

The Year Was...

1939

In 1939, the Roper Organization conducted a commercial survey of 3,157 respondents between the ages of 10 and 19, aimed, apparently, at assessing the market for tea among young people.

It is our great good fortune that in the effort to get to know their potential customers, the survey sponsor, a now-obscure (and presumably defunct) entity called the "Tea Bureau," commissioned a number of questions that help us, 62 years later, get to know them as well.

This is not to say we are given any more than a glimpse. Sticking mostly to the obvious and innocuous, the pollsters did not attempt to elicit information from their youthful respondents about anything much more serious than what they did to annoy their parents, and vice versa. Perhaps at that time it did not occur to them to do so; the problems of adolescence were not something people seemed to give much thought to in the 1930s.

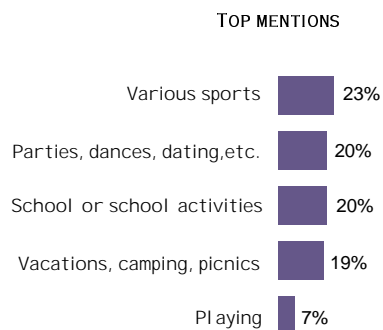
Yet this particular generation of teens and preteens had everything to be serious about. Children of an economic depression from which their country was still struggling to emerge, teetering on the brink of the most destructive war the world has thus far known, they spoke in the survey of simple pleasures from a past that for many must have been bleak, and dreamed of hopeful futures which many would never see—not, at least, in the way they'd dreamed them.

Today, all of the participants in the Tea Bureau survey are either deceased or getting quite old. Based on these meager data, can we compare their former selves with our own youth, whose problems and pleasures are so different? Probably not; but as we tally the percentages of their responses and read the open-ended remarks represented here, we might at least pick up some faint echo of what it was like back then to be young.

—Lisa Ferraro Parmelee

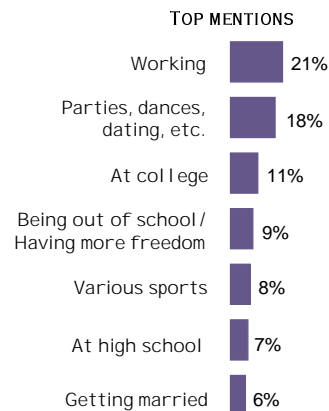
Question:

At what time up to now have you had the most fun?



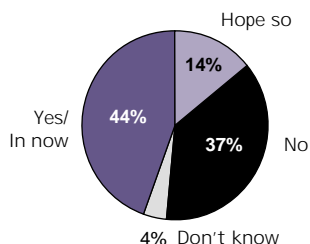
Question:

At what time of life in the future so you expect to have the most fun?



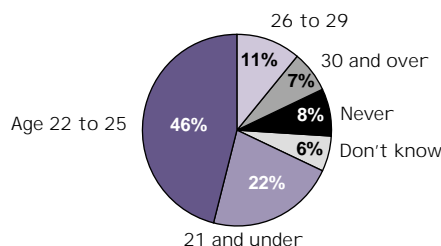
Question:

Do you plan on going to college?



Question:

At what age do you expect, or want, or hope to get married?

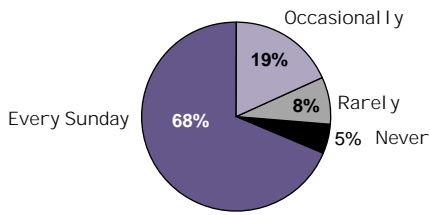


Source: All data on this page are from a survey of youths ages 10-19 by the Roper Organization, August 1939.

Virtues and Vices

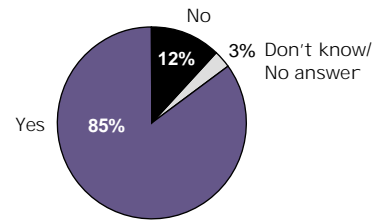
Question:

How often do you go to church or Sunday school?



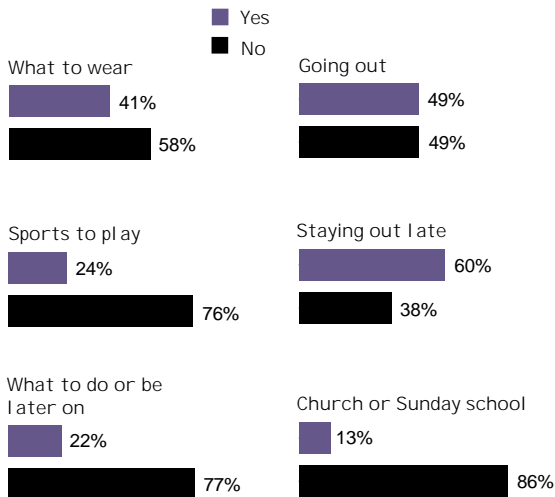
Question:

Do you think it is important that everyone go to church?



Question:

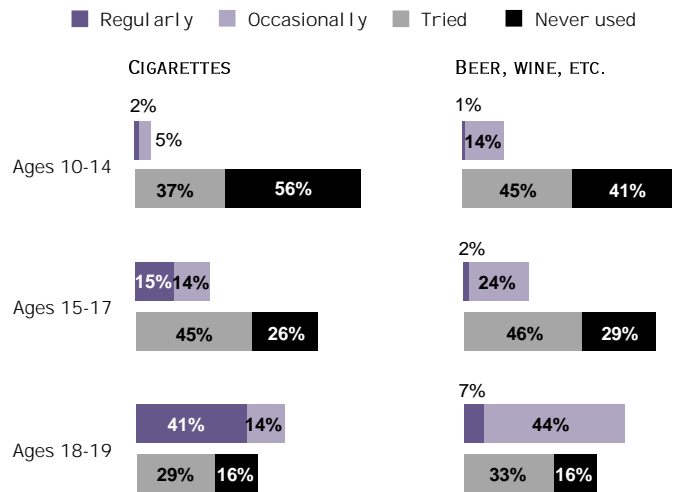
Do you have different ideas from either one or both of your parents on...



Acquired Tastes

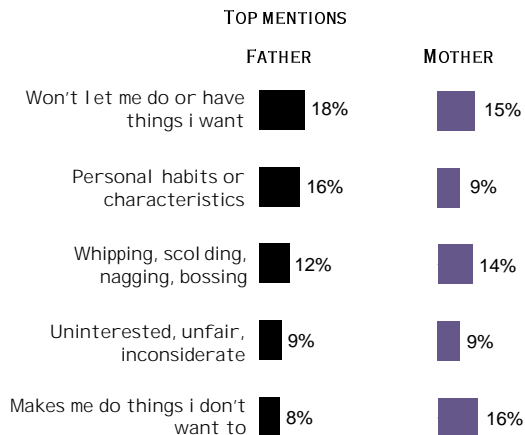
Question:

Which of these do you use and how regularly?



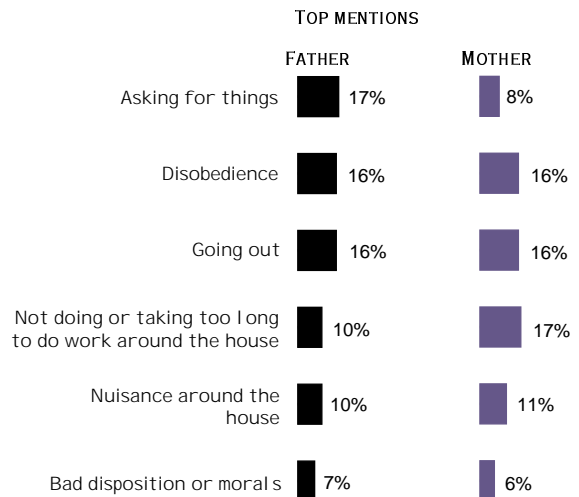
Question:

[Even though parents and children are very fond of each other, they both do or say things that sometimes irritate each other.] What one or two things does your father do or say that particularly bothers you? Your mother?



Question:

...Can you think of one or two things you do or say that particularly irritates your father? Mother?



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