

ADOLESCENT BOYS OF EAST LONDON

PETER WILLMOTT



LONDON

ROUTLEDGE & KEGAN PAUL

III

GIRLS, SEX AND MARRIAGE

This chapter traces out the phases through which most boys pass in their relationships with girls. At first, feminine company hardly figures at all. This is the common pattern until 12 or 13, and sometimes persists until 15. A quarter of the boys aged 14 and 15 in our sample said they had 'little to do with girls'; most of them belonged to the male peer groups that formed the subject of the previous chapter. They 'played "he" together round the buildings', 'larked about', went to the cinema together, met and talked in the local café, played football in their street or in Victoria Park. Though such boys are of course aware of girls and most are certainly 'interested' in them, this is not expressed much in their day-to-day behaviour.

The first awkward advances are usually made from the safe ranks of the boys' group. Two diary extracts:

'In the evening the four of us went over Victoria Park looking for birds. We tried to pick up some girls who were sitting on a bench by the lake, but they wouldn't talk to us.' (14 year old.)

'7.30 p.m. Went to the Regal with three of my mates. We sat behind some birds and tried to start talking to them. They kept on giggling and telling us to shut up.

'10.30 p.m. When we came out we walked along with them and mucked about. We went to where they lived. We said we might see them at the Regal again next Friday night.' (15 year old.)

Of course, 'picking up' girls is not confined to the younger boys; it is a recognized method of approach right through adolescence. In describing what they did in the company of their 'mates', a number of boys mentioned this - 'We hang around and

Girls, Sex and Marriage

try to pick up a few girls' (16 year old); 'We drink and look out for a couple of girls' (18 year old). A 16 year old wrote in his diary:

'Sunday. 6 p.m. Went and called for Arthur and Barry and we all went down to Trafalgar Square. We picked up some birds and took them into St. James's Park. Lovely grub!

'10.30 p.m. Took the birds home and then came back home by tube . . .

'Tuesday. 7 p.m. Went for a walk with Arthur and Barry, but there were no birds about because it was raining. So we came back to the flats and talked on the stairs until 10.'

And a 19 year old:

'Friday. 8 p.m. Went round to my mate Steve and we went round to call for Pete, had a few drinks in the Green Man and went up the West End at 11 p.m. We went to the Flamingo. We got talking to three girls there, had a few dances with them and Steve went off with one of the girls. Pete and I took the other two girls for a cup of coffee in a place called the Contact, had a chat and then left at about 2.30 a.m. and got a taxi home.'

But 'picking up' – though it may continue – does not remain, for most boys, the main source of feminine contacts. Most of them, in one way and another, get to know girls and mix with them. As the previous chapter showed, there is, outside the group of close friends, a wider circle of acquaintances, and as boys get older this is likely to include girls as well. The circle is usually a local one, and its female members, at least up to 16 or so, often local girls the boys have met at school or as neighbours. A 15-year-old grammar schoolboy belonged to a group of six boys living in the same block of flats (although not all went to the same school); the boys were friendly with some of the girls living there. He wrote in his diary:

'After school I went home and waited outside the flats for Colin, June and Linda to come back from their school. I particularly wanted to see June, first because I like her, and second, because I always take the mickey out of her school uniform (she has to wear white socks). Colin came home from

Girls, Sex and Marriage

school first and we both waited for June and Linda. When they came, of course we took the mickey. We talked to them for half an hour and then we all went in for tea. At 6.30 p.m. I went out again and called for Colin and Mick and we met up with our four other mates who live near by. The girls came out too and we were with them, talking and larking about around the flats, until 8.30 p.m. Colin went round the back with Carol but not for long – she ran out after he tried to give her a “French kiss”. After 8.30 the girls went in and we went up Colin’s home to look at TV. At 11 p.m. we all went home, and I wrote my diary. Then I went to bed and started thinking about June. She is an angel, about the best girl I’ve ever met. I don’t trust Mick – he is the Don Juan in our group. But I don’t think June likes him.’

Sometimes the girls are members of the same youth club or go to the same dance hall or dancing club. A 15 year old reported:

‘We were over the fair in Victoria Park. At about 8.30 one of my mates said, “Let’s all go up the Blue Beat Club in Mare Street.” When we got there we found they had two good groups playing. We danced with some girls we knew – we usually see them up there.’

At about 15 or 16, mixed teenage parties become common. Six of the thirty diarists described parties on Saturday or Sunday night during their week. One was a boy of 14, whose party was an all-male affair. The other boys who reported parties were aged 15, 16, 17 (two) and 18, and the pattern they described seemed much the same – girls, records, dancing and beer or cider to drink. Although newcomers are sometimes brought along by other guests, the girls at such parties are usually drawn from the familiar circle. Here is the account by the 16 year old, a van-boy:

‘On Saturday afternoon Jill came round and asked me to go to a party at her house that evening – her parents had gone to her aunt’s for the week-end. She told me to ask some of my friends and said she’d ask some of hers. I went round to Robert and Frank, and told them to ask our other mates. . . . When I got there at 7 p.m. the party had started. Me and my mates went over the off-licence and bought some beer and cider – we all put 5s. each. We had all the top records;

Girls, Sex and Marriage

we danced a lot and I got a little drunk. I went upstairs with Jill and we did a bit of snogging on the bed.'

That is one way in which boys and girls begin to pair off. Other boys start by taking a girl home from the dance or the youth club, or arrange to take her out alone – to the cinema or for a walk in the Park. The girl may have been 'picked up' one night and 'dated' by the boy who partnered her then, or she may be a member of the existing circle of acquaintances. However it happens, most boys have started taking girls out alone by about 16 or 17.

The effects on peer groups

The previous chapter remarked upon two changes as the boys get older. First, the older groups more often include girls as well as boys – the proportion of groups including girls was less than a quarter at 14 and 15, nearly half at 19 and 20. Second, older boys are less likely to belong to groups at all. In other words, the peer group may broaden to include girls or it may break up altogether.

The shift from all-male to mixed-sex groups is one reflection of the general enlargement of the boy's social world. Mixed groups are usually larger than those made up of boys alone: two-thirds of the former had six or more members, compared with less than a third of the latter. There seemed, however, to be two distinct sorts of 'mixed group'. One type was smaller and was made up of two or three couples, older and with stable partnerships, who had joined together to go dancing, to the cinema or to jazz clubs. The other, larger groups which were more common had been formed by extending or amalgamating one-sex groups to include girls from what I have called the 'wider circle of acquaintances'.

Within these 'amalgamated' peer groups, the boys' own set sometimes survived as a distinct sub-group. Charlie Stephens, an 18-year-old apprentice electrician, provides an example. He said that he belonged to a mixed group of 'about a dozen'. One of the girls, Carol, was his own girl; 'I'm courting steady,' he said at one point. His week's diary showed that he had spent some of the time with Carol alone – he had spent Sunday evening at her home, 'watching television, listening to the gram and necking on the settee' and had taken her to the cinema on Friday. On four other

Girls, Sex and Marriage

evenings he had taken her home at the end, but most of the time had been spent in the company of some or all of the group. One evening Charlie took Carol to a dance and met the others there; another evening he took her to a party at a friend's home; on the third he went to a dancing club 'with five of my mates and found that Carol was there dancing with her friends'; and on the fourth 'we all got in the van with the girls and drove out to Epping Forest for a drink'. On the remaining evening he, 'Went out with the boys. We had a few drinks and skylarked around a bit. I really enjoy a night like this, out with my mates.'

What has happened to Charlie Stephens and his 'mates' is clear. The constant companions of a year or two earlier are now fellow members of a wider boys-and-girls set. The boys spend less time together; their solidarity as a group of 'mates' has been weakened. They stay together at least some of the time, but now usually with their girls as well.

Not all male groups change in this way. If the group is not widened to include girls, the acquisition of a girl friend by one of its members may threaten the group's unity, indeed existence. The groups do not necessarily break up completely: one in seven of the engaged boys still belonged to an all-male group, as did nearly half of those with a 'regular girl'; but this was compared with two-thirds among the rest.

When one of their number starts going out with a girl this inevitably poses problems.¹ Obviously the boys are interested in girls – they clearly talk about girls and sex a good deal of the time they are together. On the other hand, they value the group's solidarity; for most boys, as I have said, the male group is the crucial 'primary group' in early adolescence, and feelings of friendship and loyalty die hard. As a result many, at least to begin with, are wary of 'going steady' with a girl. The cynical 'male' view at this stage is that you go with a girl for what you can get sexually, and above all you avoid becoming entangled. This attitude was expressed thus in a tape-recorded conversation between two boys aged 16.

RON Three-quarters of us don't go out with girls; we'd sooner go out with boys and have a giggle. It's more

¹ Allcorn, D. H., found the same in his West London study: *The Social Development of Young Men in an English Industrial Suburb*, pp. 273-4.

Girls, Sex and Marriage

excitement. A girl will do you for one night, but you get over it. Some boys nowadays they take a bird home and they think 'I like her, I'll go with her again and again,' but I don't think that's no life.

JACK Well, it depends if you're that sort of bloke. If you go with a bird and you like her enough, you keep her, don't you?

RON I'll put it this way, supposing you go for a walk through the park and you see a couple of nice-looking birds, and you can get what you want, sort of thing, and you leave them, you've got none of the expense of carting a bird out? Right?

Right, maybe. What usually happens, though, is that the boy's attitude changes.

'The three of us always used to go round together. Now we don't so much, now that Arthur and myself have got girls. George is jealous. I mean, *he's* trying to get a steady girl now because the thing has caught on. Before, we all used to say, "We won't go steady," but now it's all the rage. I used to laugh at it as well. But now - well, it's fabulous.' (19 year old.)

Others similarly find that they are becoming more attached, more involved. The unity of the group - and its pattern of behaviour - is disrupted. 'Five of us used to always be together,' said a 17 year old, 'Now one of the lads has started courting. He comes with us sometimes but he's with his girl three or four nights a week. It's all breaking up.' 'I used to go out all the time with a group of mates,' said a 20 year old. 'That was before I started courting. I don't go with them now.'

The boys may have some regrets about the change. As an 18 year old put it, 'My pet like is going out for a night with the fellows. I'm afraid I don't get a chance to do it so much, now I'm courting rather strong.' But he does not propose to give up his girl; 'We're practically engaged. I intend to marry her.' Another - a 17 year old - was perfectly clear what was at issue: he said, 'I don't want to get caught with a girl. I still like going out with the boys.'

Girls, Sex and Marriage

From courtship to marriage

The boys' first encounters with girls are unlikely to turn into anything lasting or to offer much of a threat to the peer group. Later partnerships may be taken more seriously – the girl is then regarded as 'my girl friend', and others recognize that the pair are 'going out together'. Even so, the attachments may still be relatively temporary. Among the boys of about 18 and under, we found that having a 'regular girl' did not always mean quite as stable a relationship as it might suggest. When a boy wrote up his diary, only a week or two after saying in an interview that he had a 'regular girl', it sometimes turned out that she had apparently disappeared from his life. Perhaps some boys had invented the liaison for prestige. What seems more likely, from what they told us when we asked about the discrepancy, is that 'girl friends' come and go fairly rapidly at this age. A girl whom a boy described as his 'girl friend' might only remain in that relationship for two or three weeks. A 17 year old said he had taken out 'dozens of girls' since he was about 15; 'One lasted several months but with the others it was only a week or two, if that.' The boys explained how such relationships ended. 'I packed her in'; 'We got fed up with each other'; 'She went off with my mate.'

At some stage, more 'serious' liaisons are formed. It is obviously difficult to pin an age to this transition: some boys of 15 had been going with the same girl for 18 months, and some of 19 and 20 were insistent that, though they took girls out, they were 'not going to get hooked yet'. But the general trend is clear; it is apparent in Table IX, which sums up the developments discussed in this chapter, by showing the answers of boys at different ages when asked how much they had to do with girls.

At 14 and 15, a quarter of the boys say they have 'little to do with girls'; from 16 onwards the proportion is down to under one in ten. Taking girls out 'sometimes' is most popular around 16, 17 and 18. As the boys get older they become involved in more lasting relationships – the proportion with a 'regular girl' goes up and by the age of 19 or 20 more than a quarter of the boys are engaged. One of the boys in our sample was already married.²

Inevitably the sheer time spent in the company of girls increases

² The sample almost certainly under-represents married young men. See pp. 182-4, Appendix I.

Girls, Sex and Marriage

TABLE IX

Age and relationship with girls

	14/15	16-18	19/20
'Have little to do with girls'	26%	9%	6%
'See girls around'	32%	24%	14%
'Take girls out sometimes'	24%	41%	24%
'Have regular girl friend'	18%	21%	26%
Engaged	—	5%	28%
Married	—	—	2%
Total %	100%	100%	100%
Number	68	128	50

as the boys mature. Among the thirty who wrote detailed diaries for us, the proportion who were with a girl on four or more evenings in the week rose from one in ten at 14 and 15 to nearly three-quarters at 19 and 20. The diaries illustrate what happens in the more stable relationships.

'Sunday evening I had my tea, washed and left for my girl-friend's house, in Bow. When I arrived her mother let me in and told me to take a seat in the living-room. Christine (my girl) and I watched "Sunday Night at the London Palladium". Afterwards we went for a walk until about 10.30 p.m. when I took her home and said "Good night", for about 20 minutes before leaving . . .'

'Friday evening I went to call for Christine. I took her to the Mile End Odeon. I think they were two good films — to tell the truth, I didn't pay much attention to them. After the films I took Christine down Chinatown, and we had chow mein, which is very nice. I saw her home and, after saying my good nights, left for my own home. I got into bed at 11.45 p.m. . . .'

'Saturday evening After tea I went round Christine's house and watched the television. I was tired out and fell asleep while we were smooching on the bed-settee.' (18 year old.)

'Thursday evening About 7.30 I put on a suit and went to

Girls, Sex and Marriage

my girl's house in Shoreditch. I took her out for a drink. We had a chat about what to do over the week-end and decided to go to the pictures on Saturday and over Regent's Park Sunday if it's nice. We left the pub when it shut, got to her house at about 11.30. I left at about midnight.' (20 year old.)

As I have already reported, boys who had earlier joked with their 'mates' about 'going for what you can get' and had resisted 'being caught' or 'settling down' with a girl found their attitudes changing. They said in interviews, 'I've found the right girl for me' (18 year old) or 'I love the girl' (20 year old). Another 20 year old said:

'I found, before I met this girl, that I could get away with anything. I used to mess the girls about, not turn up for dates and all that. Now this girl, I'm a bit under her thumb. It's very nice being under her thumb. Now I live for the days I go out with her - Monday, Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. The way things are going I can't see myself giving her up. We'll get engaged.'

Some of the boys had passed this stage and were engaged already or making the plans for their marriage.

'Sunday. 2 p.m. Went round on my motor bike to my fiancée, who lives in the flats near Victoria Park. We were going to go for a ride but it started raining, so we stayed in playing records until 6 o'clock. Then we had tea, the usual Sunday salad, with her family.

'7 p.m. We rode round to Jack and June, a married couple who are friends of ours and live in Bow. Jack collects the same sort of records as I do - folk-music and blues. We played records and talked. While my fiancée and June were fixing something to eat, Jack and I went round to the off-licence to get some cider and cigarettes. We then had a meal and talked some more.

'10.30 p.m. We left and I took my fiancée home. I then went home, covered up my motor bike and went to bed.' (18 year old.)

During the week, he had spent every evening but one with her,

Girls, Sex and Marriage

either at her home, visiting friends or going for a motor bike ride. The remaining evening he worked on his motor bike and then 'decided to have an early night'.

Two other boys, both 19, were busy with wedding arrangements:

'Tuesday evening After watching television I took the girl home at 10.30. We discussed our wedding which is on 10th August . . .

'Friday evening I went round to Sheila's house to sort out some wedding arrangements with her father and mother . . .'

'Monday evening After I had picked my girl up at her office in the City, we caught the 253 bus to Bethnal Green Town Hall - we went to the photographer's shop opposite to book up a photographer for the wedding. They showed us different wedding photos and asked what kind of photos we wanted done . . .

'Wednesday evening After I had my tea I went round to my girl-friend's and picked her up - we went to see about a hall for the wedding reception. Afterwards we went round to see my Uncle Jack, who lives off Roman Road. He asked how much we intended spending on beer and we said about £50, and he asked how much on spirits and we said about £60. He said if he was going to be barman, like he was at our engagement party, he suggests holding back the spirits at the beginning . . .'

If we could look ahead a few years, we would find most of the other boys doing the same things - calling in at the photographer's, booking the hall, making arrangements for the wedding party. In 1961, according to the Census, more than a third of the men in Bethnal Green aged 20 to 24 were married, and nearly three-quarters of those aged 25 to 29.³ We asked the 245 unmarried boys in our main sample (that is, excluding the one already married) whether they expected to get married. Seven per cent said 'No' and 2 per cent that they did not know; the remaining 91 per cent said 'Yes'. Most expected to marry young; of those who thought they would get married, 66 per cent thought it would be before they were 25, 27 per cent between 25 and 30,

³ *Census 1961, London, Table VI, p. 10.*

Girls, Sex and Marriage

only 5 per cent over 30 (2 per cent said they did not know when).

More than a quarter of those who expected to marry gave as their 'reason' that it was just 'natural' or 'inevitable'.

'Everybody seems to sooner or later. All my brothers and sisters are married. It seems the most natural thing to do. You have your fling, then settle down.' (17 year old.)

'There's not much else to do after you stop being a teenager. You've got to have a change some time - I more or less just go out drinking now. I don't want to go on doing that.' (19 year old.)

A quarter of the boys laid the emphasis on love; the proportion was understandably higher - more than half - among those already engaged, who were answering in terms of a specific partner, although some younger boys also gave this answer.

'I should think it will be because I love the girl.' (15 year old.)

'I'm in love. When someone means enough to you, you want to spend all your life with them, not just nights.' (19 year old.)

About one in seven said they would need companionship and a similar proportion that they would like children.

'I want to have a family - because I like children.' (17 year old.)

'I wouldn't like to live alone all my life. I'd want someone to come home to after work, companionship in my old age.' (19 year old.)

The remainder - just over one in ten of the boys who expected to marry - gave reasons that could not be classified under any of these four headings. Some were facetious. 'It won't be for love,' said a 14 year old, 'Sex is more like it.' And a boy of 20: 'I might get someone into trouble.'

Similarly, some of the minority who did not expect to marry were cynical about marriage.

'I'd like my freedom, instead of worrying about a wife and kids.' (15 year old.)

Girls, Sex and Marriage

'When you get married you've got to tag along with one girl. I don't fancy that.' (16 year old.)

Most of those who express such views will no doubt change their minds later. But there will still be some who remain, as one 18 year old described himself, 'not the marrying kind'. A fifth of the 19 and 20 year olds said they either 'had little to do with girls' or just 'saw them around'; they explained 'I just don't bother with girls' or 'I don't like girls all that much'. 'I've never taken a girl out,' said a 19 year old, 'I don't think about girls.' Some will never marry, like the 'born bachelors' mentioned by Hoggart⁴ or the single working men who 'never bother with women' described by Zweig.⁵ They are a minority, though. Most boys both expect to marry and think it right to do so.⁶ As one boy of 16 summed it up, 'You expect to get married. You can't be a teenager all your life.'

Sexual experience

The sexual element in the boys' relationships with girls has so far been implicit rather than explicit. Sexual drives, excitements and frustrations are, however, so much a part of adolescence that they must be brought into the account. The treatment can only be sketchy, because we discussed sex just with some of the boys who came to the Institute for tape-recorded interviews. Their answers certainly cannot be regarded as representative; of the twenty or so who talked about sex, all were not equally communicative, and they formed no sort of sample. But they provide enough information to support a plausible chronological account of what commonly happens, parallel with the more general one presented so far in this chapter.

First the boys suggested that masturbation was common, if not universal.⁷

'Some people with a big mouth say, "I do this and that with

⁴ Hoggart, R., *The Uses of Literacy*, pp. 83-84.

⁵ Zweig, F., *The British Worker*, p. 68.

⁶ This has been found in other studies. See Jephcott, P., *Rising Twenty*, pp. 70-71; Allcorn, D. H., *op. cit.*, p. 279; Veness, T., *School Leavers*, p. 26.

⁷ Kinsey's data suggest that in the United States by the age of 20 virtually all boys are masturbating. (Kinsey, A. C., Pomery, W. B. and Martin, C. E., *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male*, p. 500).

Girls, Sex and Marriage

my girl". But they go home and masturbate, the same as everybody else.' (18 year old.)

'I suppose all boys do it. I know all my mates do. We talk about it sometimes, have a joke about it. I think you do get some boys who think, "I'm not going to tell anyone in case they think I'm dirty, wanking myself off". But me and my mates, we tell everybody we wank off.' (17 year old.)

They had usually started at 12, 13 or 14.⁸

'When I was 13, my friends at school asked me if I'd ever had a wank. I didn't know what they were talking about. Then I walked into the toilets one day and there were two geezers in there doing it. I watched them and then one night I tried it myself. Then I started doing it pretty regular.' (16 year old.)

'I started at 14. When I first discovered it I went really mad over it. Then after a while it turned me off a bit. There were boys at school who used to do it underneath the desk. Glassy looking and going it like mad, they were. That always sickened me somehow.' (19 year old.)

Apart from early games of 'doctors' or 'mothers and fathers', the first sexual explorations with girls had often been at about 14 or 15. The interest that many boys took in girls at this age was predominantly sexual, rather than romantic. If they 'picked up' a girl in Victoria Park or London Fields, they would often try to move on from kissing to sexual play; as they put it, they 'titted a girl up' or 'had a bit of lumber', 'went up her skirt' or 'touched her up'. One 16 year old described two of his early sexual experiences of this kind.

'When I was about 14 I walked a girl home for the first time, but I didn't really do anything. I kissed her and cuddled her and had a bit of lumber. Some time after that I was out with my mate and we picked up a couple of girls. We took them round to his house because his mother and father were away for the night. We had the lights out and I started getting to work on my girl: I started rubbing my hand up and down her ribs, getting nearer and nearer to her tits, and all of a

⁸ Kinsey, again, reports that 12, 13 or 14 are the most common ages among American boys of a comparable educational level to most Bethnal Greeners (*ibid.*, p. 500).

Girls, Sex and Marriage

sudden I got my hand on her tit and I thought well, that's all right. So I thought I'd try for her quim. I started rubbing away at it on the outside and she didn't seem to mind. Then all of a sudden my mate jumps up and switches on the light. I pulled my hand away and she pulls her skirt down quick and that was it. He wasn't getting anywhere himself, and his girl said to my one, "Coming home, Jeannie?" and off they went. That was the end of that.'

Some boys had approached girls in a different way. A 19 year old explained:

'When I was 14 there was hardly any sex life at all. It was all kiss and cuddle and just talking - it was a great experience just to talk to a girl, to see how a girl thinks.'

We obviously do not know how many had started sexual play or intercourse by different ages. Those we talked to suggested that by 18 something like a third or half the local boys would have had intercourse.⁹ There were variations not only in the age at which they began but also in the type of relationship and the circumstances. It seemed that when boys had experienced sexual intercourse relatively early - at 15 or 16 - it had often been with someone 'picked up' or met casually.

'I've been all the way with girls twice, both times in the last six months or so. The first time was over London Fields and the second was up an alley over Hackney Wick. The first time I wasn't expecting nothing. I picked this girl up and was taking her home and we stopped in London Fields on the way. We started kissing and I started feeling her up and that led on to it.' (16 year old.)

'I didn't really know the girl. We'd all had quite a lot to drink and it turned into an orgy - the parents of the chap who gave the party were away for the week-end. I got on the bed with this bird and got it in. I got the impression everybody was doing it. One girl cried afterwards.' (17 year old, first experience of intercourse a year earlier.)

⁹ Schofield, M., *The Sexual Behaviour of Young People*, a survey based on interviews with a national sample of boys and girls aged 15 to 19, suggests that a quarter of boys have had intercourse by 17 and a third by 18 (p. 33).

Girls, Sex and Marriage

The boys suggested that this more promiscuous sexual intercourse was usually with a minority of girls who, in their words, were 'easy lays', 'old slags' or 'bangers'.¹⁰

'I could see straight away she was a right banger,' said a 17 year old of one girl. 'A banger's a goer - a girl who'll do anything with anyone.'

'You can always get a bit if you want it, with the girls with the big mouths. It gets around that they're that sort of girl. But that sort of thing turns you off after a while - you realize that if you can get it, so can anyone else.' (18 year old.)

If a boy's initiation into sex is with such a girl he may feel guilty afterwards - or at least pretend to.

'I did it once, but it wasn't a good thing to do. I was there, so we had it, that was all. One girl took eight of us over the park, on the grass over the park.' (16 year old.)

'Some girls are forced into it with a crowd of boys, and then the word gets round and everyone tries. I did it myself once like that, six months ago, over Hackney Marshes. I knew she was like that, but I didn't like her.' (17 year old.)

The other sort of boy, if he had experienced intercourse at all, had started later; he was more likely to begin with a 'steady' girl friend.

'The only girl I've been all the way with is my girl, the one I'm going with now, and that's only in the last three months or so. We do it in the front room late at night, when I've seen her home and her parents are upstairs in bed.' (18 year old.)

When the relationship is relatively stable - when the couple are engaged or nearly so - it is often regarded as quite 'respectable' to become sexual partners.

'I've been going out with the same girl for two years. We're engaged now. We'd never done anything except kissing and

¹⁰ Schofield's study supports this. He says: 'There is a hint . . . of a small pocket of less cautious girls who engage in more casual relationships' (ibid., p. 92), and he also remarks that girls who start having intercourse at a relatively early age are more likely to have it with a 'casual partner' (p. 72).

Girls, Sex and Marriage

petting until a couple of months ago, when her mum and dad went away for the week-end. We got up to some really heavy petting, and we just couldn't hold it back any more. I think it's all right to do it – to have intercourse – if you really intend to get married. Just don't take it too far, is what I think – don't knock the daylight out of it.' (19 year old.)

Many boys seemed to think that this was generally recognized. As one put it, 'It's done so much, it's just a natural thing – it's all right if they're engaged.'¹¹ Not all agreed; among those with a fiancée were some who believed, in the words of a 19 year old, in 'saving it up until we get married'.

This discussion about sexual behaviour can now be linked to what was said earlier about the development of the boys' relationships with girls generally. The conclusion is broadly the same. Though there are inevitably variations in sexual experience, particularly at the younger ages, all but a minority are moving on the familiar path. As they do so their attitude may change. A 20 year old said, 'When I was younger I was all for sex. I'd pick up any bird and get all I could. Now that I've met the girl, all that's out.' Sex is still important, of course, but now it is more and more likely to be associated with love and with the idea of marriage. It is channelled into something approaching a husband-wife relationship. In this sense, the boys have begun to 'settle down'.

¹¹ Schofield reports: 'Many of the teenagers marry the only person with whom they have had sexual intercourse' (*ibid.*, p. 167).