

ADOLESCENT BOYS
OF EAST LONDON

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APPENDIX I
METHODS OF RESEARCH

As the Introduction explains, much of the information in this book was drawn from relatively free interviews and group discussions with boys we got to know well, from our observation in Bethnal Green, and from the diaries.¹ Most of the quantitative data, however, came from what I have described as the 'main sample', and most of this Appendix is devoted to a description of the sample survey and a discussion of the sample interviewed.²

There is no sampling frame from which one can select a random sample³ of boys aged 14 to 20. We therefore had to spend some time and effort locating such a sample. We began by selecting a sample of *addresses* from the electoral registers covering what was then the borough of Bethnal Green. These had been compiled in October 1963 and published in February 1964. Using the procedure suggested by Gray, Corlett and Frankland,⁴ we picked from these lists a random sample of 2,310 private addresses.

The first task for the interviewers was to see whether there were eligible boys at the selected addresses. Forty-five of the addresses were unoccupied or in process of demolition (14 and 31 respectively). This left 2,265. At these addresses there were 279 eligible young men. In order to decide how many addresses to select initially, we had calculated from Census data for 1961 that we would need to call at seven or eight addresses to find one boy; in practice this turned out to be about right – the ratio of addresses to eligible boys was 8.1.

Of the 279 young men selected by this method, nine could not be contacted – they worked out of London for much of the time

¹ The diaries are discussed in Appendix 3.

² Appendix 2 reprints the interviewers' instructions and the interview schedule.

³ The word 'random' is used in the statistical sense, to mean that every eligible person had an equal chance of selection.

⁴ Gray, P. G., Corlett, T. and Frankland, P., *The Register of Electors as a Sampling Frame*, pp. 10-11.

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(two), were on their holidays and would not return before we stopped interviewing (three), or they were simply never in although we called six or more times (four). Another three could not be interviewed for special reasons – one was deaf, one had a speech defect, and the third was mentally defective. This left 267 boys. Of these, twenty-one refused an interview;⁵ and the remaining 246 made up the sample interviewed. The response is summarized in Table XXIII.

TABLE XXIII
Response in youth survey

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Interviewed	246	88%
Refused	21	8%
Not contacted	9	3%
Not able to be interviewed	3	1%
Number eligible	279	100%

If we assume that the initial information – about the presence or absence of boys at the selected addresses – was correct, the response was reasonably good. Those interviewed amounted to 88 per cent of the sample of boys, and the proportion who refused was 8 per cent.

Bias in the sample?

It is difficult to form any judgements about possible ways in which the sample interviewed might differ from the relevant 'population' – boys aged 14 to 20 living in Bethnal Green at the time of the survey. However, the sample almost certainly included a smaller proportion of married young men. In the sample of 246 only one was married, and Census data suggest that we might have expected more. Some married men would have been excluded from our initial sample of addresses; since these were

⁵ In fact sixteen refused themselves and five refusals were from parents. Where parents said that they did not want their son interviewed – or that he would not want it – we did what we could to persuade them to allow us to see the boy and let him decide for himself. Unfortunately four parents – one of whom had two sons – would not allow this.

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drawn from electoral registers, they could not include any addresses at which there were only people under 21 – say a young married couple. As for losses after this stage, we know that one man who refused was married; others who refused and those who were not contacted may also have been married, but it is unlikely, since the interviewers were on the look-out for them.

To make some sort of comparison of the ages of the boys in our sample with those in Bethnal Green generally, we projected forward the age figures from the 1961 Census. Thus boys aged 11 in October 1961 were counted as age 14 in June 1964, and so on. (Doing this involved the reasonable assumption that there had been no net migration in or out of Bethnal Green of boys of these ages).⁶ The ages of Bethnal Green boys aged 14 to 20, calculated in this way, are shown in Table XXIV, together with the ages of the boys in the sample interviewed.⁷

There seems to be a fairly broad correspondence between the

TABLE XXIV
Ages of Bethnal Green boys
(Census 1961 adjusted and sample interviewed)

	<i>Census 1961</i> (adjusted to 1964)	<i>Sample</i> <i>interviewed</i>
14	12%	13%
15	15%	15%
16	15%	21%
17	18%	16%
18	14%	15%
19	14%	9%
20	12%	11%
Total %	100%	100%
Number	2,334	246

⁶ The total population of Bethnal Green changed hardly at all between 1961 and 1964, according to the estimates of the Medical Officer of Health: the estimated figures were 46,490 for mid-1961 and 46,420 for mid-1964. (*Annual Reports of the Medical Officer of Health*, Metropolitan Borough of Bethnal Green, 1961 and 1964.)

⁷ We also recorded the ages of the boys who could not be contacted or who refused; the interviewers asked the ages of eligible boys at the selected addresses and were able to get those of all but eight. The age distribution of the initial sample of boys is not shown because it matched almost exactly that of the sample interviewed. This suggests that there was in fact no specially heavy loss at this stage among 19 or 20 year olds or among married young men in particular.

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sample interviewed and the adjusted Census figures. It looks as if our sample contains a rather high proportion of 16 year olds, and the 19 and 20 year olds together may be rather under-represented – the proportions were 26 per cent in the Census and 20 per cent in the sample interviewed. This discrepancy would fit in with the suggestion earlier that our initial sample may well have under-represented married men, who would probably have been aged 19 or 20. To sum up, our sample slightly over-represents boys of 16 and under-represents men of 19 and 20, particularly those who were married.

Statistical analysis and interpretation

When the interviews were completed the information was transferred to punch-cards and analysed on a 'counter-sorter' machine. Many more analyses were, of course, undertaken than are – or could be – presented in the book. In deciding what to include, I was naturally guided first, by what particular tabulations seemed to 'show' in the way of differences or similarities. and secondly, by the drift of the other data of various kinds.

In considering whether an apparent difference in the figures – for example, between the club membership of boys of different ages – reflected a real difference, I have been guided by the results of appropriate tests of 'statistical significance'. I pointed out in an earlier book that the use of such tests had been criticized by a number of social scientists, and I said that these arguments had convinced me.⁸ I still think that there is a good deal of force in the criticisms. First, there may well be 'non-random' errors in the sampling, interviewing or coding that the tests cannot throw light on. Secondly, 'hunting' for significant differences, as distinct from testing previously stated hypotheses, is bound to give some apparently 'significant' results that have arisen by chance.⁹

It is, however, a great advantage to have some objective criterion to measure 'probability'. The statistical tests do, after all, take into account the two crucial factors – the numbers involved and the size of the differences – and do give some indication of

⁸ Willmott, P., *The Evolution of a Community*, pp. 132–3. Examples of critical writings are Selvin, H. C., 'A Critique of Tests of Significance in Survey Research'; Selvin, H. C., 'Survey Analysis', pp. 26–28. Coleman, J. S., 'Methodological Note' in Lipset, S. M., Trow, M.A. and Coleman, J. S., *Union Democracy*.

⁹ See Selvin, H. C. and Stuart, A., 'Data-Dredging Procedures in Survey Analysis'.

whether a particular difference is so small or is based on such small numbers that it might well have arisen by chance alone. All in all, it now seems to me right to use the tests, applying standard levels of probability, as long as one points out the limitations: a test does not *prove* that the difference in question reflects a real variation; it only establishes some sort of (admittedly shaky) base.

This is the approach adopted in the present book. The results of the statistical tests have not been reproduced 'to avoid the appearance of spurious precision which the presentation of such tests might seem to imply'.¹⁰ But, since the tests do 'provide some indication of the probability of differences occurring by chance',¹¹ they have been carried out and in general attention has not been drawn to any difference which statistical tests suggest might have occurred by chance one or more times in twenty (where P is .05 or greater).

¹⁰ Cartwright, A., *Human Relations and Hospital Care*, p. 248.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 248.