

THE FORMULA FOR LOVE

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“Love Happens” isn't just a 2009 rom-com but it's also the general mindset of people on the topic of love. Love, more often than not, is perceived as something that will magically and fatefully appear once you meet the right person, say the right things, and share the same feelings. However, how do you find the elusive Mr./Ms. Right One? How do you know what to say? And how do you know about the feelings you share?

An answer might just be available in a social experiment devised and first conducted by American psychology professor and researcher Arthur Aron and his associates in 1997. At the very base of his experiment, he had two single strangers sit across one another, ask 36 progressively personal questions and then look into each other's eyes for exactly four minutes. In the many times this experiment has been carried out, it has proven to accelerate a sense of closeness between two people. To investigate this further, we, at SHOUT, have recreated the core of the experiment using seven pairs of strangers who have never crossed paths before in their lives.

The questions start off light, the first being an innocent, “Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?” By question 13 though, the participants begin probing into the lives of each other, “If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future or anything else, what would you want to know?” The questions slowly start delving into both their fondest as well as their darkest memories. Towards the end, some of the “questions” initiate verbal appreciation of each other, such as no. 28, “Tell your partner what you like about them; be very honest this time, saying things that you might not say to someone you've just met.”

When you think about the questions, you find that even though the questions are deeply personal, there are no questions such as “Where are you from?”, “Which school did you go to?” or “How good are your grades?” This reflects on how just knowing the thoughts and memories of a person are enough to feel attached.

As the first pair, we have Debdas and Parbati. Deb came in to participate, hoping for days he might just find love, while Parbati arrived on short notice just hours beforehand. Both started with an open mind and hit it off quite well. Initially, Parbati was under the impression that it would be awkward but later went on to say “as we started talking, we found out that we have way too much in common, and we even think a lot like each other.” They even diverged from the

long list of questions, and ended up wanting to know even more. Both of them even found reasons to stay in touch.

The following pair, Romeo and Juliet, however, did not find a spark. While Romeo was pumped by the thought of the experiment, Juliet was slightly more hesitant. Juliet basically waltzed into the experiment not having read through the metaphorical “Terms and Conditions” part, because who does? Their feelings before the start of the experiment reflected into it as well. She felt the questions were too “invasive” and refused to be in contact with Romeo. Their status reminds one of Mandy Len Catron's immensely popular article, “To Fall in Love With Anyone, Do This” published in The New York Times. The article is an outline of how Mandy and one of her male acquaintances developed a romantic relationship after trying the experiment. While her article gives off implications of the dream shortcut for romance, the concluding paragraph speaks volumes on how it is the willingness of the participants that truly matter when conducting this experiment, “Love didn't happen to us. We're in love because we each made the choice to be.”

you can put two people together and have them ask each other intimate questions, it can't go too far if there's always a certain conflict of interest.

Conversely, the fourth pair for the experiment had very little conflict of interest and went along swimmingly. At first sight, Rahul and Anjali seemed too different to work out. But once they sat down with the experiment, after the initial long awkward pauses, it was quite easy to spot how well they got along. In fact, yours truly had to buy a second serving of dessert to pass the time as they continued to talk. “I really liked talking to her, and I kept wanting to talk to her. I don't know if this actually works, but it helped me get to know her better,” commented Rahul on the experience.

When the fifth pair, Shirin and Farhad, was introduced they immediately immersed themselves into it with only a clue of what was supposed to happen by the end of the experiment. They were both pleasantly surprised by the experience. Farhad reflected that, “Even with friends, I don't know the things I know about her. I feel like these questions really helped me see her.” Shirin admitted that she would not have

The seventh and the last pair for the experiment, Shahjahan and Mumtaz first met each other in a loud and bustling university cafeteria. Finding an – at least relatively – quiet spot, they delved into the questions. As the experiment went on, the pair who had started out with their bodies angled away from each other, slowly moved towards to look at each other. “It was nice in a way that I got to know a lot about the person, but a lot of questions kept repeating themselves, in my opinion,” said Shahjahan. At the question of whether they'd like to get in touch with each after this little rendezvous, the response was a half smile with an emphasised “maybe.”

Aron's experiment isn't foolproof; it has a couple of flaws and it definitely does not guarantee love; however, it still goes to show how any two people asking the right questions could become, at the very least, good friends. As our little social experiment proved, results vary from having absolutely no effect to making complete strangers fall in love; with outcomes like fostering new friendships and proceeding to second dates scattered in between.

While we always knew that it isn't quite possible to “synthesise” love, these questions could potentially bring two people closer in less than 45 minutes, especially if you're honest and open with each other. You might even want to try this on friends, family or your current partner to grow closer.

So, this Valentine's Day, forcing your crush to play out this experiment with you may or may not exactly be in your best interest. It all depends, really. Go ahead, try your luck, but if it doesn't work out the way you envisioned it, just don't tell people SHOUT made you do this.

Reference:
<http://psp.sagepub.com/content/23/4/363.full.pdf+html>
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/fashion/modern-love-to-fall-in-love-with-anyone-do-this.html>
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**The names have been changed because the participants were embarrassed.*

