

CHAPTER 1

TRADITIONAL DATING: Is It for Everyone?

*One can be too young for marriage,
but never too old for love.*

GERMAN PROVERB

If you think you've already read every possible piece of advice about finding lasting love and happiness, this book will surprise you with its fresh approach to finding satisfying relationships. You will learn practical skills to help you pursue love and happiness without sacrificing your dignity, your personality, or your way of life.

You might have been unsuccessful in the traditional methods of finding dates; maybe you hoped that one day you'd meet the right person and fall in love. Perhaps that hasn't happened, and you feel miserable and lonely. Now you hope to fall in love again, but with someone more suitable.

"It's easier to become sexually and emotionally involved with an incompatible person than with a compatible one"

You might have already discovered that it's easier to become sexually and emotionally involved with an incompatible person than with a compatible one. This often happens when people compromise their lifestyles or modify their personalities for the sake of rushing into a relationship. Rushed relationships have become so widespread that today most people consider dating no more than a game of roulette. Because of this attitude, many marriages end in divorce, and most relationships turn into disappointments.

After a series of failed relationships, it is tempting to attribute the problem to a personality deficiency. Authors of many popular books reinforce this notion, but if we were to take their claim seriously, more than 70 percent of all Americans would need a major personality change or behavior modification! However, the mismatch of personalities is typically the problem, not the personality itself. A personality that clashes with one partner's personality might harmonize with someone else's. The difficulty

is that for every compatible match, there are hundreds of possible incompatible matches.

This book respects differences in personalities. Unless you're self-destructive or malicious, somewhere there is someone who will love you for who you are. Whether you're in your teens or your eighties, male or female, gay or straight, a battle-scarred veteran or a novice at romance, this book can help you find someone just right for you.

This book is for the shy, the hesitant, and also for the competitive, eager pursuer of love and affection. Whoever you are, the message is that no single method works for everyone, but there could be one that is best for you. And that's what matters.

"Lasting happiness is achieved through love between people who choose each other for what they value, not for what they imagine about each other based on superficial impressions"

If chance encounters with strangers appeal to you, chapter 3 will show you how to use that method to your advantage. If you don't like to meet people in that way, don't sacrifice your happiness by convincing yourself that unconventional methods of finding someone special are not for you. Such an attitude may block your pursuit of

happiness. Instead, learn from those who have found love through innovative means.

Love Justifies the Means

This is not a book about finding anyone at any cost. On the contrary, lasting happiness is achieved through love between people who choose each other for what they value, not

for what they imagine about each other based on superficial impressions.

Predictably, many people today don't achieve happiness in their relationships. They put more effort into choosing a new car, house, or even a stereo system than into finding someone to marry. They persist in relying on luck and traditional dating, whether that method suits them or not. Although there are other options available, many people never even consider them.

If traditional dating fails, you have four options: 1) modify your personality through counseling; 2) persist in the same behavior and hope for better luck next time; 3) drop out of the search for dates whether you want to settle down with someone or not, or 4) use new means that suit your personality and your desired level of love and commitment.

Most people never think of the fourth option, although there are many ways of finding love. The more ways you know, the more successful you can be. Without such knowledge, millions of people are doomed to unhappy relationships or to no relationships at all.

Consider Len, a graduate student at a major university. Despite his extreme discomfort in approaching strangers, he persisted for years in using chance encounters as his only means of finding dates. Since his freshman year in high school, Len felt that at five feet, six inches he was too short to attract women. When he entered college, that feeling remained. He sought counseling, and the counselor encouraged him to be more assertive in approaching women.

Len's chance to assert himself came one day when he entered a pizza parlor to get out of the pouring rain. He took off his coat and waited for his eyes to adjust to the dark. Then, in the flicker of the candlelight, he noticed a pretty face framed with long, straight hair. He ordered a soft drink and approached the woman's table hesitantly. "May I join you?" he asked. The worst

he expected was, "No, thank you. I'm expecting someone." To his surprise she said, "Go to hell!"

Len was ready for therapy now. He felt unlucky, ugly, too short, and permanently excluded from pursuing romance. "If only I were two inches taller," he sighed to a female colleague. "I have a roommate," she said, "who wants to cut her legs by six inches. She's worried that she's too tall. I wish you two could get together. You'd understand each other."

Len's colleague was sincere. She arranged a blind date for him with Natalie, her roommate. He accepted, and they met for dinner in an Italian restaurant. Yet only a few days before his last rejection, Len would have entered therapy rather than let someone else find him a date. He thought mistakenly that true love comes only to those who boldly pick up strangers!

Because Len accepted a friend's help, today he has an ideal marriage: love, happiness, sharing, two children, and no signs of marital problems. What's more, he has never again felt a need for therapy. He is a good public speaker, works well with others, and no longer feels self-conscious about his height.

Hank and Lucy, who met through personal advertisements as explained in chapter 5, are another example of how love justifies the means of beginning a relationship. Hank surprises his friends when he reminisces about his courtship through email. Lucy was one of the many women who responded to his personal advertisement. "The leisurely pace of emailing gave us both a chance to reflect on what's important in our lives," he said in an interview. "We fell in love even before we met." Falling in love without a face-to-face meeting occurs regularly. I attended a wedding for a couple who courted through email and by phone for six months, fell in love, and married within the month of their first face-to-face meeting.

Hank believes that he would still be a bachelor if he had relied on chance. Instead, he let the world know through an

advertisement that he was available for marriage. As a result, today he and Lucy are a happy couple. They credit their success to a close meshing of their values and their personalities.

You don't need to have a personal problem to try a different method of finding a match. Curiosity, your sense of adventure, and a desire for greater freedom of choice of living arrangements are good reasons to try the unconventional. On the other hand, personal problems can be compelling reasons to make a change.

Changing Your Luck

There are hundreds of good reasons to begin a relationship in a way that suits your personality. One of the best reasons is to escape the label "unlucky." If that label applies to you, it's time to try something new.

"Unlucky" describes a tendency, common in most people, to follow one unsuccessful relationship with another. It seems that we continue to favor the same kind of person, even after a disappointing relationship. This tendency is so common that divorce rates are higher after remarriages than after first marriages. Even battered spouses tend to remarry other batterers.

In most cases, it is wrong to think of these serial disasters as "bad luck." Face-to-face chance encounters tend to produce the same results each time. "Luck" can be changed through methods that allow free expression of personal traits without embarrassment or fear of rejection. Trying something new after repeated failures is likely to change your reputation as being "unlucky."

Some people need a severe jolt before they will consider changing their way of finding a compatible match. Rita was such a person. Only weeks before her marriage, she discovered her fiancé in bed with another man. The experience jolted her so badly that she

couldn't stand to go out with any man for a year. When she decided to date again, she went on a long vacation, where she could find men of different cultures. "I don't want to be reminded of my past,"

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she said. "I don't want to see anyone who even resembles my ex-fiancé." During her travels in Europe, she found an Englishman whose manners, demeanor, and loyalty to her were so different from her ex-

fiancé's that she was sure this was a new start. They married years ago, have children, and live in suburban Connecticut.

Rita's case is not unique. Thousands of Americans marry outside their culture each year. Most of them want to escape any reminder of someone unpleasant in their past. They might also wish to escape from abusive parents, previous spouses, or former lovers. In any case, this method seems to work. People like Rita, who go out of their way to avoid repeating their errors, are among the most satisfied.

Traditional dating could be appropriate at one point in one's life, but not at another. When you are in high school, for example, dating is an expected norm. Today, though, high school dating rarely leads to long term relationships. Men and women initiate their careers, start businesses or pursue college degrees. When they are ready for a committed relationship, they might not have enough time for planning dates and sorting partners. These busy people could be more likely to find a compatible partner if they relied on nontraditional ways of matching.

To help with this crucial decision, I have devised a test based on the experiences of thousands of couples who found happiness in various unconventional ways. Thanks to their trailblazing, single people can answer this question objectively for the first time:

Is Traditional Dating for Me?

Traditional dating means finding someone on your own in a face-to-face chance encounter and then making arrangements for another meeting. There's nothing wrong with this method if the odds are in your favor, but it helps to know the alternatives if the odds are against you.

"How do I know what the odds are?" you ask. The accompanying test, "Paths to Happiness," will help you find the answer. Based on that answer, you decide on how to proceed in your search of a happy relationship.

Paths to Happiness

One reason I wrote this book is to help you avoid the unpleasantness of trying to change yourself to fit someone else's notion of an ideal relationship. It's foolish to think that there's only one right way to find someone special. Paths to happiness can lead to your local bar or to an online matchmaking service. How you meet someone special should depend on your circumstances, interests, personality, and *not* on any barriers that could separate you from your ideal relationship.

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As a preview of what you'll read in the following chapters, here are some examples of ways to find a compatible match.

Paths to Happiness: A Self-Test

State whether you agree or disagree with each statement that applies to you. Write "A" if you agree with the statement, "D" if you disagree, and leave blank if it does not apply. Visit www.affinocompress.com to print this insert.

1. I feel uncomfortable in places where singles usually go. _____
2. There are no eligible partners where I live and work. _____
3. My last relationship was a disaster. _____
4. I feel uncomfortable approaching people I don't know. _____
5. In the last six months, I haven't met anyone I would like as a lover. _____
6. I feel that I'm too old to date. _____
7. I don't enjoy being approached by strangers. _____
8. I would like to have more contacts with available people. _____
9. I fear being rejected by my lover. _____
10. I react strongly to first impressions. _____
11. I don't have time to look for dates. _____
12. It's difficult for me to end a bad relationship. _____
13. I don't want to be anyone's one-night stand. _____
14. I would like to delay sexual involvement until I know the person better. _____
15. I resent being judged solely by my appearance. _____
16. I need to keep my emotions under control. _____
17. I would like to avoid the games people play during dating. _____
18. I would like to screen the people I meet. _____
19. I would like to date someone from a different culture. _____
20. I am more interested in whom I meet than in how I meet them. _____

Before you score your test, decide which statements have the greatest influence on your life now. Copy these statements on a 3 x 5 card to remind yourself what is important to you as you read this book. Then, count the number of times you checked "A." Save that number. Each time you agreed with a statement, you identified a barrier or a disadvantage for you in the usual face-to-face chance encounters. The higher the number, the more likely that your path to happiness lies in a nontraditional way of matching and dating.

1) The most frequent complaint among singles is that they don't feel comfortable in places where singles usually go. "I don't like to smoke or drink, and I don't like loud music," said Don, a twenty-four-year-old college student. "Yet I go to these places, because my friends go there." Don will appear again in chapter 3, when he meets Tracy in an antique shop.

2) People often say, "There is no one I can date where I live and work." Perhaps you may feel that way too, but don't despair. As you read, you'll learn that space is no longer a barrier. In fact, some of the happiest marriages today are between people who found each other across state lines, across national boundaries, and even across oceans. You'll learn that if there are no available singles in your vicinity, they could be in the neighboring town, state, or country. I will show you how to find them.

"If one person you date is a poor prospect for love or marriage, the subsequent ones who share the same social network are likely to be poor prospects also."

3) If you have a history of unhappy relationships, chances are you're attracted to the same kind of person each time. Break that pattern. Thousands have done so. Some people, usually those with the bitterest experiences, seek partners from other cul-

tures the second time around to avoid repeating their mistakes. Their strategy tends to work. The people who plan to avoid making the same old mistakes tend to find long-lasting happiness.

4) I find it disturbing when people who feel uncomfortable approaching strangers are told to change. "I don't seem to be able to approach girls," complained one student. "How can I overcome this problem?"

"Why do you want to approach girls you don't know?" I asked.

The student looked at me as if I were joking.

"I'm serious," I persisted. "Why do you think it's important to meet someone who might not want to meet you?"

"Because I want to date and if I don't meet people, I can't date them."

"There are dozens of ways to meet girls who really want to date you. If you want to date, find another way."

The student took my advice. His parents had always tried to introduce him to a girl who was "just right for him." They were amazed when he accepted their offer. As you'll discover in chapter 4, sometimes it pays to listen to other people.

5) "I've dated several people, but I didn't like any of them." People with this complaint tend to feel that they're being too choosy, but often their self-analysis is wrong. They don't realize that they interact repeatedly with the same kinds of people. If one person you date is a poor prospect for love or marriage, the subsequent ones who share the same social network are likely to be poor prospects also. People in this position usually tend to lower their personal standards to match those they date. Consequently, they tend to pair with someone incompatible.

Instead of compromising your standards, expand your contacts. The reason is that the more people you meet, the more likely it is someone will fit the bill. Many men and women expand their contacts from a dozen or so people to several hundred simply by placing a personal advertisement online. Chapter 5 shows how this method prevents people from compromising their standards for what they want in a relationship. That chapter will also show you how to increase your choices and how to

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improve your chances for forming a truly loving, caring, and enduring relationship.

6) My studies show that people in their eighties still date, seek love, and marry as long as they have good health. I suspect that many more could be happier in their remaining years if they only knew how to find someone to love. Aging women, unfortunately, tend to give up the search for love too soon. They feel unwanted or too old, or they think that there are too few men.

If meeting others means dancing to rock music in the local nightclub, aging people will certainly drop out. On the other hand, if they meet people through social networks, computers, advertisements, or matchmakers, their chances will improve regardless of age.

7) Many people resent being approached by strangers. A twenty-seven-year-old, single graduate student spoke for many women when she said to an interviewer, "I am many things, a graduate student, a reasonably well-educated person, a researcher in marketing, and a woman with ambition. Yet, men approach me solely for my looks." This woman resented the attention of strangers, because she knew from experience that some of the shallowest people devote much of their time to perfecting their pick-up techniques.

Being good at approaching strangers for dates does not mean being a good marriage partner. Generally, people who enjoy using their pick-up techniques are likely to continue using them even after marriage. The good news is that chapter 8, "The Organized Society," shows how you can take control of whom you meet without succumbing to the pick-up lines.

8) Sociologists have long recognized that successful relationships rest on compatible values. Yet, strangely enough, few people discuss their values before marriage. In the following chapters, you'll read about couples whose marriages didn't work, because they did not know before marriage that their values were incompatible.

Even after disappointments, few people set out deliberately to prevent another mismatch. Those who do so tend to communicate through email and telephone before they commit themselves emotionally. They have learned that in the absence of face-to-face communication, they are better able to discuss their values. Without the interference of gestures and appearance, their attraction begins with insights into each other's values. Their appearance is still important, but it is not the first or the main reason for their mutual attraction.

9) People who fear rejection often find comfort in using online matchmaking services assisted by computers. Several years ago, I wrote that computers could be the most humanizing influence in

"Computers could be the most humanizing influence in our society since the renaissance."

our society since the Renaissance. As more people use computers to guide them in the search for satisfying relationships, divorce could become a rare event. In addition to making the initial rejection less painful, computers can be programmed to act as go-betweens. Far from intruding on your happiness, they could suggest who are your most compatible matches. You would then select or reject dates anonymously. The most successful online dating sites use personality tests to match profiles, ensuring at least some degree of compatibility.

Today, internet options for initiating relationships online are increasing. For example, niche dating sites like ChristianCafe, JDate for Jewish singles, Shaadi for Indian singles, and Amigos for Latin American singles are growing in popularity. Gay and lesbian dating sites, such as Manhunt for men seeking men, also attract a large number of users. Social networking sites like Facebook, although not geared specifically toward dating, appear to be a popular method of online matching. In Second

Life, an online virtual world where users (or “Residents”) interact in three-dimensional space, lovers often meet one another in message boards or chat groups. These are just a few examples of the many ways people connect online.

10) If you are one of the many who are influenced strongly by first impressions, any method that delays face-to-face meeting will allow you to do some screening based on more important considerations. Be honest with yourself. Do you go overboard at the sight of an appealing eligible? Do you wait anxiously, wondering why the person you met only once hasn’t called you? Are you susceptible to “love at first sight?” Many marriages were made

“Keeping emotions under control is a problem for many people, but only a few do something about it.”

and later broken because instant love is too risky. I estimate that the odds are less than one in one hundred that love at first sight will result in a happy marriage. Yet the media keep presenting this type of meeting as the route to an

ideal relationship! Don’t let the media fool you. There are too many unsuitable partners to make such a hit-or-miss approach reliable.

The worst disappointment in “love at first sight” is that it is rarely mutual. The more the “hooked” person tries to change the other’s feelings, the more the other resists. If the feeling becomes reciprocated, the impulsive person’s affections may wane just as the other person is getting serious. To avoid this type of mismatch, some people use electronic communication, letter writing, advertisements, matchmakers, or dating services. Each of these methods of partner search controls their impulses when meeting someone for the first time. Any of these methods will delay the first meeting until each person feels sure that the other is likely to reciprocate love and affection. Keeping emotions

under control is a problem for many people, but only a few do something about it.

11) Depending on your income and your stamina, the path to happiness could take you far from home. Adventurous people and those in search of someone culturally different will find much useful information in chapter 7, “Vacation Interludes.” You need not leave your home state to find adventure and new people, but today Americans seem to find spouses no matter where they travel. Romance truly has become a global affair. The growth of international business and tourism has brought a corresponding increase in the globalization of romance. Today more than 4 percent of all marriages in the United States involve a foreign spouse. Some of these marriages are prompted by international marriage brokers, such as those described in chapter 6. Most international marriages, however, result when American men and women go abroad for business, pleasure, or defense of their country.

You don’t have to leave your home to find happiness. What is necessary is knowing yourself. As you will discover in the next chapter, your ability to find what you want in a partner depends on that knowledge.