

The Sexual Behaviour of Young People

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LONGMANS

7 ATTITUDES

A. THE ATTITUDE INVENTORY

The rationale and construction of the attitude inventory is described in appendix 3. It was completed by 780 boys and 761 girls, and the results are given in table 7.1. To make comparison easier the five-point scale is condensed: 'agree' includes all those who indicated both *agreement* and *strong agreement*; 'disagree' includes all those who indicated both *disagreement* and *strong disagreement*.

Table 7.1 *The responses of 780 boys and 761 girls to the fifty statements on the attitude inventory*

Statement	Boys			Girls		
	Agree, %	DK, %	Dis- agree, %	Agree, %	DK, %	Dis- agree, %
1 Life is so short that having a good time is more important than anything else	47	10	43	50	7	43
2 Most parents ought to be stricter with their children	54	19	27	47	15	38
3 It always pays to be honest	75	9	16	84	4	12
4 Summer holidays without parents are more enjoyable	63	23	14	65	17	18
5 Most teenagers are bored with their jobs	36	29	35	30	22	48
6 Each person should decide for himself what is right and wrong	72	5	23	84	5	11
7 The family should spend an evening at home together at least once a week	64	17	19	75	11	14
8 Most adults say one thing and do another	41	21	38	44	16	40
9 It is best to have a good time before you are married because after that life is pretty dreary	28	18	54	27	8	65

Statement	Boys			Girls		
	Agree, %	DK, %	Dis- agree, %	Agree, %	DK, %	Dis- agree, %
10 I learn more from friends of my own age than I can learn from my parents	58	11	31	53	10	37
11 If a boy gets a girl pregnant he should be willing to marry her	66	16	18	66	15	19
12 Today's teenagers are very different from teenagers in the past	52	18	30	58	9	33
13 There is no need to teach about sex in schools, because you can find out all you need to know for yourself	21	9	70	13	9	78
14 Parents should advise their children about the sort of work they should do	41	8	51	44	7	49
15 Teenage boys spend too much time thinking about their clothes and hair styles	38	12	50	34	15	51
16 People should realise their greatest loyalty is to their family	79	11	10	73	14	13
17 Girls believe today that if they are not married before they are 21 they are on the shelf	28	23	49	30	10	60
18 The average man can live a good life without religion	58	15	27	53	17	30
19 Young people should be taught all about birth control	81	13	6	83	11	6
20 TV and radio programmes have a strong influence on most teenagers	55	9	36	58	8	34
21 A girl is usually looking for a man to marry, but a boy is usually looking for sex	49	15	36	53	15	32

Statement	Boys			Girls		
	Agree, %	DK, %	Dis- agree, %	Agree, %	DK, %	Dis- agree, %
22 It should be made easier for married people to get divorced if they want to	39	15	46	30	12	58
23 In this country there is one law for the rich and another for the poor	41	15	44	32	18	50
24 Young people can only really be free if they live away from home	18	10	72	16	6	78
25 The police are unfair in their treatment of teenagers	28	13	59	19	15	66
26 When it comes to sex, there is one standard for men and another for women	31	37	32	45	28	27
27 If a girl has sex before marriage she gets a bad reputation	45	18	37	58	14	28
28 There is no harm in travelling without a ticket occasionally if you can get away with it	53	10	37	43	9	48
29 I'd rather take my holidays with my parents	19	23	58	20	23	57
30 I'd rather work for someone strict and fair, than for someone who is easy going	72	11	17	69	11	20
31 The advantages of living at home with the family outweigh the disadvantages	71	20	9	71	16	13
32 It is important for a person who gives sex education to have had some first hand experience of sex	77	14	9	66	14	20
33 I'm usually a bit bored when I stay at home in the evenings	49	6	45	39	5	56
34 The Church is the best authority to decide on matters of right and wrong	22	17	61	28	14	58

Statement	Boys			Girls		
	Agree, %	DK, %	Dis- agree, %	Agree, %	DK, %	Dis- agree, %
35 I think I'll have a better job than my father has when I am his age	59	29	12	28	38	34
36 Teenagers have sex thrown at them all the time from advertisements, films and TV	70	7	23	68	6	26
37 I would rather go to my parents for advice than to my friends	55	16	29	53	12	35
38 Sexual intercourse before marriage is all right for boys but not for girls	23	21	56	42	14	44
39 Teenagers should be able to go out in the evening without having to tell their parents where they are going	55	13	32	40	11	49
40 Very few adults really understand teenagers	54	13	33	47	14	39
41 Most boys want to marry a virgin	66	19	15	69	19	12
42 The average teenager expects to live much the same kind of life as his parents do	37	15	48	38	13	49
43 Sexual intercourse before marriage is wrong	35	20	45	62	14	24
44 All homosexuals should be severely punished	47	18	35	35	20	45
45 Foreigners should stay in their own country	30	11	59	24	10	66
46 It would be best to keep coloured people in their own districts in order to prevent too much contact with whites	25	11	64	24	13	63
47 Girls should not get married before they are 21	19	21	60	18	15	67

Statement	Boys		Girls			
	Agree, %	DK, %	Dis- agree, %	Agree, %	DK, %	Dis- agree, %
48 What teenagers do and how they dress outside their homes is their business	59	12	29	58	12	30
49 Too much freedom in the early teens leads to trouble when one gets older	50	14	36	45	12	43
50 There is more to sex than just having a good time	86	10	4	87	8	5

B. ATTITUDES TO MARRIAGE

Many of the attitudes shown in table 7.1 are interesting in themselves and require no further comment. In the remaining five sections of this chapter some of the opinions and beliefs which emerged during the interview will be discussed and compared with the relevant responses in the attitude inventory.

Very few of our sample rejected the prospect of marriage; 6 per cent of the younger boys and 3 per cent of the older boys said at the interview that they did not want to marry; hardly any of the girls (1 per cent in each age group) said they did not want to marry. Another 7 per cent of the boys and 1 per cent of the girls felt unable to answer the question. But although most of the boys and nearly all the girls wanted to get married, over a quarter of both boys (28 per cent) and girls (27 per cent) agreed with the statement that *it is best to have a good time before you are married because after that life is pretty dreary* (statement no. 9 in table 7.1).

A big difference between the sexes about the ideal age of marriage was revealed at the interview. Among the boys 35 per cent of the younger and 43 per cent of the older said they did not want to marry before the age of twenty-five; the corresponding figure for girls is 9 per cent in both age groups.

The majority of boys and girls would prefer to marry after the age of twenty-one, but the proportion is much bigger for boys than for girls and is also bigger for older girls than for younger girls. Over a third (38 per cent) of younger girls would like to marry before they are twenty-one. This shows the tremendous prominence

of marriage as an immediate goal in the lives of many teenage girls. Table 7.2 gives the responses to the question during the interview and two related statements from the attitude inventory.

Table 7.2 *Opinions about the ideal age of marriage*

Item	Age-sex group	Over 21	Under 21	Don't know
At what age would you like to get married?	YB	78	9	13
	OB	83	8	9
	YG	60	38	2
	OG	70	27	3
Girls believe today that if they are not married before they are twenty-one they are on the shelf		Agree	Disagree	Don't know
	YB	28	51	22
	OB	28	47	25
	YG	30	59	12
	OG	30	62	8
Girls should not get married before they are twenty-one		Agree	Disagree	Don't know
	YB	19	61	20
	OB	20	59	21
	YG	17	67	15
	OG	19	66	14

Approximately one-third of each age-sex group believe that most girls think their marriage chances are over at twenty-one. This corresponds with the 27 per cent of older girls who would like to marry before twenty-one and the 38 per cent of younger girls. The fact that the percentage of younger girls who would like to marry before twenty-one is higher than the percentage who consider girls are on the shelf at twenty-one suggests that many younger girls would like to marry before twenty-one independently of whether or not this is the terminal age of their marriage chances. Not surprisingly a relatively small but constant percentage of all groups think girls should not marry before the age of twenty-one.

The differences between the sexes on the desired age of marriage

are shown by plotting accumulated percentage curves for each age-sex group (figure 7.1). Any point on one of these curves gives the percentage of teenagers who would like to marry at or below a particular age. For most boys and nearly all girls marriage is an expected, almost inevitable, part of a person's life. But in spite of its inevitability about a quarter of the teenagers see marital life in an unfavourable light and seem to suggest that enjoyment ends when marriage begins.

Not unexpectedly most of them (62 per cent boys, 89 per cent girls) said they expected to remain faithful after marriage. However, 9 per cent of the boys and 1 per cent of the girls said they thought they would have sex with others besides their spouse after marriage. Perhaps more surprising are the 17 per cent boys and 6 per cent girls who said they were not sure when they were asked this question: Do you think you will have sex with anyone else after you are married? The others (12 per cent boys, 3 per cent girls) were unable to answer the question because they had not made up their minds about marriage.

G. ATTITUDES TO SEX EDUCATION

In figure 7.2 we bring together the responses of three interview questions and one of the attitude statements on the subject of knowledge about sex. A quarter of the boys and a third of the girls felt they should have been taught more about sex by their parents. So the boys did not get much advice from their parents, and there was not much demand for it. It is clear that more boys would rather learn about sex from their teachers than from their parents. A third of the girls had also hoped to learn more from their teachers although many more girls (86 per cent) had already received some kind of sex education at school.

The third item in figure 7.2 shows that many boys and girls want help with their sex problems from their school teachers. There are also some signs that the teenagers have not been altogether content with what little sex education they have been getting. In fact 77 per cent of the boys and even 66 per cent of the girls agreed with the statement that *it is important for a person who gives sex education to have had some first-hand experience of sex* (statement no. 32 on table 7.1). Two others statements show that the teenagers had only a limited amount of respect for adult advice. Most teenagers agreed that *I learn more from friends of my own age than I can learn from adults*, and most agreed that *very few adults really understand teenagers* (statement nos. 10 and 40 on table 7.1).

Figure 7/1
Desired age of marriage accumulated upwards

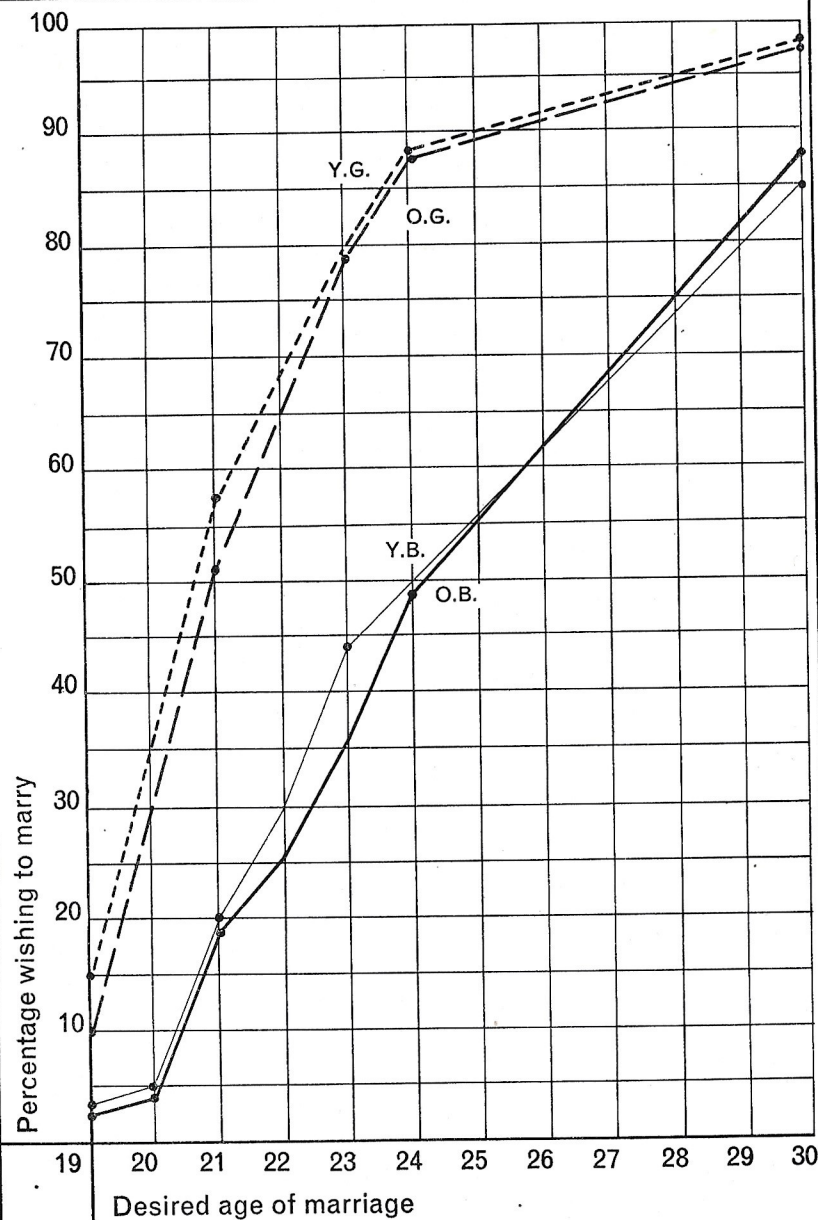
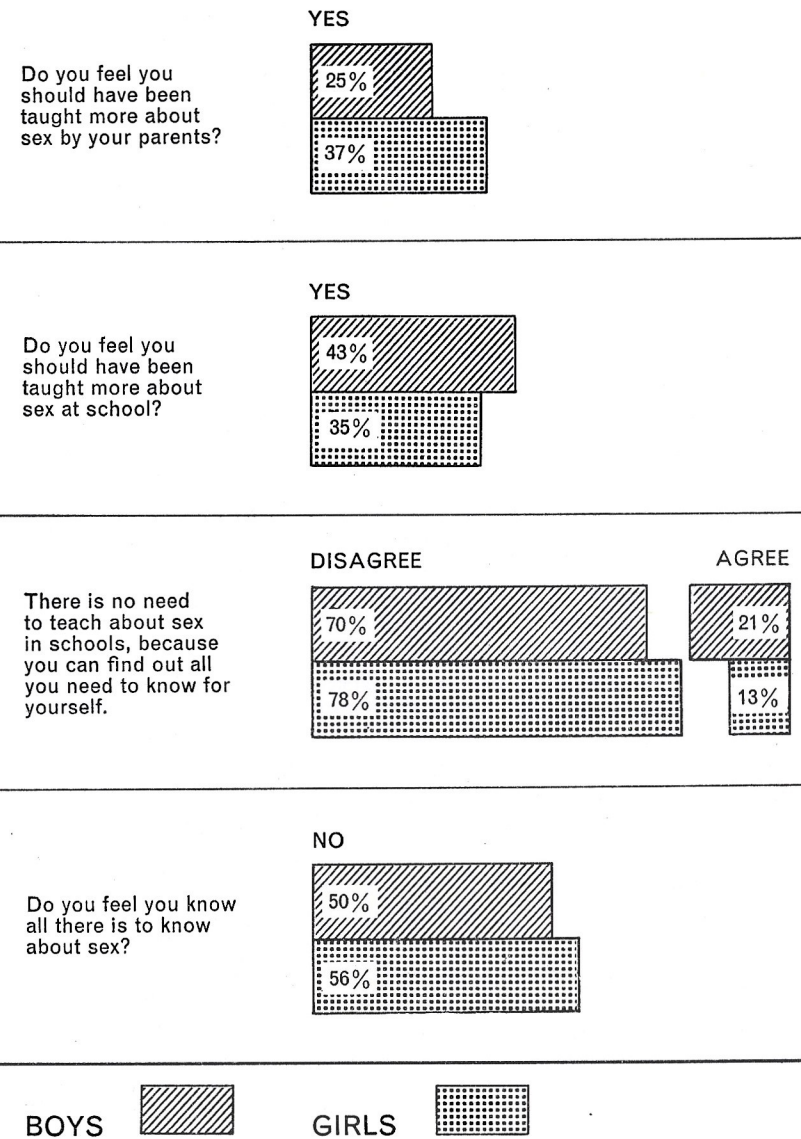


Figure 7/2
Attitude to Sex Education



The last item of figure 7.2 emphasises what a difficult task the teacher has to face, for nearly half the boys and girls think they know all there is to know about sex. Our later questions, particularly on birth control and venereal disease, showed that much of this confidence was misplaced and that their knowledge on sexual matters was very often limited. It was the younger adolescents who were sure that they did not have anything more to learn about sex and this over-confidence decreased as they got older.

Although it is clear that a large part of the teacher's task is to correct misinformation, this research has shown that there is a lively demand for information about sex, and there are indications that this demand is not being fulfilled.

D. INHIBITING FACTORS

All the boys who had experienced sexual intercourse were asked if they were ever afraid that the girls might become pregnant, and the experienced girls were asked if they feared pregnancy. Nearly half the boys did not worry about it; 8 per cent said they had never thought about it and 41 per cent said they did not think it would happen to their girl friend; 51 per cent boys said that they had been afraid of a possible pregnancy on one or more occasions. The attitude of the girls is quite different. Only 12 per cent said they had not thought about it and another 18 per cent said they did not worry about it. This leaves 70 per cent of the experienced girls who have feared pregnancy.

Most of the boys (66 per cent) agreed with the statement that *if a boy gets a girl pregnant he should be willing to marry her*. The same number (66 per cent) of girls agreed, but it is interesting to note that very slightly more girls (19 per cent) than boys (18 per cent) actually disagreed with this statement.

There is little doubt that fear of pregnancy is still an inhibiting factor for some people; nearly a third (30 per cent) of the experienced boys and nearly a half (44 per cent) of the experienced girls said they sometimes stopped short of complete intercourse because of the risks of pregnancy. Furthermore over half (54 per cent) the boys who had experience of genital apposition said they had refrained from sexual intercourse because of the risks of pregnancy and this applied to almost a third (31 per cent) of the girls with experience of genital apposition but not of sexual intercourse.¹

1. Incidentally some (17 per cent) of the boys and a quarter (26 per cent) of the girls with experience of genital apposition disallowed sexual intercourse for moral reasons.

Thus 9 per cent of the boys and 7 per cent of the girls in the whole sample were using genital apposition as a form of birth control and a substitute for sexual intercourse.

A general attempt was made to find out what had stopped those who had not had sexual intercourse. Apart from those who had very little contact with the opposite sex (i.e. those in stage I), all the others who had not had experience of sexual intercourse (i.e. all those in stages II and III), were questioned about this. When they had revealed the full extent of their sexual experience, they were asked: Is there any reason why you don't go farther than this? Their replies are given in table 7.3.

Table 7.3 *Reasons for not having sexual intercourse classified into eight categories*

Reason	Boys, %	Girls, %
Fear pregnancy	24	17
Moral reasons	19	40
Religious reasons	3	5
Girl's reputation	11	9
Keep virginity	1	4
Fear VD	1	2
No reasons	14	2
DK, NK, Other	27	21
TOTAL	100	100
No. (100%)	596	769

This was a very demanding question and required the sort of response which was difficult to put into words for many of the teenagers, and beyond the capabilities of others. The possibility had not occurred to many of them, while others took it for granted that their first experience of sexual intercourse would occur after they had married. Care had to be taken not to disturb these young people or leave the impression that the interviewer was disappointed with their reply, so in 24 per cent of the cases we did not press for an answer. Another 14 per cent of the boys and 2 per cent of the girls said there was no reason why they should not go farther, implying that they would take the chance when it occurred.

An important inhibiting influence was fear of pregnancy, just as it was the most usual reason for restraint given by the experienced teenagers (stage IV and V); rather surprisingly this applied to more boys (24 per cent) than girls (17 per cent). The most usual restraint for girls (45 per cent) and an important restraint for boys (22 per cent) were moral and religious reasons, although religion was not often mentioned specifically. The girls' reputation was also an important factor about as often for the boys (11 per cent) as for the girls (9 per cent); this reinforces the suggestion made later (section F) that girls who permit premarital intercourse are disparaged by some boys, even by the boys who are seeking to have intercourse with them. This is similar to the idea that it is important for the girl to keep her virginity which was mentioned by some girls (4 per cent), but only a very few boys (1 per cent) were concerned for their own virginity. Fear of venereal disease appears to be the least important of the reasons it was possible to classify.

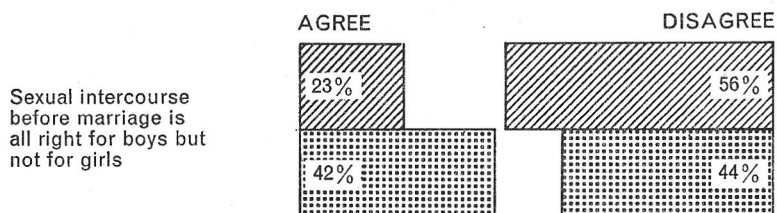
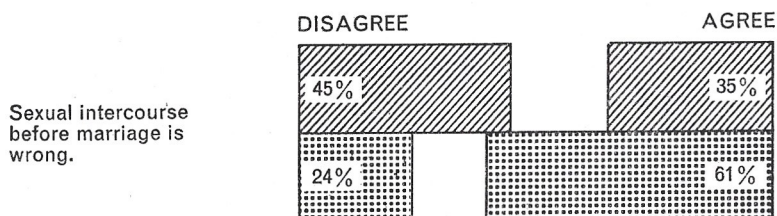
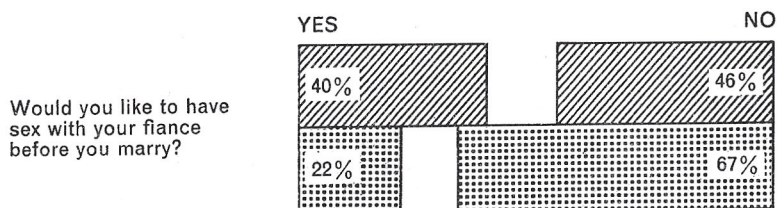
E. ATTITUDES TO SEX BEFORE MARRIAGE

The responses to the question and the first statement shown in figure 7.3 are very similar. Boys are more in favour of intercourse with their fiancées than girls, and also disagree more strongly that *sexual intercourse before marriage is wrong*. The older age groups are more permissive than the younger boys and girls. More teenagers reject premarital intercourse for themselves in the question, than as a general principle in the statement. Among the older boys less than a third (29 per cent) believe that sex before marriage is definitely wrong but nearly half (46 per cent) said they did not want sex with their fiancée.

Nearly half the boys appear to be in favour of premarital intercourse whereas less than a quarter of the girls hold this view. It is interesting to compare these attitudes with those expressed on sex education. Girls are more interested in learning about sex than boys, but boys are far more permissive than girls in their attitude towards sexual experience itself.

Furthermore many girls expect boys to be more experienced. Many more girls than boys believed that *sexual intercourse before marriage is all right for boys but not for girls*. Although only a minority in any group supported this double standard of sexual morality as many as 45 per cent of the younger girls and 39 per cent of the older girls agreed with this statement, compared with only 25 per cent younger boys and 21 per cent older boys. The other statement on this idea confirms that girls are prepared to endure sexual behaviour

Figure 7/3
Attitude to Sex before Marriage



BOYS  **GIRLS** 

in boys which they would not tolerate in themselves; 45 per cent of the girls compared with 31 per cent of the boys agreed that *when it comes to sex there is one standard for men and another for women* (statement no. 26 on table 7.1).

F. ATTITUDES TO VIRGINITY

Figure 7.4 reveals the basic moral dilemma that teenagers are faced with and the confusion that exists among them on moral questions. Many (45 per cent) boys are not against premarital intercourse but a majority (64 per cent) wish to marry virgins. Only a quarter of the boys said they did not mind either way and one in ten said they definitely did not want to marry a virgin. It seemed a little tactless to ask this question of girls who had already experienced sexual intercourse, but a very large number (85 per cent) of the others (stages I-III) wanted to be a virgin when they married. This conflicts slightly with the previous figure (7.3) where 22 per cent of the girls said they would like to have sex with their fiancé, but this includes people who already have had this experience; the others probably mean they wish the first experience to be with the man they are going to marry whether this be before they are married or after.

Over half (51 per cent) the boys would like to have sex experience, but two-thirds (64 per cent) want to marry virgins. Some of the boys drew a sharp distinction between girls to have sex with and girls to marry.

Most girls do not want to have sex before they marry, and they believe that their boy friends want to marry a virgin. They also believe, more often than the boys, that a girl who has sex before marriage gets a bad reputation. But many of them do not mind if their boy friend has sex elsewhere before they are married. A third (36 per cent) stated definitely that they wanted their boy friend to have sexual experience, and another quarter (26 per cent) were undecided; only 38 per cent were against their boy friend having sexual experience.

It is clear that all teenagers expect the girls to be much more circumspect than the boys. Girls are slightly more consistent and realistic in the attitudes they express on these issues. They are more likely to realise that there is a double standard for men and women, and a majority accept the view that girls who have sex before marriage get a bad reputation. They also want to be virgins when they marry and realise that this is what the boys expect; more girls than boys believe that most boys want to marry virgins. The

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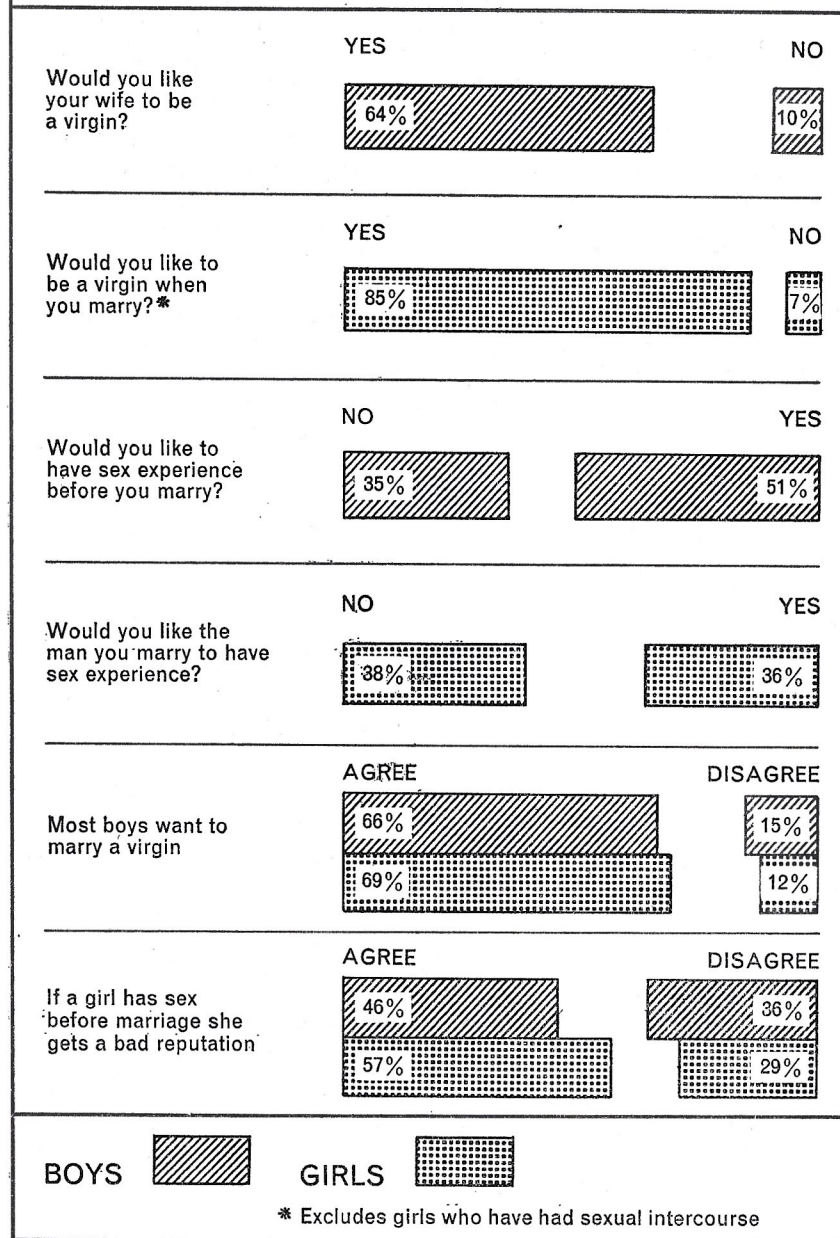
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Figure 7/4
Attitudes to Virginity



number of girls who want to be virgins when they marry is higher than the number of boys who expect their wives to be virgins. Indeed over a third of the boys either preferred their wife not to be a virgin or were not concerned either way. It is possible that the girls have been over-estimating the desirability – from the boys' point of view – of being a virgin on their wedding day.

A final aspect of this question is revealed by considering the sexual experience of the two older groups in relation to their views on virginity. Table 7.4 shows that the percentage of girls wanting to be virgins is large among non-experienced and inceptive girls, but the inceptives (stage III) are slightly less in favour of virginity than those in stages I and II. The number of boys wanting virgins as marriage partners drops for the sexually experienced although it still remains over half. But 41 per cent of the experienced boys are not concerned about the girl's virginity. To 4 per cent of the sexually experienced boys marriage to any girl is not an attractive proposition.

Table 7.4 *Sexual experience analysed by attitude to virginity among the older boys (OB) and older girls (OG)*

Attitude	Stage of sex					
	I and II		III		IV and V	
	OB, %	OG, %	OB, %	OG, %	OB, %	OG,* %
For girl's virginity	63	92	68	85	55	—
Indifferent to virginity	32	6	30	15	41	—
Against marriage	5	2	2	0	4	—
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100	—
No. (100%)	167	205	151	186	138	73

* Girls who had experienced sexual intercourse were not asked this question.

From this there emerges the impression that there is a group of boys who are keen to lose their own virginity but are critical of girls who provide them with this opportunity. If they wish to marry at all they are intent on marrying girls who are virgins and thus

preclude marriage from their premarital sexual relationships. Girls, aware of the dangers, play a defensive role. They wish to protect their own virginity but expect boys to gain sexual experience, and find it acceptable that boys should be able to do what they rule out for themselves.