

How Chaste are American Girls?

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CHASTITY was so highly valued in early Biblical days that whenever a young woman was challenged and was unable to prove her virginity she was stoned to death. If that practice were revived in America tomorrow, I'm afraid the resultant stoning would deplete the ranks of American womanhood.

Another old custom was that the bride wore a white wedding gown only when she could proclaim to the groom and all onlookers that she was going to the marriage bed a virgin. The white symbolized purity. Do brides today still regard that white symbol conscientiously? Apparently not. If they did, more than half of them would feel obliged to appear at the altar in some other color.

Some months ago Dr. Anna O. Stephens of the health service here at Penn State went about Pennsylvania meeting with large groups of high-school girls. She had been sent to answer their inquiries about the mysteries of sex. Questions were written out by the girls and she answered them on the platform. She had assumed her explanations would have to be held to the birds-and-bees level. Instead, she found the girls asking such questions as:

"Is it wrong to let a boy feel your bust if you like him?"

"Is there any way of telling when the days are that sexual intercourse will not have any effect?"

"Does constant petting hurt a girl's health?"

"When a fellow goes in for heavy petting what am I supposed to do?"

A noted clinical psychologist reports on a disturbing trend. His findings are supported by scientific surveys—some never previously available for publication—among thousands of our young women

“Is there any harm in a boy feeling a girl’s leg?”

“How far can a good girl go?”

There were also many questions about pregnancy and the cure of venereal disease. (Practically every high school has an occasional pregnant girl.) But the last question, “How far can a good girl go?” is most typical of all because our youths today are at a loss for standards. No one tells the typical girl the answer. She is puzzled to know how far she can go and still keep her respect, and how far she has to go to keep the interest of men. No one except an occasional parent bothers to give a girl the answer. She is not loose, just lost.

A few weeks ago an older girl (26) came to me in a desperate mood. She was engaged to marry,

soon, a doctor several years older. They had not engaged in anything beyond mild caresses; she hadn’t told him that even the thought of any physical relationship turned her cold. Back in high school, she had fallen sublimely in love with the school idol and star athlete, a spoiled boy who took her virginity and then went on to another girl. After that, disillusioned, she had sexual affairs with seven successive men and ended up feeling even more frustrated. Now, she felt guilty because she was to marry a man she really loved, with little prospect that she could ever respond to him physically.

The war and its aftermath have played a major part in confusing the thinking of girls and leading many to promiscuity. This is shown

The Decline of Chastity in American Women

These findings on chastity among American women are reported by Dr. L. M. Terman in his book, *Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness*:

Of women who married before 1912.....	12%					were non-virgins at marriage
Of women who married during and immediately after World War I.....	26%	"	"	"	"	
Of women who married between 1922 and 1931....	49%	"	"	"	"	
Of women who married between 1932 and 1937....	68%	"	"	"	"	

in the fact that illegitimate births rose 25 per cent during the war years. Abortions also rose. The unhappiest aspect of this is that most of the girls in trouble were those in their teens who lacked the skill and sophistication of older girls.

One 19-year-old girl's experience started out as typical. Her boy friend was leaving for overseas service. Normally she might have remained chaste; but she wanted to "give" him something and was overpowered by the emotions of parting. Thus far the incident was all too usual. But after he left she had to have an abortion. Because of a slipshod abortionist, she became infected and almost lost her life. Now the boy is coming back and she is completely sterile. She wants to marry him but doubts he will want to marry her when he learns her condition.

In offering such examples of unchastity, I hope I am not doing an injustice to American girls in general. I want to emphasize that millions of them, with little outside

help, establish their own standards of morality and cling to them.

But taking American girls as a whole, just how chaste are they? Only a few attempts have been made at an accurate overall estimate. Society doesn't approve of investigations into its morality. Several able investigators have lost their jobs because their studies brought disagreeable revelations. However, we do have results on a half dozen comprehensive studies to guide us. I will sum up those findings and also give the informal conclusions I have reached myself as a result of interviewing several thousand young people.

All the studies point to the fact that in one generation startling changes have taken place in the sexual behavior of our youth. In the words of Dr. L. M. Terman, author of *Psychological Factors in Marital Happiness*: "The trend toward premarital sex experience is proceeding with extraordinary rapidity."

Let's look at the evidence. Kath-

arine Bement Davis made a study (reported in *Factors in the Sex Life of 2,200 Women*) of women who married just prior to World War I. Only 8 per cent of them admitted to having had premarital sexual experience.

The first war brought a profound change in sexual attitudes. This is shown in G. V. Hamilton's study of 100 women (*A Research in Marriage*), many of whom married during World War I. It showed that 35 per cent of them had engaged in intercourse before their wedding night. Twenty per cent had had intercourse with men other than their future husbands.

Terman, in studying some 792 married couples, found evidence tending to confirm these two earlier studies and obtained data on women who had married in the 1930s. (His findings appear in the box on page 146.)

Terman concluded that, if the rise in premarital experience continued at the same rate it has for a generation, "virginity at marriage will be close to the vanishing point . . . for females born after 1940."

In other words, if the trend continued, virtually every American girl now under six years old would "go the limit" some time before marriage. Actually, I am confident that will never happen. The pendulum will swing back toward greater chastity. In fact, it may already have turned. Still, of the young engaged girls contemplating early marriage who come to me today, roughly three-quarters are experienced sexually. (I recognize that as a counselor I get a selected group of girls. Many come for counsel in connection with prob-

lems arising from their own guilty feelings.) Best guess I can make is that among girls in general, in 1946, around 60 per cent are non-virgins on the day they marry.

There are variations, of course. Take even the occupation of the girl's father. Several years ago Dorothy Dunbar Bromley and Florence Haxton Britten questioned 618 college girls and reported their findings in *Youth and Sex*. They found that a third of the girls whose fathers were small business men were sexually experienced while still in college; less than a fourth of the daughters of professional men were.

Morality may vary extremely between neighboring towns. A student recently told me that during his high-school days he moved from one town to another 28 miles away. In the first, a college community, boy-girl relationships were on a conservative, idealistic basis. But in the second, an industrial town, the majority of his classmates (both boys and girls) appeared to be veterans at physical love-making.

Perhaps the most startling variations exist between girls who go to college and those who don't. Here we are indebted to the findings (as yet unpublished) of Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey and his associates at Indiana University, who are making an exhaustive scientific study of human sex behavior. Already they have studied minutely and with every caution of modern science the sex behavior of 10,000 persons, using a very careful interviewing technique. They plan to interview tens of thousands more. When their results are in, we will have the most comprehensive in-

vestigation of human sex behavior ever undertaken.

There is a widespread impression that college girls are the flaming youth of our generation. Actually, Dr. Kinsey's group has found them conservative and relatively more inhibited than girls as a whole. (And in marriage they are on an average not nearly as well-adjusted sexually to their husbands as are the girls who never went past high school. Their sex drive is less than a third that of non-college girls.) Cultural restraints imposed upon the girls who go to college, both in their homes and in the college atmosphere, appear to be largely responsible for the inhibitions.

One-third of the college girls, Dr. Kinsey has found, had experiences in full intimacy by the time of graduation. Of girls who did not go to college, half had done so by the same age.

While fewer college girls go the limit than other girls it is significant that they submit to bodily petting a great deal more. Dr. Kinsey has found that twice as many college girls pet without intercourse as do the girls who never go to college. In any case, young women as a whole pet at least twice as much today as their mothers did. Easily nine-tenths of all girls pet sometime before marriage. And a great many of them pet to the point of orgasm. Bromley and Britten make this significant observation:

"That a girl should feel she can give without giving all, can permit intimacies without compromising her essential virginity, is one of the phenomena of the contemporary younger generation's *mores*."

The abandon with which mod-

ern girls pet and "go the limit" would lead us to think they are having a hard time controlling their passions. When a girl strides down the street with her dress clinging, her hair flying, her toes sticking out, she may look like the embodiment of sexual feeling.

Actually, with the average girl, this is an illusion. The typical girl under 22 knows very little about sexual feeling and certainly isn't driven by intolerable pressures within her. A girl matures in her ability to experience passion much later than a man, partly because she labors under more restraints. During her teens—and often right up to marriage—her sex feelings are generalized. That is, they are diffused over the surface of her body and express themselves in esthetic ways, in the thrill she gets from a beautiful sunset or a romantic movie. The feelings usually are not localized until she is in her middle 20s.

Dr. Kinsey's group has found that, while the male's sex drive is at its peak at the age of 16-20, the female's peak usually comes at 35-40; and that peak is considerably lower than the man's. The drives of a man and a woman usually do not equalize until both are about 37, when the male drive has been declining for 20 years. The average girl of 18-20 is too young to experience the passion of the wife married for 15 years.

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If little sex feeling is involved, why, you may ask, do girls become involved so early in petting and full intimacy? In the words of Dr. Anna Stephens: "Most girls start to pet when young because they are afraid they won't be able to get another date unless they do. Once started, the habit gains momentum and soon may be out of control." Too, these girls are dating boys who are at the peak of their sex drive—and hence importunate.

Girls give kisses to boys as rewards for taking them out or saying nice things to them. And they value kisses from men primarily as evidence they are approved. I hold that at least one-half of our "wild" sex delinquents get little or no pleasure from the sex activity. They indulge primarily to get something else they want: the prestige and pleasure of having dates.

Many girls try to groom themselves so that they will look irresistible to men. When they achieve that appearance they are usually chagrined at the result. Bromley and Britten asked girls why they had gone the limit and received such responses as these:

"If you date all the time you are certain sooner or later to go too far."

"It's a contest of wills. He tries to make you; you see how far you can go and still stop. Sometimes you win; sometimes he does."

But, whether it be an intolerable sex urge or simply masculine pressure, why are girls today any more or less promiscuous than those of 35 years ago? Here are what I consider the major reasons:

1. The emotions engendered by

two world wars and their aftermaths have made people feel insecure and brought different standards to them.

2. Psychoanalysis with its emphasis upon sex and its stimulus to ignore inhibitions has made it easier for sex to be talked about and *experimented with*. One bright girl reported to me she let herself be seduced purely out of curiosity and added cryptically: "I wasn't carried away."

3. Wider dissemination of contraceptive information has released many people from the fear of pregnancy. Katharine Davis's study revealed that a girl's knowledge of contraceptives is closely related to the likelihood of her engaging in pre-marital intercourse.

4. Marriages must be postponed longer now. Some marriage experts believe this is the heart of the whole problem. Men entering the professions do not marry nowadays until they are about 25; until then, few have the vocational preparation and experience to earn a living for two.

5. The automobile has made it easier for young people to get away from the scrutiny of their elders. Development of tourist camps and a lenient attitude among hotel managers have made out-of-town rendezvous easier.

6. The relaxation of family chaperonage, with no adequate substitute, is a factor.

7. The public generally is less condemnatory of "ruined" women and the churches for the most part have made less attempt to throw the fear of hell into transgressors.

8. The wartime shortage of men in American towns, plus the long-

range shift of our population toward a surplus of women over men, has made many girls aggressive. (This population shift is fully discussed in my forthcoming book *How to Pick a Mate*.) Many girls consider petting one of the most effective techniques for minimizing the effect of the male shortage on their own lives.

9. Many young people believe sexual compatibility essential to happy marriage. With that in mind, some of them experiment beforehand.

10. American girls are confronted at every turn with inducements to make themselves more alluring and amenable to men. Our billboards, our newspaper and magazine advertising promote soap and perfume and deodorants by showing girls clinging sensuously to men. The movies have glamorized "It," "Oomph" and sarongs. Stage shows play up premarital and extramarital unchastity. The radio has become more "sexized" during the past decade. Our best sellers are such books as *Strange Fruit*, *The Manatee* and *Forever Amber*—all replete with seduction scenes.

With such a steady diet of sex it is no wonder to me that many girls feel that sexual experimentation is approved, and even expected of them. But so long as society disapproves such behavior, it is hard to see how it can be indulged in under circumstances favorable to sexual harmony.

Hamilton has found, for example, that a quarter of all wives he interviewed found their *initial* sexual encounter disappointing, disgusting or frightening. When the shock the girl might feel at first

even in marriage is compounded by the hazards that accompany most premarital experiences, the danger of permanent scars is high. There usually are feelings of guilt. In one instance, with a couple deeply in love, this guilt—plus the ineptness of the boy, the fear of discovery and the general tension—produced such disagreeable feelings in both that they broke their engagement.

I am a clinical psychologist, and as a scientist I must view human behavior objectively. Moralists, not scientists, must set the standards. An engineer may design an automobile but its use must be determined by someone else. Permissible behavior before marriage must be decided by someone other than the scientist.

What is permissible behavior? Is kissing permissible before engagement? Is bodily petting? What can a girl do to determine whether she and her fiance are physically compatible? Our social code defines full intimacy as a privilege, a right and an obligation a girl should reserve for marriage. Does that mean she may do anything short of that in trying to find out about compatibility?

I will say this: she can get some clues by noting the consideration with which the man treats her, and the strength of their reactions and feelings toward each other. And I know a promiscuous girl often is a poor risk for marriage. For some of the factors that make her promiscuous also may cause emotional insecurity and immaturity.

Some time ago I took the records of 25 girls who—according to my tests—were unconventional in attitudes and generally unstable

emotionally (and thus very poor marriage risks). Later, 21 of the 25 confided to me that they had been involved in sexual experiences with three or more men. I would hesitate to recommend any of them in marriage.

I do not mean to imply from all I've said that *any* physical contact is harmful before marriage. Quite the contrary. I feel it is important that an *engaged* couple learn to feel responsive to each other through mutual caresses so that the full intimacy of marriage will seem desirable and right. But society should make it possible for them to marry by the time they have developed such feelings that both yearn for satisfaction.

Every girl, I believe, should sit

down in the quiet of her own room and formulate a personal philosophy that she can live with for the rest of her life. Where does intimacy fit into that philosophy? If she elects to remain chaste until marriage, she should accept the fact she will need to set limits against below-the-shoulder petting. For intimacy is progressive.

In forming her philosophy, she can accept two statements as facts:

1. An unmarried girl does not need to engage in intercourse for the sake of her health.

2. A girl does not have to be promiscuous to be popular with men. In fact, promiscuity frequently alienates a serious-minded man from any thought of her in connection with marriage.

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