

Missionary Singles Issues: Matchmakers

Junko had served cross-culturally for nearly three years. Knowing that her parents disapproved of what she was doing, one Sunday after the service her pastor told her that he would be glad to help her find a husband. She was delighted and thanked him profusely. She wanted to marry but just did not know how to go about finding a husband because her host culture did not seem to have any way for her to find a mate.

Bill, also single, served with a different agency but attended the same church. A couple of weeks later the pastor suggested to him that he might want to date Junko. Rather than being grateful, Bill politely told the pastor to “mind his own business.” He had previously thought of asking Junko, but this “pressure” by the pastor made him change his mind.

Why did Junko and Bill react so differently? The basic answer is that they were from different cultures, Junko from an Eastern one and Bill from a Western one.

Matchmakers

Matchmakers are usually defined as those who bring two unmarried individuals together in an attempt to promote a marriage. Traditionally these matchmakers may range anywhere from individuals who invite two people over for dinner, hoping that a romantic relationship will develop, to those who are certified matchmakers who make their living getting couples together. Today matchmakers also include internet dating services which attempt to match people on a variety of criteria.

Such matchmakers may be appreciated and accepted or despised and rejected. A 1977

Webster's Twentieth Century Dictionary defines matchmakers as those who arrange marriages but adds “or try to do so by scheming.” Such scheming matchmakers are often rejected with little consideration.

Matchmakers in the Bible

Several kinds of matchmakers appear in the pages of the first books of both the Old and New Testaments. People today often think that such marriages do not involve love, but many of them resulted in loving relationships.

- Abraham asked his most trusted servant to be a matchmaker to find a wife for his son, Isaac. This servant found a woman that fit the criteria Abraham gave, Isaac married Rebekah, and he loved her (Genesis 24).
- Isaac did not get a matchmaker or give any input regarding Esau's wives. These marriages were a source of grief to both parents, Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 26:34-35; 27:46).
- Isaac gave Jacob (his other son) specific instructions about who he should marry, Jacob followed the instructions, and he had a loving marriage with Rachel (Genesis 28-29:30).
- Laban, Rachel's father, was a scheming matchmaker, and it resulted in a marriage to Jacob, one in which Leah did not feel loved (Genesis 29:31-34).
- The matchmaker is not named, but Mary and Joseph were pledged (betrothed) to be married before she was pregnant with Jesus. Although he did not understand what was happening, Joseph must have loved Mary deeply because he wanted to break the betrothal quietly so she would not be disgraced (Matthew 1:18-19).

Matchmakers since Bible Times

Many cultures before, during, and since Bible times have included matchmakers as one of the principal ways singles could meet each other. The roles of matchmakers varied widely across cultures. In some cultures most singles met their prospective spouses through matchmakers, so it was common throughout the culture. In other cultures only royalty or upper class people met through matchmakers.

Such matchmaking continued for another 1800 years. However, as adolescence was being invented in Europe and North America, matchmaking there became less common. As individualism increased, the idea of having someone else (matchmaker), perhaps chosen by yet someone else (parents), choose one's spouse became less and less popular. What was once common has become rather rare as two major changes occurred in Western culture during the last two centuries.

The first change in the use of matchmakers took place in Europe and North America as Western culture invented adolescence. Simultaneous with gradually requiring everyone to live their teen years as singles, Western culture gradually eliminated the use of matchmakers. This change took place between 1850 and 1950.

Fiddler on the Roof, long-running musical on Broadway and Academy Award-winning movie, is set in 1905 czarist Russia. It begins with the song “Tradition” followed by the song “Matchmaker.” In it a poor Jewish milkman struggles with the loss of tradition while his three oldest daughters struggle with what is left of it relative to matchmakers finding them husbands. Each of the three strong-willed teenagers' choice of

a husband moves further and further from the customs of their father's faith.

The second change is occurring now, a century later at the turn of the 21st century, but it is taking place more rapidly and is an increasing use of matchmakers of a different kind. Rather than parents finding a friend, relative, or professional matchmaker, singles who want to marry are increasingly turning to Internet dating services which match people for marriage. In fact, one such service has chosen to call itself Matchmaker.com.

Using the New Matchmakers

Singles who decide to use these new matchmakers, Internet dating services, need to do so carefully. In the American justice system people are assumed to be innocent until proven guilty. Internet dating needs to be viewed the opposite; assume people to be guilty until you have carefully determined that they are innocent.

Do not assume that Christian workers are innocent. I was at staff meeting in a church when a new youth pastor wanted to use volunteers before they had attended the church for six months (church policy). He ended his plea saying, “They are seminary students, so they must be OK.” The pastor replied, “In the five years I have been here we have had three incidents, and all three perpetrators have been seminary students.” Here are some suggestions.

- Choose wisely. Internet dating services vary widely. eHarmony.com is very popular among missionaries. This is probably because it emphasizes long-term relationships, was developed by a Christian psychologist teaching at a Christian graduate school, and matches singles on the basis of their answers to

many items in a research-validated questionnaire .

- Remain anonymous. Use an email address that does not include your name or agency and a phone that cannot be traced to you.
- Do a background check. This may seem unromantic, but remember that all information was supplied by the person. You can do your own check on the Internet or pay for one that may be more thorough.
- Meet for the first time in public and do not end the meeting by going to either of your homes.
- Tell someone who you are going to meet, where you are going, and when you plan to return from that first meeting.
- Drive yourself, take your cell phone, and don't leave personal things unattended at that first meeting.
- If meeting far away, stay in a hotel, use taxi or rental car, and keep family and friends posted by phone calls or texting.
- Stop communicating if and when "red flags" appear.

Elaborations on these suggestions and additional ones are available at match.com under "Online Dating Safety Tips."

Red Flags

Watch for these "red flags" that may indicate a predator or fraud. You may not consider these to be "red flags," so if any happen, it would be best to ask a trusted friend if they may indicate a problem when a potential date...

- Asks for financial information, such as credit card numbers or bank information.
- Pressures you for personal information, such as your phone number, address, or Social Security number.

- Asks for your address, even to send flowers or gifts.
- Asks for money in any form, especially if he or she asks for it to be wired.
- Claims to be recently widowed and needing companionship.
- Talks about destiny or "fate" relative to meeting you.
- Includes grammar or spelling errors, especially those which would be rare for someone writing in his or her first language.

Responses to Self-Appointed Matchmakers

Finally, here are some suggested ways to respond to people who take it upon themselves to be matchmakers for you.

- Colleagues from your passport culture. The best way to respond to unwanted matchmaking when expatriate friends try it is just as you would at home. However, do remember that you will be interacting with them over years to come, so respond politely and respectfully. They probably want to help, not to harm or offend.
- Multi-cultural teammates. In these days of multicultural teams, others serving with your agency may attempt to find a match for you. Remember that they probably mean well, but they just do not understand that singleness is a viable option, especially if they come from cultures where it is shameful or really bad.
- Nationals. The same is true as for nationals where you serve. If singleness is frowned on, such nationals probably mean well and just do not understand. There may be unspoken expectations on the part of the matchmaker involving saving "face" should a match not go as

hoped. There may be pressure after accepting the initial "set-up":)

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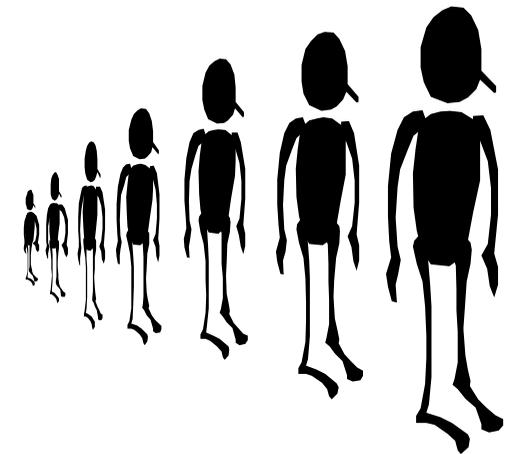
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