**Why redheads take longer than blondes to lose their virginity: Genes influence how promiscuous people are**

* **Geneticists studied 380,000 people to look for genes behind sexual activity**
* **They found 38 genes associated with age when a person first has sex**
* **One of these genes is associated with a risk-taking personality**

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Scientists claim they have found genes that show hair colour can affect how likely someone is to have sex.

Natural redheads – both men and women - were more likely to delay having sex until an older age than people of different hair colouring.

Women who had freckles were also more likely to wait longer before their first sexual experience, although this had no effect on men with freckles.

Genetics has a surprising role to play in helping determining the age of someone’s first sexual experience, how many sexual partners they have, and how many more children, scientists found.

The reverse was also true: the same variations predicted when people were more likely to be older when they have their first sexual experience or at the time of the birth of their first child, or even if they are more likely to be childless, the study found.

Gene variations affecting hair colour were just some of 38 found to influence sexual behaviour.

A risk-taking gene called CADM2 makes certain people more likely to have sex at an earlier age, and with more partners, the researchers found.

Perhaps unsurprisingly people with genes linked to being irritable called MSRA were likely to first have sex at an older age than average.

There may be a surprise benefit to being irritable, however, the researchers note that in fruit flies the same gene it also leads to a delay in reproduction - but has the benefit of making flies live longer.

The research published in Nature Genetics looked at links between genetic characteristics and sexual behaviour in 380,000 people from around the world – including around 130,000 British people.

It is hoped that a better understanding of sexual behaviour, particularly in young people, could lead to improvements in public health.

The timing of a person’s first sexual experience and birth of their first child is linked to doing badly in school, poorer health including diabetes, heart disease and breast cancer.

Researchers from the Medical Research Council and Cambridge University looked at the genetic role of sexual behaviour as other factors such as economic disadvantage, family instability, low levels of parental monitoring and religion have received more attention in the past.

Hair colour was affected by a gene called MC1R which affects hair colour and freckles.

The report states: ‘Genetically predicted skin freckling seemed to promote later AFS [adult first sexual experience] in women but not in men and genetically predicted red hair seemed to promote later AFS [adult first sexual experience] in both men and women’.

The study found that the overall average age of the first sexual experience was 18, and the birth of the first child was 25.

Dr John Perry, a geneticist at the MRC Epidemiology Unit and lead author estimated that the effect of DNA on sexual behaviour was around 25 per cent – with social and cultural factors the remainder.

He said that the finding there are genes affecting risk taking and irritability are novel findings.

‘The broad picture is with all human diseases and complex traits, any individual gene has a small effect,' he added.

‘It’s a sum of many, many genes. It’s not like there’s a gene that’s going to make you have sex on 23 May 2016.’ But he said that genes may speed up or slow down the time someone has sex by ‘weeks’.

On the finding that irritability makes people less attractive, he said: ‘It’s easy to imagine your personality can have an effect on attractiveness.’

Dr Perry added: ‘While social and cultural factors are clearly relevant, we show that age at first sexual intercourse is also influenced by genes which act on the timing of childhood physical maturity and by genes which contribute to our natural differences in personality types.

‘One example is a genetic variant in CADM2, a gene that controls brain cell connections and brain activity, which we found was associated with a greater likelihood of having a risk-taking personality, and with an earlier age at first sexual intercourse and a higher lifetime number of children.’

Explaining how the CADM2 gene is likely to work, Dr Perry said: ‘it changes our perception of risk. It’s probably manifesting in all sorts of ways, but the most obvious manifestation is the number of sexual partners.’

Dr Perry stressed that the effect is likely to be small – around ‘one tenth’ of a sexual partner – but over a large number of people makes a significant difference.

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