

A Study in Four Segments of the Faith Mission Fellowship Youth

Note: The youth have one activity per week which involves singing, book studies, games, etc. Most of these observations and case studies were taken during these weekly youth activities.

Cliques and Groups

The youth can be divided into two main categories: the curfew group and the non-curfew group.

Case Study One:

There are two waves of departures for the youth from the activity that generally occur:

- 1) The first wave consists of the curfew group leaving. Some of the ones in the curfew group don't actually have a curfew, but they leave in the first wave. They depart after a few minutes of conversation immediately following the activity.
- 2) The second wave consists of the non-curfew group leaving, thus bringing an end to the socializing after the youth activity.

Case Study Two:

A group of non-curfew youth recently went to Florida to visit another member of the non-curfew group. According to a member of the curfew group, none of the curfew people were invited, but he wouldn't have wanted to go anyhow because, "more than likely I wouldn't have enjoyed the kind of activities the group would have wanted to do."

Case Study Three:

After a youth activity, there was a snack, and some games were played. The games were light and reserved. After a little bit, the curfew group and outcasts left leaving the non-curfew group to continue playing games. Two groups were created: one large group playing a card game around a table involving quick actions to grab and lots of touching as a result. Another group was just one girl and one boy, both who had just been at Bible school. They were playing a card game involving slapping their hands on the cards, a game also involving an extended amount of touching.

Case Study Four:

Six youth (not including myself) were talking after an activity. Two were girls and four were boys. One of the boys was a curfew person and the other five were non-curfew. The conversation fluctuated between two settings: two conversations each involving a male and female and two men involved in no conversation, and the entire group conversing. One of the men which was left out, a non-curfew person, had quite a number more years up on the rest of the group, and the other person left out was an out of place curfew person. In each of the two boy-girl conversations, the boy was currently in a dating relationship with some other girl.

Analysis:

At the beginning of a youth activity, there is much reserve between the genders. This is because of the presence of the curfew group. Once most of the chaff has been removed from the wheat, the non-curfew group harvests their interactions by loosening social reserve between the genders. Often the curfew group is intimidated by the increasingly looser interactions between the genders of the non-curfew group, and thus the curfew group feels it is time to pull out. Case Study #2 and #4 demonstrate the looser interactions after the curfew group leaves. This does not

necessarily mean that they have intimate/dating interests in one another, however, since the youth have never really dated with one another in the past. Case Study #4 is an excellent demonstration of how the curfew group is not compatible with the non-curfew group with the exclusion of the one boy. The other non-curfew male in the case study was assumed to be excluded because of his age.

Case Study #2 demonstrates that these groups spill over past the time period following the youth activity. These are cliques in the youth that extend beyond the activity time frame. They are not obvious and seriously opposing cliques because the two groups exchange some social interaction during activities. Without the results produced after youth activities, it would be difficult to detect these groupings.

Seating

Seating and standing arrangements between the genders is somewhat of a game, a tessellation. A few case studies will be told to help gather somewhat of a sense of how to put this puzzle together. All of these studies took place during a pre-curfew era.

Case Study One:

I was in a family's house playing a game around the table. The table was rectangular in shape, and there were five seats at the table: two each at the narrow end and one on one of the long ends. Two males were sitting side-by-side at one end, one mother was sitting in the chair on the long end, and I was sitting in a chair on the opposite end of the two males. There was an empty chair beside me on the end. A girl from the youth passed through the room and was invited by her mother to play. The mother got out of her chair and pulled the chair next to me around to her side, but then took that seat as a separator between where her daughter would sit and me.

Case Study Two:

The youth were coming into a room where the seats were arranged in a semicircle. The groups slowly began to establish centralized seating areas, two for the women and one for the men. As the lines grew, the men and women began to bump into one another (which, in actuality, is still about a six foot gap). At these intervals was either a brother-sister relationship or a large gap. Conversation was attempted at one interval which proceeded awkwardly as is evident by the gaps of conversation and strange seating position (a large gap, and the male was facing straight away while the female had her back to him and only turned to him when she needed to respond).

Case Study Three:

In a setting where there were rows of seats, two seats were empty towards the aisle. The third and fourth seats were occupied by an elderly husband and wife in that order. A young couple walked up the narrow aisle towards those seats; the wife was first and the husband following. With a bit of stumbling, the wife stepped aside so that the husband could enter into the seating first and thereby sit next to the man when it would have been easiest and most practical for the young wife to file into the empty seats in order and take the seat next to the elderly man.

Case Study Four:

In another setting, four young people were sitting in a line, an unusual pattern: female (1f), male (1m), female (2f), male (2m). 1m was leaning forward the entire time until 1f leaned forward; at that point 1m leaned back so as not to touch her and remained there, bumping into 2f, until 1f leaned back again whereas 1m leaned forward once more. 2f and 2m were both leaning back and touching slightly. 1f and 1m conversed with one another whenever the opportunity arose, and 1m and 2f also conversed to a much lesser extent. 2f and 2m conversed regularly.

Analysis:

The nature of the youth in a pre-curfew era is to be drawn towards members of the same gender for social interaction, a sort of “polarization”. However, polarizations can only grow so big before they bump into one another as was the scenario in Case Study #2. When there are areas where a male must sit next to a female, there needs to be a “link”. A link comes in three different forms: sister-brother, a dating couple, and a married couple. If a group lacks these links, then the seating arrangements are often awkward, some choosing to stand or sit on the floor rather than sit next to a member of the opposite sex. With this knowledge, the relationships among the four people in Case Study #4 are assumed to be thus: 1f and 1m are dating, 1m and 2f are siblings, and 2f and 2m are a young married couple. Without prior knowledge of any of this, I asked someone nearby who would know better. He affirmed these relationships of the four people. We can see the links in effect here- 1f and 1m were a link because of their dating status; however, they were dating because the male made such an effort not to bump into the female. It was evident that 1m and 2f were siblings because neither of them minded bumping into one another *plus* they did not converse with each other as much as they did with the other person by whom each was sitting. 2f and 2m was a young married couple because of their frequent interaction and intimate touching such as holding hands. In this group of four, the three main “links” between people is found.

However, in Case Study #2 the young married female would not sit next to the elderly married man. Despite age and marriage status, this does not make such a seating arrangement a link. Therefore, it was the young married man’s duty to form a polarized male connection to separate the young married lady from the elderly man. In this relation we have between the elderly married couple a link, the two men a masculine polarization, and the young couple a link.

Case Study #1 also confirms this view. There was one empty seat left. When the girl wanted to have a seat, it was not kosher for us to sit next to one another since we did not fall into one of the three link categories. Therefore, the married woman moved the empty chair to an adjacent side of the table. She placed herself on the same side as the young girl except she located herself between the young lady and me, however, closer to the girl than to me. This was a compromise as there are exceptions to the rule; however, in a family's private home, as was this situation, it would be especially suspect for the young girl to sit next to a young man if there wasn't a link situation. A young man sitting next to a married woman (older) or a young lady sitting next to a married man (older) is a compromise link when the situation cannot offer something better.

Dating and Marriage

None of the youth are dating others within the youth group. There are several that are dating outside of the youth, though. The typical past cycle for dating and marriage patterns within the youth has been such:

There are four locations in the rite of passage: church 1, 2, and 3, and V.S./Bible School. A youth person from Church 1 attends a periodic Bible School or goes into V.S. service. This is a change to get out of the fairly isolate Church 1 and mingle with other Beachy youth. The opportunity affords the youth to demonstrate their maturity outside of their parent's household. "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). Two reasons can be seen for the youth not dating within their own youth group:

- 1) Since they grow up together, they know what each of the others were like when they were young and immature; this image cannot be shaken from memory.

- 2) The youth only see what the others are like when living with their parents as single people; this limited perspective does not give others within the youth group to see what the person is like outside of their parents' house, as was seen in Genesis 2:24.

When mingling with other Beachy youth away from home in V.S. or Bible School, the mature ones who can handle themselves away from home will seek out one another and begin dating. The person from Church 1 will begin to date the person from Church 2. The same may be true of the immature youth who seek out one another and date, but the impression I've gotten is that these relationships don't last as often as the mature couples' relationships do.

Eventually the couple will get married and will move to either Church 1 or Church 2 where they can receive help from their parents. There are currently a few young married couples at the church of which the youth were studied. Most consist of a former youth member married to a person from Church 2. Eventually, the married couple hopes to break free of parental dependence and move to Church 3, an unrelated church, to escape cliques with which one of the spouses has grown up.

Conversation

Conversation between the genders has limitations to which the rest of U.S. society may not be used.

Case Study One:

At the beginning of a youth activity, both genders were polarized into their own lines adjacent from one another. When I came into the room, I aberrantly walked over to a random line of girls and began speaking with them about mission work, sociology of development principles, and my school work. There were four girls within receiving range. One was 23, and

the other three were between 17 and 20, all part of the curfew group. Realizing that someone had to talk, the 23 year old girl took the initiative and engaged in a somewhat limited conversation. As it developed, the other three girls had thoughts they wanted to interject. Instead of telling me what they thought, they told the 23 year old girl loud enough so that I can hear, and the 23 year old nodded her head to me in acknowledgement of what was said. While the 23 year old may eye contact, whenever I looked at the younger three, they all looked away.

Case Study Two:

After a youth activity before the curfew group left, the genders were polarized. I walked over to a group of girls in a line and stood near them, making my presence known, and with my back to them. The conversation went from a somewhat intimate conversation to an abrupt silence. It was this way for a minute before the girls began talking once more about an impersonal topic.

Case Study Three:

I broke my ankle during the time period of this project. The night I broke it I was at a youth activity running around outside when I slipped and broke it. There were just girls around me and, shocked, they spoke amongst themselves as to whether I was injured or not, but never directly addressing me. In a few moments some youth men came and helped me. When I went to church that Sunday, no youth girl asked me what happened (for those who didn't know) or how I was doing; neither did they do anything to help me such as offer to carry a book or hold the door. Men were helpful in all of the aforementioned, and girls my age at EMU were more than helpful on Monday and throughout my handicapped time while on crutches.

Case Study Four:

From the case studies in the section entitled *Cliques and Groups* we can draw three conclusions, that there is limited conversation between the genders between the non-curfew group and curfew group when together, limited conversation between genders among the members of the curfew group, and less reserve between genders in the non-curfew group.

Analysis:

Conversation is generally limited between the genders when members of both groups are present. During this time groups will form more based on gender polarization than curfew and non-curfew. When cross gender conversations do occur, it is typically between the older youth or a momentarily straying set of non-curfew youth. The younger the youth person, the more timid they are when interacting with the other gender when the curfew and non-curfew groups are mixed.

The impression I have is that both groups are reserved for fear of leading a member of the opposite sex on. Therefore, for a girl to personally ask me about my broken ankle or to offer to help me could be seen by the recipient (me in this case) as an inquiry into a level of conversation beyond the surface and thus possibly demonstrating intimate interest. An excerpt from the church's *Statement of Faith and Standards of Practice* says, "Young People: Friendly associations are encouraged within a Christian atmosphere although a healthy reserve must be maintained. Avoid close "brother/sister" relationships with the opposite sex."