 to 21. They came to Janet’s office at the Institute of Education to be interviewed usually or at a place of their choice if they particularly had one, otherwise for privacy somewhere totally independent.

**I: I know in Manchester the older ones are either university students from the two universities or there was recruitment done through unions, so there was quite a few women who were working in the Manchester data which feels more unusual. Now we don’t often recruit young people who are in full-time work in research, probably because more young people are in education now and perhaps the union wouldn’t be used as a recruitment.**

R: Yes. I don’t know what they’d say now.

**I: Do you have any memories of doing the interviews? Are there any interviews that have really stuck with you that you can still remember that …**

R: The one that I think Rachel mentioned at some point, I did this epic interview with the young woman who got gang raped in [NAME OF COUNTRY], I think it was. That was a long, long interview. I didn’t go knowing that she’d been raped. It wasn’t something that she put in her questionnaire. I’m pretty sure she didn’t, so I can remember that pretty vividly and it wasn’t so recent, but it was obviously traumatic. She did want to talk about it, and then -

**I: What was that like for you?**

R: I suppose I found myself not exactly distancing myself but being very sympathetic but not getting too overwhelmed by it for her. Just trying to be a good listener and whatever. Afterwards, because we’d done it in the evening and what I can remember, but I have no way of validating this, I remember that my car, I’d obviously driven somewhere, broke down. I had to get my partner out to tow me home or something like that, so it was a big distraction, in fact, from what I’d just been talking about. Then you talk about it and that’s a sort of debriefing, things like that.

**I: I was going to ask about that, how you supported each other to process the content because that’s perhaps the most difficult example, but there’s sort of low level sexual violence in lots of the interviews and quite difficult themes, so how did you manage that as a team?**

R: We did talk about it in the meetings and living at Janet’s, she and I could talk about any interviews that we’d done and debrief or whatever in that sort of context. That was very good.

**I: Did you ever have any follow-up with the young woman you interviewed?**

R: No. In fact, I know we followed some up, but I can’t remember who we followed up.

**I: That was one of the things that I was going to ask about because we found a couple of second interviews which I didn’t know had been done. There’s also mention of a diary, so at the end -**

R: Some people were meant to keep diaries. I’m not sure what happened to them and whether they exist somewhere or another.

**I: Do you remember about the methodology? Was there a plan to do some sort of follow-up?**

R: There was a plan to look at the follow-ups and see whether perhaps the first interview even had an impact on the second interview. I don’t remember but that’s because I don’t remember. I don’t remember what happened about that, so that will be interesting to know. I would be interested to know because I think we didn’t do that many. I did speak to Janet and she thought we’d done about a dozen, but I don’t know. I’d have to look at all the data again, but I don’t have the data so I can’t.

**I: You never kept any of the WRAP data yourself?**

R: No. It all stayed at Janet’s.

**I: There are two follow-up interviews in the Manchesters, I think, out of 50 or something like that, so very few. I don’t know if there are more in London. I suppose I was wondering whether you remember that there was an intention that you would do it and then it didn’t happen or whether you did them and then thought this is so interesting, we have to do a follow-up one? I don’t know if you can remember which way around that …**

R: No. I think there was an intention to do a few follow-up ones, but I’m not sure that anything much came of it because we got so much data from the first lot that I’m not sure. I don’t remember us actually doing much with the second interviews as second interviews.

**I: Are there any other interviews that have stuck with you?**

R: One of the ones from [TRAINING CENTRE], who was a traveller. I was struck with her because she was very strongly not having sex and basically it seemed to me that she would more or less knock somebody’s head off if they tried it. I was very impressed with how feisty she was. At the same time as her talking like so many of the women there talked about having children and how presumably … not how awful it was but hard work and things like. I don’t know whether she wouldn’t get pregnant or not, but at the moment she was speaking to me it sounded like she wasn’t going to let anyone do anything she didn’t want to do, which didn’t mean to say she didn’t end up getting pregnant at some point in that, well, who knows when. She made an impact on me a bit.

**I: Something about her power, her assertiveness.**

R: Yeah. It felt like that’s how she survived in a context of wherever she lived with travellers and which was quite a hard life, I think.

**I: Do you remember whether the experience of having all these conversations with young women about sex and sexuality, whether that changed how you felt or thought about anything, or did that leave an impact, or did that have traces on you?**

R: It makes you think about your own sexuality and safe sex and things like where you are in this sort of spectrum of what you do in someone else’s situation, so it does … and also, I think most of us were in long-term relationships where it was almost thinking that safe sex didn’t apply to us because you’re talking to these young people and yet thinking … I can’t speak for anyone else really but thinking I’m alright because I’ve been with my partner for so many years and yet it may not be true. Who knows?

**I: That’s what a lot of the young women say in the interviews re-reading them. They say I don’t need to think about AIDS because I’m in a long-term relationship.**

R: Yes.

**I: Interesting too think that as the researchers you were perhaps doing the same thing. I don’t need to worry about it because I’m in a long-term relationship.**

R: Exactly, yeah.

**I: We all think it’s not us.**

R: That’s right. It’s them out there.

**I: The more vulnerable ones or whoever they are.**

R: Yes.

**I: How old were you when you were doing the research? I was wondering what the age difference was between you and the young women you were -**

R: Enormous. What was I? What was it ‘88?

**I: ‘89, ‘90.**

R: I was 44.

**I: Okay. Did you have a sense of how they saw you or how they related to you in the interview?**

R: Not really. I mainly felt fairly comfortable with them. Sometimes the younger ones if you’re doing it, especially if we had to do them in schools or something like that, you’re going to be cast as an adult, an older woman. That was always a little bit different, but obviously not a teacher. We try to be a bit cooler than that.

**I: Before 1989 there were debates about doing a feminist interview. I suppose I wondered whether you saw yourself as a feminist interviewer and what that meant or what that looked like in practice?**

R: I suppose I always assumed I was a feminist interviewer in the context of trying to be aware of feminist context and inequalities and both inequalities in whatever you’re talking about, whether it’s sexuality meaning power gender relations or whether it’s feminist researcher talking to someone. The power between you and the person you’re researching, especially if they’re a much younger woman. You’ve got the age thing, you’ve got that you’re an academic and you’ve got a tape recorder. It can be a bit intimidating. I suppose trying to put people at their ease plus being aware and trying to draw out aspects of inequality if we’re talking about the WRAP project and things like that.

From doing the *Falling for Love*, the one on teenage mothers, I talked to quite a lot of young women about how they got pregnant, for instance, a whole bit about conception. There was the whole background about how for some of them obviously it was consent and some of them it was more ignorance. I don’t think any of them had been raped or anything, but some of them didn’t even know they were pregnant. There was a whole aspect of girls lack of awareness which is one of the things that WRAP actually made me aware of was young women’s lack of confidence, lack of awareness of sexual equality and safety and things like that. I think we all felt that.

**I: You thought that maybe girls were more attuned to this stuff than you found out that they were?**

R: I think a bit, yes. Just as an aside, when I did go back into schools to ask similar questions and interviewing some women for a remake of *Just Like a Girl*, and that was in the early nineties, and they all said we’ve got feminism now. That’s all been and gone and whatever, and yet I would say, although we didn’t talk about sex like in the WRAP project, that they still had the same sort of relative lack of awareness of things like that in ‘92 or whatever it was.

**I: Was feminism or popular feminism part of the conversations that you were having in WRAP with the young women? Did you have a sense that the politics of the time was part of the conversation you were having?**

R: Not that I can remember that much, to be honest. I think it might have come up a bit with perhaps some of the older ones, but I can’t remember much with the younger ones. I don’t think we contexted it that much to them as being feminist research as such. It was all in the context of the AIDS so-called epidemic and panic and all the rest of that.

**I: Okay, so that was part of how you explained to them why you were doing what you were doing.**

R: Yeah.

**I: Did you have a sense when you started out with WRAP about why you wanted to do it? I know you weren’t involved in the initial funding application, but when you came into the project did you have a sense of what you wanted the project to achieve?**

R: I suppose you want it to maybe show the government that scary tactics and icebergs are really not helping anybody and that what we needed to do was educate and inform young people and older people, not just young people, about safe sex. It seemed like the government just wanted to scare people into either having safe sex or not having sex at all.

**I: Did that feel like a radical thing for you to be doing or unusual? Did you feeling working on WRAP that you were pushing the boundaries or anything or the edge of anything or for you, you were doing your job of researching girls and that’s what you do? I suppose I would now see WRAP has become a landmark study in terms of what it was able to do around naming heteronormativity and breaking all of that stuff down. I wondered if you felt at the time that you were part of something that was …**

R: I think it evolved. I think when I started it, I wasn’t aware that I was on the edge of something that was so ground breaking. Because we were pushing the boundaries a bit just because we were asking people about sex and what happened on your first experience of sexual intercourse. Obviously some people who we interviewed kind of told us but sort of thought, oh, (laughter) not sure I expected that.

**I: Just by asking young women about sex, that in itself felt like an edgy thing to do?**

R: Yeah. As it evolved and as we started doing the writing and talking about all the stuff in the team meetings and through time because there was then the MRAP [Men, Risk and AIDS Project], so the whole thing sort of combined together to actually look at much more the gendered relationships and the hidden meanings and what it was that was stopping young women from having much more agency in sex and sexual relationships.

**I: Was there a sense that that focus which is the focus of *The Male in the Head* around gender power relations, that was where you evolved as part of a journey which wasn’t quite where you started with the project? Is that -**

R: In a way because I think we got two years to do WRAP. Funding was so precarious, well, always funding is precarious, so halfway through you’ve got to start thinking do we do anymore and can we get any more funding. I don’t know. Janet would be the one to ask and Rachel more, but perhaps it was that … I can’t remember whether we went for the MRAP partly because almost it’s like the other half of male and female, if you like. Also, you’re more likely to get some funding because you’re not doing more of the same. You’re doing something different and the funders like something perhaps a bit different rather than giving us an extra year to do more. Perhaps follow-up interviews or something they’d have said no, you’ve done your bit.

**I: One of the things that I wanted to ask about was about the team and how you worked together and on a really basic level whether it was an unusual thing to be working as a team of researchers at that time?**

R: It was for me because I’d always been working on my own. In fact, it was very nice. It was nice having a project that was being shared and, obviously, Janet and I were friends. We got on very well. I hadn’t met Caroline before, but that was fine. Sue and Rachel, I met through the Manchester bit. And they would come down for meetings, I think possibly Rachel more than Sue but I’m not sure. I think most meetings were in London. I don’t remember going to Manchester *that* much. We did, but it was mainly London meetings. And the team. I hadn’t worked in another team. I haven’t worked, luckily, in a hierarchical team. Whereas this team and every other one I’ve worked with since, which has usually involved a combination of either Janet, Rachel or whatever, has been non-hierarchical which is great because you don’t all do exactly the same thing, but nobody is the director or whatever.

The meetings were all very … they’re very productive but quite informal if they’re a day meeting. You’d have lunch and there’d be taking minutes and we’d a lot of tasks. People would know what they were doing, and you’d talk about … there would be a whole … I thought it was a really good way of working.

**I: Were you also involved in the analysis of the material, so you weren’t contracted just to do the interviews but also to be part of doing the analysis as well?**

R: Oh yes. It went on the computer. The questionnaires obviously went on the computer. We did SPSS on that which I was doing at the Middlesex Hospital anyway. A lot of it got done either at the institute or I can remember things churning out of a printer in Janet’s bedroom. Ethnograph which was is presumably totally out of date now. I don’t know, but it was a way of coding different aspects of … you coded them up and then the programme put them together, about the themes.

**I: I think I’ve got an example here which I brought in case you wanted a memory jog. It says sorted output file. It looks like that’s been coded or this one, condom risk, contraception. Do these look familiar?**

R: They look familiar. They all churned out and we all used to go through them and make notes and mark bits.

**I: How did it work then? There’s a team of you. You’re not geographically in the same place. You’ve got masses of material. Do you remember how you coded the interviews or who did that, whether you all coded your own or …**

R: I think we coded our own, I think. I think we did. Certainly Manchester and London were separate, so that would have been separate. I suppose I was used to using SPSS. I presume we coded them, that Janet knew as well because she’d done other projects with young women and used that sort of thing. I think we did it. Caroline didn’t, so it was mainly Janet and I doing the analysis. Then when we all met together to talk about how the programmes that we were using, that programme and everything like that.

**I: You were using Ethnograph and Rachel and Sue were also using -**

R: Were they?

**I: I don’t know. (laughter)**

R: I can’t remember. I would assume so because you’d want it to be in parallel so you could put it together.

**I: Yeah.**

R: I assume so. That’s something I can’t remember.

**I: Ethnograph would have been new then. That was a fairly new bit of technology. Can you remember what that was like whether it’s in relation to WRAP or not, so imagining previously when you were doing your research in the 1970s there was no technology for coding interviews?**

R: No.

**I: Did that change anything for you and how you worked with interview data?**

R: It certainly changed from how I’d code the qualitative data because how I did it, for instance, for the W*orking mothers* was very labour intensive. I used to go through every interview and then I’d mark down where … because I had a coding machine, I hired a coding machine, and every bit that was about a whole set of themes that I’d got, I would mark where it was on the tape. When I wanted to do, say, childcare or something I would go through all the tapes going to 153 or something.

**I: You weren’t working with the transcripts, you would work with the audio in the analysis?**

R: Yes.

**I: Interesting.**

R: I never had any transcripts for the working mothers. I did it almost all in ethnographic themes which is very labour intensive, I have to say.

**I: What’s a coding machine that you said you would hire one, how did that work?**

R: You’ve got a foot pedal that moves the tape on and earphones to listen to it. You just write notes. It’s just kind of a transcribing machine.

**I: Would you mark the tapes yourself?**

R: I couldn’t mark the tapes. That’s why I would put whatever number it was on the tape machine. There was no way I was going to be able to transcribe the whole tapes myself. I did 120 interviews. I think I was a bit mad in a way, but I just kept trundling on. Ethnograph cut through all of that because you kind of had the transcripts already that someone else had transcribed. You marked them up and then Ethnograph put them together for you all about, say, condoms and risk like that one was.

**I: Do you think you lose anything by working with the transcript rather than the audio?**

R: I suppose you do a bit. You get more a sense of the person from the audio, but the transcriptions are pretty good, I think. In a way you’ve got to work with what you’ve got.

**I: Yeah. You would do your coding and then at meetings did you kind of work with the data in meetings together and …**

R: I think we looked at bits of it or we talked about it together. If it was a meeting you couldn’t spend loads of time going through the data, but you could certainly summarise things and say what appeared to have come out of it and things and compare and whatever. Yes, we certainly talked about different interviews, different themes and how we put it into context or theory or whatever.

**I: Particularly in *Male in the Head*, you’re all very explicit that you’ve used feminist theory to create this account of young people’s sexual relationships. I suppose I was wondering in practice how that worked. How did you use the theory to analyse the data on a practical level or was it just that …**

R: I don’t know. I suppose kind of looking for somehow contradictions and things that were implied and not said or whatever. It’s quite tricky really.

**I: Yeah.**

R: Writing it was quite an epic really. It was really good. I can remember all the chapters would be put together and there’d been all the WRAP pamphlets.

**I: Purple pamphlets.**

R: The purple pamphlets. They’d made the basis for all this and then we put it all together and there was endless rewriting bits and editing which mainly took place at Janet’s. I can remember sitting up in her study editing chapters and things like that we’d go over and over things.

**I: How did the publication of the purple pamphlets come about? Now that seems like an unusual way to disseminate research, but it feels like what I’ve heard through doing this project it was really powerful, so they were a really effective way of reaching out to youth workers and practitioners and people really used them and really read them. I was wondering how that came about that you ended up publishing in that way?**

R: I think you’ll probably hear more about that from Janet because it was really Robert who … I don’t know quite who suggested what, but he was quite keen to start-up a little publishing business almost which was the Tufnell Press. I can’t remember chicken or egg, whether it was because we got the articles from WRAP that were being accepted by journals and things like that. In order to disseminate them out to more people, putting them in a pamphlet of some sort made it much easier to distribute and got to more people, so the result was that Robert kind of put these together as a publication and that’s how it started. We did one and then another one and another one. There’s quite a lot now. There must be about eight or ten.

**I: Were you involved in writing some of them? I can’t remember who wrote which ones now.**

R: Some of them I was involved in writing, not all of them. I did less of the writing, I think, partly because … I think Janet and Caroline and Rachel were busy doing that and I was trying to write other things as well. I think I did a bit less of the writing, but certainly the ones that my name are on came to me for bits like the data. It would be a bit Caroline and Janet and Rachel and Sue as well. Looking at all the previous studies, doing literature review for it or whatever, and I’d perhaps be more involved with the data bit where we’re doing the examples and actually looking at how that is exemplified by whatever aspect of WRAP we were looking at.

**I: Do you remember there being differences between the Manchester and the London data?**

R: I don’t remember. I’ll be honest about that, I don’t remember.

**I: Because the data is written about as one data set.**

R: Yeah.

**I: There’s no distinction made about where people are from. I suppose I was wondering about whether that was something that was discussed or …**

R: It probably was discussed, but I can’t remember it. I imagine that some of the things we were talking about are universal but there would be context-wise, the young women in Manchester are going to be slightly differently context from living in London, but how much that affected their sexual experience, knowledge and whatever, I don’t remember whether we actually really discussed that.

**I: The other thing I was wondering, so going back to Manchester now we’ve been back to lots of youth clubs which is where quite a lot of the original research in Manchester was done in the youth clubs. Most of the young people who go there are BME and the research feels really white when working with them. There are some non-white young women in the sample, but there’s something about the project or the way race gets talked about that it feels quite like a white project. I was wondering, particularly working in London where I think the sample was more diverse and you and Janet as white women doing the research, how that played out in the interviews and in the analysis and where race was in the project? It was really widely discussed within feminist debates at the time, wasn’t it?**

R: Yes, but I think it was quite a white project just because of we were reliant on volunteers. I’m just speculating now, but in the questionnaires there would be some ethnicity, but then it would be people who then volunteered on the last page of the questionnaire that they would be followed-up for an interview. In a way, we didn’t have control over getting a very ethnically diverse sample.

**I: Did you have a sense that more white young women were volunteering?**

R: I think so, yes.

**I: Was that because you were white researchers or because there was something about sexual health or sex and sexuality that was framed as a white project or something or…**

R: Possibly, or just because it was a project. I don’t know whether it was because we were white researchers or anything like that.

**I: Was it something that kind of played out … I suppose I was thinking about when you were talking about the inequalities of being attuned to them in the interview. I was wondering if you have any memories of how race might have played out within the interviews?**

R: No. I don’t remember that many. I’d have to have a look at my interviews. I don’t remember that many. Most of my interviews were white. I’d have to look because I know there was the pamphlet about young women and ethnicity.

**I: Yeah, that Janet wrote.**

R: I can’t remember how many that we had within the project.

**I: It’s small.**

R: I think it’s quite small.

**I: It is. I relooked at that pamphlet recently. I can’t remember the numbers but it’s not many. In Manchester there’s a sense that the way that the young women were recruited was via this feminist network of feminist youth work and feminist health promotion. There was a network of women that eased recruitment because it was lots of women who really cared about this issue and wanted young women to be heard. I wonder if there was a sense of that in London as well that you had networks of women in the city who could get you in places?**

R: I’m not sure. A bit I suppose and going into some of the schools the women teachers were very sympathetic to that sort of thing because they’d want young women to be more aware. I think I can remember we went to somewhere in Hackney. I think there was a school in Hackney and a school in Kentish Town and all the girls’ side of a mixed school, then there was [TRAINING CENTRE], and if only I could remember where we got the older ones from it might shed some light on whether the people who facilitated that were through youth people or whatever.

**I: You don’t remember it being a problem trying to find young women?**

R: Not really, no.

**I: The doors were opening fairly easily for you.**

R: Yeah, and I think people thought it was a very valid worthwhile project because of the context we were doing it with, and the aims were to somehow shed a light and help in terms of sex education and AIDS knowledge and whatever.

**I: Were you involved in MRAP at all, the Men, Risk and AIDS Project?**

R: Yes. I did lots of interviews on that.

**I: I’ve not heard much about that. How did that come about, MRAP and …**

R: MRAP was like putting something on…We did WRAP and what we were saying about funding was that MRAP was putting the other side to WRAP and also it was easier to fund, I think. Again funding-wise, other people like Jan would be better equipped to talk about that. We got young men in schools, but we also got young men from, I think, things like [TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMPANY] and things like that. We had to get some who were older. It was again 16 to 21.

**I: Was that your first experience of interviewing young men?**

R: I’m trying to think. Probably.

**I: What was that like having spent at least a decade working with girls and young women?**

R: It felt alright. It was different. I have to say that. It was different. We did ask the young men whether they’d prefer to be interviewed by a woman or a man and more of them wanted to be interviewed by a woman.

**I: Interesting.**

R: They knew what the study was about, that we were going to be asking questions about sex and things like that. It was quite different because, if you like, the slightly different power relationship and you’re asking them about sex and sexual experiences and wondering whether they’re going to exaggerate because (a) you’re a woman and (b) you’re being interviewed or whatever. You can only take what they give you so it’s a representation of them, whatever it is. I thought it was really interesting because I hadn’t done it before.

**I: I was wondering if you ever felt … rage is maybe too strong but knowing what you knew from the work you did with young women about some of their experiences with men that were non-consensual or traumatic in some way, I was wondering where emotionally that stuff was in an interview with the young men. Did it feel like that was at play?**

R: Not really, no. I suppose just interviewing and privately I might think, god, I think you’re a bit of a shit or something. Someone might say it probably came out, but I don’t think it did because I was interested in it even though you read or think about it afterwards.

**I: You just wanted to hear their story.**

R: You just want to hear their story and encourage them to be as open as possible. Certainly not judgemental, no.

**I: Do you remember anything about ethics at the time? I was asking Sue and she said there was no formal ethical procedure that had to be gone through for WRAP, but I was wondering whether you remember how you then managed the ethics of doing research about sex and sexuality with young people as a team? How did you ensure that the research was ethical, that you kept young people safe and yourself safe?**

R: I think we talked about it a bit and certainly they’d given their consent, so we had their consent and I’m pretty sure we got consent and said if we write about this, you will be anonymised. If we publish things it will be anonymised. We talked about if anybody somehow needed some sort of information, we would try and guide them to either some kind of organisation, literature or something. It could be to do with contraception or pregnancy or anything, but we tried to be helpful and also that doing the interview with us was safe for them as well. That’s as far as it got, which was us almost informally talking about ethics and that rather than it being now, it’s almost written in stone tablets, isn’t it, or something?

**I: Yeah. It feels quite a bureaucratic process now. I suppose that’s what’s interesting is just because there was no bureaucratic process, it didn’t mean it wasn’t happening.**

R: No.

**I: In fact, maybe it was easier to make it happen because you didn’t have the bureaucratic fallback of, if you like, we’re being ethical because we’ve got institutional approval.**

R: Yeah.

**I: Did that ever happen? Do you remember that people wanted advice or information?**

R: Not a lot, no. I think I gave out some of the information about family planning or the … I’ve just forgotten what it’s called -

**I: Like GUM clinics or sexual health clinics?**

R: Yes, things like that, but mainly it wasn’t actually necessary. You told them, at least I did, what’s going to happen to the research. We transcribe, we read it and then we might write about it, and if we do you’ll be anonymised. That was more or less, I think, what we did.

**I: Did you have a sense that through doing the interview you were making an intervention in those young people’s lives, that something might change for them as a result of doing the interview with you?**

R: Sometimes, yes. Sometimes you could feel that they were having to talk about something that they hadn’t talked about before, because either there’s no one to talk about it with because they don’t talk, and so it could be. I suppose that’s what the follow-up interviews might have shown, but I could often feel that I was asking things that perhaps no one had really made them verbalise before because some of them were first sexual experience. Some of them hadn’t told anybody about it before, certainly not their parents or anything. Here they were talking to an interviewer about what happened and how they felt and whether they had an orgasm or not. Even with friends, they didn’t always get that sort of detailed information.

**I: Through doing that, did you have a sense of what that might then mean for them to have talked about it?**

R: I thought it might make them think about it more, and what the implications were by having … if I’d questioned anything then … which they hadn’t thought about before or something, but that they would think about it next time. Without being prescriptive, just because you’re asking the questions.

**I: Do you have a sense of what impact the study that WRAP had at the time, like what people made of it when you started either talking about it, the research you were doing or putting it out through the pamphlets and then the book?**

R: People seemed really interested, which was great. It seemed that it was quite innovative and other people were starting to do the same sort of thing or offshoots or whatever. It felt like it was a bit of a vanguard in that sense about talking to young people about very sensitive issues really and that was qualitative. There was the whole thing in the … maybe it was in the nineties as well, but in the eighties and before the tension between qualitative and quantitative, so I always believed that qualitative let you know what things were really going on. Quantitative gave you the demographic context, but when you talked to people it was much more you’ve got to know much more about what the quantitative really meant. There was still that tension. I don’t know if you remember it?

**I: Yeah.**

R: Often the funders thought that quantitative research was much better than qualitative research. You’re just talking to people. It’s a bit like putting you down and it didn’t have a value, which I’m sure has changed. It was quite hard to defend at some points.

**I: You felt like winning the research community helped show what was possible to do this qualitative research and to make the case for it.**

R: Yes and confronting all the bit about being objective and how do you know they’re telling the truth and how to say, well, to a certain extent it doesn’t matter if they’re not telling the truth if they’re representing how they see something. It’s their meanings or whatever that you’re looking at as well. All those sorts of things, it was good to confront all those methodological objections that people would put about the qualitative and things like that.

**I: Do you think that doing WRAP and MRAP, the whole project really, did it have any impact for you personally or in terms of your career?**

R: Personally, like we were saying earlier, it made me more aware of all the sexual aspects of sex and safe sex and things in one’s own life. Both looking back, what you’ve done when you’re a teenager, and also what you’re doing now you were supposed to be a grownup. Academically, it didn’t make any difference to me at all apart from having worked with this lovely team and then going on to work with Rachel on *Respect* it was first and then *Inventing Adulthoods* and then on the *Motherhood* project. Academically, it didn’t rise me up to be an academic because that’s not where I was, but it gave me access to do these other wonderful projects which was longitudinal qualitative research, which I think I’ve been really lucky that I then spent the next 20 years doing. I haven’t done anything since 2011, partly because it’s probably time to stop and partly because my husband was very ill. So I’m a bit out of date on some of it, but I loved interviews.

**I: It kind of started or cemented relationships that you then worked with for the rest of your career.**

R: Yeah.

**I: I didn’t know that. How do you feel about the data being reused now? How do you feel about interviews that you’ve done being made publicly available?**

R: I hope they’re good enough. I don’t mind. I think it’s good. I think as a combination of social history, which is what all these sorts of interviews are, and, in fact, Rachel has got all of my working mothers’ interviews.

**I: She said, yeah.**

R: Which are from ‘78/’79. I think it’s great, both from other people to work on bits of that old data and do research on more data and do a comparative or taking it onwards. I think it’s great.

**I: I f someone was to stumble across or seek out the WRAP archive in the future who doesn’t know any of you or anything about WRAP and they’re new to it, what context is it important for them to know so that they’re able to use the interviews and make sense of them?**

R: I suppose they would have to look at all the social and emotional stuff about sex at the time, which would mean probably doing a whole media literature review for a start. I suppose with anything that you’re going to look at that’s sort of back in time, you do a whole context both historical, politically and economically as well.

**I: What were some of the key features of that time that you remember about the sort of social context that might be quite different from now?**

R: I’m not sure. I wouldn’t like to say really. There are obviously loads of things that are different. I can’t think of … obviously politically it was very different, I think. Economically it was getting harder and harder. I can remember that. Socially, things are always changing socially. It’s a bit like the mass observation archives. Did you ever look at those?

**I: Bits of them, yeah.**

R: It’s a bit like those give you a context. I remember looking at them for some of my books as people talking about aspects of their general social everyday life. I think that would be useful to do.

**I: Yeah. I was wondering what you might have scribbled in your little book? I think we’ve covered -**

R: Most of the stuff that we’ve talked about, I think. I think we’ve more or less done it. We’ve done it.

**I: Brilliant. I think I’m done then.**

R: Thank you.