

...with Roger Ingham

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One moment that changed the course of your career

Getting a phone call out of the blue in 1986 asking me to give a lecture on safe sex. When HIV first became an issue, nobody quite knew how to react. Because I had previously worked on 'real-life' applied issues (like football-related violence), someone felt that I would also know about sex. Curious but true.

After a couple of weeks of declining, but realising the sheer complexity of the area, I capitulated. The talk led to an offer of research funding, this led to more grants, work with the World Health Organization, 10 years advising the previous UK government on teenage

pregnancy, travel to faraway places, etc.

One factor that makes sexual health so interesting

It's so much more than the



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specific activities themselves; it's the way that the whole area is surrounded by a wide range

of moral, cultural, religious, personal, legal, economic and other frameworks.

The behaviour has to be understood within these contexts, which makes it a lot more complex than any number of seven-point scales and multiple regressions can hope to address. Many groups have vested interests in policy formulation.

One hero

Difficult, since there have been many, but (philosopher of science) Rom Harré stands out for the way he challenged the pseudo-scientific aspirations of much of social psychology in the 1970s (and still present in some places). Much of the shift towards qualitative approaches and the importance of language and discursive frameworks can be traced back to his influence. I was fortunate enough to be in the same college as him at Oxford, so we had regular lunches together – I like to think I understood some of what he used to say.

One high spot of your career

Having the opportunity to point out to *Daily Mail* columnist Melanie Phillips on

The Moral Maze that sex was not illegal (yet).

One low spot

Observing the failure to get sex and relationships education as a statutory part of the school curriculum when it was so close, and despite the overwhelming evidence in its favour (as well as overwhelming public support). It was scuppered during the final days of the previous government by a mix of mis-truths and panic creation by the right wing moralists, and some fearful conservative Lords.

One of my cultural crutches

Whenever I feel too pessimistic about the state of the world, I turn to Leonard Cohen to cheer me up. Words that inspire and help to make sense of it all.

One challenge facing health psychology

It's been brilliant seeing the fledgling area grow in strength and numbers, and long may this continue. But I sometimes feel that there needs to be greater engagement in, and awareness of, the policy process, and the ways that different political approaches lead in fundamentally different directions in some domains. Achieving a suitable balance between doing excellent research on the one hand, and pointing out the impact of inequalities, the power of vested commercial interests, the negative impact that sheer prejudice can exert, and so on, on the other hand, will be immensely challenging. In some cases, we may need to be more aware of whose behaviour we actually need to be changing.

resource

Ingham, R. & Aggleton, P. (Eds.) (2006). *Promoting Young People's Sexual Health; International Perspectives*. Abingdon: Routledge. 'A collection of chapters that highlight the complexities of the area and suggest some positive ways forward.'

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