

## PSYCHIATRY

# Sex Offense Interpreted

► WHEN IS the "sex offender" really a criminal?

Examples of our society's inconsistent attitudes toward sex and the sex offender are reported in a new book entitled *Sex Offenders*. The book, published by Harper & Row, was written by Dr. Paul Gebhard, John Gagnon, Dr. Wardell Pomeroy and Cornelia Christenson, all of the Institute of Sex Research, Indiana University, Bloomington, founded by the late Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey. The book is the result of a 25-year study of 2,721 men, of whom 1,356 were serving sentences for sex crimes.

"Society is caught in a contradiction" when it comes to offenses involving adult males and females, the researchers report. "On one hand we stress and encourage the development of heterosexual behavior—the literature, the advertisements, the movies, everything relentlessly dines in the order: be sexually attractive, find romance, get a mate! On the other hand we strive to prevent heterosexual coitus, the logical end product of the social campaign for heterosexuality, in any situation other than legal marriage."

The book also discloses a number of interesting findings regarding offenses against children. The idea of the stranger lurking in the shadows ready to spring upon an innocent child appears to be a popular misconception, since a man who molests a child is often not a stranger to her. A young child is "more vulnerable" to adult friends and acquaintances than to the mythical stranger, the researchers said. Three-fifths

of the offenders in the study knew the child, while only two-fifths were strangers.

Most child molesters find their erotic pleasure in merely fondling little girls and often do not even attempt to touch their private parts. Only one in ten child molesters interviewed tried to rape the child. Most of the little girls who had experienced sex offenses hardly knew what had happened or were upset very little, if at all, unless their parents or the school and police became panic-stricken.

Most of the child molesters are "not physically dangerous" and are more disorganized than hostile, the researchers said.

Few of the sex offenders interviewed resembled the popularly described "sex fiend," but were generally from low class homes, with little education or job success. They usually made a blunder out of their crimes, whether attempted rape or "peeping," and they were quickly caught by police in many cases.

Contradicting another popular belief, few sex offenders were found to be dope addicts.

"The drug-crazed fiend or the sex-crazed drug addict are figments of journalistic imagination," they said. In addition, the offenders were found not to be in any way inspired by pornography. Many, however, did commit their crimes under the influence of alcohol.

Although a high percentage of the sex offenders were single or had experienced broken marriages, a great number reported that they had happy marriages.

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## PSYCHOLOGY

# Fire Signs Go Unnoticed

► FORESTERS may have to revamp some of the standard roadside fire prevention signs if they expect forest users to get the message, since a lot of people apparently do not even see the signs.

Regularly used signs were pitted against a number of improvised ones to test the forest public's reaction in a recent California test. The new signs were the same size as the old ones, but were different in shape, color and wording and in the use of symbols. Nearly 1,200 drivers were interviewed on a stretch of country road to find out if they remembered seeing any of the signs and, if so, which ones they remembered.

Some 30% of the drivers questioned said that they had not seen any signs at all when the regular ones were displayed along the road. Only 15% failed to see any of the signs when the experimental ones were displayed.

"In general, the set of new signs did show up better," reported Gail J. Ruckel and William S. Folkman, both of the U.S. Forest Service in Berkeley, Calif. The study did not show why the new signs were better, but the ones in both sets that proved most effective had short messages of two or

three words in contrast to the longer messages of four to fourteen words in the less effective signs.

No doubt color, design and novelty were also important factors, the researchers said.

Forest users have had ample opportunity over the years to become familiar with the old signs, the researchers said. Fourteen percent of the drivers asked to pick the one old-style sign that stood out in their minds, however, mentioned signs that were not even used in the study. Also, some 44% were unable to remember any sign at all as outstanding.

In another test of recall, the drivers were shown a card containing color reproductions of all the signs used in the study and were asked to point out the signs displayed in the test area. On the average, those exposed to the new signs recalled 2.4 signs. Those exposed to the old set averaged only 1.5 signs and more than 20% of them said that they had seen none of the signs. In contrast, less than five percent of those exposed to the new signs failed to see any of them.

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