OBSERVATIONS ON SOME CASES OF EXHIBITIONISM.*

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EXHIBITIONISM was stated by East to be the commonest sexual offence for which men are received into prison; this proved to be true in 1946, when 98 men charged with exposing themselves were received into Brixton Prison during the year. Exhibitionism is customarily dealt with under Section 4 of the Vagrancy Act, 1824, and the offender is charged with being a Rogue and Vagabond in that he "did wilfully, openly, lewdly and obscenely expose his person with intent to insult a female." The term "exposure of the person" is presumed to be synonymous with exhibition of the genitals. The 98 cases about to be discussed represented 32·2 per cent. of the sexual offences and 1·95 per cent. of all offences received into the prison during 1946. Exhibitionism presents a difficult problem both to the doctor and to the layman, as it is often apparently nonsensical and meaningless. All cases received into prison are specially interviewed as a routine and frequently the Court requests a report as to the accused's state of mind. In this series this was requested in 88 cases—a much higher proportion than for any other offence.

In 1924 East recorded a series of 150 cases of exhibitionists received into Brixton Prison to which frequent reference will be made in this paper, and he gave in addition figures of sexual offenders received over a period of twelve months. It is interesting, therefore, to compare these figures he gave with those for 1946 in a tabular form.

	East's series.	Present series.
All sexual offences	291	295
All other offences	7,401	4,728
Percentage of sexual offences	3·8	5·9
Exposing person	107	98
Indecent assault on females	69	78
Carnal knowledge or attempts	42	23
Indecent assault on males	37	39
Importuning	19	24
Unnatural offences against males	17	33
Reports requested by Courts on sexual offenders	101	196

The most striking difference is the increased percentage of sexual offences and the great increase in requests from magistrates for reports as to the mental condition of offenders.

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The act of exposure shows great variations from case to case. Havelock Ellis describes the exhibitionist as usually a shy and timid person, who seldom makes demands on the woman and is satisfied with the mere act and the emotion it produces; he seldom speaks or makes an effort to approach her; he may have no erection and seldom masturbates. The response of the woman may be one of fright and flight, one of indignation and abuse, or one of pleasure and amusement; in the latter case the emotion produced is the most pleasurable. Walker and Strauss state that the exhibitionist will return over and over to the same spot and repeat the act, especially if it is received by the female with a response such as giggling. Allen considers the emotion is greater if the female is shocked; he also mentions the favourite spot, usually a lonely site, such as a country lane or a railway carriage. East and Hubert are more definite and rightly stress that the maximum sexual excitement may not necessarily occur at the time of actual exposure. They describe the object as always a stranger, sometimes plural in number, of constant age, often girls in their twenties or teens. In this series all the above examples were encountered. It was quite common for the man to have a fixed object, such as one or more females in the twenties or teens, but in addition many exposures were to children. In the latter cases, males might also be present, but there were always one or more female children in addition. There were, however, several cases of exposure in crowded places or actually to a crowd. One man, for instance, exposed himself to a crowd who were waiting to see a distinguished personage visiting the "Britain Can Make It" Exhibition; another to a bus queue of schoolgirls; and yet another to several A.T.S. girls standing at the windows of their hostel. In most cases the females were strangers; but one man exposed himself to his neighbour's wife, another to his landlady and a third to his own children. Nor was the object always fixed, for several men stood or sat in public parks and exposed themselves to all passing females, irrespective of their age. In the table below, showing the nature of the objects, the adult women were most frequently in their twenties:

One adult woman only	34 cases.
Two adult women	14 ,,
More than two adult women	19 ,,
One adolescent only	3 ,,
Two adolescents	5 ,,
More than two adolescents	5 ,,
One child only	6 ,,
Two children	3 ,,
More than two children	9 ,,

The emotion experienced was, in general, directly related to the response shown by the women. If the latter expressed indignation, embarrassment or amusement the greatest emotion was experienced. When the exposure was to two women much greater pleasure was felt if one of them was seen to comment on the exposure to the other. In the few cases in which it was alleged that the woman showed interest or pleasure, much less emotion was experienced;

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the most unsatisfactory result, from the man's point of view, was a complete lack of interest on the part of the woman.

The site of the exposure varied considerably. There were lonely country lanes, railway carriages and the windows of the offenders' homes. At the other extreme, there were busy thoroughfares, like Piccadilly, stations like Waterloo, crowds, public parks and, in particular, the entrances of public urinals. A very common site was in bombed buildings.

Thirty-one of the offenders admitted masturbation at the time of the exposure, whereas the remaining 67 denied it; 43 admitted that the penis was erect. In considering these figures it should be borne in mind that reports by the Police were usually available and that a check on the prisoners' statements could be made; they frequently changed their first story when they realized this.

Prisoners charged with indecent exposure deny their guilt more frequently than in any other sexual offence. 46 (= 47 per cent.) of this series denied the offence and many offered an excuse of some sort; in East's series 55 per cent. made a denial. The excuses offered were varied; the commonest was that they had been observed while micturating (18 cases); 5 claimed to be drunk and not to remember anything about the offence; a further 19 alleged consumption of alcohol immediately before; 8 claimed that some physical disability had caused the act, combined with micturition or alcohol. The physical disabilities were (*a*) genito-urinary, such as an enlarged prostate, sensitive small bladder (confirmed by catheterization at the prisoner's request), enuresis, nephritis and urethral stricture; and (*b*) diseases causing scratching or involving auto-examination by the man, e.g. scabies, tinea cruris and furuncle of the thigh. Other excuses offered were that they were observed while masturbating (5 cases), that there was mistaken identity (2 cases), or that they had forgotten to fasten the trousers after micturition (3 cases). At this point it is relevant to mention the rather slender evidence which is sometimes offered that a man has exposed himself. In view of the frequent denials made by men against whom the evidence is indisputable, it is sometimes difficult in less obvious cases to form a conclusion as to the real state of affairs; but there can be little doubt that there are cases in which no exposure, or at any rate no exposure "with intent to insult a female," was in fact committed. It is only fair to say, however, that the Courts tend to take a very lenient view of such cases and few are ever committed to prison.

Contrary to the findings of East, who found 60 per cent. of his series to be bachelors, the greater proportion in this series were married men. Of the 98 cases, 53 were married and 7 had mistresses or were engaged and having sexual intercourse with their fiancées; only 38 were single men. Separation, domestic strife or dissatisfaction were common among the married men as follows:

Separated	15 cases.
Unsatisfactory relations	18 ,,
Wife pregnant and no intercourse possible	5 ,,
No disharmony obvious	15 ,,

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These figures still confirm, therefore, the important part that deprivation of sexual intercourse plays in the aetiology of exhibitionism.

The incidence of exhibitionism is greater in the younger age-groups and falls off as old age is approached. The curve was found to drop sharply after the group 30–39 years as follows:

23–29 years	37 cases.
30–39 ,,	36 ,,
40–49 ,,	11 ,,
50–59 ,,	9 ,,
60 and over	5 ,,

These findings correspond fairly closely to those of East, though the drop after the 30–39 year group is more marked. At the present time only males of 23 years and over are received into Brixton Prison, whereas in 1924 males of 16 years and over were received.

No less than 56 of the offenders had no previous convictions of any kind whatsoever; 19 more had previous convictions for offences other than exposure, usually of a petty nature. One man had 21 previous convictions for larceny, drunkenness, etc. It is seen, therefore, that in all 76·7 per cent. had no previous conviction for exhibitionism. Of the 23 cases which had previous convictions for exposure, 10 had one, 3 had two, 4 had three and 6 had more than three convictions. Some of them had other convictions for non-sexual offences. In view of this relatively small percentage of recidivists—and bearing in mind that none of the 10 cases with only one previous conviction had been sent to prison—may one not again repeat East's question and ask if the effect of prison is not a strong deterrent in cases of exhibitionism? The view that general criminality is more common in exhibitionists than in other forms of sexual offence is also supported by these figures.

There have been many classifications of exhibitionism. Havelock Ellis quotes Maeder as dividing cases into:

(1) The infantile exhibitionists, who desire to gaze and be gazed at; (2) the seniles, who are impotent; and (3) those indulging in exhibitionism for the purpose of invitation, and who are of definite virility.

None of the cases in this series fall into Class 1, not more than two into Class 2 and only relatively few of the remainder were exposing themselves by way of invitation. Krafft-Ebbing in his classical work (pp. 478 *et seq.*) divided exhibitionism into four groups:

(1) Acquired states of mental weakness with cerebral or spinal disease clouding consciousness and at the same time causing impotence.

(2) Epileptics in whom the act is an abnormal organic impulse performed in a state of imperfect consciousness.

(3) The somewhat allied group of neurasthenic cases.

(4) Periodical impulsive cases with deep hereditary taint.

Havelock Ellis criticizes this classification as unsatisfactory; this is confirmed in the present series. Only two cases fall into Group 1, none were epileptic and only four cases would fall into Group 3. East in his paper divided

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his cases into two groups—the psychopathic and the depraved. Adopting the same classification for this series the results were as follows:

A. Psychopathic.		B. Depraved.	
1. Psychoses	3	1. The exposure as a preliminary to an attempt at carnal knowledge	0
2. Undeveloped psychoses	4		
3. Psycho-neuroses	4		
4. Personality defects	14	2. The exposure as an attempt to debauch young children to commit a masturbatory act upon the exhibitionist	9
5. Mental defectives	2		
6. Subnormals	11		
7. Visionaries	29	3. The exposure as an attempt to attract, excite or invite a female	17
8. Alcoholics	5		
Total	72	Total	26

It is very difficult to fit all the cases satisfactorily into these groups and many could be placed into two or more. Comparison with East's figures, however, show a striking general similarity. It was found necessary to add a sub-group of personality defects owing to their relatively high number. These consisted mainly of psychopaths, but there were three cases of post-concussive syndrome. All the psychoses were schizophrenics. The psychoneuroses consisted of two anxiety states and two compulsive-obsessive neuroses; this compares closely with East's five and the significance of the small number is discussed below. As in East's series there were no epileptics. The greatest discrepancy between these figures and those of 1924 is the mental defectives—2 as against 24. One can only assume that this is due to the improved detection of mental defectives nowadays by Education Authorities and the disposal of them at a much earlier age. The percentage of visionaries in both series is almost identical. In only four cases was there any strong evidence of other perversions; this figure cannot be regarded as really accurate as the length of time available for observation did not permit of such a deep and detailed investigation as is required to discover other than very obvious perversions. Only 12 cases had had any form of psychotherapy, but 9 of these were men with several previous convictions for the same offence. The 3 who had received treatment and who had no previous convictions consisted of an anxiety state, a compulsive-obsessive neurosis and a post-concussive syndrome. All 4 cases of psychoneurosis had received psychotherapy.

In 1939 East and Hubert gave a further grouping, which is found to be much more satisfactory in use and it is relatively easy to place each case in its correct group; a typical case history is given in each case.

Group 1.—These are the true exhibitionists, who practice exposure as a means of sexual relief in preference to any other means. They have usually been doing it for many years and it replaces, to a great extent, normal sexual intercourse. The act is often repeated; the men are anxious and fight hard against the temptation. Treatment is sought, but often seems of little help to them. In the present series there were 15 cases of this nature; 11 had

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previous convictions and in 3 cases they had as many as seven in number. A typical case-history was as follows:

CASE 5.—Aged 61. Seven previous convictions for the same offence. He was a charming old gentleman of good education and pleasant manners. Indecent exposures commenced at puberty and had continued intermittently both in this country and in India, where his career had been ruined in consequence. He married in early life and had a family of three; intimate relations with his wife had never been really good. At first he chose adult women, including coloured girls, as his object, but in later years all his exposures had been to children. His frequent convictions had caused continuous moves from one country to another. Treatment had been sought frequently, but had little curative effect; he had also tried to exhaust himself sexually by frequent intercourse, but with no better result. Thinking it might benefit his condition he remarried a girl of 26 years in 1935; at interview this wife stated that he was completely impotent and had only achieved intercourse satisfactorily on two occasions. At the time of the present offence he was attending a clinic and had recently been a voluntary patient in a private mental hospital. He had just left court after being bound over on a charge of exposure to children, and was on his way back to the mental hospital, travelling alone in his car. He stopped, approached two female children, aged 8 years, and exposed himself to them. He was frank and co-operative at interview, and described a feeling of excitement at the time of exposure, followed by one of guilt; he stated that he had the same guilty feeling following sexual intercourse. There was a history of being afraid of enclosed spaces and he had on several occasions commenced to disrobe whilst travelling on tubes and buses. His own psychiatrist was 'phoned and stated that he had noted the strong guilt complex, and that analysis had revealed subconscious guilt in addition. The exposures were regarded as obsessive in character in view of the inability to control his impulses, the distress caused and the failure of imprisonment to deter him. The man was so anxious about his continued offences that he suggested castration as the only possible means of ridding himself of his condition. The court again bound him over and he re-entered the private mental hospital as a voluntary patient, being escorted there on this occasion.

Group 2 consists of those who expose themselves as a prelude to obtaining sexual intercourse; that is, to attract, excite and invite the female. Naturally the objects in these cases are adult women or adolescents, often of attractive appearance. In addition the woman is usually alone and the exposure tends to take place in a secluded spot. The male has an erection and goes through the motions of masturbation. This form of exposure is not so common as one is usually led to suppose in the literature; in this series there were only 12 cases.

CASE 2.—Aged 27. Four previous convictions for the same offence. He was a married man, but had been separated from his wife for over a year. From his story he had a voracious sexual appetite and had frequent sexual intercourse. He was invalided from the Forces, and twelve months previously had been a voluntary patient in a mental hospital following impulsive acts of violence to others. He was discharged following an attack on a male nurse; at that time he was not considered certifiable as insane. In this and all his previous charges his behaviour had been identical. He approached an attractive woman, between 20 and 30 years of age in a lonely part of a wood and exposed his erect penis. He admitted that his object was to obtain intercourse and though in most cases the woman ran away, he alleged that on two occasions he had been successful. He was shy and introverted whilst under observation, but his history showed frequent impulsive behaviour. He was considered to be an early non-certifiable schizophrenic.

Group 3 consists of those men who are unable to, or afraid of, obtaining normal sexual intercourse. Most of them are bachelors or married men who are separated. They ask for nothing from the woman and experience a sense of relief and satisfaction, usually at the time of the exposure. There are often

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several women and the penis may or may not be erect. Sometimes a spontaneous ejaculation occurs. 21 cases occurred and 3 of these alleged a fear of contracting venereal disease as their reason for avoiding intercourse.

CASE 83.—Aged 29. No previous convictions. He was a married man with two children, and his wife had refused all intercourse for a long period, as she did not wish to have any more children; she thought that contraceptives were unreliable. He had served in the Forces, but was discharged owing to "nerves." On the morning of the offence there had been some "love-play" with his wife, but no intercourse was permitted. Whilst he was dressing he went to the bedroom window and exposed himself to passing women in the street. He was emotionally unstable and showed a very poorly integrated personality.

Group 4 was the largest group and consisted of 45 cases. These were men in whom the exposure was an isolated occurrence due to sudden temptation. They included the alcoholics and those who alleged that they were micturating when the opportunity for exposure was suddenly presented; others were masturbating or about to do so when a female was observed. It includes all the "physical" excuses and indeed most of those who denied the offence. The object was not fixed and the site was varied, but was often at or near a public urinal. Most of the men had no previous convictions.

CASE 84.—Aged 53. No previous convictions. He was a happily married man, who was on excellent terms with his wife, and had no history of any mental disorder. He was walking in the park after visiting a public house and felt a sudden urgent desire to empty his bladder. The nearest urinal was the other side of the park, so he stepped into the bushes and urinated behind a tree. As he stepped out, buttoning his trousers, he saw two girls in their late teens approaching and he exposed himself to them; he had no erection. He stated that the action was impulsive and had given him no satisfaction, at least not a conscious satisfaction.

Group 5 was a small one (5 cases) and consisted only of subnormal or defective persons. They regard exposure as the normal sexual approach to a woman, as to them it is the most easily understood. It resembles the behaviour of animals during mating, e.g. the love dance of the apes.

CASE 82.—Aged 28. Three previous convictions for the same offence. He was a dull and backward man with a mental age of 11½ years. He had been in a mental hospital, but was never considered certifiable under the Mental Deficiency Acts. He pleaded guilty to exposing himself to a girl of about fourteen years of age whom he saw walking in the park. She aroused a desire in him, but he did not really wish for intercourse with her. He had done the same thing on former occasions and failed to regard his conduct as in any way abnormal.

A further *Group* 6 was described by East and Hubert, and consisted of cases precipitated by the commencement of ordinary heterosexual life; there were no such cases in this series.

The above results are tabulated below:

Group 1.	The true exhibitionists	15 cases.
,, 2.	Exposure as an invitation to intercourse .	12 ,,
,, 3.	Substitution for normal intercourse .	21 ,,
,, 4.	Isolated instances due to sudden temptation	45 ,,
,, 5.	Subnormals to whom exposure is the natural approach	5 ,,
Total		98 ,,

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Exhibitionism is a product of civilization and does not occur as a rule among naked savages. In such races there is no attraction, for it is that which is hidden, and not that which is exposed, which creates curiosity. The psychoanalysts consider that exhibitionism is the result of the castration complex; Fenichel states that the man exposes himself to prove that he has a penis and subconsciously desires the woman to show him that she had not. Näcke regards it as a form of sadism; whilst Stekel considers it to be essentially narcissistic in origin. Havelock Ellis compares exposure with the actions of the flagellist when the man approaches the woman with a rod representing the penis; he describes exhibitionism as a psychic detumescence. Few cases can be regarded as psychoneurotic in origin. As already stated, only four cases, of which two were compulsive-obsessives, occurred out of 98 offenders. The act of exposure is often impulsive in nature and there is an ever-increasing urge to carry it out; but ordinarily there is no distress at giving way to the desire and no real effort to control the impulse. In addition, as has been suggested earlier, the effect of imprisonment is so frequently deterrent as to contraindicate a diagnosis of neurosis. Masturbation at frequent intervals from puberty onwards is a common history. No less than 34 men in this series volunteered that it was a habit at the time of the offence. The exposing of the organ added an increase to the excitement which they gained from masturbation, the most primitive form of sexual relief. It will be appreciated from the divergent views quoted above and from the study of the present series of cases, that no single aetiological factor can be applied to exhibitionism in general. Numerous factors, constitutional and environmental, are involved; each case must be judged on its own merits, both as regards the personality of the individual, and as regards the environment in which he customarily lives and the circumstances in which the particular offence occurred.

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