

LATENCY: FACT OR FICTION?

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We owe the basis of our understanding of childhood sexuality to Sigmund Freud, who rocked the world in his day with his theories of infantile and childhood sexuality. When Freud described the impact of a child's experience on his adult character, the world was made to take cognizance of the universality of sexual activity and learning in children. In his theory of infantile sexuality, Freud described the erotic lives of infants and young children. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* Freud established the critical periods of psychosexual development and described the various stages of sexual development during the first four years of life.

Freud reconstructed the early sexual experiences, responses and fantasies of his adult patients, and it was this data that provided the framework for a developmental theory of childhood sexuality. The genius of Freud is not to be denied. Today, however, psychoanalytic theory is often the recipient of aggressive criticism concerning the validity and derivation of its concepts. All too frequently we, as members of the analytic community, respond defensively, tenaciously holding onto the learned analytic principles.

The organicists challenge psychoanalysis on the basis that so much of the theory is derived from case studies that are detailed but too few in number. At present, psychoanalytic concepts stand or fall on these limited case histories. If we are to consider psychoanalysis as a science, it is important to scientifically validate, or if need be, invalidate, our theories. Little primary research in this field has been initiated. Difficult as such research may seem, it need not be considered impossible. If psychoanalysis is to survive as an important and respected theory and treatment modality, then its theories must be justified. To theorize from five to ten case reports leaves psychoanalysis open to justly earned criticism.

This study investigates the concept of latency as a paradigm for beginning psychoanalytic research. The concept of latency is taught both in the psychiatric residency training programs and in analytic institutes. It may be incorporated as an absolute truth by psychiatrists and analysts in training, but in informal conversation, experienced clinicians say, "Of course there is no latency period." What seems the obvious is taken for granted. It is important to

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document the obvious. The paucity of investigative work into the myth or reality of the latency period stimulated this study.

This study challenges the concept of the latency period as universal and as applicable in modern times to the interruption and cessation of psychosexual development. By investigating the sexual knowledge and fantasies of children, it seems as if the latency period does not exist; rather, there is a progressive sexual development from infancy through adolescence without interruption, and sexuality remains in the forefront during the period from five to eleven years of age. This study surveys a large number of children, and investigates their sexuality during the so-called latency period.

Method

The child population studied consisted of a heterogeneous group of school children from kindergarten through the sixth grade. The subjects of this study were 3,200 children from urban and suburban areas. An equal representation of ages, races, socioeconomic groups, religions, and sexes are included. The ages ranged from five to twelve. The elementary school population consisted entirely of children in the latency period.

Essays and picture drawings were analyzed for overt and covert sexual material, sexual identity, gender identity, and sexual activity. Children were instructed to write compositions according to specific instructions. They were told to write about boys and girls, why they should not see X-rated movies, or what they should not know about X-rated movies.

Results

As can be seen in Table 1, sexual identity is well established by kindergarten in 97 percent of the child population and increases to 99 percent by grade three. Obviously, there is a very small percentage of children who remain unsure of their sexual identity throughout life. Gender identity is also well established by kindergarten, with 78 percent and 74 percent for males and females, respectively. This difference can be explained by cultural pressures,

Table 1. Percentage of Compositions Including Sexual Identity, Gender Identity, and Sexual Activity.

Grade	Sexual Identity		Gender Identity		Sexual Activity	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
K-1	97	97	78	74	16	24
2-3	99	99	90	88	18	35
4-5	99	99	98	98	39	44
6	99	99	99	99	56	54

parental pressures, and preferences for masculine activity—that is, for little boys to act like “men.” Sexual activity in its overtly recognizable behaviors develops progressively from kindergarten to sixth grade. In kindergarten, 16 percent of male compositions show overt sexuality; in grade six this increases to 56 percent. Interestingly, in the lower grades, girls are less reticent than boys in talking about sexuality and sex-appropriate behavior. By grade six the sexes are apparently equal in speaking out.

Presented below are representative compositions from each age group with an assessment of the psychosexual development manifested in them.

Kindergarten and Grade One

For kindergarten and grade one children, the teachers wrote the compositions verbatim as told to them by their students.

If a boy kissed me, I would kiss him more. And I would say I like you. I like Carlos because he is very nice with me. And he took me on a date. I like Carlos more than anybody in my class. I want him to want me. And do you know what? He came to my house and gave me a big, big, big, big kiss. The first time he saw me I was wearing a beautiful dress and it popped his eyes out.

Migdalia

Whoever kisses me I will slap his face. He was a strong boy but he was a nice boy. I asked his name and he didn't answer me. I got so angry that I wanted to throw him out the window. But I couldn't believe that I was going to have a baby. I had the baby and I was glad because that was what I wanted. That was what he told me.

Noreen

If I was sleeping in the morning and my husband came and kissed me in the neck, I'd kiss him in his mouth and I'd wink my eye at him.

Louisa

Children in kindergarten and grade one are surprisingly aware of the sex-appropriate activities and roles. There is awareness, and for some children, acting out of physical contact. At this stage there are also a great many love-hate relationships. Children are aware of make-up and clothes and their impact. Words like *loving* and *liking* are bandied about. Kissing is a prominent form of sexual activity recognized by both male and female children. They write freely about kissing and indicate that it is what one does sexually with the opposite sex. There are implications that one does more than kissing and that kisses can be placed in different areas: the neck and the mouth. Children are very much aware of the concepts of pretty and ugly. There is also much awareness of social courtship and marital roles. The compositions show identification with parental roles and with parental sex. At this age, the girls are aware that men fight for female favors. Fears of molestation are related. Activities like dancing and looking under girls' dresses are both exciting and frightening. The

awareness of sex-role differentiation, that is, the differential expectations of the girls and boys, begins to develop and become obvious in this age group. Boys, for example, should be rough and interested in sports; girls are pressured into roles of being demure, clean, and polite. There is a global awareness of marriage, housekeeping, and other sex-related identifications.

Grades Two and Three

I don't like boys because they kiss girls. They make the bed stink. I like to call them sissies. They piss the bed. I don't like William because he eats too much. He is fat. The boys always with one finger. Boys scream too much and they are stupid.

Elnora

I like about the girls. I like when a girl is not very smart but has good manners. I like when their breasts are not flat, and their legs are not fat and they are not conceited. I don't like when they think they could have any boy. I like when they wear short dresses.

Anonymous

I don't like boys because they are nasty. They look under your dress and try to kiss you. Boys are very dirty. I don't like sissies. When you go up the bus they look under your dress. They kiss the girls. They give me the creeps. They are silly. That is what I don't like about boys. They come from Mars. They asked me for a date. I said no and closed the door. Don't come back, I said. If you come back, I will scream.

Rhonda

I don't like boys because they look under girls dresses sometimes. And they look silly when they play jump rope with girls. Sometimes they hit girls and girls hit back.

Daisy

A boy is someone who looks handsome. A boy can be someone with pimples. Some boys grow up to be men. Boys are fellows. Fellows are boys that grow to be men. Boys can be husbands and actors and singers. Boys can get married. Boys can be fathers. Boys are good. Boys can be polite if they know how to handle a girl. But one thing he has to know how to act with girls. You must say you like them, take them out every night, propose to them. Say you want to marry me.

Carlotta

There is a growth of sophistication from the kindergarten and first graders to the second and third graders. These children are concerned with role definition and knowing how to handle the opposite sex. There is much preoccupation with voyeurism, both in thought and act. The specificity of sex-related objects, for example, stockings, lipstick, and clothes in general, seems to be prominent. Grade two and three children concern themselves with sexual activity beyond just kissing; they relate to hugging, kissing, and dancing with the opposite sex. There is an awareness of social dating behavior, and they show aspirations toward its initiation. Voyeurism is prominent for both sexes. The boys play with Ken dolls, while the girls play with Barbie dolls, both sexes acting out dating fantasies. The boys' sexual vocabulary and mannerisms are

looked upon as nasty by little girls and as masculine and mature by other boys. Both boys and girls are aware of gender-identity problems and point out and object to, for example, "sissy behavior" in boys.

Grades Four and Five

I like the legs, the waist, the breasts. I like the way they walk, the way they talk. I also like them because it's nature.

Tony

I like girls. They are beautiful. I am going to marry one. I really like girls. They look beautiful. They dress up beautiful. They dance good. Their legs are lovely. Some girls have long hair and short but I like their hair every way they fix it. They wear beautiful clothing. When girls grow up they are ladies and have children.

Wilfus

Most boys are very strong with their muscles. The boys I like are tall, dark, and handsome. If you go on a date, boys are well mannered. Some boys when they come over to your house they compliment you. This makes a girl feel real good on the inside, a burning sensation. Without boys, girls or women would be helpless. You couldn't share your love, or if you got mugged then a policeman would come to the rescue and save you. Some boys are dream bosses.

Linda

I would like to take my girl out someday when I grow up tall. I would get marry, and sure I will have twin babys. I will stick my dick in her pussy. I will suck her lips.

Willis

I like the shape in general. Legs, waist, face, and breasts. I think I want to be a photographer of nude women. I like what they do with men. I do not like fat women. P.S. I wish I was 12 years older.

Bill

I like girls to give them babies. I like girls to kiss them. I like girls to get them in my bed. I like girls to stick them. I like girls legs, I like girls sexy shapes. I like girls that let the boys stick it in them. I like girls to have private parties, and then I'll do my thing and put on my door do not disturb. Sorry I cannot finish.

Anonymous

The following major themes are predominant in the compositions from grades four through five: touching and its connection with sex, shapes and personal tastes, awareness of intimate sexual activity, bragging, teachers and actresses as sex objects, privacy with the opposite sex, and body and breath odor. In these grades, physical contact is purposeful, and sexual overtures become prominent. Body sizes and shapes come into focus. Ann-Margaret and Raquel Welch are symbols of sexuality and pulchritude. Voyeurism is extended from the infantile peeking up skirts to fascination with girlie and nude magazines. Looking up sexual terms in the dictionary and increasing one's sexual vocabulary are frequent activities. Body odors and breath smells become

specifically sexual, simultaneously exciting and repelling. Mixed parties without adult supervision and privacy in parties are demanded. Some children begin to develop secondary sexual characteristics which become noticeable.

Grade Six

I think that a girl can get pregnant at any age above thirteen because she should know what she is doing if her mother tells her about sex. My father thinks that I should not have a boyfriend. I think that if a girl wants a boy to feel her it is her business not her parents. I think that a girl can kiss a boy at any time, my father thinks I shouldn't.

Delilah

Somedays I see pretty girls walking along the street. They have good ass and a good waist and a good nouck and I will find another sweet ho that suck dick.

Harold

I think that miniskirts should be worn, but my parents think that miniskirts are temptations for boys. They say that they might rape you if walk with a miniskirt. They put down the hems of your dresses without telling you. I think that sex education should be taught, because if something happens to you, you want to know what's wrong with you. About making the baby, they think, if you learn about it you would immediately go out and get pregnant. They don't let you with boys because you'll go to lover's lane and get pregnant. If you ask questions about sex they tell you to mind your business and you'll learn someday.

Female anonymous

In grade six there is an increase in factual knowledge in regard to menarche and its implications for pregnancy. There is specific knowledge of the act of intercourse and its possible consequences. Peer values replace parental and traditional values. Permissiveness varies with the group. This particular group asserts that they know all about sex. Masturbation to orgasm is prominent in both boys and girls. There is an increasing awareness of the sex desires and drives. There is a desire to be older so that one may participate in sexual activity. Demands for control over one's body in regard to masturbation and petting are reminiscent of the power struggle with parents about toilet training. The message of these kids is, "This is my body and I will do with it as I please."

Conclusion

Through the analysis of compositions of children from kindergarten through grade six, this study reveals the presence of overt sexual interest and knowledge. There is a continuing, progressive expansion of social awareness and activities. Even if one is to consider this in the most classical sense, the sexual development in mental activity does not seem to be interrupted or repressed but, in fact, continues to manifest itself blatantly. In consideration of more recent concepts of sexuality, a person's sexuality is considered dependent on three interrelated components: one's sexual identity, one's gender

identity, and one's sexual behavior. Sexual identity is the sense of one's maleness or femaleness. This depends on biologic sexual characteristics and is usually firmly established by age two to three. Gender identity, according to Stoller,² is the psychological aspect of behavior related to masculinity and femininity. Gender identity is a social phenomenon and is derived from social cues of important persons in one's life. A part of gender identity is gender role which, according to Money and Hampson, is "all those things a person does or says to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or girl." Sexual activity is the third component of one's sexuality. Masturbation is one sexual activity that begins in infancy and continues uninterrupted throughout one's life. In latency, masturbation may be prominent and may be a part of exhibitionism. Evaluating childrens' sexual development by these present-day concepts of sexuality shows that progressive psychosexual development continues during years five through twelve.

Cultural factors contribute to the elimination of the latency period. The sexual revolution and freedom in the mass media are sexual enlightenments to children. Movie ratings, titles, advertisements, coming attractions, and songs and records such as "Lay Lady Lay" by Bob Dylan and "Let's Do It in the Road" by the Beatles are sexually blatant. There is an ubiquitous availability on neighborhood newstands and in the grocery and candy stores of soft- and hard-core pornography. Television's relaxed censorship allows overt sexual material during children's prime-time hours. In addition, there is the inability of subcultures to isolate their children because of integration in the school system. Freud studied middle- and upper-middle-class children who were most sheltered. Ghetto children are exposed to the raw essence of life and do not have the opportunities to be shielded from adult sexuality. Exchange of sexual knowledge crosses the class lines.

When we tried to evaluate childrens' sexuality by utilizing a straightforward approach with instructions such as "Write about the opposite sex," the responses from the children were sparse, cautious, and brief. By experimenting with various directions, such as "What do you like or dislike about the opposite sex," responses were more factual, indicated greater sexual knowledge, and were more personal. The most productive responses were elicited with the instructions, "Why children shouldn't be allowed to see R and X rated movies; or, "What is in R and X movies that children are too young to know about?" here, the children proceeded with aplomb to tell all that they knew but were not supposed to know. By being paradigmatic and catering to the children's adult-established value system, the children would reveal what they did know, while at the same time denying that they had any right to know it. By avoiding conflict with their value system, the subjects could reveal the extent of their knowledge and experiences. One learns that what the adult world has established is an adult psychic censor that will not admit of

children's growth and experience. Selective perception may becloud and avoid awareness of childhood sexuality, but it does not eliminate it.

Many of the productions of the children showed confusion and pain in grasping and dealing with present realities of both themselves and their parents. It would be an act of kindness and love for adults to acknowledge the presence of this awareness and to share with their children the true facts of life so that they may help their children to grow in a healthy manner. Apparently, although many families are unable or unwilling to do this, it has not stopped, now or ever, the generation-to-generation flow of sex knowledge that is whispered, snickered, and fantasied about. Sex education does exist. The only option is whether it should come from adults or peers. By turning one's back on children's needs in this area, one condemns them to doubt, anxiety, fear, and even exploitation. A positive acknowledgment is the only responsible course of action.

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