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**The
newspaper reading
public
of tomorrow**

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PRESENTED BY THE SUN

The Sun, the new independent daily newspaper which will be published in the autumn of 1964, asked Dr. Mark Abrams to make this survey. Its aim: to bring together in perspective sociological data from many sources, and in the light of today's trends to predict the nature of our society tomorrow.

Dr. Abrams' survey will command wide interest not only as an important sociological document in its own right, but as a valuable guide to the changing nature of the British mass market for everyone concerned with the selling of goods and services.

8. Age Instead of Class

The traditional classification of the British people has been into social classes. People identified themselves and were recognised by others as belonging to the middle class or the working class (or subdivisions of these) on the basis of clear-cut characteristics—speech, occupation and the size and source of one's income. For the great majority of people all these were settled at birth—people were born working class or middle class and stayed within their particular categories until they died.

The affluent revolution

In the post-war world these class barriers have tended to lose their clarity and become confused. Some working-class families have incomes as high as some white-collar families and there is little to choose between their styles of living and the goods and services they consume. Again new occupations have appeared which do not fit easily into the old classifications: industrial technicians could be regarded as neither skilled manual workers nor as members of the professions. Differences of speech and dress have greatly diminished under the impact of the mass media—particularly broadcasting and the women's magazines. Again, access to higher education, and the economic and social advantages that follow from this access, are no longer a near-monopoly of the children of middle-class parents; opportunities for social mobility through education is taken as a matter of course in millions of working-class homes. Increasingly, the attitude of non-middle class people is to identify themselves with a particular social group on the basis of their material well-being and on the sort of education received by their children. Under conditions of increasing general prosperity the social study of society in class terms is less and less illuminating. And its place is taken by differences

**The five ages
of woman**

related to age and to stages in the family life cycle. For example, the middle-class teenager probably has more in common with a working-class teenager than he has with middle-aged middle-class people. Or again, young middle-class married people often have more in common with young working-class married couples than they have with their parents.

In terms of a woman's experience the cycle of family life in Great Britain today runs, on average, as follows.

At the age of twenty-two a spinster marries a bachelor of twenty-five. For the first eighteen months of her marriage the wife continues to go out to work. She then gives up her job because her first confinement is only two or three months off. Then, just before her twenty-fourth birthday she has her first child. Her second child is born three years later, and usually this will be her last child. For the next eight years her life is dominated by bringing up her two children. Then, when she is between thirty-five and forty years of age and the elder child is nearing school-leaving age, she will probably take a part-time job in a factory or a shop—partly for the sake of additional companionship, and partly so as to help her family, through her earnings, to enjoy a higher standard of living.

Soon after she can expect both her children to leave school, become economically independent, and even contribute something to the family income. For a few years the family is highly prosperous since it contains several earners and no dependants. This stage, however, is comparatively brief. By the time the housewife is in her late forties both children will have left home and got married. She and her husband are now on their own again; both of them probably have full-time jobs, and they remain reasonably prosperous while both are still in the prime of life. Then in their sixties both husband and wife retire from work, and their economic well-being is likely to suffer an appreciable setback as they adjust themselves to living on their pensions, their savings, and, in many cases, on these supplemented by National Assistance.

These, then, are for the average person the five stages today in the typical life-cycle.

For all the men and women aged 16 and over in this country in 1963 the dimensions and definitions of these stages can be set out as follows:—

Table 29. Stages in Life cycle

Stage in Life cycle	Proportion of all women	Proportion of all men	Com- bined
	%	%	%
1. Young single: aged 16 to 24	10	14	12
2. Young married: under 35	19	17	18
3. Middle married: 35 to 44	15	17	16
4. Older married: 45 to 64	26	30	28
5. Married and single: 65 and over	18	13	16
6. All others: 25-64 and unmarried	12	9	10
Total	100	100	100

**Family
earnings:
age group
differences**

Economically the most important difference between these groups springs from variations in the number of people in the household with full-time jobs. The prosperity of teenagers has two main sources—their own high earnings and, probably of greater importance, the fact that many of them are members of households where there are three or more full-time earners. At the 'young marrieds' stage the position is vastly different—three-quarters of them have only one full time earner. Among older married couples there is a return to multiple earnings, and then among those aged 65 and over nearly two-thirds of the households are without even one earner.

The advantages of multiple earners in the family are compounded by the fact that there is normally a negative correlation between having several earners in the family and having few dependent children. For example, among the young marrieds three-quarters have at least one child below school-leaving age; among the older married the position is almost reversed—nearly three-quarters have no young children to maintain.

Finally, to add to the contrasts is the fact that part-time earners are usually found in families with no dependent children and with several full-time earners. Thus, of all married women aged 16 to 34 only 11 per cent have

part-time jobs but among married women in the next two stages the proportions are 21 per cent and 18 per cent respectively.

Table 30. Earners and dependants: life-cycle group

No. in household with full-time jobs	Young Unmarried %	Young married %	Middle married %	Older married %	All 65 and over %	Rest %	Total %
0	1	1	1	5	61	15	13
1	14	73	62	46	28	41	47
2	39	22	28	33	8	26	26
3	31	2	8	12	2	13	10
4 or more	15	2	1	4	1	5	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Proportion with children in household aged 0-15	42	76	78	28	6	15	42

Higher standards of today's young marrieds

With these differences in incomes and responsibilities there are inevitably differences in the ownership of durable consumer goods. For the most part the younger marrieds are less well endowed than their elders, but what is much more striking is that the differences here are much less than one might expect. In other words, the age groups have real differences in their definitions of household priorities. From the figures in Table 30 one might be led to conclude that cars, washing machines, refrigerators, home-owning, etc., would all be relatively rare items in the lives of younger marrieds. But not at all; in spite of their tight budgets they acquire and consume these goods on a generous scale. And their elders, in spite of their much greater prosperity, are not noticeably better off as far as these things are concerned. Presumably their prosperity has come too late in life for them to abandon the habits and values they acquired a generation ago in the 1930's. The young unmarrieds seem to be particularly determined to acquire a washing machine, a refrigerator, a home of their own, and a car.

Much the same is true about generation differences in values about holidays. Despite their relative poverty and their family ties young marrieds nowadays are almost as likely to go away for holidays as are the more prosperous and less-encumbered elders. They have, however, cut

down very drastically on their cinema going—they are not much more likely to go than are old-age pensioners. And apparently, concerned with the full-time care of young children they are slightly less inclined than their elders to watch television.

Table 31. Family ownership of durable consumer goods

Stage in Life-cycle	Home Owners %	Car Owners %	Washing Machine %	Refrigerator %	Lawn Mower %
Unmarried: 16–24	37	43	63	38	55
Young Married: under 35	40	39	59	36	43
Middle Married: 35–44	41	45	67	44	59
Older Married: 45–64	44	41	54	44	58
All 65 and over	43	18	31	23	44
Rest	36	21	25	28	44
All	41	36	52	37	51

Table 32. Some leisure activities

Stage in Life-cycle	Holiday away from home %	Visit cinema once a week %	Watch BBC 5 or more days weekly %	Watch ITV 5 or more days weekly %
Unmarried: 16–24	68	37	41	49
Young Married: under 35	53	7	55	65
Middle Married: 35–44	60	3	62	68
Older Married: 45–64	59	3	65	65
All 65 and over	37	3	59	51
Rest	55	8	51	51
All	55	8	58	60

The changing educational background

Another area in which differences in the generations are beginning to emerge is that of educational background. Almost 25 per cent of the present group of young marrieds are people who finished their full-time schooling after they had reached and passed their sixteenth birthday. Among older marrieds the proportion with this sort of background is no higher than 15 per cent. In five years' time the proportion of young marrieds who stayed on at school at least until they were sixteen may well be as high as 40 per cent.

Table 33. Terminal education age

Stage in Life-cycle	15 or under %	16 to 18 %	19 or over %	Still at school %	
Young Unmarried: 16-24	60	24	3	13	=100%
Young Married: under 35	77	20	3	-	
Middle Married: 35-44	82	15	3	-	
Older Married: 45-64	85	13	2	-	
All 65 and over	88	10	2	-	
Rest	78	17	5	-	
All	80	15	4	1	

The newspapers we read

Over the past decade, despite the demise of some national newspapers and despite the fear in some quarters about the effects of the mass spread of television there has been no noticeable decline in the reading of national daily and Sunday newspapers. These now reach practically the whole population, but the penetration of particular papers into the different groups in the life cycle varies considerably.

Currently, the average person aged 16 and over in Great Britain reads 1.25 national newspapers each day. This figure of gross readership, however, is not constant over the life-cycle groups; it is highest among young single people, but apparently one of the minor economies of time or money effected by younger married people is in a slight reduction of their newspaper reading. Among the middle and older marrieds there is an increase in reading, but then it tails off very sharply among people aged 65 and over.

Among those now in the three younger stages of family life the Daily Mirror is easily the most widely read daily paper and reaches almost half of them and it constitutes one-third of all their reading of national daily newspapers. Even among older married people the Daily Mirror is read by one-third of the group, and although it again is in first place yet it shares this with the Daily Express. It is among people over 64 years of age that the Daily Express moves clearly into the lead and only one in four in this group are readers of the Daily Mirror. Among the young marrieds the Daily Mirror is the only newspaper

which scores better than it does among the population as a whole; the Daily Mail and the Daily Herald are noticeably weaker.

Table 34. Readership of national daily newspapers*

	All	Young single	Young married	Middle married	Older married	65 and over	Rest
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Daily Mirror	38	45	45	44	36	23	34
Daily Express	33	34	30	33	36	29	35
Daily Mail	18	16	13	16	20	22	20
Daily Herald	13	14	10	12	15	12	13
Daily Sketch	9	12	9	9	10	6	10
Daily Telegraph	9	9	8	9	9	8	10
The Times	2	4	2	2	3	1	3
Guardian	2	3	2	3	2	1	3
Financial Times	1	2	1	1	2	1	2
Total	125	139	120	129	133	103	130

At all stages and for all papers readership tends to be lower among women than among men. The average man aged 16 and over reads 1.48 national daily papers each day; for women the figure is nearly 25 per cent lower at 1.14. This gap in reading habits between the two sexes is greatest in the young marrieds group; here the average man reads 1.50 papers each day while his wife manages only 1.08—nearly a 30 per cent lower reading level.

Table 35. Daily newspaper reading of young marrieds*

	Men %	Women %	Women's level as % men's level
Daily Mirror	50	41	82
Daily Express	36	25	69
Daily Herald	15	6	40
Daily Mail	14	14	100
Daily Sketch	13	7	54

For both sexes the Daily Mirror is easily the most widely read paper; moreover, it does almost as well as the Daily Mail in attracting equally husband and wife.

*The figures in these newspaper reading tables are ones derived from the IPA National Readership Survey for the twelve months ending Dec 1963.

The reading of national Sunday newspapers is even more widespread than the reading of national dailies. The average person aged 16 and over reads 1·67 national Sundays each week.

Table 36. Readership of national Sunday newspapers *

	All	Young single	Young married	Middle married	Older married	65 and over	Rest
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
News of World	43	47	44	40	46	37	42
The People	40	40	41	43	42	35	36
Sunday Mirror	36	44	44	44	33	21	31
Sunday Express	28	28	23	28	31	27	32
Sunday Times	8	10	7	9	8	6	10
Sunday Telegraph	5	5	5	6	5	4	6
Observer	5	5	5	5	4	3	5
Sunday Citizen	2	2	1	2	3	2	2
Total	167	181	170	177	172	135	164

The gross readership figure is reasonably identical over all stages except among those aged 65 or more. For the whole population the Sunday Mirror is in third place (after the News of the World and The People), but among married people under 45 years of age the Sunday Mirror is the most widely read national Sunday newspaper. The average man reads slightly more than the average woman (1·83 compared with 1·63), and this differential is constant at all stages and usually for all newspapers. But among young marrieds, the gap is wider; the average man looks at 1·95 Sunday papers while his wife manages only 1·72.

*IPA National Readership Survey for the 12 months ending December 1963.