

## the changing definition of sex

### TRENDS

While the generation gap has mostly dwindled to a crack in areas such as music and TV shows, it's chasmlike when it comes to the sexual activities of teenagers. New York magazine asked 100 Manhattan teenagers and 100 adults with kids in the same demographic to take a "purity test"—just to see how well the adults knew what the kids were really doing. Here are some of the eye-opening comparisons:

	STUDENTS SAY	PARENTS SAY THEIR OWN TEEN HAS
<b>Have you ever...</b>		
...kissed someone?	96%	74%
...gone on a date?	93%	68%
...French-kissed?	84%	43%
...told someone that you loved him or her?	68%	32%
...watched an X-rated movie?	65%	25%
...received oral sex?	61%	10%
...performed oral sex?	51%	1%
...masturbated?	57%	36%
...undressed someone?	56%	11%
...had sexual intercourse?	55%	26%
...purchased contraceptives?	34%	7%
...taken a shower with someone in the nude?	27%	6%
...had sexual conversations with a stranger on the Internet	25%	3%

Manhattan teenagers don't exactly reflect the sexual experiences of teenagers in general. The National Center for Health Statistics surveyed more than 10,000 teenagers and found that just over 36% of 15- to 17-year-old boys have had sexual intercourse and 49% of all 15- to 17-year-old girls have had *no sexual contacts at all*. Meanwhile, the Centers for Disease Control released a survey that found more than half of all 15- to 17-year-olds have given or received oral sex.

All this feedback from teenagers about their sexual beliefs and practices accentuates a huge adult-teenager difference in opinion about what constitutes intimacy. David Walsh, a psychologist and author of *Why Do They Act That Way?*, says in a USA Today interview, "Now that some kids are using oral sex as something that's more casual, it's shocking to [parents]. [Sex] just becomes kind of a recreational activity that is separate from a close, personal relationship." Doris Fuller, a parent of two teenagers and co-author with them of the 2004 book *Promise You Won't Freak Out*, agrees: "Intimacy has been so devalued. What will the impact be on their ultimately more lasting relationships? I don't think we know yet."

Kids, predictably, don't think any of this is such a big deal.

"Some adults say it is a form of sex, but kids don't really see it that way," says 19-year-old Natalie Fuller in USA Today. "For most teens, the only form of sex is penetration, and anything else doesn't count. You can have oral sex and be a virgin." When an article about oral sex, written entirely by students at Columbus North High School in Indiana, got published in the school newspaper, it caused an uproar in the community. Some demanded the kids who produced the article be expelled.

**Two related notes:** Soon after Apple introduced its new video iPod, tech consulting firms predicted the wireless pornography market will reach \$1 billion by 2008. Meanwhile, according to researchers with the National Study of Youth and Religion, religiously active parents are more likely to talk about the morality of sexual activity than the mechanics of sex and birth control.