

DATING AND MARRIAGE

A 2001 study (Glenn & Marquardt) of 1,000 young women attending four-year colleges and universities across the United States found that “dating” has all but disappeared from American college campuses. Only half of the women reported they had been asked on six or more dates during their entire college career. In fact, one-third of the women had had two dates or fewer during the same four years.

Instead of dating, college students now “hang out” in mixed groups in a variety of settings, including apartments, dormitory rooms, student centers, pizza parlors, coffee shops, and bars. From these associations young people may pair off and “hook up” with a member of the opposite sex.

In Glenn and Marquardt’s study, “hooking up” was defined as “when a girl and a guy get together for a physical encounter and don’t necessarily expect anything further” (Glenn and Marquardt, 2001, p. 4). Forty percent of the women in the study had participated in a hookup, and over 90% indicated that hooking up is a regular activity on their campus.

However, the level of physical intimacy involved in a

hookup remains vague in student conversations, meaning anything from kissing to sexual intercourse. The vagueness of the term allows students to tell others that they have hooked up without completely compromising their reputation. Some college students applaud the idea that hanging out and hooking up carry no commitment or responsibility, such as exclusivity or the designation of the relationship as “girlfriend and boyfriend.”

The popularity of hanging out and hooking up has influenced many college students to shift their focus from seeking marriage to seeking casual sexual relationships. Phrases like “friends with benefits” and “sex without strings and relationships without rings” are tossed around on campus, and sexual intimacy has evolved into something casual and common.

This startling description of hooking up and the demise of dating on American campuses motivated us to conduct a study among BYU students to ascertain whether or not these trends have in any way invaded that campus as well. Upon enrollment, BYU students make a commitment to “live a chaste and virtuous life” (Honor Code). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and BYU affirm that sexual relationships outside the covenant of marriage are inappropriate.

President Gordon B. Hinckley (1988) told the BYU student body:

This university will become increasingly unique among the universities of the nation and the world. We must never lose that uniqueness. We must hold tenaciously to it. Without it there would be no justification whatever for sponsorship by the Church and the use of the tithing funds of the Church to support it. . . .

The honor code to which you subscribe is also related to this. It is designed to insure the presence on this campus of a student body of young men and young women with standards above the cut of the world at large, ideals that are conducive to spiritual relationships and a social atmosphere of respectability.

Interestingly, Leon Kass (1997), a non-LDS researcher, suggested that in light of the disturbing findings about hooking-up activities on college campuses that American parents should steer their children “to religiously affiliated colleges that attract like-minded people” (p. 62). According to him, such a choice will assist their children in avoiding involvement in the hooking-up culture. The primary purpose of our study was to ascertain if BYU’s unique culture offers the protection hoped for by Kass.

Over the past 40 years, young people have been marrying later and later in their lives. Parents, Church leaders, and public policy makers are seriously concerned about whether or not a substantial number of young Americans are merely delaying marriage or have rejected marriage and opted for singleness. The answer to this question has very significant implications for society. Unfortunately, a definitive answer will not be known for a generation or more. However, some clues about LDS young people are available now in this survey of unmarried BYU students.

THE BYU SURVEY

The survey was designed to learn about BYU students’ goals and attitudes about marriage and dating: how important marriage is to them, how confident they are that they will find a mate, and how they go about the process of getting to know people of the opposite sex. We also asked what type of physical intimacy students thought appropriate for hanging-out and dating relationships and what intimate activity they had participated in. The methodology of the survey is given in Appendix A.

Life goals and attitudes about marriage. One indication of the relative importance of marriage was obtained by identifying how single BYU students ranked marriage in relation to several other important life goals, ranging from finishing college to helping the less fortunate. The highest-ranked goal for BYU students was a close personal relationship with God, closely followed by marriage in the temple, a goal which is both

spiritual and marital (see Table 1). Ninety-seven percent of the BYU women and 93% of the BYU men answered that marrying in the temple is a “very important” goal.

We compared the attitudes of BYU students to those of a very large national sample of graduating high school seniors (eighteen years old) interviewed in the spring of 2000 in the Monitoring the Future Project (Bachman, Johnston, & O’Malley, 2001). These high school seniors are younger than typical BYU students, but they provide a reasonable picture of what young people are generally thinking about marriage. The goals ranked by the high school seniors, although not identical to those chosen by BYU students, were similar; marriage was an important goal for both groups. It seems that most young people in this country desire to marry.

Although aspirations for marriage and a happy family life were similar between BYU and the national sample, there is a striking difference concerning religious or spiritual goals.

We asked BYU students several other questions about their perceptions of and attitudes toward marriage (see Table 3).

Table 1. BYU Students’ Life Goals

How important are the following goals to you? Percentage of single BYU students who responded “very important.”		
Goal	Men (<i>n</i> = 327)	Women (<i>n</i> = 445)
A close personal relationship with God	93	98
Marrying in the temple	93	97
Finishing college	93	85
Having children	85	90
Marrying	87	88
Obtaining a job I like	89	53
Maintaining health/fitness	54	59
Helping people who are less fortunate	48	51
Having recreational and leisure activity	45	38
Earning considerable money	28	11

Ninety-six percent of the BYU students claimed that “being married is a very important goal” to them. In the Glenn and Marquardt study mentioned above, 83% of women agreed

Table 2. American High School Students’ Life Goals

How important is each of the following to you in your life? Percentage who responded “very important.”		
Goal	Men (n = 996)	Women (n = 992)
Having a good marriage and family life	73	83
Being able to find steady work	65	72
Finding purpose and meaning in my life	53	70
Having plenty of time for recreation and hobbies	41	27
Having lots of money	34	20
Working to correct social and economic inequalities	11	11

Bachman, J. G., Johnston, L. D., & O’Malley, P. M. (2001). *Monitoring the future: Questionnaire responses from the nation’s high school seniors*. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.

Table 3. BYU Students’ Attitudes about Marriage, by Percentage

Percentage of single BYU students who responded “strongly agree” or “agree.”		
Attitude	Men (n = 327)	Women (n = 445)
Being married is a very important goal to me.	96	97
I believe that when the time is right, I will find the right person to marry.	88	92
I would like to meet my future husband/wife at college.	68	57
When I look ahead five or ten years, it is hard to see how marriage fits in with my other plans.	7	5
Most people will have fuller and happier lives if they choose legal marriage rather than staying single or just living with someone.	93	87
I see so few good or happy marriages that I question it as a good way of life.	6	6

(“strongly agree” or “somewhat agree”) that marriage is a very important goal (see Table 4).

Interestingly, the women in the national study are more optimistic about finding a mate when the time is right than are BYU students. Nearly the entire national sample of women, 99%, is convinced the right spouse will appear in their lives at the appropriate time. The BYU women are a little less confident at 92%, followed by BYU men at 88%. The differences are small, but they do suggest that BYU students take seriously the task of finding a spouse who meets their high expectations. They are a little less sure that someone with the traits they desire will appear at the right time.

Table 4. American College Women’s Attitudes about Marriage, by Percentage

Being married is a very important goal for me.	
Strongly agree	85
Somewhat agree	14
I believe that when the time is right, I will find the right person to marry.	
Strongly agree	47
Somewhat agree	36
Somewhat disagree	12
Strongly disagree	6
I would like to meet my future husband at college.	
Strongly agree	19
Somewhat agree	44
Somewhat disagree	24
Strongly disagree	12
When I look ahead five or ten years, it is hard to see how marriage fits in with my other plans.	
Strongly or somewhat agree	29

Telephone survey of 1,000 women at four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. in winter 2000. In Glenn, N., & Marquardt, E. (2001), *Hooking up, hanging out, and hoping for Mr. Right: College women on dating and mating today*. New York: Institute for American Values, 42, 73, 74.

About two-thirds of the women in the national Glenn and Marquardt study and two-thirds of the BYU men in our study desired to meet their future husband or wife at college. We were a little surprised that only 57% of the BYU women hoped to meet their future husband at college. As we will discuss below, some BYU women planned on finishing their schooling before they marry. For whatever reason, nearly half of the young women at BYU reported not being very concerned about meeting their future spouse while attending BYU.

The vast majority of BYU students not only hope to marry but expect to be married within five to ten years. Only 5% of the men and 7% of the women do not see marriage in their future within that time frame. This is considerably less than the 29% of the national sample of women who feel that marriage is more distant than five to ten years in their future.

BYU students are convinced that marriage is a happier way of life than singleness or cohabitation. Approximately 90% of the BYU students feel marriage is the more fulfilling lifestyle, as compared to 39% of the female high school seniors and 28% of the male high school seniors (answering “agree” or “mostly agree” in Table 5). Clearly, the teaching of marriage as an important part of the “plan of happiness” in the doctrines and scriptures of the LDS Church influences the hopes of LDS youth and young adults.

While BYU students have likely seen family conflict and divorce in their own families or their friends’ families, these experiences do not greatly discourage BYU students from seeking marriage. Only 6% of those attending BYU indicated that they questioned marriage as a way of life, as compared to 28% of the non-LDS high school seniors. However, this 6%, though a relatively low figure, may be cause for concern among parents and Church leaders. The Church gives marriage high priority because of its importance for happiness in this life and exaltation in the hereafter.

Although most studies among college students have discovered that to a large degree students feel marriage is important, have a desire to get married, and are confident they will eventually do so, these feelings and aspirations are significantly stronger among BYU students.

Hanging out. The hanging-out and hooking-up culture flourishes on college campuses across the country to such an extent that it has become the norm. In fact, few researchers bother to collect data on this phenomenon. They simply identify this culture as a way of life among modern college students (Milanese, 2002). As seen in Table 6, hanging out is also very popular among BYU students. One-fourth of the BYU students said they hang out in mixed groups six or more times a week. Hanging-out activities in some form have always been a staple of college social life. What seems to be different with the

Table 5. American High School Seniors' Attitudes about Marriage, by Percentage

	Men	Women
Most people will have fuller and happier lives if they choose legal marriage rather than staying single or just living with someone.		
Agree	20	15
Mostly agree	19	13
Neither	36	31
Mostly disagree	11	13
Disagree	15	28
I see so few good or happy marriages that I question it as a way of life.		
Agree	11	12
Mostly agree	16	17
Neither	29	23
Mostly disagree	16	20
Disagree	27	29

Bachman, J. G., Johnston, L. D., & O'Malley, P. M. (2001). *Monitoring the future: Questionnaire responses from the nation's high school seniors*. Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 167, 194.

current generation of college students is that men and women are hanging out together considerably more often than in generations past.

The most popular hanging-out activity among BYU students appears to be just sitting around a dorm or apartment and talking. Watching television or a video and going out to eat are also popular hanging-out activities. Ball games, concerts, plays, church meetings, or firesides were occasionally identified as things to do when hanging out.

Young women at BYU reported that they like hanging out because it allows them a more active role in initiating interaction with young men. Both men and women acknowledged that women often get a hanging-out session going, although hanging out is still more often initiated by men (see Table 7).

Table 6. Frequency of Hanging Out and Dating among BYU Students, by Percentage

	Men (n = 324)	Women (n = 436)
How often each week did you hang out with members of the opposite sex last semester?		
0	3	2
1	15	18
2	17	22
3	15	14
4	13	12
5	9	11
6 or more	28	23
How often each month did you go on a date last semester?		
0	7	16
1	26	29
2	19	16
3	13	11
4	12	8
5	7	6
6 or more	16	13

Table 7. Initiation of Hanging Out and Dating among BYU Students, by Percentage

	Men (n = 321)	Women (n = 444)
Who initiated any hanging out you participated in last semester?		
Only men	6	16
Mostly men	36	53
Men and women equally	47	30
Mostly women	11	1
Only women	0	0
Who initiated any dates you went on last semester?		
Only men	27	26
Mostly men	44	36
Men and women equally	21	25
Mostly women	5	8
Only women	3	4

Young men at BYU reported that they often prefer hanging out to dating because it spares them having to ask for a date and risk rejection. Also, hanging out reduces a man's financial burden, since everyone pays his or her own way.

The only major regret BYU students have about hanging out is that they don't do as much of it as they would like. About 40% of both men and women indicated that they would like to hang out more often (see Table 8).

Dating. Dating involves one of the partners, usually the young man, extending an invitation to the other to participate together in a specified activity. Unlike dating at most American campuses, dating at BYU has not been replaced by hanging out. Twenty-three percent of the men and 19% of the women reported going on five or more dates per month (see Table 6). Thirty-five percent of the men and 27% of the women had at least one date a week. Only 7% of the young men and 16% of the women reported they had not been on a date during the previous month. Many BYU students have as many dates in

Table 8. Satisfaction with Frequency of Hanging Out and Dating among BYU Students, by Percentage

	Men (<i>n</i> = 325)	Women (<i>n</i> = 441)
How did you feel about the frequency of your hanging out with members of the opposite sex last semester?		
Too often	5	3
About right	59	57
Not often enough	25	31
Not nearly often enough	11	9
How do you feel about the frequency of your dating last semester?		
Too often	4	3
About right	45	34
Not often enough	35	36
Not nearly often enough	16	27

one month as the senior women in the national study had in nearly four years.

Dating practices at BYU today are not drastically different from those of previous generations. Men do most of the inviting (see Table 7). Our survey respondents said that the typical date involves dinner along with a concert, play, or similar activity. Most of the popular activities require the man to pay for dinner and tickets. BYU students listed less-expensive dates as well, such as watching a video, playing cards or board games, attending church activities, hiking, and going for a drive. What has changed is that a substantial number of BYU women have issued a date invitation, and hanging out takes the place of some of the dating. But hanging out has not replaced dating to the same extent it has at other universities.

Compared to men, BYU women were less happy with the frequency of their dating (see Table 8). A few BYU women said they have an active and satisfying dating life, while the others voiced a desire for more. Over half of the women felt they do not date often enough. A majority of the men, 51%, also felt

they don't date often enough. When asked why they did not date more, BYU men identified the fear of rejection, financial constraints, and study demands as limiting factors.

Physical intimacy. As discussed earlier, hanging out on American campuses today is linked to hooking up, which usually involves some degree of physical intimacy. According to a study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control, 68% of college students in the United States had sexual intercourse during the three months previous to the survey (National College Health Risk Behavior Survey—United States, 1995). Among college senior women in Glenn and Marquardt's 2001 national study, only 31% reported they had never engaged in sex, and of the women who had sex, only 36% had not had sexual intercourse during the previous month (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001).

To determine the degree of physical intimacy that is part of the dating culture at BYU, we first asked the sample of students what they felt was acceptable and then the kinds of physical acts in which they had been involved. BYU students, not surprisingly, are quite conservative in their acceptance of physical intimacy in hanging out or in dating relationships. It is clear from the responses in Table 9 that they defined hanging out as largely platonic: around 70% feel that holding hands, hugging, and kissing are inappropriate in a hanging-out relationship. A small percentage of students said that "making out and intense kissing" are acceptable in a hanging-out relationship. Such activity is commonly known at BYU as a NCMO (nik-mo), a "noncommittal make-out," the BYU equivalent of the casual sexual behavior found on other American campuses.

Finally, an overwhelming majority of BYU students feel that premarital sexual intimacy is unacceptable. Given the Latter-day Saint doctrine and teachings on moral cleanliness, coupled with the BYU Honor Code, it is not surprising that casual sexual behavior is not nearly as prevalent at BYU as on other college campuses. BYU students are almost unanimous in

feeling that physical expressions of affection like holding hands, hugging, and good-night kisses are appropriate and acceptable in a dating relationship. About half feel there is nothing wrong with more intense kissing while dating. But even among dating couples there is near-unanimous rejection of serious sexual involvement, mainly petting and intercourse.

Importantly, when it comes to actual behavior, the actions of BYU students closely reflect their ideals (see Table 9). The levels of holding hands, hugging, and kissing (including intense kissing) among those in a casual, hanging-out relationship are a little higher than we expected, but not much. Only 2% of the young men have engaged in oral sex or intercourse while in a hanging-out relationship with a young woman. Only 1% of the young women have done so.

Not surprisingly, intimacy is higher among dating couples. But the number who acknowledged having oral sex or intercourse is still remarkably low. Only 3 to 4% of single BYU students have had sex, as compared to 60 to 70% among their peers at other universities. Even if there is some underreporting among BYU students because of feelings of shame or a fear of being turned in to the Honor Code Office, the level is nowhere near the national average. At BYU, personal integrity and religiosity combine with the Honor Code and a religious environment including religion classes, campus congregations, and devotionals with Church authorities to produce a remarkably low rate of premarital sexual activity.

Shifting from hanging out to dating. Some confusion, conflict, disappointment, and pain have been observed among couples moving from a casual hanging-out relationship to dating (Kass, 1997). One person may define a relationship as intimate and long-term, while the other feels that it is strictly a casual association. Insights into how BYU students shift from a “just-friends” relationship to a dating relationship were ascertained from responses to our open-ended question: “How does someone try to shift a relationship from hanging out to dating?”

Table 9. Intimacy during Hanging Out and Dating among BYU Students, by Percentage

	Hanging Out		Dating	
	Men (n = 326)	Women (n = 445)	Men (n = 326)	Women (n = 445)
What role does physical intimacy such as holding hands, kissing, making out, petting, and sexual behavior play in hanging out and dating? (The following lists the percentage of single BYU students who said "appropriate" or "very appropriate.")				
Holding hands, hugging, and kissing	30	28	98	99
Making out and intense kissing	3	1	44	37
Petting	1	1	4	3
Sexual behavior	1	0	2	1
At college, which of these activities have you participated in while hanging out/while dating? (The following lists the percentage of single BYU students who said they have done the listed activities.)				
Holding hands, hugging, and kissing	47	49	86	81
Making out and intense kissing	13	10	54	46
Petting	3	2	12	12
Oral sex or intercourse	2	1	3	4

The ways and means of shifting hanging out into something more serious are presented in Table 10. The confusion noted on other campuses is also present at BYU, and there are no universally accepted ways of saying to one another, “We are now in a dating relationship.”

Not surprisingly, the most frequently mentioned strategy was to spend time together outside the circle of friends. One student insightfully made this point: “Relationships are not formed in groups, so separate from the group and spend quality one-on-one time with the person. I think too many students are afraid of the transitional risk—the ‘what will happen if I speak up and ask him or her for a date’—so they remain in the comfortable bubble of hanging out because there is no commitment or failure that way!”

Another said the shift comes when “they ‘ask out’ the other person, thus formally establishing interest.” One young woman got right to the point: “Someone has to say the word *date!* This shift in formality sends the other person the message that another dimension of the relationship is desired.”

An increase in physical intimacy is another important signal among BYU students. One student noted that “some sort

Table 10. How BYU Students Shift from Hanging Out to Dating, by Percentage

	Men (n = 476)	Women (n = 552)
How does someone try to shift a relationship from hanging out to dating?		
Spend more one-on-one time	45	44
Increase physical intimacy	19	21
Talking about creating a dating relationship	18	20
Happens naturally over time	6	5
I don't know	5	4
When man pays for activities	2	2
Other	5	6

of contact, like holding hands, cuddling, and kissing,” defines the shift. Contact even as casual as holding hands sends the message that a couple has changed the type and intensity of the relationship. Kissing was cited by a large number as the most obvious sign that a relationship has grown serious.

Another described the shift in these words: “My friend turned into my boyfriend by asking me if it would ruin the friendship if he kissed me. He did, and I continued to think of him as a friend until a few more kisses. We realized that we were basically dating after we kissed. We hung out together more, talked more, and kissed more.”

BYU students are similar in this regard to other college women in the national study, who reported that kissing signaled a dating relationship. Said one woman at Yale: “We didn’t talk about it. We kissed. I guess that . . . at the end it sort of became clear [that we were together], and after that we just started to hang out all the time. And at that point I knew that we were dating. And later on, after a couple of weeks, like we actually became a couple, as in I would refer to him as my boyfriend” (Glenn and Marquardt, 2001, p. 28).

Only about 20% of the BYU students identified talking to each other as a way to confirm a dating relationship. This low level of using discussion as the definer is somewhat surprising, given that 85% of BYU students know about the concept of “defining the relationship,” known popularly as “DTR.” This type of discussion has different names but seems to be present on most campuses.

An illustrative comment from a BYU student is, “Verbally, you have to talk about it so both individuals know that now you are ‘dating,’ so there are not unmet expectations or misunderstanding.”

Another student said, “DTRs—Defining the Relationship. In other words, you have to tell each other that you are only dating each other and no one else.”

Student comments reveal a general loathing of the dreaded DTR. In spite of the distaste, nearly two-thirds had experienced at least one DTR during the previous semester. A few students, nearly 10%, had had four or more DTRs during the semester. Young men were a little more likely than women to initiate the “where are we going” talk. It seems that partners in dating relationships are moving at different speeds, and one generally feels the need for clarification before the other does.

Although the hanging-out culture is certainly prevalent at BYU, students here date more and hook up less than their national college-student peers. There is significantly less premarital sex among BYU students due to their strong religious values concerning chastity and their commitment to the Honor Code. BYU students, however, are like other college students in that they often experience uncertainty about shifting a casual relationship to a more serious one. Fortunately, most realize that one-on-one time, modest physical contact, and heart-to-heart talks are ways to communicate a desire to make the relationship more serious—to consciously move from the “just friends” to the “we are a couple” state.

The search for a spouse. Most BYU students reported they hoped to find someone to marry while at the university, so we asked them to identify the traits they were looking for in a spouse. We asked them to rate how important it is that the person they marry has certain traits (see Table 11).

We were pleasantly surprised that BYU students identified spirituality or religiosity as the most favored trait. Over 90% of the women and 87% of the men rated religiosity as “very important” in considering someone for marriage. They want to marry someone who is committed to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its doctrines, principles, and practices.

Most research on characteristics desired in a potential spouse has ignored religiosity. The few studies that have added religious orientation to the list have found college students rate it at or near the bottom (Buss, 1998; Stewart, Stinnett, &

Table 11. Traits BYU Students Desire in a Spouse, by Percentage

How important are the following characteristics in the person you desire to marry? Remember, no one is perfect, so please don't mark "very important" for every trait. The following table lists answers marked "very important."	Men (<i>n</i> = 327)	Women (<i>n</i> = 445)
Spirituality, religious	87	91
Communicative, open	77	78
Wants children	69	80
Kind, considerate, understanding	67	78
Fun, sense of humor	59	61
Ambitious, hard worker	40	68
Educated	32	59
Intelligence/Smart	43	42
Healthy	35	26
Social, outgoing	26	28
Physically attractive	37	9
From a good family	12	16
Athletic	10	8
Earning capacity	1	12

Rosenfeld, 2000). This is another way in which BYU students are dramatically different from most other young adults.

Many studies have noted that both men and women desire pleasant, cooperative, and supportive personalities in those they consider for marriage (Buss, 1998; Stewart et al., 2000). Kindness, communicativeness, sense of humor, consideration for others, and empathy are strongly desired. These virtues were extolled by Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, a Church leader and former president of Brigham Young University, in counsel to BYU students: "There are many qualities you will want to look for in a friend or a serious date—to say nothing of a spouse and eternal companion—but surely among the very first and most basic of those qualities will be those of care and sensitiv-

ity towards others, a minimum of self-centeredness that allows compassion and courtesy to be evident” (Holland, 2000, p. 3).

Research reported prominently in national news has made much to-do about men’s fixation on physical attractiveness in a potential wife. Such is not the case among BYU students, as only 37% of the men admitted that looks were “very important” to them.

An examination of these desired traits reveals that BYU students have a pretty good idea of the type of person they wish to marry. Fortunately, the desired traits are those that will most likely foster a fulfilling marriage. The most important traits in the eyes of BYU students are those of spirituality and a kind and open personality, both of which facilitate a strong marital relationship.

False starts. When students talk freely among themselves, it is common to hear stories of unrequited love and broken hearts, or what might be characterized as “false starts.” Exactly half of the BYU students, both men and women, reported they had broken up a romantic relationship during the school year. One-third reported one broken relationship, 12% claimed two, and 4% of the men and 6% of the women reported three or more break-ups.

Not surprisingly, no single reason, event, or circumstance precipitated the demise of most courtships. The reasons these romantic relationships ended in failure are reported in Table 12. For about 20% of the students, as the couple spent more time together, feelings of attraction declined and the relationship lost its initial excitement.

As can be seen in Table 13, a study of 185 college students reported similar results: 27% of them cited being “tired of each other” as a factor in their decision to end a romantic relationship (Knox, Gibson, Zusman, & Gallmeier, 1997). One BYU woman’s comment illustrates this process. “We didn’t have very much in common—I fell out of love. I couldn’t imagine marrying him.”

Table 12. Reasons BYU Students Ended a Relationship,
by Percentage

Why did the last relationship end?	(n = 146)
Died out, boring, didn't feel right	19
Conflicts, possessive partner, unbalanced relationship	19
Partner had someone else, cheating	11
Relationship became too physical	9
Physically separated, mission, moved	9
Not ready for marriage, too immature	8
Drifted apart, different goals	7
Relationship happened too fast	6
Met someone else, wanted to date others	6
Other	5

A young BYU man explained, “I stopped having feelings for her, so I ended it.”

Another young BYU man noted, “I was not in love with her. We dated for ten months—she was in love with me—and I tried to fall in love with her. She is a great person, but I couldn't fall in love with her.”

Besides just the gradual decline in romantic feelings, about 20% of the BYU student relationships fell apart due to serious conflicts when the students got to know each other better. In some cases, one partner became jealous and overly possessive, while in others the relationship became unbalanced, with one partner giving much more than the other.

As shown in Table 13, the study at a large southeastern university found that 43% of students terminated a relationship because of “too many differences/different values.” This number is more than double the percentage at BYU. We suspect that a greater similarity of values and expectations has a positive effect on relationships among BYU students, since most are members of the LDS Church.

Table 13. Reasons American College Students Ended a Relationship, by Percentage

Reason for ending relationship	(n = 146)
Too many differences/different values	43
Got tired of each other	27
Cheating	18
Dishonesty	18
I met someone new	15
Separation	15
My partner met someone new	13
Parental disapproval	13
Violence/abuse	9
Alcohol/drugs	7
I went back to a previous lover	6
My partner went back to a previous lover	5

Survey of 185 undergraduates at a southeastern university.

Knox, D., et al. (1997). "Why college students end relationships," *College Student Journal* 31(4), 451.

BYU students reported that they ended unbalanced relationships. "It was all one-sided," one young woman stated and went on to say, "He wanted to marry me, and I got swept off my feet at first, then I few days later realized I did not even like him, so I ended it."

A young man complained, "She started to get really annoying. We didn't get along anymore. I found myself caring about her less and less."

Several students noted religion was the source of their conflict. For example, "We ran out of things to talk about; we were just very different—different goals and levels of spiritual commitment."

One young woman ended a relationship "because he decided to leave the Church and began to question the principles that I believe in."

About 10% wanted out when they discovered their partner was “two-timing” them. Students made it clear that “cheating,” even if it does not involve physical intimacy, is given zero tolerance at BYU. The anger of a young woman is obvious in her comment: “He had a girlfriend I did not know about!! I am not bitter, yeah right!”

Another said, “He strung several girls along without any of us knowing and then dumped all of us but one, got engaged in a month, and got married the next.”

Another 10% of the students felt they were attracted only physically or became too physically involved; the resultant guilt caused them to flee the relationship and sometimes to resent their partner. One young man noted his mistaking lust for love: “It was all physical. I was deceiving myself about my love for her, which was actually only physical.”

A young woman lamented, “I ended it because we were ‘too physical’ without having potential for marriage. We love each other, dated for two years, but it got too physical. We messed up and it ruined us! I’m glad it finally ended.”

Physical separation, immaturity, and moving too quickly without really knowing each other were also mentioned by students as strong reasons for ending a relationship that seemed at one point in time to hold the promise of marriage.

The frequency of false starts and the variety of reasons for failed relationships suggest that finding a marriageable partner is not an easy task and often involves a certain amount of what some view as good luck or serendipity. It is clear that many events, experiences, and circumstances can doom a romantic relationship.

Contributing to the difficulty of the task is that both partners must be simultaneously motivated to pursue an enduring relationship. Unfortunately, if one of the partners loses interest, the other is left feeling rejected, hurt, and sometimes angry.

In spite of the long litany of things that go wrong in relationships, BYU institutional research shows that 63% of male

students who graduate are married by graduation time, as are 55% of female students (Brigham Young University, 2003).

Deciding to marry. Making a decision to marry a person—which to most BYU students has eternal implications—can be a daunting challenge. Students were asked how they would know when they had found “the one” or “someone” to marry. The responses to this open-ended question revealed both considerable variation and some confusion among students about how to identify someone to marry (see Table 14). Most frequently mentioned was asking for some type of spiritual confirmation. 22% of the answers given by the men and nearly 30% by the women reported they focused primarily on spiritual feelings and answers to prayers. Looking to spiritual manifestations makes the BYU mate selection process considerably different from the process by which their national peers make the decision to marry.

Feelings that it is the right thing to do ranked next, followed by feelings of love. Compatibility in personality, goals, and hopes for the future accounted for 9 or 10%. Enjoyment of being together, bringing out the best in each other, friendship, open communication, physical attractiveness, and trust were mentioned in 1 to 7% of the answers. Interestingly, 7% of the young men and 4% of the young women admitted they were totally clueless about how they would make a decision whether or not to marry.

The rate of students’ successful searches for an eternal companion is fairly high at BYU. Thirty-eight percent of the young women and 43% of the young men reported they were currently in a relationship with marriage potential. The percentage is somewhat higher for BYU seniors, at 48% for both men and women. This is the same proportion in the national sample, where 48% of senior women reported they currently had a boyfriend (Glenn & Marquardt, 2001).

Hesitation in the search. Even though BYU students engage in a lot of hanging out and dating, many do not seem to be

Table 14. How BYU Students Expect to Decide to Marry, by Percentage

How will you know when you have found a person or "the" person to marry?	Men (<i>n</i> = 486*)	Women (<i>n</i> = 767*)
Spiritual confirmation	22	29
Feels right	15	12
Feelings of love	10	10
Compatible, complement each other	10	9
Enjoy spending time together	7	7
Brings out the best in me	4	7
Friendship	3	5
Open communication	3	4
Physical attraction	3	1
Trust, confidence	2	1
I don't know	7	4
Other	15	11

* Some respondents gave more than one answer.

making much progress toward getting married. These unmarried students identified the factors that were influencing them to avoid marriage (see Table 15). Some of these students have experienced the divorces of their own parents. In addition, marriage is generally portrayed negatively in the media. A study of American young adults not attending college reported the same fear:

Despite doubts and difficulties, young men and women have not given up on the ideal of finding a soul mate to marry. On the contrary, they are dedicated to the goal of finding a lifelong best friend and kindred spirit. However, their ideals of soul-mate marriage contrast sharply with personal experience—as well as the popular culture's portrait—of married people. Both media images and real-life models of marriage tend to be more negative than positive. Many in this study have grown up with unhappily married

or divorced parents. They know exactly what a bad marriage is, but they are less sure of what a good marriage looks like. Some can only describe a good marriage as “the opposite of my parents.” (Popenoe & Whitefield, 2000, p. 16)

Sixty percent of BYU students indicated “fear of making a mistake” as a primary factor that discourages them in making decisions regarding marriage. Closely associated with this fear of selecting the wrong mate was a fear of the responsibilities of marriage, along with a fear of parenthood. About a third of the students identified both these fears as either “strong” or “moderate” influences to delay marriage.

Over half of the women and around one-third of the men claimed they had not yet had a viable opportunity to marry. Surprisingly, more young women than young men indicated they were delaying marriage to finish their schooling. Nearly half of the young women identified educational goals as a significant influence in their decision not to marry at that time.

About 10% of the students report that their family pressures them not to marry while in college. We feel this is unfortunate, because opportunities for meeting potential partners become much more limited after leaving BYU in most cases. Many BYU students are following the trend of the world to delay marriage and family for educational and professional reasons. Yet more undergraduates at BYU, 23%, are married than at other four-year institutions (Brigham Young University, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Leon Kass (1997) gave parents sound advice when he encouraged them to guide their children to religiously affiliated colleges and universities if they want their children to marry. This is particularly evident at BYU. Almost all students desire to marry and are confident that they will. They have been taught and recognize that marriage is “ordained of God” (D&C 49:15).

Table 15. Factors Influencing BYU Students to Delay Marriage, by Percentage

Are any of the following factors influencing you to delay marriage? Choose "strong," "moderate," "weak," or "no influence." The following lists the percentage of single BYU students who responded "strong" or "moderate" influence.	Men (<i>n</i> = 327)	Women (<i>n</i> = 445)
Fear of making a mistake	59	58
Need more emotional maturity	44	59
No opportunity to marry	33	56
Desire to finish school	26	45
Fear of responsibility	33	34
Fear of responsibility of parenthood	29	33
Desire to establish career	29	22
Pressure from family not to marry	12	12
Pressure from friends not to marry	6	9
Unworthy to marry in the temple	9	5
Other	25	11

BYU students hang out in mixed groups, just like students at other universities, yet the casual sexual encounters associated with hooking up are mostly absent. Remarkably, relatively few single BYU students report sexual experience. Most are keeping their commitment to chastity. Even though the dating culture at BYU may have changed somewhat in recent years, it is still an environment conducive to finding a mate who shares fundamental beliefs and values.

The traits identified by BYU students as desirable in a spouse are in some ways similar to those identified by other college students. Most want to marry someone who has a pleasant personality and is motivated to complete his or her education and pursue a career. What is dramatically different is that BYU students place a much higher premium on spirituality and religiosity than other students do. The characteristics BYU students are seeking will generally foster a strong and satisfying marital relationship.

This is not to say that the process is easy. Students often struggle in the dating game. Most experience moments of fun and fulfillment but also times of despair when relationships are absent or fail.

BYU is a remarkable meeting place for LDS young people. Literally thousands of single members of the opposite sex, in the desired age range and with many of the desired traits, including shared religious values, are gathered there. The sheer number of potential partners may be bewildering and make it hard to decide whom to marry—77% of BYU's nearly 30,000 students are single—but most students appreciate the opportunity to meet and date in a religious atmosphere. It is encouraging to see that most BYU students eventually marry.

This chapter was coauthored with Lauren Smith, who at the time of this research was an undergraduate research assistant in sociology at BYU, and Mindy Judd, who was a graduate student in sociology at BYU.

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