The Annual Mary Lou Fulton Mentored Research Conference showcases some of the best student research from the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences. The mentored learning program encourages undergraduate students to participate in hands-on and practical research under the direction of a faculty member. Students create these posters as an aide in presenting the results of their research to the public, faculty, and their peers.

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
Jubber, Lara; Fackrell, Tamara; Hansen, Jessica; and Holman, Thomas B., "Female Dating Initiation at BYU" (2010). FHSS Mentored Research Conference. 54.
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub/54
ABSTRACT

Through qualitative dating analysis, we interviewed 12 females from BYU and found several patterns regarding dating initiation. First, there was perceived male responsibility to initiate the date. Second, there was confusion that results in how a female should let a male know of their interest in him. Third, ambiguity resulted because the communication in dating initiation is not straightforward. Fourth, dating is viewed as a game with rules that vary depending on the participant.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What are the patterns among females for dating initiation at BYU?
• How do gender roles play into the dating initiation?

STRENGTHS OF PRESENT STUDY

• Interviews and follow-ups allowed us to clarify questions and continue the study on a longitudinal basis.
• In-depth interviews allowed us to be able to understand the how’s and why’s of dating.

METHODS

The data used for these analyses were collected via the LDS Pathways to Marriage Study. The study was designed to evaluate marital pathways among young LDS singles and the extent to which these pathways resemble American vs. LDS values. Participants were 24 Young Single Adults attending BYU. 12 females, 12 males. All participants were Caucasian, Avg. age was 21 years, std. dev. 2.2 years.

MEASUREMENT

Analysis for the core category Marital Ideals was conducted using 11 questions from the interview guide used in the LDS Pathways to Marriage Study. A total of 4 categories were pulled from the data, these categories were Marital Ideals, Where They Come From, How they Influence Dating, and Proxy for American. Out of the 24 respondents 21 contributed to these categories with a total of 129 individual references.

RESULTS

1. Perceived Male Responsibility to Initiate the Date

• Female participants express great concern for “making a fool of themselves”, or “pushing” themselves outside their comfort zone and initiating dates. Some female expectations were that a male will come and actively pursue them without any encouragement on the female end.

• Parents’ belief in traditional dating initiation roles influenced female participants. Karri expressed, “My mom would always tell me in high school that it takes away their manhood to ask him on a date or if you are always in charge of the relationship. They need to learn to be a gentleman and take care of you… I think the husband in a marriage should be the one to take care of his wife and his family.”

• Female dating initiation is viewed as improper, and unorthodox. Melinda expressed, “I was raised in a very conservative home, where my mother was like, ‘You’re not allowed to call boys on the phone, you’re not allowed…’ I’m not allowed to be the forward one, that’s just how I was raised and I think that has just carried on to now. I am not forward, and I think it’s cause I think that has just carried on to now. I am not forward, and I think it’s cause I am a girl. I’m not forward at all.”

2. Female have feelings of confusion, helplessness and desire to be “subtle” in dating initiation because of the way they define the role of women in dating initiation.

• When asked what guys did to show interest Annette said, “Well they were going out of their way to talk with me or they were friendly. They went out of their way to introduce themselves or talk to you again. I’m kind of horrible at reading body language… and my friend is like, ‘He touched your arm?’ ‘Oh, I guess they did touch your arm.’”

• Brianna states, “Making those kinds of comments. I don’t know how to respond. I don’t want it to shut down any interest, but I don’t want it to freak out… Yes he is joking or does he just want to see the reaction.”

• Speaking of interest cues, Samantha said, “That’s tricky because unless it’s pretty obvious on both sides… then it is really hard to make that happen. Especially from a girls point of view. I think that guys have the power to say ‘if they start being interested in a girl to ask her on a specific date and make it more obvious that it’s a date. With girls I mean they can do that as well but it’s not as easy.”

• Female participants felt that beyond flirting, their options were limited. Haley said, “I kind of wait for them to make the first move. I flirt with them and stuff… Then they are the ones that actually ask me out. They are the ones that initiate things like holding hands and stuff. So… I don’t know I kind of wait.”

3. Ambiguity results because communication is not straightforward in dating initiation.

• One participant said, “It’s kind of this step back and forth, trying to test the waters. If they seem receptive to step a little bit further. It’s more having to do with not wanting to hurt each others feelings or misunderstanding the signals we put out there as something else. Whereas I may think I’m putting myself out there, someone who doesn’t know me that well might think ‘she’s just being nice or we’re just friends or something.’”

• Female participants expressed frustration that guys were not straight forward with their intentions. Brianna said, “And that is probably the most frustrating that guys just don’t get to know you and just ask you out if they want to. They feel like they have to do the Cloak and Dagger type stuff and that is way more frustrating.”

• A focus on communication can overcome ambiguity. Haley expressed her frustrations, “How guys and girls don’t seem to understand each other ever. And girls are just so difficult and guys are just so I don’t know what’s going on.” (Laugh) so yeah, that’s kind of frustrating but it’s easy to get past if you just focus on communicating.”

4. Dating is viewed as a game.

• Annette describes her nervousness while dating: “then there’s the first date was everybody’s nervous… everyone is trying to over their nerves and trying to be natural, but you’re like ‘what if they don’t like me?’ SO there’s trying to get over that. Then second date, you’re like, ‘this one will be better because we were so nervous the first date… will be more relaxed.’ And then by the third date if you’re not relaxed with each other or trying to open up with each other… maybe this isn’t going somewhere… so trying to figure out where it’s going is if it should go anywhere that is this whole crazy game. You don’t want shine a spotlight on them and say, ‘Do you like me?’ That kind of defeats the game. It’s a little cheating.”

• Susan lists some rules of the game, “I know you never give off more emotion than he is showing. In kind of the rule we have in my apt if the guy is very open towards you about his feelings, then you can be open back, but if he is very reserved and doesn’t tell you he likes you or not, then you don’t say a anything either. And there are a lot of little rules when it comes to first and second dates like when you’re at a restaurant… you can’t order something that is really, really cheap; but you can’t order something that is really expensive either, so there is always this ball park so you try to figure out how to get the guy to order first because then you have his price and you can go around there…”

• Samantha: “I feel like there’s this invisible line of the girl and the guy you have to show them that you do it like them or that you are interested in them to a certain degree but if you cross this invisible line and show them too much interest then instead of being interested back they will freak out a little bit because there’s such a line in wanting to date for fun and like pursuing marriage right away. Referring to the dating game Samantha also said, “I kind of understand that it exists but I think that it’s exaggerated by society to the point where it’s unnecessary. I mean we all hate it, yet we all play it. So I understand that there has to be some kind of play between people because if we were all just brutally honest I don’t know if that would work as well (Laugh). So I guess I understand it but I think it’s exaggerated.”

CONCLUSIONS

Dating initiation is paramount in dating. Gender roles are what drive the culture of dating. Most females interviewed at BYU still believe in traditional gender roles where the males should be initiating the dating. Females often are unsure on how to give subtle dating cues to males. Because the communication lacks candor at the dating initiation stage, many feel that the first three dates become a type of “dating game.” Although all of our participants agreed the game exists, they each defined the “rules of the game” differently.