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like a boy and girl going steady,
but their primary concern is
how much they can mean to
each other. Girls are often
asked, "Do you want to go
steady?" Such a question is in-
conceivable in terms of a rela-
tionship; it just happens.

What about love? Oddly
enough, there's a certain reti-
cence on this point. Young peo-
ple take the *idea* seriously in-
deed. Love is what they want—
only they tend to regard it as
awesome, perhaps unobtain-
able. Sex, on the other hand, is
viewed matter-of-factly. Most
high school couples stop short
of sexual intercourse—for rea-
sons practical rather than mor-
al. (Few of the thirty-odd high
school students interviewed
thought premarital sex was
absolutely wrong—some only
that it was not right for *them*.)
Boys at this stage are inclined to
be nervous, either about their
own performance or the possi-
bility of pregnancy. For girls
the problems are more complex.
The thought of seeing a doctor
about contraception is alarm-
ing; the alternative—relying on

the boy's precautions—is more
alarming still. Girls care more
than boys about the setting of a
love affair: "I don't want my
first experience in the back seat
of a car." They are also more
concerned about upsetting a
delicate balance. "As things are
now," says a seventeen-year-
old, "Harry and I are equally
free. If I slept with him, I'd feel
more committed than he would.
That could be rough." On the
whole, high school students
tend to see complete physical

intimacy as an experience
they're just not ready for.
School is full of pressures, aca-
demic and extracurricular.
Family relationships may be
tense. "Frankly," says a ha-
rassed senior, "sex would be too
much of a hassle."

After graduation the picture
changes: a meaningful relation-
ship is more often than not a
physical one too. In the college
world the pill is widely avail-
able; family controls dissolve;
relaxed parietal rules (or off-

campus apartments) provide
plenty of opportunity. In addi-
tion, religious scruples are less
operative at this stage.

"I think Catholic girls are still
uptight," says one boy. "But the
whole thing about chastity
seems to be breaking down.
Besides," he goes on, "there's
not much feeling about sex be-
ing embarrassing anymore. Like
being afraid to face someone
you've slept with—that's dead."
This appears to be true for girls
as well as for boys. The decision
is always a conscious one for
the girl, according to a Barnard
junior. "Should I or shouldn't I
was the main subject of conver-
sation in the dorms during my
freshman year. And I don't
know anyone who slept with a
boy as a result of being mo-
mentarily carried away—the
girl had always made up her
mind beforehand. It's much
healthier that way because it
relieves the boy of total respon-
sibility. At the same time, if
you're in a relationship, the boy
feels bound to continue seeing
you; if you're just dating, he
might (continued on page 172)

