

# The health educator's hat

John Balding

HEA Schools Health Education Unit

University of Exeter

Stereotyped images are useful and powerful – but are not always accurate. This article explores how personal labels can affect expectations: from professional status within a social context to the more humdrum concept of the boy who spends his time fishing.

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As teachers within our own staff rooms, our colleagues have expectations of us. In addition to expert knowledge in our own fields, we also have projected upon us expectations of certain standards of behaviour and particular subject areas that we should be interested in. Socially, when we meet members of other professions, it is not unusual to draw upon particular expertise – for example, to raise dental problems with a dentist or disease problems with the doctor. There is also a tendency to be conscious of aspects of our own behaviour when in the presence of members of other professional groups: how does the presence of a policeman or a clergyman affect conversation and behaviour? Standing in the staff-room one day I juggled with a biscuit and dropped it; it broke into three pieces which, being a dirty biologist at heart, I picked up and ate. This caused considerable hot debate about appropriate behaviour and I left before its conclusion, but clearly I had let some people down.

On my arrival one day at the meal table to join colleagues participating in the joys of cafeteria lunch, with my health-education hat apparent, the conversation turned to the perils of smoking and secondary smoking. Mike Golby, a very fit and health conscious colleague, remarked upon some explanations he had

recently read in the press of reasons given by intelligent and caring pregnant women and mothers of young children for their continued need to smoke, despite the abundant evidence that it would damage not only their own health but that of their unborn and young children. We think that the press article was based on a journalist's translation of some of Hilary Graham's recent work following earlier researches (Graham, 1987). The explanation was that the activity provided a *private space* into which the harassed Mum could withdraw and regain composure before returning to the chores of being a parent.

## Fishing and smoking

Feeling the relevance of this explanation, I immediately reflected upon the context of questions in the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire for behavioural situations which might provide this withdrawal atmosphere for young people; the question that sprang to mind was *Do you go fishing?* Reporting this to my lunch-time colleagues and perhaps being misunderstood (being busy with my pie and chips) Mike's further comment was to observe that whenever his jogging route took him along the Tiverton canal "all the fishermen were smoking". It was inevitable thereafter that we should

explore the Health Related Behaviour data bank for connections between the two behaviours.

Table 1 is the result of these searches. This summarises the responses from the 1987 data bank of the 5th-year (15-16 year old) boys, numbering in total 1204. About a quarter of them go fishing, and just over half of the fishers frequent the banks of river, canal, or pond at least once a week. In round figures, the results show that 17% of non fishers smoke, compared with the 20% of the less serious fishers and the 30% of the weekly fishermen who smoke.

What rewards does smoking bring to the fisherman? Does it enhance the peacefulness of the activity? Does it relieve the boredom between bites? Does it help to keep the gnats at bay? Or does it do all of these as well as being intrinsically enjoyable?

I can recall the visual imagery of cigarette advertisements portraying clean bubbling streams, sunlight filtering through springtime foliage – can this be the connection? Or was it the attractive partner I overlooked in my description of the advertisement? (I have never seen any such partnerships beneath the fishing umbrellas, and perhaps they are not allowed.)

**Expectations defied**

This search of the data bank began with the assumption that the pastime/sport/activity of fishing provided an individual with the opportunity to withdraw from the daily toil and strife and to become reflective

Fishing behaviour	Never smoked	Smoked once or twice	Given up smoking	Would like to stop	Doesn't want to stop
Rarely or never go fishing (76.3%)	40.6	29.3	13.3	10.2	6.6
Go fishing at least once a month (10.7%)	31.0	34.9	14.0	16.3	3.9
Go fishing at least once a week (12.9%)	31.4	26.9	11.5	23.7	6.4

*Table 1. Fishing and smoking in 15-16 year olds. The results are based on a sample of 1265 boys completing the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire in 1987. Figures in percentages of 'fishing behaviour'.*

and to recharge his (her?) batteries. Therefore I expected to confirm this image of the 5th-form fisherboy (FFFB) as a retiring sort of person. Far from it! Further searches of the data reveal, in fact, that the converse of this image may be more likely: for example, examination of Table 2 shows that significantly higher percentages of the FFFBs had been to a disco within the past two weeks, and Table 3 shows that they were more likely to have got part of last week's ration of alcohol at a party. Several more differences between the FFFBs and the other boys in the same age group are displayed in Tables 2, 3 and 4 for the reader to examine. The higher level of drinking alcohol is reflected in the numbers using the four sources selected in Table 3.

How youngsters choose to spend their money is a powerful indicator of lifestyle, and some interesting differences are suggested by the figures in Table 4. The smoking percentages are almost totally consistent with the figures in Table 1, which is to be expected but nevertheless reassuring to find. The percentages shown for money spent on music, cinema and video hire suggest some small differences, whereas the use of slot machines (space invaders, pinball, and so on) shows substantial differences between the groups. Links between the use of these machines, other social activities, and sources of alcohol are likely. The use of gambling machines is not separated from this group in the current version of the Questionnaire, but will be in the coming Version 12, planned for 1989.

*Table 2. Fishing and selected behaviours in 14-15 year olds. The results are based on a sample of 1265 boys completing the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire in 1987. Figures in percentages of 'fishing behaviour'.*

	Fishing behaviour		
	Rarely or never (76.3%)	At least once a month (10.7%)	At least once a week (12.9%)
Went to disco in past week . . . .	31	42	51
At least 1 unit of alcohol drunk last week . . . . .	71	80	90
4+ 'vigorous sports' played in season . . . . .	13	17	30
Often go on a motorbike or moped	12	14	23
Intend taking a motorbike test . .	40	53	50
Participate in bicycle racing . . . .	9	15	17

*Table 3. Fishing and sources of alcohol during the past week for 14-15 year olds. The results are based on a sample of 1265 boys completing the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire in 1987. Figures in percentages of 'fishing behaviour'.*

	Fishing behaviour		
	Rarely or never (76.3%)	At least once a month (10.7%)	At least once a week (12.9%)
Supermarket . . . . .	8	5	11
Off-licence . . . . .	24	27	36
Pub . . . . .	24	28	38
Home . . . . .	32	35	40
Party or disco . . . . .	19	21	28

*Table 4. Fishing and money spent by 14-15 year olds during the past month. The results are based on a sample of 1265 boys completing the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire in 1987. Figures in percentages of 'fishing behaviour'.*

	Fishing behaviour		
	Rarely or never (76.3%)	At least once a month (10.7%)	At least once a week (12.9%)
Books . . . . .	11	12	8
Cigarettes . . . . .	17	20	29
Alcoholic drinks . . . . .	43	48	60
Records . . . . .	53	57	61
Cinema . . . . .	23	21	29
Video hire . . . . .	40	46	48
Slot machines . . . . .	30	43	46
Sports equipment . . . . .	30	36	44

The differences in involvement in sports is worthy of separate attention. The question *Have you spent any money on sports equipment in the past 4 weeks?* (see Table 4) produced a marked difference, with more of the FFFBs saying Yes; of course, this could include the purchase of small items to maintain their pastime of fishing. However, in Table 2 we see that almost twice as many of the most frequent fishers (at 30%) actually identify four or more vigorous sports from the list in Table 5, in which they participate at least once a week when they are in season.

### Conclusion

Despite the above evidence, there may be some 'quiet recluse' types amongst the FFFBs. Not all the FFFBs will display all the characteristics examined above. Each will display them to a greater or lesser degree; thus not all of them will smoke a lot, drink a lot, play the slot machines,

go to discos and play at least four vigorous team games each week (when in season). However, the image suggested by the data is of a group of interesting and lively young people.

The use of the Health Related Behaviour survey method with the wide ranging content of health related behaviours does enable the research of lifestyles. Health-related behaviours cannot be treated in isolation and need to be understood in the context of the total life of the individual. How many of the readers of this article began with my prejudice about the typical fisherman? The use of the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire can dispel some myths and undermine some stereotypes.

Let's all go fishing!

### Reference

- Graham, H. (1987). Women's smoking and family health. *Social Science and Medicine*, 25, 1, 47-56.

Aerobics	Gymnastics	Roller/ice skating	Squash
Basketball	Hockey	Rowing	Swimming
Competitive cycling	Jogging	Rugby	Tennis
Cross-country running	Judo, karate, etc.	Skiing	Trampolineing
Fitness exercises	Netball	Soccer	Windsurfing

*Table 5. The 'vigorous sports', listed in the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire, from which the selection noted in Table 2 was made.*