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How to drop the B-bomb with fewer casualties

By JOSH WINGROVE
From Thursday's Globe and Mail

Opinions are split over whether women should go with a pre-emptive strike or a softer approach to tell guys they're taken

Christine Hart calls it the B-bomb, and you don't ever want to set it off.

The fuse is often set when a young, single male meets a young, single female for the first time. Unless he's a real charmer and she's on the market - a rare luxury of fate - the B-bomb is eventually triggered: "I have a boyfriend."

The blast area is pretty big, and there's usually cleanup to be done.

If a woman drops it too soon, guys feel jilted ("why you gotta assume?") or confused ("I didn't ... even ... *what?*"). Too late, and they feel led on.

So what's the best way to say it, and when?

"It's a tough call," admits Ms. Hart, founder of Calgary-based Your Date Coach.

In bars, an upfront approach is better, she says, even if it means forgoing that free drink. In a quieter setting, women are better advised to slip it casually into conversation. Either way, Ms. Hart says, let a guy know so he doesn't get the wrong idea.

Many B-bombardiers prefer the pre-emptive strike. "If the girl does it from the get-go, the guys don't get offended as much," says Olga Coman, 27, a fan of the "clean cut" approach.

But not all dating experts agree. Some say coming clean right away takes the fun out of harmless flirting.

"No, no, because that's assuming his intentions," Ms. Hart says. "There are so many innocent adult conversations that happen all the time. It doesn't mean he's trying to pick you up."

So maybe it is best to wait a bit, and then drop it in? The risk with delaying the B-bomb is offending your boyfriend. That's the case with Leah, a gregarious twentysomething. "People shouldn't be penalized for being friendly," she argues. "You don't want to jump to any conclusions."

But her boyfriend sees it differently. "She doesn't take it as, 'Guys are hitting on me,'" laments James, who is also in his 20s. (The couple asked that their last names not be published.) "Women-speak: 'friendly'; men-speak: 'lead-on', 'tease.' "

It's a tough subject, but young people appear the most concerned by it. Irene Yarkoni, an old-school Ottawa dating coach, doesn't get the fuss.

"The whole article is about that?" asks Ms. Yarkoni, founder of CanadianSingles.com, who works with an older crowd. To her, flirting is simple, and the onus is on men: Either be a "hound dog" or relax.

"He has to make it clear that he is interested," Ms. Yarkoni says. "It's maybe risking rejection, but there's no other way. Nothing has changed."

Jen McNeely, 29, of the Toronto women's blog SheDoesTheCity.com, says it's typically younger women who avoid mentioning their boyfriend when having a lengthy chat with another guy. They often enjoy basking in a man's attention and don't care that they're sending mixed messages, Ms. McNeely says.

"There's nothing more irritating than when you have a close guy friend, and you want to hook him up with somebody, and he's talking to some girl who you know has a boyfriend," she says. "That's just not nice behaviour. It's self-centred."

Ms. McNeely suggests making a passing reference after a while (Example: "Camping? My boyfriend and I love camping!"), but not waiting too long. Even Ms. Nabok, the fan of the pre-emptive strike, admits a soft approach is sometimes more agreeable.

"You can do that if you want to be sneaky," she says. "You don't want to, like, drop the bomb."

But both Ms. Hart and the old-school Ms. Yarkoni agree: Men and women need to send clear signals - no or go - and realize that body language, flirting and a long conversation will only force the awkward line to be played eventually.

Ms. Yarkoni's advice to guys: "Ask her. If she says she has a boyfriend, fine. The reason dating is so awkward nowadays is people don't actually express what they want."

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