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Opening Lines

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Opening Lines

Goal: To help students identify effective opening lines to use in initiating cross-sex relationships.

Our initial statements to strangers or "opening lines" play a key role in the formation of relationships.

Those first few words lay the groundwork for acceptance or rejection and are particularly critical when making contacts with persons of the opposite sex.

In this classroom activity, students construct opening lines and receive feedback about their statements from members of the target gender group. I divide the class into equal numbers of male and female groups. The groups don't have to be equal in size, but each male group must be matched with a female group. Next, the same-sex groups construct lists of opening lines that could be used or have been used in initial encounters with members of the other gender in such social settings as parties and bars. Students also could construct opening lines to use in school or at work. After the lists are finished, male and female groups exchange lists. Each group then ranks from most effective to least effective, the opening lines it has received.

After completing the rankings, groups present their ratings to the entire class, along with explanations of their most and least effective choices. Following the group presentations, I ask class members to identify the characteristics of effective and ineffective opening lines. For example, a line like "What's your major?" often receives low evaluations because it is overused. A line such as "Would you like to dance?" would be a more effective line because it offers to do something for or with the other party.

We also discuss similarities and differences between same-sex and cross-sex opening lines. Then I move from this discussion into a presentation of Mark Knapp's model of relational development.

(See Knapp's *Social Intercourse: From Greeting to Goodbye* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1978) for more on the concept of opening lines.)

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