

Sex and Youth

A Twenty-Four Year Investigation

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To Sean, Camryn, Oliver, Molly,
“Felix,” and Carter

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1—What Do We Really Know About People and Sex?

Chapter 2—Sexual Histories of the Students

Chapter 3—Early Sexual Behaviors: Masturbation, Necking,
Petting, and Genital Fondling

Chapter 4—Sexual Attractiveness

Chapter 5—Oral-Genital Sex in the Samples

Chapter 6—Sexual Intercourse

Chapter 7—Sexual Odds and Ends

Chapter 8—Homosexuality

Chapter 9—Romantic Love

Chapter 10—Fifty Conclusions

Acknowledgments

I always thanked my students for revealing everything I wanted to know about their sex lives, but I want to say it once more here. This book would not exist without their candor. (Furthermore, without them I wouldn't have had a job!) Now, at last, I have finished collecting data and written this volume. I hope my students find out about it, and receive my thanks again.

Praise be to Lulu Press, which gives authors such a simple way to publish their work. I didn't even try to place this book with a regular publisher. They are intentionally off-putting. (“**Do Not** contact us! **Do Not** send us your manuscript! In fact, drop dead!”) True, no one may ever hear of *Sex and Youth*. But in return, Lulu Press won't make me go on a promotion tour, gleefully handing my life over to the tender machinations of the airline industry, and morning TV show hosts who haven't read a word you've written.

Another thing about not having a real publisher is that this book has not been professionally edited. Some people made this point rather noisily about my last work, *The Authoritarians*. (I discovered that they were all editors themselves.) My wife Jean did read over the final draft of this book, and she nailed some of my typos, misspellings and grammatical felonies. But she couldn't possibly correct all my violations, especially the ones I was determined to keep. If you did not like the writing style in my previous books, I promise that you'll abhor this one even more. (Why are you even reading this?)

If you are familiar with my previous Acknowledgments, you know that this is the first time Jean has ever read one of my books. The reason is simple. “Maybe this time you've written something interesting,” she said.

Well, maybe. Maybe not. Perhaps I've pulled off the impossible, and written the first really, truly, abominably boring book about sex. See what you think.

Chapter 1

What Do We Really Know about People and Sex?

If you follow the news, or if you read *Cosmopolitan*, you know how faithfully the media keep us informed about the shocking results of the latest sex survey. It must seem that most behavioral scientists spend all their time peeking under the sheets. However, not that many do. It's just that you're more likely to hear about a sex survey than a study of anything else. For some reason I've never been able to understand (when I'm in a coma), people are quite interested in sex. Aren't you providing a bit of evidence to that effect at this very moment?

You may discover from these news reports that "everyone is cheating now," or "young people are humping like bunny rabbits during study periods," or "lots of sex makes you live longer." You may have read that most girls in high school now have "friends with privileges"—boys for whom they will give "hand jobs," perform oral sex, or have intercourse whenever the guy asks for it, with no romantic attachment whatsoever. You may have read that kids in junior high routinely "dance" in lascivious ways, simulating intercourse in various positions.

You may have heard that university students "hook up" so often with someone they just met at a party that the few left standing at such an affair have a big "L for Loser" branded on their foreheads. You may have read that young women frequently use camera phones to send nude pictures of themselves to their boyfriends. You may have heard that oral sex leading to orgasm occurs so frequently among young people today that "it's like holding hands," not a serious sex act at all.

But you're *not* going to discover, as you read the news reports, the most important thing of all: how these studies were done.

Problems with Most Sex Surveys

Researchers know that people sometimes lie to pollsters. More folks will say they voted in an election than actually did. Fewer and fewer people will admit they supported an unpopular president as the president's ratings drop. Polls find more money was given to charities than charities received. Year after year 40 percent of Gallup samples say they went to church last week, when head counts find significantly fewer faithful in the pews. In all these cases, some folks are trying to make themselves look good. Is there any reason to believe people wouldn't do this in a sex survey, especially when they know they can be identified?

How were the data collected? Some sex surveys are done by telephone. How trustworthy are the answers obtained that way? Let's say you're at home, the phone rings, and a voice says "I'm calling for the Whippersnapper Polling Associates, and we're doing a survey of social behavior. Is there a woman or a man at this phone number between the age of 18 and 80 who would be willing to answer a few questions for us?" You say "yes," and after some increasingly personal inquiries about your sexual history you're asked if you've ever cheated on your spouse/current lover. Let's pretend you have. (I didn't *say* you have; I said "Let's pretend...") Are you going to tell the pollster the truth? If you are, someone should take you to a safe, quiet place somewhere, give you milk and cookies, and protect you for the rest of your life. How do you know who's on the other end of the line? Anyone can claim to be doing a survey.

Someone who sends you a sex questionnaire through the Internet could be targeting just you, so if you answer it, the milk-and-cookies conclusion applies again. Even if you answer a sex survey on the Web that you stumble across at work (while doing *anything* except what you're supposed to be doing), you must know that your identity is, ultimately, traceable.

Suppose a sex survey arrives in the mail, promising complete anonymity. You again could be the only one being asked. Even if there are others, your copy of the survey may be coded to reveal your identity in dozens of undetectable ways. For example, it could be printed in a particular font just for you, or have particular margins. How on earth could you detect that?

Suppose someone comes to the door and asks to administer a sex questionnaire face to face. I hope you've got the good sense to say "Go away," and then call the neighbors, rather than say "Come in" and then tell him your favorite position for intercourse.

A lot of sex surveys are done with university students who answer the questions while sitting in their classrooms. The students surely realize that others sitting around them can easily read their responses—and students who nevertheless reveal their sexual history in that circumstance also need to be put into a milk-and-cookies protection program. If the students are asked to take the survey home and return it, that's better. But there's still a danger someone at home might "happen" upon it after it's been answered, with devastating consequences. Students who recognize this danger might be less than candid.

Suppose Dr. Kinsey returns from the grave and you volunteer to serve in his study, which involves a face-to-face interview. Even if you trust the scientist, and know the study is being done for purely scientific reasons, it takes a special kind of candor to describe deeply personal things to someone who's looking right at you—which is probably why priests in confessionals sit sideways behind a screen. Also a face-to-face interviewer can only promise you "confidentiality," not anonymity. He knows who you are, and you know he knows. Are you likely to be as honest as you would be if you *knew* you were completely anonymous? (If so, call 555-555-5555 and we'll send someone over to ask you unimaginably personal questions.)

I'm not saying that people will always tell the truth even if they're completely anonymous. I spent forty years studying authoritarian personalities, for example, and it's clear from many experiments that they hide lots of things away in little mental boxes that they don't like to admit *to themselves*, much less to a researcher. But doesn't it make sense that the more anonymous people are, the less reason they'll have to omit, hedge and lie?

How might someone fudge the truth when answering a sex survey? In the very olden days of my youth, men might have presented themselves as more sexually experienced than they really were, and women less. Perhaps that has changed now. Perhaps. *But if you don't know the specifics of how the data in a sex survey were collected, you have no basis for judging how true the findings are.* All of the research techniques mentioned so far promote dishonest answering. You have to take that into account when deciding how much faith to put in the results.

How representative is the sample? You also have to factor in how representative the sample was to begin with. Shere Hite provided the classic example of a very unrepresentative, misleading sample in her book, *Women and Love* (1987: Alfred A. Knopf), which reported that 70 percent of wives who had been married at least five years were having an affair. This "fact" was mined from mail-back surveys from some 4,500 women. But the survey was sent out to 100,000 members of various women's organizations, so those 4,500 respondents constituted an extremely self-selected sample (potentially less than 5 percent) of a group that was pretty unrepresentative to start with. (Most studies show much lower levels of cheating in marriage, so don't start sneaking suspicious glances at your Aunt Mildred and Uncle Fred.) Thus it's quite important, when digesting the latest sex survey, to ask, "How was the sample drawn, and how many people opted out?" You're almost never told these things in *Cosmo* or even in *The New York Times* (and often the investigators don't even tell you in their scientific write-ups).

Lazy researchers increasingly use the Internet to conduct surveys, but those samples can also be poisoned by self-selection bias, and even worse poxes, since the surveyors often have no control over *who* answers the questions. For example, in May 2008, *Cookie Magazine* announced that its on-line sex survey found that 34 percent of married mothers had had an affair since becoming a mom.¹ (Notes appear at the end of the chapters, page 18 in this case.) Furthermore, 77 percent of them wanted more sex than they were getting from their husbands—which I suspect would be news to a lot of fathers. But how does anyone know the data were provided by a representative sample of mothers? *I* could have answered it, and a couple of skilled computer “nerds” could have skewed the results in any direction they wished.²

The *Cookie* surveyors pointed out that 30,000 people (supposedly) had answered their survey. But a big sample is worse than no sample at all if it’s ridiculously unrepresentative. The most famous sex survey ever done, the Kinsey Reports mentioned earlier, used large samples of American men and women but they hardly faithfully represented all humanity—which Kinsey seemingly thought they did. Most of the participants *volunteered* to be in the survey. Kinsey also went out of his way to interview many “sexual deviants” as a way of studying the variety of human sexual experience. But samples loaded with atypical persons cannot, by definition, be normal.

Do you suspect that people who decline to participate in a sex survey differ from those who do take part? The authoritarians I was talking about at the top of page 4 don’t like to talk about sex in general, much less disclose what they’ve personally done. It’s a “dirty” subject. They’re not even supposed to think about it. Others who haven’t had much sexual experience, but who think everybody else has, may not want to talk about “what’s wrong with me.” This opting-out by the sexually inactive will produce misleading results that overstate how much sex is going on—reinforcing the impression that “everybody’s doing it.”

Let me illustrate my points by referring to the issue of *Cosmopolitan* that was for sale at my grocery store when I began writing this book in February 2008. The cover prominently advertised an article entitled “The Most Satisfying Sex Position: It Turns Him On, and It Feels Awesome for You.” (Go ahead, look it up. I’ll wait right here for you.) The magic position turned out to be “pony girl,” in which the woman sits atop a man lying on his back, facing him. The reason why women should have sex this way? The magazine explained, “Every time *Cosmo* has polled guys about their favorite passion poses, girl-on-top came out, well, on top.”

You can believe this if you want, but you know nothing about the evidence that supposedly supports this conclusion. You don’t know how many studies were done, you don’t know how the samples were drawn, you don’t know what the questions were, you don’t know how they were asked, you don’t really know what the results were, you don’t know squat. The magazine doesn’t even tell you which past issues to consult to discover these details—if indeed they were ever reported.

As well, there’s a rather large disconnect between the “evidence” that is cited and the conclusion that couples will enjoy this position most. Women, you will note, weren’t even asked. And girl-on-top may be preferred by more men than any other position, but that does not mean most men preferred it. The New York Yankees may have more fans than any other team, but that does not mean most people root for the Bronx Bombers. So a woman who climbs aboard her man hoping to thrill him no end may, in most cases, be heading in the wrong direction because most men may prefer other positions. And of course, results about what men like do not, by a long shot, mean that women will find those acts “awesome.” And isn’t there something suspect about the premise that men care a great deal about what position they’re in when having intercourse? Does position make a huge difference for guys? Aren’t there lots of good ones?

I'm not thunderstruck that magazines and newspapers use sex to sell themselves. Don't also brewers and auto makers? And *Cosmo* isn't a scientific periodical, which is just one reason why it hugely outsells the scholarly *Journal of Sex Research*. And your morning paper would quickly lose readers if it ran full technical descriptions of the sex studies it routinely summarizes in three or four paragraphs. But I am asking, *what do you really know about sexual behavior in our society, and why do you think you know it?* If your knowledge is based on your own experience, on your friends' reports, and on studies you've "heard about," you should realize that all of these can be ferociously misleading. So when you hear something about sex that seems obviously wrong, ask yourself, "How do I know what is obviously right?"

The 1992 National Opinion Research Center study. Most people know about the Kinsey Reports, but have you ever heard of the study done by Edward O. Laumann and his associates at the University of Chicago and the National Opinion Research Center ("NORC"), which was done in 1992 and reported two years later in *The Social Organization of Sexuality* (University of Chicago Press)? For my money, it's the best sex survey ever done of the American people.

The researchers used the NORC's finely tuned sampling procedures to identify a large representative group of American adults between the ages of 18 and 59. They then successfully collected data from a cool 80 percent of the folks selected. That's a *very good* response rate, which was achieved by appealing to people's better instincts ("[Participating] will help contain the spread of HIV/AIDS"), through persistence (phone calls, "conversion letters," and videotapes), and with dough (nothing or \$10 when the study began, then \$25 to decliners to pump up the response rate, and as much as \$100 if the pre-selected person held out long enough). The final sample was 3,432 persons, which is several times larger than is used in most of the public opinion polls you read about. The study cost about \$450 per person.

Nearly all of the data were obtained through face-to-face interviews conducted by very well-trained, usually female, professionals. Four sets of questions, however, were given to the respondent in printed form. They were answered privately, placed in an envelope, sealed, and handed back to the interviewer. These included questions about masturbation, which the researchers thought was the most sensitive topic covered, and adultery. The investigators said they used the “privacy envelope” to encourage honest reporting on these topics. This *was* better than asking the questions in the direct interview, but it points out the vulnerability of all the answers that were obtained face-to-face. (Besides, you don’t have to be a rocket scientist, or even the person who empties the rocket scientist’s waste basket, to realize that giving your answers to the interviewer in a sealed envelope doesn’t necessarily buy you one bean of privacy.)

The NORC study painted a surprisingly staid picture of sexual America—hardly the stuff that soap operas present—and maybe that’s why so few people have heard of it.³ For example, contrary to Shere Hite’s headline grabbing “finding” that most married women were having an affair, Laumann et al. found that 96 percent of married women said they had had sex only with their husbands during the past year.^{4, 5}

Face-to-face interviews conducted by highly trained professionals probably come as close as you can to finding out the truth about the sexual behavior of a large, representative, national sample. But the results can still be questioned. You may have your doubts about that 96 percent fidelity rate for example. What would the results have been if the subjects *knew* no one could ever know who they were? Similarly a 2002 survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that, on the average, mature men (aged 30-44) said they’d had about seven sexual partners in their lives, while mature women said they’d only had about four.⁶ Those numbers don’t exactly square, do they?

The “Secret Survey”

I started studying sex in the 1980s when I began teaching introductory psychology at my university. Sexual behavior is a standard topic in the course; you’ll find it in almost any intro psych textbook. But it’s a very special subject. The hush that fell over the class, and the roars of laughter that followed even the puniest jokes told me my students were as keenly interested in the subject as I had been while in college. I realized that they would be particularly interested in what people like them were doing. So I started asking. (I began studying romantic love, we shall see in Chapter 9, for the same reason.)

Using my own students gave me great control over the research procedures. I still had to hammer out the procedures—and I do mean “hammer”—with the ethical review committees at my school that had to give permission for every study I ran. But believing that previous sex surveys had, to varying degrees, left themselves open to misleading results, I tried doing a better one.

The participants. I would not argue, in case you’re wondering, that the sexual behavior of my introductory psychology students at the University of Manitoba is typical of human beings everywhere at all times, or of Canadians now, or even of Manitobans of the same age. But I do suspect it was typical of intro psych students at my university. (I got quite an ordinary draw of students, year after year, who mainly chose their section of the course to make a workable timetable.) I’ll go further and opine that my students represent rather well the first year students who rejuvenate our school every autumn, since most incoming students take intro psych, the most heavily enrolled course on campus. Furthermore, I’d bet that they basically resemble intro psych students at many other big public universities in North America, as they have in other studies on other topics.

Let me give you some particulars about my students, so you can have grounds for caution when caution serves us well. About 80 percent were slogging their way through their first year at university, and most of the rest were slogging through their second. Because some of them have taken a year or two off school, they averaged 19 years of age. In the 1980s men predominated in the course, but by the 2000s women filled over 60 percent of the seats. Very few were married. About 75 percent were “white” folk. The visible minorities—very visible to me because they tended to sit close to the front of the room—were Chinese and Filipino. Politically, about three out of eight couldn’t have cared less; one out of eight respectively preferred the leftist, the centrist, and the conservative party; and the remaining two-eighths considered themselves independents.

Religiously, almost all the students had a family religion, but they also had had a religion-lite upbringing. Consequently about 35 percent said they didn’t belong to any religion, and most of the rest were Anglicans, Lutherans, etcetera “in name only.” Most of the students never went to church, and most of those who did went only once a month. Only about one in eight attended services weekly. By 2008 half of the students in my class said they believed in God, the other half didn’t—with agnostics outnumbering atheists 4 to 1 among the nonbelievers.

Given these facts, which give you an idea of how ordinary/distinctive my samples were, let us be bound by the understanding, written in italics here if not in blood, that *the data in this book only apply, for sure, to the students who provided them*. One can easily find many populations whose sexual behavior is markedly different. If there’s one thing in which people vary enormously, it’s sex.

But if that’s true, why should you be interested in these studies? You won’t be if you’re mainly interested in sex during marriage, or geriatric sex (and who isn’t?), or sex in Brazil, or

sex fifty years ago. But if you have any reason for wondering about sex among young unmarried college students—say because you once were one yourself, because you are one now, or because you know someone well who’s carrying your chromosomes around on a college campus and you’re curious whose DNA your DNA might be running into—this book might be informative.

If you want another reason for reading this book, I don’t think you’re going to find more trustworthy data anywhere on the sexual behavior of the sort of young adults I studied. I make this bold statement because of the way the data were collected. To which we now turn, with quickened pulse, because methodology is the most important thing about a sex survey. (Or any other kind of study.)

The survey procedure. Intro psych is a “full year” six-credit course at my school. During the first class each September, I told my students that I’d offer them a chance to serve in an anonymous but highly invasive “Secret Survey” about sex later in the year, and we’d be discussing the results when we covered the topic of motivation in February. (I gave an “A” warning on the course syllabus for “Adult situations.”) Students didn’t have to serve in this study if they didn’t want to, but if they did I’d give them an “experimental credit” worth 1 percent of their grade. But they could earn that credit in other studies instead.

I almost always gave the Secret Survey during the third class after the Christmas break in January. At the beginning of the *second* class I showed my students, via overheads, the entire survey that would be given out at our next meeting, so they could make an informed judgment about participating. I explained that participation was quite voluntary, the payoff for them could hardly be less, and students who didn’t want to serve in the study could simply come to our classroom at a designated time, when I’d fill up the back end of the 75-minute period with some lecturing.

I then explained the procedures to be followed in the study. At the beginning of our next class period, I said, they could pick up any copy of the questionnaire they wished from large piles placed at the front of the room. The survey for women would be printed on pink paper, and that for men on blue. They then *had* to leave the lecture hall and go singly to any place they chose on campus to answer the questions. I suggested going to the library, with all its stacks and empty study carrels, or to empty classrooms, or to stalls in bathrooms. I gave the students enough time to go almost anywhere they wanted on campus, answer the survey in detail, and get back to the lecture hall for the rest of the period.⁷

I then told them (remember, this happened during *the class before* the survey was administered) that they had to promise me two things in order to serve in the study. They absolutely had to answer alone, in privacy. Flopping down in a hallway with some friends or their lover was verboten, I emphasized. If someone tried to pressure them into filling out the survey together, they should say, “I promised I wouldn’t. You’re asking me to break my word.”

Second, they had to promise me that they would answer my questions with complete truthfulness. *If they couldn’t do that for a question, they should leave it unanswered.* I wanted no answer, rather than a partial truth or a lie. I told them that in past years students had been exceptionally forthcoming in their responses, which they would appreciate when I presented the data from times past in the feedback lecture. So again, I wanted to analyze only truthful answers. (I know that left me open to people who would skip most or all of the survey, but that almost never happened.)

Most years I told the students that I would ask them to put their “Secret Number” on their Secret Survey booklet. What’s that? That was a number each student chose in the fall when I

administered a questionnaire to my class built around my measures of authoritarianism and religious fundamentalism. I told them at that time to pick some number, such as the last four digits of a very familiar phone number (but not their own), a number that wouldn't mean anything to me, which I could use to link their answers to that September survey to other anonymous surveys given in the future. (Usually I sent a questionnaire home in October to the students' parents—**Not About Sex!**—and the students put their Secret Numbers on them to give me a link-up to their September answers. So they'd used this procedure before.)

Getting back to the students' orientation to the Secret Survey, I told them that after they had completed the survey, they should fold it several times, bring it back to our lecture hall, and put it in a large box that I'd place at the front of the room. Then they should go to some tables up by the blackboard and sign a credit sheet, showing they had served in the study.

I told the students that I would probably report the results of the survey in a book I intended to write on sexual behavior in this population. I promised them that my feedback lecture would involve overall numbers like averages, and I would not report anything that could possibly lead to anyone's identification. I furthermore promised that I would never know anyone's particular answers—that everything was purposely arranged so *they could see that I couldn't possibly*.

I also assured them that I'd keep their answers under lock and key, and never show their surveys to anyone. I told them that they could easily check out everything I'd said by talking to older students who had taken intro psych with me. I emphasized, in closing, that the whole idea of collecting the data this way was to encourage them to tell the truth, safely and anonymously, about a very important subject that we needed to know a lot more about for everyone's sake.

Then I took them through the survey I had worked up for that particular year, item by item, using an overhead projector. This gave me a chance to explain exactly what I was trying to find out. The Secret Survey always began with, “Are you a virgin?” After that, I started getting intrusive. Questions sometimes drew audible gasps when the class saw them.

Besides giving the students complete knowledge of the experiment before they agreed to serve in it, this previewing gave them two days to figure out the answers to some of the questions, such as when they first touched an opposite sex’s genitalia, what their favorite sexual fantasy was, and why, and how much they liked different versions of oral-genital sex.

Subjects’ cooperation. Despite the fact that participation was voluntary, the explicit reward for serving in the study was minimal, and the questions were extremely personal, almost all the students always showed up for the next class and served in the study. For example, on January 24, 2008, 150 women and 80 men answered the Secret Survey I had shown to them on January 22, for a total of 230 students.

One week later 252 students in that class wrote a required hour exam. I had not let eight of these 252 answer the Secret Survey because they were either married or over 25 years old. (They still got the credit.) Thus 230 of the 244 unmarried, “young” students who were in the class at that point participated in the study. That’s 94 percent, and it’s not too shabby. It means that if everyone who was eligible for the survey had participated, the results would be virtually unchanged. It means that even students who did not like to talk about sex talked about sex. Furthermore, since by that point in the course some students only showed up in class to write the scheduled exams (hoping for a miracle), and did not know about the Secret Survey, *almost everyone* who did know participated.

In 2007, when I was teaching two sections of “Intro,” it was 90 percent. In 2006, it was 91 percent. I’m not particularly happy about it, but my students showed up in greater numbers for the Secret Survey than they did for any of my lectures. So what was the self-selection factor for these studies? Piddling. *Year after year, at least 90 percent of the students eligible to fill out the Secret Survey did so. You’ll have trouble, I wager, finding any survey about a sensitive topic that matches that.*

Furthermore, the vast majority of the students answered every question I asked—no matter what it was. In 2008, for example, every student answered Question One about virginity. I can’t guarantee they told the truth; I didn’t go along with them on their dates. But I would hope they told me the truth because they knew they were answering anonymously, and I had told them to skip any question they couldn’t answer with complete honesty.

Some questions got more “No Response” responses than others. Questions asking for graphic descriptions of various sex acts were understandably skipped more than others. But at most, 10-15 percent of the sample took a pass on one of my inquiries. At least 80 percent of the students for whom a question was relevant answered it. The great majority of my questions over the years were answered by at least 95 percent of the students. So not only were the samples essentially free of self-selection bias, they proved very responsive respondents as well.

No one ever complained about any of the Secret Surveys to the ethical review committees that had to judge and approve them—a fact I capitalized on when I kept pushing the envelope for more intrusive questions in the next year’s survey. You can check that out by writing the Human Ethics Coordinator at the University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada, R3T 2N2.

Why were these students so incredibly forthcoming? I don’t think it had much to do with me per se. When I first started

administering sex surveys, I tried doing it in other professors' classes as well as my own. Many more students in these sections declined to participate, and those who did skipped a lot of questions. I also got some highly dubious answers, such as guys' saying they'd had sex with a thousand different women. My own students almost never yanked my chain on the Secret Survey. So perhaps the trust and positive regard that develops over the course of a course between the students and their teacher helps produce high participation rates and honest answers to a degree unlikely to be attained by a stranger.

Sample sizes. I made a report of my early Secret Surveys in Chapter 7 of a 1996 book entitled *The Authoritarian Specter* (Harvard University Press), so I'm mainly going to report on the samples I've studied since, which are listed in Table 1-1. The sample sizes were affected by my teaching assignments (whether I taught one intro class or two), and the capacity of the lecture hall involved. Also I collected no data while on study leave in 1997 and 2004. In total, the new studies involved 2,249 unmarried women and 1,246 unmarried men, most of them 18 or 19 years-old, none older than 25, and virtually all of them heterosexuals.

A Final Introductory Word

I'm going to do my best to describe these studies in relaxed, everyday English, not the dense technical language that scientists usually use when writing up their findings. But I'm not going to dumb anything down. This won't be, "Six months ago I couldn't even spell 'virgin,' and now I are one." And there *will* be numerous numbers along the way, because that's the simplest way to tell you what I found. However, since you've gotten to the end of this rather technical chapter about (shudder) methodology, you've clearly shown you can handle me at my worst.⁸

Table 1-1
Sample Sizes of Previously Unreported Secret Surveys
(Unmarried Students under 26)

Date	Number of Women	Number of Men
January, 1996	178	128
January, 1998	222	129
January, 1999	244	116
January , 2000	281	141
January, 2001	303	167
January, 2002	158	83
January, 2003	153	78
January, 2005	157	83
January, 2006	128	91
January, 2007	275	151
January, 2008	150	80

Endnotes

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.com/colleen-dealy-and-taylor-baldwin/sex-and-the-american-mom_b_101403.html

² A hacker at MIT said he had voted “three or four thousand times” to bring Alex Doonesbury to his school in the comic strip contest. I would never collect data through the Internet. It’s too easy for a single person to compromise the results. I’m not reassured much by investigators’ claims that “foolproof” safeguards were in place, given how often hackers get into the most protected places.

³ In general, the screwier the results of a study, the *more* likely it will be picked up by the media. If I said in this book that most men admitted to having sex with baboons, that (and probably only that) would be reported in a lot of newspapers and news broadcasts for a week.

⁴ Maybe guardian angels keep tabs, but no researcher knows how many people commit adultery. Nevertheless, fascinating evidence gathered by Bryan Sykes and reported in *Adam’s Curse* (2003, Norton: pages 5-14) indicates the un-titillating NORC result hits much closer to the truth than Shere Hite’s. Fathers pass their Y chromosome to their biological sons, and customarily their last name as well. These Y chromosomes can be distinguished from those passed down in other families. Sykes collected DNA samples from British men named Sykes, a name that first appeared in Yorkshire in the late 1200s, and found an astonishing number of Y chromosome matches that had all apparently descended from a medieval farmer named Henri del Sike.

How astonishing was the connection between the name and the DNA? Well, when you take into account all the generations involved, about 99 percent of the men named Sykes in any generation were the biological sons of their dad (or, to be completely accurate, sons of one of Henri’s male descendents).

Repeating the study with other surnames produced basically the same result. Virtually all baby boys (and presumably girls) were conceived by the usual suspects, their assumed biological parents. Marital faithfulness appears to have been extraordinarily common over the generations going back some 700 years.

Of course, adultery usually does not produce pregnancy, pregnancy does not always end with birth, and adultery may be more common now in our era of effective birth control. So the angels may know that the NORC's "96 percent" significantly overstates virtue. But I still find Sykes's results compelling. For all those British novels and movies about disinherited bastard sons who make good (or come back to kill off the legal heirs), there really were very few. Almost everyone seemingly and semen-ly sprang from the loins of their presumed mom and dad.

By the by, why is it "Y"? The Y chromosome is not shaped like a Y (nor does the partnering X chromosome resemble an X). As Sykes tells the story (pages 44-45), when scientists began using early microscopes to study a cell's nucleus, they found the chromosomes at times arranged themselves in pairs, with an exception. One chromosome appeared to be all by itself. Scientists assigned numbers to the pairs, and since they (the scientists) must have all taken algebra, they naturally called the mysterious loner the "X" chromosome. (If they had known what was on a chromosome, they could have called it the "X File.") When microscopes improved, it turned out X had a partner too, only it was very tiny. X's partner was naturally dubbed "Y."

Why is the Y chromosome such a weenie? "All" it does in humans is turn what would otherwise become a bonnie lass into a bonnie laddie. It pulls this off with the 27 genes it contains that still work. The Y chromosome used to have many more working genes on it, eons ago, but they have become botched up and no longer carry a workable code.

That's why some "sex-linked diseases" exist. In guys, with their X and Y chromosomes, the only instruction for doing some things comes from the X, because that instruction was never on the Y chromosome, or it was scrambled up a long, long time ago in a species now far, far away. Most of the time it doesn't matter, because the man's X chromosome, which he got from his mother, carries a sound version of the gene. But if the gene on a man's X chromosome is defective, there's no "co-pilot" at hand to take over the mission.

If the defective gene is supposed to produce blood clotting, for example, the man will suffer from hemophilia. If a woman inherits the defective gene from either her mother or father, she has another X chromosome that will almost always get the job done right. XX humans thus have a real genetic advantage over the XY version. This partially accounts for "male vulnerability"—the statistical fact that, from conception on, guys are more likely to die than gals the same age, even though guys don't have to wait in long lines to use the bathroom.

So what's been clobbering the Y chromosome? Read Sykes's book and see what he thinks.

⁵ The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention administer a sex survey that also ranks among the best. Their 2002 National Survey of Family Growth, for example, collected interviews from a representative sample of (wow!) 12,571 Americans aged 15 to 44—who amounted to 79 percent (double wow!) of the people asked to participate.

⁶ http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/reports/2004spec_no5/default.htm

⁷ The knowledgeable reader may realize it's a bit nippy in Winnipeg in January. But all of the major buildings on campus are connected by heated walkways.

⁸ A word about statistical significance, for those who care. Because of the large sample sizes involved in these studies, almost any difference that catches your eye will be “statistically significant.” (That’s a science term. It means we’re pretty sure we’d get the same basic result if we did the study again with another random sample of the same population. In other words, the findings that turned up were probably not due to fluke sampling “luck.”) Because of that, and the fact that I actually did replicate almost all my findings in a later study, I’m not going to interrupt the flow of the narrative with hundreds of statistical tests. (Admirably skeptical researchers should be able to work out the “*p*” values on their own in most cases.) If you wonder whether a particular result is statistically significant and can’t figure it out from the information presented, write me in care of the Department of Psychology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Canada, R3T 2N2. I’m retired now and long in the tooth, but I hope to be around to answer questions for a few more years at least.

Chapter 2

The Sexual Histories of the Students

When did you perform your first sexual act? Was it when you first “played Doctor”? Held hands? French-kissed? My Catholic upbringing clearly shaped my thinking when I prepared a survey of sexual history for my 2007 students, for I only asked about things I had been taught were sins. So I skipped clandestine medical examinations in the garage, holding hands, and French kissing, and started instead with masturbation. Then I asked about petting, genital stroking, oral-genital acts, and finally intercourse.¹

I asked the students to tell me what they had done first, what the next step had been in their sexual explorations, the third adventure, and so on. I told them to rank order only the things they had done. If several “first times” had happened on the same momentous occasion, I said to give them the same number.

I then asked them how old they had been when they crossed each bridge, and the circumstances involved. Most of the crossings would have involved another person (who almost always turned out to be of the opposite sex), so I asked who the person was (“Serious boy/girlfriend, boy/girlfriend, date, friend, acquaintance, stranger, other”). I also inquired where the act had occurred (“Party, car, your house, other person’s house, friend’s house, other”). Finally I asked the students how they had felt after moving ahead that next notch [“Very bad (-2), Bad (-1), Mixed (0), Good (+1), Very Good (+2)”]

Can university students accurately remember such details? In general, emotional arousal increases memory storage, and if there’s one thing you can be sure is happening when someone ventures across a sexual frontier, it’s arousal. I’m 68, and I can tell you whom I was with the first time I stroked a female breast, where we two were, which breast it was, what was playing on the television at the time (“Sea Hunt”), and how surprised I was that the breast was soft.

(In the 1950s, inexperienced guys thought that breasts were hard, and sharply pointed—a deception produced by the brassieres of the era: “I dreamt I dented a delivery van in my Maidenform bra.”) The 19 year-olds who detailed their sexual histories for me were talking about things that had happened relatively recently in their lives. So I’m inclined to trust their recollections.

The Women’s Sexual Histories

Let’s look at Table 2-1, which summarizes the women’s answers, at the row labeled “Masturbation.” (The shading helps you find certain numbers.) You can see that 75 percent (*i.e.*, 188) of the 252² women who gave a sexual history said they had masturbated at least once, and that on the average they had been 14.2 years old that first time. For 109 of those 188 women, this had been their first sexual act (of the options I presented). For 10 others, it had been their second. Other women began masturbating later in their sexual histories, right up to twelve who had done all the other things first. Overall they had mixed feelings after they masturbated the first time, the mean being +0.21 on the -2 to +2 scale. They had experienced not only pleasure (they wrote), but also shame and fear.

(You will inevitably compare these students’ responses to the milestones in your own sexual history. So I invite you to write down your own answers right here in this book. Perhaps you’d like to send a copy to your parents.)

Masturbation, when it occurred, usually began at an earlier age than the other acts I listed, but it wasn’t the usual first act for the women *overall* because a quarter of them had never masturbated. Instead, the women’s sex lives more commonly began (N=124) when someone stroked their breasts—which had happened to nearly all of them (94 percent), at an average age of about 15. Most (62 percent) of the women said they had felt good after being “felt up,” but some found it otherwise, so the average (+0.56) landed about halfway between 0 and +1.

Table 2-1
 Frequency, Age, Order, and Liking for First Sexual Acts
 252 Females

Act	% Who Did It	Mean Age	Number of Women Who Did It									Mean Liking -2 to +2
			1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	
Masturbation	75%	14.2	109	10	10	19	3	4	9	12	12	+ 0.21
Had breasts stroked	94%	15.1	124	78	24	5	2	0	0	0	1	+ 0.56
Had own genitals stroked	91%	15.5	21	85	76	22	11	1	1	0	0	+ 0.60
Stroked boy's genitals	88%	15.6	17	57	95	35	7	4	4	0	0	+ 0.42
Gave oral-genital, but not an orgasm	63%	16.2	0	1	11	26	61	28	19	7	3	+ 0.35
Received O-G, but no orgasm	71%	16.2	5	2	11	37	58	31	28	5	1	+ 0.37
Gave O-G and he had an orgasm	72%	16.3	4	6	5	18	23	57	45	19	2	+ 0.58
Received O-G and she had an orgasm	52%	16.8	1	0	1	3	13	20	37	35	19	+ 1.47
Sexual intercourse	73%	16.4	4	4	7	16	24	23	36	34	35	+ 0.52

Stroking other “naughty bits,” genitalia, appeared next on my list of sexual acts, and also came next in the usual sequence of things. Almost all the women had had their genitals stroked, and had in turn touched a guy’s. In both cases this first happened at about age fifteen-and-a-half. The two events often occurred at the same grand gripping and groping get-together. But otherwise it tended to happen to the girls first (85 versus 57), and then the guys got theirs (76 versus 95). (To put it another way, the boys took the initiative when it came to getting into one another’s pants.) Most of the 227 women said having their genitals rubbed had been a good, or very good experience that first time. But enough rated it neutral or negative to bring the mean down to +0.60. *Doing* the stroking had been a little less fun: +0.42.

Then came age 16. Generally speaking, the lassies had taken the same steps in the same order as they travelled the path of sexual experiences. But when they reached 16, they ran into the woods in all different directions. No clear, “normal” progression of events emerged hereafter. As a weak generalization, the women who “moved on” moved on to oral-genital (“O-G”) sex, and then had sexual intercourse. But others went directly to intercourse, passing O-G if not GO, and then had their first oral-genital experiences later. Or not. Thus the mean age of first intercourse equaled 16.4—not much higher than the 16.2 for initial, non-orgasmic oral sex.

If perchance you’re interested in oral sex that leads to orgasms, most of the women (72 percent) had done that to a fellow, but barely half (52 percent) had had it done to them. (One suspects the guys were again taking the initiative, only this time nobly offering their own organ for stimulation.) In fact, the women were *less* likely to have an O-G-produced orgasm than *any* of the other events on my list. Those who had been set off orally liked it a lot, with most of them saying it had been “very good” the first time. The mean of 1.47 is the only score that crashed through the 1.0 rating ceiling for the women. Nothing else came close, at least the first time.

Let me point out one more feature in the oral-genital data in Table 2-1. The women said they had gotten more pleasure from setting a guy off orally (0.58, in darker shading) than from stimulating-him-orally-but-not-setting-him-off (0.35). (You can be sure guys would feel the same way about these two outcomes.) This difference wasn't statistically significant by a two-tailed test. Still, stay tuned.

As for intercourse, experienced by 73 percent of these women, if you look at the number of times it was the fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth event in their sexual histories, you can see what I meant earlier about the bumpy flow of events. There are lots of women in each category. If intercourse represents the final step in attaining adult sexuality, some of the women attained it step-by-step, getting to it only after performing many "preliminary acts." But others skipped some of the prelimins and went more or less directly to the final without doing much else. Most (56 percent) of the 183 non-virgin women said "doing the deed" that first time had been a positive event. But almost as many gave it "mixed" or negative evaluations, so it got a 0.52 rating overall. If you can't guess why, we'll return to the subject in Chapter 6.

By the way, I don't mean to imply that everyone in my sample *longed* to have sexual experiences. Any of the 68 female virgins could have had intercourse, for example, sometime with somebody, if she had wanted to badly enough. But they chose not to.

Does that surprise you? It should if you've been convinced by media stories and suspect surveys that virginity among the young is rarer than the dodo bird. But my studies repeatedly said otherwise. Still, there were Fast Times at Ridgemoor High in at least one respect. These women had their *first* heterosexual experience at age 15.1 on the average. Those who later misplaced their virginity lost it at an average age of 16.4. That's just sixteen months! That's roaring from 0 to 60 in the blink of an eye. They hardly had time to note it in their diaries (or get a certain prescription from a doctor.)

The Men's Sexual Histories

Human males start maturing sexually about a year or two later than females do. Remember those parties in seventh grade? The girls were developing sexual interest and physical appointments, they were certainly into “display” mode, and the boys were quite intimidated about what was happening to the girls. That’s why they huddled off to the side at those parties, punching each other on the arm. Eventually the girls gave up on most of the boys their age, and took up with “more mature” guys—suave eighth- and ninth-graders. You can probably see what this leads to if you consider the ages of your parents, or you and your spousal-unit.

I thought the difference in puberty onset meant the guys in my sample would be trailing along behind the women by a year or more in experience after experience. They WERE behind their female cohorts in most respects, we shall see. But you won’t spot it if you compare Table 2-2, the Men’s Saga of First Sexual Experiences, with Table 2-1.

Take masturbation, the first sexual act for almost all the guys. Boys’ sex glands may have fired up a year or two after the girls’ glands did, but the fellows began masturbating about sixth or seventh grade, almost as soon as puberty struck, and a full year *before* the girls usually started. (Chalk that up to testosterone, the major hormonal explosive for sexual behavior in us.)

Continuing down the list, these laddies “got to first base” at about the same average age (14.8) as the women in the study first had their breasts stroked (15.1). The two sexes began genital stroking at the same time—about 15-and-a-half. Oral-genital sex and intercourse, for those who did it, also began somewhere between 16 and 17 for both sexes, on the average. So while the girls had a substantial head start on the boys in biological maturation, you get the impression the guys kept pace when it came to sexual activity.

Table 2-2
 Frequency, Age, Order, and Liking for First Sexual Acts
 149 Males

Act	% Who Did It	Mean Age	Number of Men Who Did It									Mean Liking -2 to +2
			1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	
Masturbation	99%	13.1	133	11	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	+ 0.65
Stroked girl's breast	85%	14.8	15	89	21	2	0	0	0	0	0	+ 1.19
Had own genitals stroked	78%	15.5	3	13	73	22	5	0	0	0	0	+ 1.22
Stroked girl's genitals	73%	15.6	1	9	55	39	5	0	0	0	0	+ 1.12
Gave oral-genital, but not an orgasm	44%	16.4	0	1	4	7	17	23	9	4	0	+ 0.95
Received O-G, but no orgasm	50%	16.0	0	1	2	7	33	20	5	5	1	+ 0.98
Gave O-G and she had an orgasm	44%	16.7	0	0	1	1	6	11	16	22	8	+ 1.26
Received O-G and he had an orgasm	52%	16.4	1	0	2	1	20	17	27	7	3	+1.61
Sexual intercourse	53%	16.6	0	1	4	5	9	11	18	13	18	+ 1.38

But this is an illusion. We're ignoring *how many* of the women were doing sexual things. More females had done the various acts, from the breaststroke on, than males had. (With one exception: having an orgasm from oral-genital stimulation was a tie.) *The guys this age who got into the game* got in at the same age, for each event, as the gals did. But a lot of the fellows were still standing on the sidelines, as they were at those seventh grade parties. Barely half of the men had experienced intercourse by the time of this survey compared with 73 percent of the gals. Say, what?

How Women Become More Sexually Active Than Men

I've carefully worked out the math here, double-checked my sums, and concluded that you should have an equal number of males and females involved in heterosexual intercourse. So whom did the women have sex with their first time, if it wasn't the guys in their high school class? The answer: they got it on with older fellows, while guys their age took lots of cold showers. And about half of the men were still taking them, virginity-wise, in college!

In a few years these 19 year-old males will probably have chucked their innocence to the same extent that the women had by 19. But when all is said and lost, the average age of "losing their virginity" will be noticeably higher for the men. The women in the 2007 study had considerably more sexual experience than the men with whom they graduated from high school. It also took the guys a little longer to go from 0 to 60 (20 months) than it did the women—which is telling because only the fastest guys got to 60.

Maybe you're thinking my 2007 sample was weird. If so, good! Just because you've bought this book, that doesn't mean you have to believe everything that's in it. But in this case, your splendid critical thinking runs into a solid wall of accumulated facts. As we'll see in Chapter 6, the women in my samples have, year after year, been sexually ahead of the men their age. 2007 was as ordinary as apple pie.

But this shoots our stereotypes about satyric men and self-suppressing women to smithereens. How can this be? Well, there's this thing called romantic involvement. To some extent, as you may know, being in love can lead to sex. (It especially works when the other person loves you back.) About half my female students were involved in a romantic relationship featuring sex when they answered my survey, compared to about a third of the guys. And many of the gals were enjoying their second or third such relationship, while most guys in love were still crashing around in bewilderment in their first. Thus the women will inevitably be ahead sexually if love's got anything to do with it. Gals start falling in love sooner than guys their age do.

Was it good for me? Be this as it may, scanning the "Mean Liking" columns in Tables 2-1 and 2-2 makes it clear who had more fun skipping from stone to stone developing a sexual history: the men. They enjoyed every one of the new adventures more than women did, usually by hefty margins. If you think this simply shows men enjoy sex a lot more than women do, I warn you that this too appears to be an endangered stereotype. Instead, the women's lower likings suggest that whenever they took the "next step," many experienced a downside that took some of the thrill out of it—especially first intercourse. Again, we'll revisit this in Chapter 6.

Sequence of oral-genital orgasms and intercourse for women. Let's notice one more thing about Tables 2-1 and 2-2. As mentioned earlier, women rated being orally stimulated to orgasm higher by far than any other "first." But only about half of them had had the experience. It also tended to happen after everything else on their personal list, with a mean "first time" age of 16.8 years (Table 2-1).

If you consider just the women who had received an oral-genital orgasm *and* also had had intercourse, 55 percent of them experienced coitus first. Thus most of these women had sexual intercourse, with all its implications, *before* they were ever set off orally by a guy. By contrast, 73 percent of the sexually active men

had the oral-genital orgasm first. Overall, one gender seems to be putting out more (and sooner) than it's getting in return: the women.

Circumstances of “First Times”

Table 2-3 summarizes the information the women provided about their partner the first time they did various things, and where the heavy breathing took place. For every act, gals usually “moved ahead” with a boyfriend—a tendency that understandably grew stronger as they rounded third base and headed for home. And where *were* the women when they crossed a sexual border? More than any place else, at their boyfriend's place.³ Not at parties, not in cars, not even in their own house. At his.

Table 2-3
Circumstances Surrounding First Sexual Acts
252 Women

Act	N	Who was the partner?			Where did it take place?		
		Not a Boyfriend	Boy-friend	Serious Boyfriend	His House	Her House	At a Party
Had breasts stroked	234	33%	52%	15%	42%	20%	16%
Own genitals stroked	227	27%	50%	23%	52%	27%	14%
Stroked boy's genitals	219	27%	45%	28%	48%	23%	13%
Rec'd O-G; she had no orgasm	178	22%	45%	33%	57%	25%	7%
Gave O-G; he had no orgasm	156	17%	45%	38%	48%	25%	5%
Rec'd O-G; she had an orgasm	129	13%	37%	50%	49%	34%	3%
Gave O-G; he had an orgasm	179	15%	45%	40%	58%	21%	4%
Sexual intercourse	183	14%	37%	49%	52%	30%	4%
Average for all acts		21%	45%	34%	51%	26%	8%

When you look at the guys' reports of "with whom and where" (Table 2-4), you notice some similarities to the women's accounts. Partly this occurred because a few couples in my class did their sexual exploring together (well, not during the lectures; you know what I mean), so they naturally gave the same answers. But to a certain extent the women and men went on their sexual journeys with different sorts of fellow adventurers in different circumstances, which fits in with our earlier observations about early sexual experience within a cohort.

Looking at the bottom lines of Tables 2-3 and 2-4, we notice (in bold print) that the women, compared to the guys, were twice as likely to have their "first times" with someone they were *serious* about (34 percent versus 16 percent). Why? As we saw earlier, the women were more likely to be involved in romantic relationships. So if you're a late teen male, sexually on fire and rarin' to go, but *not* romantically involved, you have to get lucky. Some girl has to do you a very nice favor by giving you some sex with no strings attached.

As my mother warned me, such girls exist. Because of their biological drive, their socialization, your undeniable charm, their loneliness, and (especially, in my samples) their having drunk too much alcohol, they are willing to share a cheap thrill with you. You'll have to reconcile yourself to a hollow, empty experience. But as Woody Allen put it, as empty experiences go, it's one of the best.

Thus we expect an appreciable number of men to have had their first sexual adventures with a friend, an acquaintance, or someone they had just met—rather than a lover. Table 2-4 confirms this hypothesis. Focusing on the Big One, over a quarter of the non-virgin men (29 percent, in the darkly shaded box) had their first intercourse with someone who was *not* a girlfriend—compared with only 14 percent of the non-virgin women.

Table 2-4
Circumstances Surrounding First Sexual Acts

149 Men

Act	N	Who was the partner?			Where did it take place?		
		Not a Girlfriend	Girl-friend	Serious Girlfriend	His House	Her House	At a Party
Stroked girl's breast	127	47%	42%	11%	15%	24%	23%
Own genitals stroked	116	38%	49%	13%	18%	31%	21%
Stroked girl's genitals	109	36%	50%	14%	23%	30%	17%
Rec'd O-G; he had no orgasm	74	43%	49%	8%	28%	32%	25%
Gave O-G; she had no orgasm	65	29%	51%	20%	44%	35%	12%
Rec'd O-G; he had an orgasm	78	35%	48%	17%	45%	24%	16%
Gave O-G; she had an orgasm	65	22%	54%	24%	44%	37%	12%
Sexual intercourse	79	29%	48%	23%	48%	23%	10%
Average for all acts		35%	49%	16%	33%	30%	17%

In counterpoint, women more likely (49 percent) had sex for the first time with a *serious* boyfriend; only 23 percent of the guys waited until they were that deeply in love. Broadening our focus, women usually waited until they were in a strongly committed relationship before they did anything “orgasmic:” the three lightly shaded squares in Table 2-3 average 46 percent, those in Table 2-4, 21 percent.

The women and location-location-location. This helps explain the whereabouts of “first times” as well. Where do romantically involved young couples most likely caress this, stroke that, and do the next thing for the first time? Someplace private, someplace safe, someplace accessible, someplace comfortable, someplace that doesn’t cost any money. If we assume that men, with their high testosterone level, are typically more interested in escalating the sex than women are—I know it’s a stretch, but humor me—that means it’s usually the woman’s decision whether to proceed. What would be worse for her—having *his* parents walk in on them with a lot of their clothes off, or *her* parents? Also, girls might ordinarily be wary of being alone with a boy on his turf, but these young women would go to their boyfriends’ place because they loved and trusted them.

I’m not saying couples had completely flow-charted the evening before anything got unbuttoned, unhooked, or unzipped. I’m not even saying the women usually knew when they went in the door how different they’d feel when they came out. Other factors may have played a role as well, such as the well-known, judgment-splattering “passion of the moment.” But it does explain why these teenage girls tended to have their first sexual experiences at their boyfriend’s place more than anywhere else.

The men. Table 2-4 reveals that a lot of the guys had their first sexual experiences at their houses—as the women’s reports we just considered would lead us to expect. But lots of other fellows personally went where they had not gone before at the woman’s

place, or at a party, and these usually signaled *non-romantic* encounters. Guys who “got lucky” that first time typically did not go home, because they hadn’t known they were going to get lucky that night and their place was full of dirty socks and unsympathetic parents. So a more experienced, better prepared woman kindly suggested going to her place. It was a pick-up, and she was doing the heavy lifting. She was sexually aggressive, and invited him up/over/in. Or else the two of them disappeared upstairs at a party—something the women in Table 2-3 almost never did for their “first times.” Or the guy and his more practiced partner did the deed in the legendary back seat of a car. His, hers, or anybody’s.

Discussion

Well, did you know the stuff in Tables 2-1 to 2-4 all along, or were you surprised by some of the outcomes? Did you foresee that almost all the women would have been “felt up,” most of them before they turned 16? Did you anticipate that virtually all the men masturbated, and they had started almost as soon as they could? Did you predict that most of the women had engaged in oral-genital sex while in high school? Did you realize that most of the men had *not*? Did you grasp how quickly these students raced from one sexual base to the next when they were 15 and 16? Did you expect that most of the women had had intercourse by the time they turned 17?

The persistence of virginity. If your answer to all these questions is, “Yes, I knew that,” then did you know how many students would still be virgins at 19? My classes were always amazed to learn how common virginity is. Movies, magazines, and possibly biased sex polls have created the impression that almost no one graduates from high school as a virgin. That’s the message of the *American Pie* movies. Maybe that’s true in some places. But it doesn’t appear to be true in my town, and it may not be true in yours either. Virginity doesn’t rule, but it’s still alive and well in lots of late teens. If you want a movie to “prove” it can happen, the hottest girl in high school in *American Beauty* turns out to be a virgin.

Some of the students, we observed earlier, *want* to be virgins. Who are these people? They tend, to a modest extent, to be right-wing authoritarians (see www.theauthoritarians.com), who are usually also religious fundamentalists. Today's authoritarian/fundamentalist students do not condemn premarital sex as much as their parents did in the 1970s. And even when they do, some fundamentalists copulate and then simply sluff off the guilt through prayer or confession. Alternately, some of them engage in oral-genital sex as a substitute for "real sex." But some live their beliefs. A woman in one of my surveys, who had never even held hands or danced with a man, wrote, "I give 'virgin' a whole new meaning."

Another batch of determined virgins doesn't think intercourse would be immoral for them, but they do feel it's highly important. Some of them don't think they're "ready" yet; it's too big a step for them now. Others feel ready but want it to happen with the right person, someone they deeply love. A few want even more, to have intercourse for the first time on their wedding night. This may sound archaic to you, but some young people are quite old-fashioned.

The men trail the women in sexual experience. My students also expressed surprise during the feedback lecture about the men's relative inexperience. It's widely presumed that guys at college get lots of sex, from coeds, "townies," oversexed mothers, and the dean's poor, neglected wife. Guys, being randier, certainly have more sex than female students do—it is assumed. But few men in my studies live up to the billing, although if dreams were dollars there'd be lots of millionaires in frat houses and men's dorms.

The fellows have been behind the ladies their age in sexual development since puberty, and some of them get sex only through booze and the kindness of strangers. *Some* fellows can pull off the Casanova thing, bedding lots of women and then quietly slipping away. They are expert hunter-gatherers. But we'll see that's a rather poor way to have lots of sex in the long run. Living off the lay of the land is a feast or famine proposition, and not many guys feast.

But how true is this stuff? You have every right to doubt the numbers in Tables 2-1 to 2-4. The results may completely contradict your impression, and your own experience. But I would again point out that those are not necessarily the best indicators of the truth. How do we really know what young people are up to? What's the best objective evidence we have? Maybe it's what you just read.

The sample unquestionably had limitations, coming from a particular place and time. If you think Winnipeg, Canada is a backwater of North American culture, then you can dismiss these results out of hand. But there aren't many backwaters left in the global village; we get all the American TV shows, movies, music, magazines, fads, and fashions like everyone else. Winnipeg is not southern California—our summers are milder—but maybe only southern California is like southern California. And maybe southern California isn't all exactly "90210" either.⁴

On the plus side, the study had virtually no self-selection bias, which can be the deadly (if unacknowledged) bane of sex research. And while I imagine some students told less than the complete truth in their answers, because they couldn't admit things to themselves, or hated to put some stuff down on paper, the circumstances suggest very few would have pulled their punches. No one had to answer any question, I told them to leave things blank rather than tell a lie, and they promised me, as a condition for serving in the study, that they would tell me the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

If you suspect that some of the students suspected I could somehow dope out who said what—which I could not—why would they have revealed what they revealed? If masturbation is so sensitive a topic that the NORC study had people put their answers in a sealed envelope, note that 75 percent of the women and 99 percent of the men in this study admitted they did it. If you think "social desirability" (looking good in your own mind and in the minds of others) played a big role in these students' answers, why

did most of the women say they were not virgins, while nearly half of the men said they were?

So maybe the Secret Survey has merit and you might want to keep on reading. We're going to move past First Times, and consider what students have been doing ever since those incredible nights when they were 16.⁵

A Closing Comment

I'm old enough to be my students' grandfather, so the generation gap between us is twice as large as the one you usually hear about. I sense a lot has changed over the fifty years that have passed since I entered university—a topic I'll take up with both hands in Chapter 10. Oh, I recall a certain amount of non-virginal activity took place among the youth two generations ago. Oral-genital sex was not completely unknown. I know couples sometimes had sex knowing little more about each other than first names. And yes, college students often cascaded down a boozy flume to the bedroom. But I don't think these things happened so widely, and I don't think they happened at as early an age, way back then, especially among young women, before the Sexual Revolution.

But we have no solid data from the 1950s and 1960s about these sorts of things, so I may be making the same mistake I warned you about in Chapter 1: trusting our personal impressions too much. I may be quite wrong about things having changed a lot. Maybe there hasn't been a sexual revolution. Even so, whether the data in Tables 2-1 to 2-4 apply to the distant past, I'm pretty sure they apply to Now, for the population I studied.

And they give me pause. Twenty-seven percent of the women in this study said they had orally brought a guy to orgasm *before* they were 16, and 24 percent had had intercourse before 16. In some sense, you end your youth when you do that. What was the hurry?

The Rest of the Book

Over the years I asked many more questions about the When, How Much, With Whom, Done How, How Grand Was It, and so on connected with the acts covered in this chapter, and other act. That's what the rest of the book is about, along with such topics as what determines sexual attractiveness, ideal sex, "hooking up," "friends with benefits," the relationship between sex and love, what people want sexually in a spouse, and the factors that affect whether a loving relationship will last. At the end, I draw conclusions about twenty things that have seemingly changed about sex in my samples over time, and thirty things that seemingly have not changed.

Endnotes

¹ Now's a good time to tell you a little about my own sexual history, which might seem strange since you're not going to tell me anything about yours in return. But you could be interested because there's a stereotype that people who study sex do so because they are sexually screwed up themselves, one way or another. So maybe I can save you some "What's his problem?" speculation by telling you a few, quite boring things about my life.

If I had answered the Secret Survey in my first year at university, or at graduation, or as I waited nervously for my bride-to-be to walk down the aisle in 1965, I'd have truthfully responded to the first question with, "I am a virgin." Thanks to my hook, line and sinker Catholic background, I had "saved myself" for marriage—even though I had said goodbye to Catholicism, Christianity, and God three years before my wedding day. My wife was also a virgin when we married. We have remained gladly, completely faithful to one another ever since, and appreciated our good fortune. Jean is the most wonderful and beautiful person I have ever known, and I hope you have the thrill of feeling the same way about whomever you love.

I've never been the least bit interested in having sex with another guy, children, other species (including baboons), dead people, while wearing women's clothes, on buses during rush hour, while being humiliated, on a bed of Rice Krispies, etcetera. No one who has known me would say there's the least bit of kinkiness in my past. Maybe you're now thinking I'm odd because I'm so straight. But you may be surprised at how many people are.

Sex is a neat thing to study, and I'm much more in favor of it than I am of other things I've investigated, such as authoritarianism and prejudice. But I started doing research on sex to be a better teacher, to make my lectures on the topic in intro psych more relevant to my students. As with everything else I've

studied, each discovery led to new questions. (I started out with a few questions per survey, and ended up with four sheets (eight sides) of legal-sized paper per booklet.) But I have not studied sex because I am impotent, deeply conflicted, a sadist—or even particularly nosey, believe it or not.

² All but one of the (275–252=) 23 women who did not give a sexual history said they were virgins, and over half of them said on a later question that they did not masturbate. So while some of the 23 may have skipped the sexual history question because they did not want to answer it (as I told them they could), some of them may have given no answers simply because they had not done any of the acts.

Only two of the 151 men in the study did not give their sexual histories. By virtue of masturbation—not a phrase the adults in my youth would have used—almost all the men had at least some sexual history to report.

³ The “location” numbers in Table 2-3 (and in Table 2-4) do not add up to 100 percent because certain less frequently used places (such as a car, a tent, a schoolroom) are not reported in the tables. (We’ll cover some of the interesting places students had intercourse in Chapter 7.)

⁴ Backwaters can foster important contributions. Marshall McLuhan, who coined the phrase, “the global village,” graduated from the University of Manitoba. He even took intro psych there. (But he did not serve in the Secret Survey.)

⁵ I repeated the 2007 “First Times” survey with my students the following year, seeking to fill gaps and test for replication. (I’m ten times as certain of something that I find twice.) Except this time I only asked about six events, most of them having to do with early sexuality: first time for tongue kissing, for a breast being felt

through clothing, for a breast being directly felt, for a male seeing the female's breast, for the female giving the male a "hand job," and for a male seeing the female's genitalia. The results for the 149 females in the sample are given in Table 2-5, and can be compared with those already seen in Tables 2-1 and 2-3.

Table 2-5

January 2008 Data on Early Sexual Experiences

149 Females

Act	% Who Did	Mean Age	Mean Liking	Who Was the Male?			Where Did It Happen?		
				Not a Boyfriend	Boy-friend	Serious Boyfriend	His House	Her House	At a Party
"Tongue kissing"	88%	14.5	0.80	41%	43%	16%	22%	14%	14%
Boy felt covered breast	80%	15.2	0.46	25%	57%	18%	32%	27%	17%
Boy felt naked breast	73%	15.5	0.64	23%	56%	21%	38%	28%	11%
Boy saw her breast	70%	15.7	0.55	18%	56%	26%	40%	29%	8%
She gave "hand Job"	70%	15.7	0.27	23%	51%	26%	45%	26%	3%
Boy saw her genitalia	69%	16.0	0.27	22%	55%	23%	51%	27%	4%

Basically the results replicated the earlier findings. Most of the women had done each of the acts presented. But as the seriousness of the act increases, the level of participation dropped. While the *range* of ages proved enormous (*e.g.*, some women began tongue-kissing at age 10, others began at 20), the means all fell (again) in the mid-teen years and predictably rose as the women advanced from preliminary sexual acts to more serious ones.

Overall, the women had mixed feelings about these first experiences. The highest rating, 0.80 for tongue kissing, lands close to “Good” on the five-point scale. To be sure, some found these events thrilling. But nearly as many said they were distressing.

For every act, the male involved was likely to be a boyfriend, and the women seemed to have waited for serious relationships before crossing the more dramatic thresholds. And as we saw in the 2007 study, these crossings were more likely to occur at the boy’s house than at the girl’s.

I also asked the women who had removed their clothes the first time they had been sexually undressed. They reported *they* had in 28 percent of the breast revelations, and in 20 percent of the genital exposures. Another 12 and 11 percent of the women respectively had assisted the guy, which was undoubtedly helpful to a highly aroused but inexperienced teenage boy trying to unhook a bra—as you might recall. But most of the time (60 percent on the upper level, and 69 percent down below) the girl had let the boy take off her clothes, while she no doubt waited nervously to be beheld.

In case you're wondering why I didn't ask when the girls had first seen boys naked, my studies have made The Obvious clear: very few students in my samples care very much about naked men. The spotlight follows the ladies. Their degree of nakedness seems to define the relationship; the male's is a speedy and foregone conclusion if the occasion demands.

The men's data from the 2008 study (Table 2-6) also mainly replicated the earlier results. Unlike the (larger) 2007 sample, the guys proved at least as likely as the women to have done these things; but most of these acts are preliminary sexual behaviors. The fellows started doing them at about the same age as the gals. But again they enjoyed them a heck of a lot more.

Men again proved much *less* likely to have had these first experiences with a serious romantic partner than the women did, and much more likely instead to have them with a friend, an acquaintance, or a stranger. And they were more likely to do these things for the first time at the woman's place than at their own, which I have interpreted as a sign that usually these acquaintances were sexually more advanced and aggressive than the guys were.

This is buttressed by the men's accounts of how the woman came to be naked that first time for these fellows. Fifty-two percent of the men said the girl revealed her breasts all by herself, and another 8 percent said she helped the guy expose her bosom. Similarly, 47 percent of the time the girl exposed her genitalia to the fellow, and another 9 percent of the time they undressed her together. So when it came time to play show-and-tete-a-tete, most of the gals that these guys were with that first time took the initiative.

Table 2-6

January, 2008 Data on Early Sexual Experiences

80 Males

Act	% Who Did	Mean Age	Mean Liking	Who Was the Female?			Where Did It Happen?		
				Not a Girlfriend	Girl-friend	Serious Girlfriend	His House	Her House	At a Party
“Tongue kissing”	82%	14.7	0.97	44%	50%	6%	14%	22%	14%
Boy felt covered breast	82%	15.1	1.25	44%	50%	6%	20%	34%	8%
Boy felt naked breast	80%	15.7	1.44	46%	49%	5%	29%	38%	6%
Boy saw her breast	81%	15.7	1.28	48%	47%	5%	26%	28%	12%
She gave “hand Job”	75%	16.4	1.32	38%	55%	7%	22%	38%	13%
Boy saw her genitalia	79%	16.5	1.14	39%	54%	7%	32%	37%	8%

You can order this book through Amazon.com, or directly from Lulu Press <http://www.lulu.com/content/6133792>. All of the author’s royalties will go into a scholarship fund at the University of Manitoba for the access program in social work, where my wife taught for many years.