# Why client, others of similar age and general

Why not try to solve this problem, asked someone in the computer technology department, by circulating a brief personality questionnaire to all new students, feeding the result into a computer and matching them up with a compatible partner for the dance? The evening was a great success and computer dating had arrived. John Patterson, a young British engineering student, heard about the Stanford ball when he was visiting America in the early 1960s. On graduating from London University, he decided to set up the first computer dating business in England. At first, the public was a little suspicious of the idea, and newspaper proprietors, even more wary, refused to take advertisements from what they feared might not be a totally respectable Endeavour. Patterson and his friends distributed thousands of leaflets by hand to students and young people, and started off with 500 names on their first computer in 1966. By 1970, Dateline, John Patterson's thriving computer dating business, could place ads in all the national daily and Sunday newspapers, and a wide range of magazines. Today, 35, 000 names are on the megabyte discs, a constantly changing population of possible partners for a drink, a visit to the theatre, or a lifetime together.

Those who want to marry are usually on and off the computer fairly quickly. They write to us and say, " I have met four people thanks to your computer service, and I am going to marry the second girl on the list." Others who simply wish to " widen their social circle" stay on for longer. Operating on the psychological principle that people do not wish to meet their duplicate, and that similarity of interests is only half the point, the system tries to track down, in the geographical area given by the client, others of similar age and general aspirations, but often complementary personality and interests.

Attraction anyway, they admit, ' is not a simple function of similarity once the introduction is made, it is up to the couple to involve themselves in the more subtle aspects of getting to know each other. That there was a need for some social agency to provide a link between those who get isolated by modern mobility and career patterns was John Patterson's original hunch: ' In the old days,' he says, everyone lived within a family environment, often in small villages and towns, and all social meetings were arranged in that context. There still are small towns where people marry those they went to school with at social gatherings. The computer is useful because it involves so many people. All that we do is to give people the opportunity of meeting.

Because that is where the problem starts. The more impersonal our society gets, the more a method is needed to introduce the young. People can't meet with and say hello each other in an easy way. You can't just go up to someone in the street.

Applicants fill in details of age, height, marital status, education and profession, before going on to question about the kind of person they would like to meet. ' Do you prefer (a) people who are your intellectual equals, (b) people more intellectual than yourself, (c) people less intellectual than yourself?' A section on personality and activities separates those who spend their leisure time camping and hiking from those who throng theatres, art galleries and restaurants. ' Attitudes' covers topics such as ' Is sex without love highly unsatisfactory?' and ' Do you consider children to be essential for the fulfillment of a marriage?' In the early days, computer dating appealed mainly to the lonely or the experimental. Today, anyone joins. Fascinating facts can be retrieved on the age and aspirations of those who turn to

Dateline for help in finding a partner. A large proportion are over twenty-four but under thirty (65 per cent), the majority of men want a pretty girl who is not more intelligent than they are, the majority of women want an intelligent and interesting man no matter what his looks. More men than women (60 per cent as against 40 per cent) think romantic love is necessary for' a successful marriage. Men seem to be not only more romantic than women, according to the Dateline returns, but more involved with idea of children.

To the question, ' Do you consider children to be essential for the fulfillment of a marriage?' 44 per cent of the men had answered ' Yes' (with 29 per cent answering ' No' and 27 per cent indifferent), while only 41 per cent of women had answered ' Yes' (with 36 per cent answering ' No' and 23 per cent indifferent). In 1969, 56 per cent of the women on the computer considered children an essential adjunct to marriage, compared to 41 per cent ten years later. While women, at least before their marriage, are turning a cooler eye on the desirability of children, men seem to be coming round to the view that children are one of the things that marriage is really about.

On this question, the sexes seem to have shifted, a shift, which nevertheless brings them into some agreement, with around 40 per cent of both sexes very keen indeed to have a family. The benefit of the computer date, John felt, ' is that if you try to ask just anyone for a date, there is no guarantee that you won't get a complete brush—off. But someone who contacts you or your contact through a computer agency, you know is at least willing to come out for an evening. You're not in line for instant rejection. You start on a more equal basis.' Although Evelyn admits that she was always interested in finding a marriage partner, John did not necessarily have marriage in

mind" I really wanted someone to go out with, and maybe a longer term relationship.

' Evelyn fell for John's ' looks, his mind and his quietness. I like quiet men. Also he's very sexy, and sex is important to me.

' For John, falling in love is something he is happy to leave beyond his scientific powers of description. ' You can't describe being in love with someone. You can't describe a subjective feeling in objective terms. I have only had this feeling once before for a young girl who died of cancer. With Evelyn, John recounts, ' I think we probably decided to look for some place to live before we decided to get married.

I wouldn't like to say which came first. But, looking at Evelyn, ' I think I knew you wouldn't say " No" if I asked you. The timing was, I think, my decision, but it was Evelyn who wanted to get engaged. We felt committed then." John completed his doctorate a few months later and Evelyn typed his thesis. Both are amazed at how traditional their relationship is in many ways. John is more surprised.

' I'm not too sure that the actual piece of paper is of any emotional importance. The ritual is important, the declaring before your family and friends that this is the person you want to be linked with in their eyes. I am a Cancer, and Cancer people are supposed to feel that their home is important and I certainly do. It's a security of place.

Evelyn agrees : ' What I like most about marriage is that it is so cosy and homely.'