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BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
Call, Matthew; Richards, Michael; and Holman, Tom B., "Hanging Out Among Latter-day Saint Young Adults: A Qualitative Study" (2010). FHSS Mentored Research Conference. 60. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/fhssconference_studentpub/60

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Hanging Out Among Latter-day Saint Young Adults:
A Qualitative Study

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Introduction
Latter-day Saint (LDS) Church leaders have recently counseled LDS young adults to avoid substituting the practice of hanging out for dating (Oaks 2006, Wickman, 2010). In the face of this counsel, hanging out continues to be a common occurrence.

The present study was conducted to better understand why hanging out occurs, how young adults conceptualize it, and what function it serves as a potential pathway to marriage.

We believe that hanging out serves two different functions, distinguishable by the intentions of participants and time commitments involved. We have termed “purposive” hanging out as being used to locate and filter potential dating partners, and “non-committal” hanging out as being used to fill needs for companionship and recreation with mixed gender groups.

Sample/Method
The data used for these analyses was collected via the LDS Pathways to Marriage interviews. 24 Young Single Adults attending BYU (12 females, 12 males) individually completed a series of open-ended interviews which were transcribed and coded to evaluate marital pathways among young LDS singles.

All participants were Caucasian,
Mean age was 21 years, std. dev. 2.2 years.

Purposive Hanging Out**

SS: “You’ve told us a little bit about your experiences but could you tell us maybe how through your observations you’ve seen dating works at BYU?”

SAMANTHA: “To be honest I think it starts with hanging out. Because in order to get into a relationship with dating somebody you have to kind of like them a degree and in that case you have to know them and so if you’re spending time in groups you see somebody and you start to like them and get to know them better and then you can move towards dating. Let see… yeah.”

NICK: “In the hangout setting you get to know how they are with a group, but then with changing to a dating setting you are getting to know who they are as an individual, their nature, their style, stuff like that.”

TERANCE: “It really depends on the situation. If I had to say I’m more comfortable doing one or the other I would probably say I’m more… usually what happens is I wind up hanging out with them a bit and then going out on a date, but really it’s just what the situation dictates, if I meet someone or I’m interested when I meet them, then I’m fairly comfortable asking them out on. On the other hand if I get to know someone then I’ve seen them a few places I’m probably more likely to ask them out just because that happens more often than meeting people who I’m just like “oh” I’m immediately interested in them.”

Discussion/Implications
The findings of the present study suggest that purposive hanging out is used as an important means of initiating relationships (Figure 1). Dating is still highly valued by Latter-day Saint young adults, however, it is no longer viewed as a casual means to initiate a relationship.

Young adults hang out to locate potential dates, who they then ask on more serious dates. If the dating process goes well the individuals will move through the courtship stage toward marriage. If, however, the prospect is not suitable, the young adults will go back to hanging out until another potential dating partner is located.

Further research is needed to determine how effective such an approach is at actually creating relationships.

Findings
Purposive Hanging Out

Intentions:
1. To observe the temperament of potential dating partners in a group setting.
2. To discover if there is more than merely passing interest.
3. To build friendship through casual interaction before attempting to pursue a more serious relationship.
4. To reduce the awkwardness that comes from dating complete strangers.
5. To filter out potential dating partners from a larger pool of possibilities.

Time Commitment:
1. Short-lived. Purposive hanging out has served its function if a date is initiated or a potential partner is discounted as a poor choice.

Non-Committal Hanging Out

Intentions:
1. To have a comfortable, risk-free association with the opposite sex.
2. To have fun, relaxation, recreation.
3. To maintain friendships without pursuing them to dating.
4. To fill time and reduce boredom.
5. As the name implies, it involves no commitment to the other person, or any interest in pursuing a commitment with members of the group.

Time Commitment:
1. Extended. Non-committal hanging out serves as a “comfort zone” that individuals are reluctant to leave for the more risky dating world.

Non-Committal Hanging Out

AF: “Okay. So do you ever see instances where individuals move from hanging out to dating?”

TIM: “I’ve heard of it. As far as personally seeing it, not here at BYU. Like maybe in high school, but out here it doesn’t even seem. Like it seems like you wouldn’t get lost anymore in what people call the friends zone where they just hang out all the time. Then one of them wanted something more but it’s too late now they’re just too good of friends and too afraid to go on a date now because they don’t want to freak the other one out or something”

SAMANTHA: “I feel like I… I mean, there are a lot of great guys that I was able to meet and get to know and so I’d start to like one or two, (laughs) but they… it’s hard to come by actual dates here. And I almost feel like I don’t know, I don’t know. I feel like it’s a lot of more of just hanging out and not a lot of time is put into it unless the person sees like potential.”

MK: “Potential meaning…”

SAMANTHA: “Like potential to get married.”

MK: “And how do you feel about that?”

SAMANTHA: “I can understand why people think that. But I think that it inhibits us from getting, from experiencing more casual dating experiences. That we could just date casually or go on a couple dates, but instead they’re afraid that, other, like I mean it happens both ways, they could be afraid that the other person is already thinking about marriage or a significant relationship and so they just opt out of having that at all.”

References
Wickman, L.B. (2010), “Confidence Tests”, Ensign, April, 12-16
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**Names of participants changed