

WWJD: Who Would Jesus Date

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Abstract

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Christian undergraduate dating markets are peculiar. This study seeks to understand this market in three ways: to measure dating preferences between college aged men and women; to compare and contrast these measurements with previously published estimates among graduate students; and to estimate the importance of spirituality for potential dating and marital partners. We observed an undergraduate speed-dating event at a Christian undergraduate college campus. The event was modeled after Fisman et al. (2006, 2008) (Fisman, hereafter) speed dating experiment among graduate students. Following Fisman, subjects evaluated potential dating partners on the basis of attractiveness, intelligence, ambition, fun, and common interests. We extended Fisman's study to include measures of spirituality and the importance of religion. Our findings indicate that preferences for undergraduate dating partners are broadly consistent with those observed among graduate students. Like Fisman, we also observed that men prefer intelligent women until the women's intelligence exceeds his own. Unlike Fisman, however, we observed that women prefer intelligent men whenever the man's intelligence exceeds her own. Surprisingly, and in contrast to Fisman's study, we found that undergraduate females (Christian or otherwise) have stronger preferences for attractiveness than undergraduate males. We also found that Christian undergraduate men have stronger preferences for spirituality than Christian undergraduate women. Our findings suggest that undergraduate preferences for dating partners differ in important and interesting ways from graduate students and that spirituality is an important factor for mate selection. The religious composition in our sample highlights the need for further study of dating and marital patterns among Christian undergraduates.

Keywords: Christian, Mate-Selection, Preferences

1. Introduction

Choosing a mate for marriage is one of the most complex and important decisions someone will make in their lifetime. The history of marital research dates back forty years to Becker (Becker 1973), who was the first to consider marriage a topic within the field of economics, and rightly so. Marital matches have influence on, among other things, the number of births and population growth, labor-force participation of women, inequality of income, ability, and allocation of leisure and other household resources (Becker 1973). Studying what might bring people together in marriage may help us understand what positively or negatively influences society (Becker 1973). Becker believed marriage to be a voluntary exchange, and thus, preferences must exist to establish those bonds. Furthermore, he asserted that since males and females often compete in this exchange, it can be and should be called a market for mates (Becker 1973). Becker's previous work inspired Fisman's research, and subsequently ours, to further understand the preferences that bring people together. Like Fisman we focus on dating, "a long period during which people engage

in more informal and often polygamous relationships”, because in contemporary societies it oftentimes precedes marriage and plays a foundational role.

In most matching games, determining preferences from equilibrium outcomes is difficult because a given set of attributes associated with a partner can be consistent with various preference structures (Fisman, 2008). Meaning, specific sub-cultures in society will express similar preferences for their mates

To overcome this problem of preference structures, Fisman created an experimental Speed Dating market, where specific preferences can be observed for each subject (Fisman, 2008). Speed dating allows us to observe individual choices, where as only “YES/NO” decisions do not reveal underlying preferences. In this case, participants show their preferences for attractiveness, intelligence, and ambition, as well as their final decision (Fisman, 2008).

We are motivated to do this study because of the hypothesis that Christian values are different than those being captured by Fisman. We have added the attribute religiosity to capture the proposed values that are seen in Genesis 2:18-25 and Galatians 5:28. In these two pieces of scripture we see that marriage is motivated by biblical values that should exist in Christian environments. Thus, our goal is to understand whether Christian students differ on preferences for their mates. Our findings, proving dissimilar or not, will yield interesting information on dating practices in Christian higher education circles.

One weakness of this study is the limited sample size. Christian liberal arts colleges range in size, however tend to be smaller in size, indicated by a national student to faculty ratio average of 11.5 (Friedman 2016). Limited size presents a challenge because subjects may know each other, coming with previous knowledge that influences their evaluation.

A second weakness is that our study was conducted in a dormitory that is populated by predominately older students that may be more inclined to be dating with marriage on their minds. Thus, the data is not entirely representative of students and all possible dating practices across Christian undergraduate environments. We hope to compare this with Fisman’s findings that males put more weight on physical appearances while females on intelligence. Furthermore, they found women were more selective based on race and income, while males demand for intelligence and ambition does not extend to women who were more intelligent or ambitious than he is (Fisman, 2008).

2. Data Collection and Description

Our data was gathered at a speed-dating event that occurred in an upperclassman dormitory and facilitated by Residence Life staff. The data was collected through five-minute speed dates between subjects and partners to determine whether they were interested in pursuing another date. If both were parties indicated that they were interested in a future date, denoted by “YES-es”, then each received the other’s contact information. While considering their “YES” or “NO” decision, each subject also rated their partner’s attributes (Attractiveness, Intelligence, Ambition, Fun, Sincerity, Religiosity) on a Likert scale to help inform their decision. Because of this experimental design, the event only catered to male-female matches; in other words, there were no homosexual dates in this event.

One significant advantage to this observational design is that it provides an environment that is similar to that of the real world situations, where there are real consequences (i.e. they receive each others email if matched). Further this study was an observation, allowing subjects to anonymously and honestly provide information that helped them arrive at their final decision of “YES or NO”.

2.1 Subjects

Our subjects are students of the Van Kampen dormitory on Westmont’s campus. These students were all undergraduate students coming from many different disciplines, and were recruited through multiples emails and flyers produced by the residence life staff. All students from the dormitory were allowed to participate.

2.2 Setting

The speed-dating event took place in the courtyard of an upperclassman dormitory on campus. Residence life staff prepared tables, lighting, and music that provided a consistent and intimate atmosphere for participants. Stations of tables were set up, with one chair on either side.

2.3 Procedure

This speed-dating event was conducted on one weekday evening in the spring semester of 2015. No participant was given the information of any other participant that would be attending, and they were unaware of how many potential people they would be meeting.

The event was organized like Fisman's speed-dating experiment. After checking in, each participant was given a pen, their ID number, and a scorecard that allowed him or her to evaluate their mating partners. The scorecard (see attached in appendix) had prewritten ID numbers of the partners they would date. Each rotation consisted of five minutes for participants to engage in conversation. After each interaction, subjects were instructed to evaluate their prior date. At the close of the evening, all men met all females.

In this event there was an uneven number of participants so one person was required to sit out during one five minute rotation, a similar situation occurred during some of the events conducted by Fisman.

SCORECARD (1-10)

YOUR ID# _____

Circle "Yes" or "No" below the ID number of each person you meet to indicate whether or not you would like to see him or her again. Please rate their attributes on a scale of 1-10: (1=awful, 10=great). If you haven't formed an opinion based on your conversation, fill in N/A, but please fill in all boxes. This will be TOTALLY confidential and will NOT be shared with anyone.

ID#	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Decision	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Attributes (1 = Awful 10 = Great)

Attractive										
Sincere										
Intelligent										
Fun										
Ambitious										
Shared interests / hobbies										
Spiritual										

Overall, how much do you like this person? (1=don't like at all, 10=like a lot)										
How probable do you think it is that this person will say 'yes' for you? (1=not probable, 10=very probable)										
What is one word you would use to describe this person?										

2.4 Data Description

Of this information collected from the speed dating event, the variable we are most interested in studying is the decision of subject i with respect to their interaction with partner j , indicated by $Decision_{ij}$. Similar to Fisman, we are particularly interested in the difference of mate selection by gender, so we create a dummy variable called $*IsFemale$, to identify the subject as female, and contrast it with the male partner. To examine the difference between gender decisions, and like Fisman, we limit variables studied to Attractiveness, Intelligence, and Ambition. However, where

we differ from Fisman’s study is the addition of the perceived religiosity of the partners, to observe the difference religion makes on mate selection by gender.

2.5 Pre-Event Survey

The pre-event survey also provided information to help differentiate gender preferences in mate selection. As Fisman did, we asked participants to provide the zip code of the city they grew up in. Per Fisman, we also obtained zip codes allowing us to find the average household income from that area based on the national consensus, providing insight into mate selection on perceived wealth. Also, participants provided their SAT scores, providing some insight into their intelligence level before entry into their undergraduate careers.

The pre-event survey also gathered self-ratings of the subject, as opposed to the ratings provided by the partners’. This information is denoted $Self_{ic}$, which is subject i ’s rating on attribute c . Also we consider the consensus view of the subject based on all those who rated subject i , and that is denoted as $Others_{ic}$, meaning other’s ratings of subject i on attribute c .

Table 1. Pre-Event Survey

	Number of Subjects	Percentage
A. Field of Study		
Biology	3	9.68%
Spanish	3	9.68%
Kinesiology	4	12.90%
Liberal Studies	1	3.23%
Economics and Business	3	9.68%
Sociology	1	3.23%
Art	2	6.45%
Theatre	1	3.23%
Psychology	3	9.68%
Communications Studies	2	6.45%
English	2	6.45%
Religious Studies	1	3.23%
Engineering Physics	1	3.23%
Music	1	3.23%
Chemistry	1	3.23%
Computer Science	1	3.23%
History	1	3.23%

3. Behavioral Theory and Theoretical Framework

Nash Equilibrium is a collection of strategies where nobody wants to deviate from their chosen strategy (holding everybody else constant). Fisman has identified a Nash Equilibrium that he calls “Straightforward Behavior” within dating markets (See Proof of Proposition 1. in Fisman “Gender Differences in Mate Selection, 2008). Under this Nash Equilibrium, players say “YES” whenever the utility of matching with a partner exceeds some minimum level. In other words, “say ‘YES’ to whomever you like (enough)”. From an empirical perspective, assuming this equilibrium behavior means that we can interpret a proposals as indications of preference. The following econometrics models correlate desirability, or the probability of a proposal, with how much of that attribute the partner possesses.

3.1 Regression Equations

$$Decision_{ij} = a + \hat{a}_{c \bar{c}} b_c Rating_{ijc} + e_{ij} \quad (1)$$

$$Decision_{ij} = a + \hat{a}_{c \bar{c}} b_c Rating_{ijc} + gReligiosity_{ij} + e_{ij} \quad (2)$$

$$Decision_{ij} = a + \hat{a}_{c \bar{c}} b_c Rating_{ijc} + gReligiosity_{ij} + \hat{a}_{c \bar{c}} fReligiosity_{ij} * Rating_{ij} \quad (3)$$

Under Straightforward Behavior, we can interpret b_c as the increase in the likelihood of a proposal associated with a unit increase in rating c . For example, if a subject only proposes to partners with high Attractiveness and low Intelligence, Straightforward Behavior demands that we interpret the subject's preferences as being positive towards Attractiveness and negative towards Intelligence ($b_{\text{Attractiveness}}$ is large and positive while ($b_{\text{Intelligence}}$ is negative).

4. Results

In this section we analyze the results on preference for the partners attributes of attractiveness, intelligence, and ambition. We assume that all participants are exhibiting Straightforward Behavior, meaning that the subjects are proposing to partners whom they like. Refer to the above section on the theory.

Table 2. Gender Differences in Subjective Attributes Weights

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Attractiveness	0.133***	0.088***	0.116***	0.159***	0.008	0.008
Intelligent	0.025	0.038	0.038	0.100	0.033	0.033
Ambition	-0.007	0.008	0.008	-0.101	0.051	0.051
Attractiveness*IsFemale	0.045	0.151*				
Intelligent*IsFemale	-0.012	0.067				
Ambition*IsFemale	-0.015	-0.152				
Subject's Gender	Female	Male	Both	Female	Male	Both
Rating Measure	Own Rating			Consensus		
Observations	15	15	30	15	15	30
R2	0.21	0.19	0.20	0.08	0.01	0.05

The above table presents the estimated first regression (1), Where $C = \{\text{Attractiveness, Intelligence, and Ambition}\}$. We have also used a linear probability model for ease of interpreting the data¹. Results, by gender, are shown in the above table and separated by column, (1) for females, (2) for males. Immediately we notice a difference in the gender difference on the attribute of attractiveness: *women put more weight on physical attractiveness than their male counterparts, while neither male or female participants have significant weights for intelligence or ambition*. This result contrasts the results that of Fisman. Interestingly, this is also in stark contrast to the evolutionary and social structure theories Fisman proposes as a comparison to mate selection².

The difference between genders on the effect attractiveness has is large (COEF??). As the attractiveness of a man increases by one point on a 1-10 scale (Likert) women are more likely to say YES by 4.5 percentage points than men. This difference implies that the effect of attractiveness is 51 percent higher for women than for men. In comparison, Fisman found the effect of attractiveness to be 18 percent higher for men. Clearly, there is an opposite and large disparity between the Fisman and our populations.

Following this regression, we consider how the subject's own attributes influence their decision for a potential date. We followed Fisman to see if the attributes of the partner were adversely affecting the decision if the attributes surpassed the subjects' own attribute. Rather, if a female proved to be more intelligent than a man, would the man still be interested in her? Eagly and Wood interestingly call attention to such a phenomenon in societal dating structures, and this data proved to be an ideal opportunity to test such a theory. To do this, we defined the indicator as $Rating_{ijc} > Self_{ic}$, meaning the rating of *subject i's* rating of *partner j* on attribute *c* is greater than the way they rated themselves on attribute *c*. The following table shows the results.

Table 3. Rating Results

	(1)	(2)
Attractiveness	0.119**	0.069***
Intelligent	0.004	0.07*
Ambition	-0.009	0.004
Attractiveness * (Attractiveness > Own Attractiveness)	0.008	0.017
Intelligent * (Intelligence > Own Intelligence)	0.0171^	-0.027*
Ambition * (Ambition > Own Ambition)	0.002	0.001
Subject's Gender	Female	Male
Rating Measure	<u>Own Rating</u>	
Observations	15	16
R2	0.21	0.19

As displayed in the table above, men have a negative reaction to women who they perceive as more intelligent than themselves. This finding is consistent with Fisman. However, unlike Fisman, *women prove to have a positive reaction when they perceive a man to be more intelligent than themselves*. Though the percentages are small, the difference between them, .044 percent, shows that a larger gender difference in the preferential treatment of someone else's intelligence.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In line with Fisman's assertion, his paper laid the groundwork for continual research to be done on young people's mate selection preferences (Fisman 2008). Also we have utilized, like Fisman, the experimental theory, which focuses on specific preferences in mate selection, as opposed to classical economic theory that focused heavily on final matches. Subject's preferences can be observed because speed-dating events occur naturally. Also, subjects many decisions throughout the event showing specific preferences for mates. Previously, no emphasis was given to specific preferences in the dating market. Fisman, based on the research done by Becker, believes that studying what proceeds marriage, i.e. dating, is important and revealing work. Becker also shows how marriages success or failure can have large economic and social implications (Becker 1973).

Our extension, as precluded to above, suggests differences in dating preferences among our population and that of Fisman. What we found differed dramatically and opposite of Fisman's findings. In particular Fisman observed attractiveness weighing more heavily and substantially on the decision process for men, whereas in our research we saw the same opposite, and women were more affected by the attractiveness of their partners.

There are a few ways in which our study could be improved upon for the future. First, the population size of this study was limited. The speed-dating event focused solely on one dormitory, which dramatically decreases the amount of participants the event caters to. Further, isolated events in dormitories make for a greater probability of prior

meetings with the subject. Living in a smaller dormitory on a smaller campus increases the likelihood that participants already knew each other, thus might have preconceived notions of their partners.

Second, the data appeared to be rather homogeneous, with only three participants deviating from the overwhelming norm of Protestants religious practices; while one expressed no religious affiliation. Nonetheless, these homogenous trends have provided insight into predominantly Caucasian and protestant dating practices in Christian environments, which previously had no documentation. We hope in the future, because of marital implications stated by Becker, our research will be extended to longitudinal studies of marriage among the same population, and nuance the disparity between dating preferences and marital success in Christian households.

6. References

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7. Endnotes

1 A linear probability model has the problem in that it is not bound by any axis, so it is possible for a result to be negative as well as over one. However, we do it for comparability with Fisman, 2008.

2 Eagly and Wood propose that subjects may express preferences for mates who align with their socially constructed gender roles (Fisman, 2008).