

**AUDIOSCRIPT**

Jim: Hello, welcome to the podcast of The Life Scientific. First broadcast on BBC radio 4. I'm Jim Al-Khalili and my mission is to interview the most fascinating and important scientists alive today, and to find out what makes them tick. My quest today is unusual and her area of studies barely existed when she first started working in it just 12 years ago. Since then she's been responsible for an explosion of research in the field. Sarah-Jayne Blakemore is professor of cognitive neuro science, University College London, and is fascinated by the teenage brain. Until recently we thought that brain development is all over by early childhood but it's her discoveries that have helped reveal the intricate and vast changes the adolescence brains still has to make on the way to adulthood. She's passionate that teenagers shouldn't be demonized or made the butt of jokes but instead should have our sympathy. And we should examine carefully how we teach and nurture them.

Jim: Sara-Jane Blakemore, welcome to The Life Scientific.

Sarah: Thank you.

Jim: Of course, your research is into the work of the adolescence brains but what is it about the teenage experience in more general that interests you so much?

Sarah: I'm really interested in teenage typical behavior so as adolescence typical behavior, things like heighten self-consciousness, this feeling of acute embarrassment we have when we're teenagers, especially in front of our parents. I'm also interested in things like risks taking, this increased propensity for teenagers to take risks, and peer influence. If you look when teenagers take those risks it's normally when they're with their friends not when they're on their own. And often in talks I like to pick up examples of these teenage typical behaviors. One example is from a letter that was written to the Guardian newspaper a couple of years ago. This is a reader writing into the Guardian and she says there's nothing like teenage diaries for putting mementos historical events in perspective. 'This is my entry for the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1969. "I went to arts centre (by myself!) in yellow cords and blouse. Ian was there but he didn't speak to me. Got rhyme put in my handbag from someone who's apparently got a crush on me. It's Nicholas, I think. UGH. Man landed on moon."

(Both laughing)

Sarah: That's just a really nice example of how, you know, for this particular teenage girl was important to have that moment in time, how things like what she's wearing, who she likes, who she doesn't like. The fact that man landed on the moon that day is less important.

Jim: And that's quite real and perfectly valid for them, that is more important that she wasn't noticed.

Sarah: It is! This is the period of life. The sense of self, and particularly the sense of social self, how other people see you, undergoes really profound transition. It's absolutely critical that teenagers go through this period of self-discovering themselves, their identity, the moral beliefs, the political beliefs, the fashion interest and music tastes who they hang out with what peer groups they are in. That's what adolescences for.

Jim: Well, you now run your own lab of sciences, you won many awards, you are already wealth of world class research, your name, but can I ask you to take aspect to the teenage SarahJane Blakemore, what were you like at school?

Sarah: I was a pretty typical teenager. I was a very high achieving academic girl school in Oxford, I wasn't particularly academic at school actually, I was a little bit naughty, but not as naughty as my sisters...

Jim: In what way were you naughty?

Sarah: Oh, just you know usual teenage misbehavior, nothing serious, just things like hiding in cupboards and a kind of things messing round with my friends and I wasn't actually very academic, my teachers just you know kind of all this gained over for me but I became really interested in learning quite late when I was probably nice at my A-level, first time I really suddenly understood why it was important and really interesting to learn, and then I did well, but before I was just a really normal teenager going out with my friends. My friends were just you know the most important thing in my life, as well as, of course, boys.

Jim: What was the sort of things did you get up to? Were you rebellious?

Sarah: I was a little bit rebellious; I used to do as much as I possibly could to persuade my parents let me go out as much as possible with my friends.

Jim: Parties, raves...

Sarah: Yeah, parties, raves... Oxford was the center of the raves scene nice for teenager...

Jim: And?

Sarah: It was fun...

Jim: You say you weren't that academic at school but there were early science, weren't they, of your emerging passion for the subject of Psychology. When you were just 15, you found yourself some interesting work experience.

Sarah: Yes when I was 15, in my school we were all required to do some work experience somewhere and earlier that year a psychologist, Professor Peter Bryant, whose daughter was at our school, had come and gave a talk about his work on dyslexia. This is my memory, he happened to have a book in his bag which was called Autism explaining the enigma by auto thread, and he gave me this book. And I became totally fascinated by developmental psychology and particularly developmental disorders like dyslexia and autism. And I wrote to Utah for this and asked her if I could do this work experience with her with characteristic general stay, and she allowed me to do that. So I went out to London and I spent a week in her lab. It just absolutely had the biggest impact on me...