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Features

Maths, love and man's best friend

by Glenda Cooper



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Choosing a partner is like finding a job

Glenda Cooper Social Affairs Correspondent

Your eyes meet across a crowded room and suddenly you know there is no one else for you. You have never felt this way before.

The glorious irrationality of the emotion called love? Not at all, according to new research. Your choice of lover has subconsciously been made coolly and rationally, based on a mathematical model – similar to how job applications are processed – which analyses the best mate you're likely to get.

But finding the love of your life through mathematics does not have to be a long, protracted process. Dr Peter Todd, of the Max Planck Institute in Munich, said that by the time someone had met 12 potential partners they had enough information to make a good choice as to who should be the life-long love.

By the time you had analysed the dozen you were attracted to, Dr Todd told the British Psychological Society's Annual Conference, you had formed the criteria of what you were looking for in a life partner and would then take the next best one that came along.

To consider more could mean you ended up with the law of diminishing returns. "This is solace for people who believe you don't have to spend your whole life searching for the right person" he said.

For true perfectionists he added that the 37 per cent rule which was currently used to evaluate job application could be employed.

It is estimated that once an employer has seen 37 per cent of job applicants a coherent picture of the ideal employee is built up and the next person to fulfil these criteria is the one that gets the job.

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When it came to affairs of the heart, Dr Todd said that you should first estimate how many people you were likely to meet in life, assess the first 37 per cent, remember who was best, and then take the next person who measured up. Unfortunately, you would probably have to search through 75 per cent of potential acquaintances to do so. And for most of us who meet thousands of people, it is likely to be an impossible task.

However, Dr Todd said there was no point in going to the other extreme and marrying your childhood sweetheart, because at the time you met, you would probably not have assessed enough potential spouses to make a logical choice.



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