

The Sexual Behaviour of Young People

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LONGMANS

13 PROFILE OF THE EXPERIENCED TEENAGER

A. RATING SCALES

This research concentrated upon the task of obtaining quantitative and measurable material because only a few researches on sex behaviour have provided this type of information. Up to this point of this report we have left out most of the qualitative material because many other books on teenagers have been based on general impressions. But during the course of a long interview there is little doubt that our interviewers often got a very vivid qualitative impression of the girl or boy. The difficulty is to convert this valuable material into a form which can be handled statistically. It was decided that this could best be done by making inferential assessments on a few general topics (section D of appendix 2).

By bringing together all the answers on a particular subject it is possible to rate each individual on a simple four- or five-point scale, using anchor definitions for each point on the scale. Inevitably this is not a precise measuring instrument; by definition, qualitative material is very difficult to measure. Despite training and supervision during the course of the research, we found inconsistencies between the different interviewers; some tended to rate towards one end of the scale, others towards the centre; in one scale (appearance) about 75 per cent of our sample were rated up at the top end of the scale. Despite these inconsistencies the assessments give an overall evaluation which complements the more specific measurable items and five of the scales turned out to be highly correlated with sex experience.

At the end of the interview each teenager was rated on a five-point scale of appearance, ranging from handsome to ugly. There appears to be a strong association between good looks and sex experience for boys ($p = 0.001$) and, rather unexpectedly, a less strong association for girls ($p = 0.05$). A similar rating was made of the response of the teenager during the interview on a five-point scale ranging from talkative to reserved; there was no association for girls but there appears to be a strong association between sex experience and loquaciousness for boys ($p = 0.001$).

Three of the scales which reflected more general impressions were found to have strong associations with sex experience. One of them was an attempt to bring together the answers to sixteen questions by rating them on a scale named *intensity of family influence*. It

was found that those who were most influenced by their families were the least experienced ($p = 0.001$ for boys and girls). Similarly the *intensity of group influence* scale based on the answers to twenty-one questions was associated with sexual experience for boys ($p = 0.01$) and girls ($p = 0.001$). Finally an important five-point scale, based on the answers to twenty questions, indicated the extent to which each individual had available the *facilities* which made sexual activities impossible, difficult or easy. This scale was strongly associated with sex experience for both boys ($p = 0.001$) and girls ($p = 0.001$).

B. UNDISTINGUISHABLE FEATURES

The two sections following this one will describe the characteristics which discriminate the sexually experienced teenagers from the others (as detailed in chapter 8-12). These two sections on their own might give the impression that experienced teenagers are quite different from other boys and girls of the same age. In fact there are many more features where there is no difference between experienced and other teenagers than there are features where a difference can be detected. Consequently it is important to emphasise that it is not possible to draw a clear-cut profile of the experienced teenager, for the distinctions are often blurred and the similarities may be just as important as the differences. This is especially the case as regards the basic background features where differences might have been expected.

The boys in our sample, aged seventeen to nineteen, who had experience of premarital intercourse came from all sections of the community and from all social classes. They were not more likely to be the sons of manual or non-manual workers. Nor did we find any difference between the two groups when we considered the social class of the mother. Their position in the family had no effect; they did not tend to be the oldest, or the youngest, or the only child in the family.

It made no difference if they came from a church-going home, and there was no difference as between those in the Church of England and Nonconformists, Roman Catholics or Jews.

The background of the boys seems to have little effect, and early experience, found to be influential in other areas of behaviour, did not appear to produce changes in sexual behaviour. Experienced boys were not more likely to come from broken homes where the father was dead or absent; the parents' marital happiness or the number of times they have moved home had no effect. Mothers

who went out to work or the relations with the father were not important; only where there were poor relations with the mother were the boys more likely to be experienced.

There were only slight variations in the sexual behaviour of boys from different types of school; experienced boys were most likely to come from secondary modern schools and least likely to come from grammar schools; there was hardly any difference between state schools of all types and independent schools; there was a slight tendency for experienced boys to come from coeducational rather than segregated schools, but no difference between day and boarding schools.

Sex education did not seem to prevent premarital intercourse or to encourage it. The experienced boys, like the other boys, wished they had been told more about sex at school and by their parents. About half of each group felt they now knew all there was to know about sex. Experienced boys started work before the others and had more jobs, but they did not appear to be less contented in their work.

Youth clubs did not seem to have much effect on sexual behaviour. Neither the number of visits in a month, nor the type of club was an influencing factor. Experienced boys did not spend any less or more time watching TV, and were not less or more likely to own a motor-cycle, scooter or have the use of a car.

Thus the sexually experienced boy did not come from a deprived home, nor was he handicapped in any other way. He seems to have had much the same start in life as the others and there are no signs in early childhood which can be used to predict the later sexual behaviour of the teenager.

C. DISCRIMINATING FEATURES

Although the early family life and background of experienced boys appear to be unexceptional, when the present family situation is considered, it is possible to detect a difference. This is particularly true of questions related to parental discipline. The parents of the less experienced boys knew where they spent their leisure and insisted that they returned home in the evenings at a definite time. Age itself is related to parental discipline; as a boy gets older he is less amenable to discipline and also more likely to be sexually experienced.

The rating scale on family influence showed a strong association with sex experience. This influence did not extend to religion as we found that the extent of parental church-going had no influence

on sex behaviour. But experienced boys do not go to church and their attitudes are out of sympathy with religious thinking.

Where there is less parental discipline there are probably more opportunities for sexual behaviour. Experienced boys were more often out of the home, and when they were at home they more often had the house to themselves. They were more likely to go to parties where there was no supervision by adults and to parties that lasted after midnight, and perhaps all night. It was made clear in the factor analysis that they would prefer to take their holidays away from their parents and many of them did this. Experienced boys either have, or create, the opportunities and facilities for more extensive sex behaviour.

The school careers of the sexually experienced boys were less satisfactory. They were more likely to be sent to a secondary modern school and they did not pass many exams; this may be more a matter of personality than intelligence because we found that the experienced boys who did take GCE 'O' level passed in just as many subjects as the other boys. But the experienced boys disliked school and had many more problems at school. And many of them left school as soon as they could.

As they left school earlier, they also went to work at an earlier age. This may partly account for the fact that they had many more jobs than the non-experienced and inceptive boys; but it is doubtful if this wholly accounts for the larger number of jobs which the experienced boys had; there are also signs of restlessness and lack of ambition (factor XII).

They received larger wages than the other boys and they had more money to spend. This is partly because they were older, but this does not fully explain the difference; the correlation between money to spend and sex experience is 0.45, and when the influence of age is excluded, it is reduced to 0.32, but this is still a high correlation. The teenagers earning very high wages were nearly all experienced boys and this may be connected in some cases with physical energy and strength. Another indication of this vigour is shown in the association with sport. Experienced boys are less likely to be interested in sport, but the few who are interested play as often as the other boys.

Their desire to leave school and go to work may also be related to physical development. It is well known that the age of puberty varies considerably (Tanner, 1961) and in the early stages of the research we tried to devise some way of recording the age at the start of puberty for each individual, but the practical difficulties were too great. So we had to be content with asking the boys if they

remembered when their voice broke. Some boys had difficulty in remembering this, and in other ways it was not a very satisfactory question, but it did reveal an association with sex experience; from this slight evidence it appears that boys who reach puberty at an early age tend to have more sexual experience ($p = 0.05$).

There were other signs that physical development might be an important influence. Experienced boys found out about the facts of life before the other boys; they also started dating at an earlier age and they had their first kiss before the other boys. It is also possible that the association between lack of parental discipline and sexual experience is related to physical maturity; the boy of seventeen who looks like an adult may resent attempts to prevent him behaving like an adult.

One of the strongest influences on a teenager's behaviour in any sphere is the desire to be like other teenagers, and sexual activities are no exception. Experienced boys spend more time in teenage groups and seek advice from friends rather than parents. They are influenced by other teenagers and by the entertainment industry and the flourishing commercial market directed towards teenage spending. Conformity with other teenagers is very important. Experienced boys are more likely to support the teenage mythology (section C of chapter 1) and are more likely to be against adult standards and outsiders of any kind. As the factor analysis showed they are the embodiment of teenage ethnocentrism.

Many boys think their friends are having more sexual experience than they are themselves. When this urgent desire to conform is combined with the fact that the most enthusiastic advocates of the teenage mythology are already sexually experienced, it becomes clear that the pressures put upon the other boys to extend the range of their sexual activities are very great indeed.

Experienced boys go out more than the others. They go to cinemas, dances, coffee bars and pubs. It is particularly the commercial premises that they like; sports clubs, youth clubs and evening institutes do not hold the same attraction. It is interesting that cinemas, dances and coffee bars are significantly associated with sexual experience for boys but not for girls. This suggests that it is not because they expect to pick up girls in these places; it is more a measure of sociability or outgoingness. (Pubs are the exception for they are significantly associated with sex for both boys and girls; this is because girls rarely go into pubs alone and are taken in by their boy friends.)

This outgoingness seems to be part of a vigorous and hedonistic search for a good time. Not only did they go to bars more often, but

they also got drunk more often. They went out with a group more often and were rated as the most talkative by the interviewers. Not only did they appear before a juvenile court more often, but they were also more prepared to admit other misdeeds. It is notable that juvenile delinquency of all kinds is associated with sexual experience, but we did not find a tendency for the experienced boys to commit the more serious offences such as stealing or violence. Their transgressions often seem to be the result of thoughtless verve and liveliness.

But there is little doubt that their attitudes as well as their activities were exceedingly permissive and even indulgent. They were sceptical about adult moral standards and opposed any kind of restrictions; most of them favoured premarital intercourse for boys, but were less sure about the propriety of intercourse for unmarried girls. Although somewhat intolerant of attitudes outside the teenage world, considerable licence is allowed inside this group on most moral issues not excluding sexual behaviour.

The profile of the sexually experienced teenager falls short of the popular image of the jazz crazy, fast living, fun loving immoral youth. Although he does not exactly fit this picture, the sexually experienced teenager can be identified in four main areas of activity:

Facilities. Although family background was not very different, lack of interest or discipline from the parents meant that the teenager found more opportunities for sex behaviour.

Physical development. The rate of human growth varies considerably and sexual behaviour seems to be connected with energy, strength and physical development, as well as with chronological age.

Conformity. The teenage mythology is now an important element in all adolescent behaviour, and those who are sexually experienced are especially liable to combine this teenage ethnocentrism with antagonism to outside adult standards.

Permissiveness. A lively gregariousness combined with a tolerant attitude to all moral questions seems to be the most universal feature of sexually experienced boys under the age of twenty.

D. EXPERIENCED GIRLS COMPARED WITH BOYS

When the sexually experienced girls were compared with the other girls in the sample, many of the same discriminating features were found, but there were some notable differences. In general the ex-

perienced girls did not have less favourable backgrounds than the other girls, but there was a difference in family relations. There was no difference in the number who came from broken homes, who moved homes more often, whose mothers were working, whose parents went to church; nor was the religious denomination, the position in the family, or social class a discriminating feature. (Although inceptive girls tended to be higher up the social scale, there was no difference between experienced girls and the others in the social class of the father or the mother.)

But experienced girls more often reported poor relations with both the father and the mother, and there were more reports of marital difficulties among the parents. It will be remembered that there was a difference in the third-order *restrictive* factor between boys and girls (section D of chapter 12). Boys who scored high on this factor favoured restraints and controls without reference to family, but girls stressed the importance of family influence and loyalty. In the analysis of the attitude inventory three of the girls' first-order factors were *antipathy to family loyalty*, *dislike of home restrictions* and *preference for friends' advice*. All these factors were highly correlated with sexual experience, but did not appear at all among the boys' first-order factors.

It is clear that experienced girls have gone much farther than experienced boys in rejecting family influences. Relations with both parents were often strained and they were less likely to receive advice on sexual matters from their parents, and when they did get this advice, they were more likely to reject it.

In matters of parental discipline the experienced girls were like the experienced boys. These girls did not tell their parents where they were going, did not have to be in at a definite time, spent more time outside the home and more often entertained their friends at home when their parents were out. Like the boys, their home situation provided them with more opportunities and facilities for sexual activities.

The religious influence is the same with girls as it is with boys. The experienced girls were less likely to go to church and less likely to hold views which were favourable to religion, but they were just as likely to come from church-going homes.

The school records of the two experienced groups were very similar. Like the boys, the girls were more likely to have been to a secondary modern or comprehensive school, and were unlikely to have taken GCE; they disliked school, had more problems, and left at an earlier age. Sex education appears to have had no influence on them either way.

As with the boys, these girls had more jobs, were paid higher wages, and had more money to spend; unlike the boys they were more often discontented at work, more often unemployed, and more often in manual jobs than the other girls.

Like the boys, the school and work record of these sexually experienced girls suggests that their physical development is more advanced than it is for the other girls in the sample. They started dating and kissing at an earlier age; they were more likely than the others to have a steady boy friend; and more often they claimed to be in love, although not everyone will regard this claim as a sign of physical development.

The tendency towards teenage conformity was just as strong among the experienced girls as it was among the experienced boys. These girls were more likely than the other girls to go around in a mixed group, to spend more time with the group, and to meet on commercial premises.

More girls than boys received advice about sex from their parents, but the experienced girls, like the experienced boys, nearly always said they would go for advice to friends of their own age rather than parents or other adults. The experienced girls tended to hold attitudes that indicated support for teenage freedom and had a high score on teenage ethnocentrism.

The gregarious outgoingness noted among the experienced boys is not quite so apparent among the experienced girls. They did not go to the cinema, dances or coffee bars any more than the other girls. The important difference for girls is the person they go with; experienced girls were much more likely to go to these places with a boy than with another girl. Experienced girls were also less likely to play sports and they visited youth clubs less often although just as many of them were members of youth clubs.

In all other ways the experienced girls were as permissive as the experienced boys, indeed our third-order factor showed them to be more permissive. Like the boys, they went to bars more often, got drunk more often, and smoked more cigarettes. They went to more unsupervised parties, often where most of the other people there were adults, and these parties lasted past midnight and sometimes all night.

Although far fewer girls than boys had ever been in trouble with the law, those who had appeared before a court were more likely to be sexually experienced. They also admitted more misdeeds than the other girls. Not surprisingly they disagreed with the attitudes that support premarital virginity and they were not opposed to sexual intercourse before marriage. They also disputed the double

standard of morality which makes premarital intercourse permissible for boys but not for girls.

The main difference between teenage girls and boys who have sexual experience is that a girl is more influenced by her family. She must overcome these family pressures and derogate her family loyalty before she can be persuaded to agree to premarital intercourse. Apart from this the discriminating factors are very similar and depend on the facilities available, the physical development, the desire to conform to the teenage mythology and the ease with which the young person can adopt a permissive attitude to moral issues; this permissiveness is essentially a personality characteristic which appears to combine with an outgoing hedonism in boys, and a rejection of family influences in girls.