

# A LINE ON LIFE

5/12/96, Revised 5/19/03

## Advertising for Love \*

David A. Gershaw, Ph.D.

If you are still unmarried, you no longer need to cram into singles bars or sweat it out in health clubs trying to find a soul mate. You can join many people who use personal ads in newspapers. If you have the money, you can pay to screen candidates through a video dating service. To add to this, online sources are now also available. However, advertising for love doesn't seem to be the cure for the "*lonely-heart syndrome*."



There are many factors that make it harder to find and sustain lasting love relationships. Many single people work longer hours. This leaves them less time and energy for social functions, where they might find potential partners. With the increased threat of AIDS and date rape, many women are cautious about going out with someone they barely know.

Even so, being single is not a goal for most people. It has been shown to be unhealthy. In both the United States and England, research indicates that single men are more likely to have drinking problems. Other reports from practitioners indicate that single women are more likely to be chronically depressed, bulimic or anorexic, or have psychosomatic problems. Essentially, women who are not married tend to believe that there is something wrong with themselves. If they seek therapy, their ultimate goal is to find a mate and be married. As Janice Lieberman – a New York psychologist who has worked with many single women over 30 – puts it:

"Many women come to treatment blaming themselves, and often their therapists support the idea that if they only work something through, they'll find somebody. But the problem is the lack of available men."

Another New York psychologist, Bonnie Jacobson, believes many single people have lost their **sense of community**. In moving to big cities, people live lonelier lives. They isolate themselves from their social supports. They work more, spend more time commuting, and have less leisure time. They are less likely to be affiliated with religious or civic organizations, which can be prime sources of social support. They seem to believe that – if they find the right person – that person can fulfill all of their needs.

"People need to learn to commit to a community. That's where you find your own unique identity. And it's better to find your own identity before you turn to a mate."

If young adults come from divorced families, research shows that, not only do they have more sexual partners, they have gloomy attitudes toward the commitment of marriage. However, merely staying married for your children's sake is not effective either. Young adults – whose parents remained together in spite of great antagonism – were still very cynical about marriage.

To find out what singles desire, a 1993 University of Minnesota study explored "*personal ads*" – classified advertisements indicating the availability of single men and women. There was support for the belief that men seek beauty and youth, while women are looking for partners who are mature and secure. Men's ads look for attractiveness and promoted their own financial status. Women's ads emphasized the desire for financially secure men.

Some changes are occurring. Women are increasingly likely to play down their "*nurturing skills*" and ask for partners who are "*expressive*." In contrast to men who are emotionally undemonstrative, women are more likely to indicate that they prefer partners who are sensitive and affectionate. Likewise, in contrast to dominant men, women are seeking partners who are kind and cooperative, but still assertive.

Overall, people seek partners who confirm their self-concept – even if their self-concept is negative. Therefore, those with low self-concepts are more likely to want a partner who is predictable and takes control. They are less likely to desire a partner who compliments them or attempts to raise their egos.

---

**Rather than finding the "*right*" partner,  
developing a lasting relationship also means that  
you need to *be* the "*right*" partner.**

---

Regardless of how you find a potential partner, it is unlikely to be "*love at first sight*." Even if you find someone who seems to be right, developing a close, life-long relationship is not easy. It is a slow step-by-step process of "*feeling each other out*" to see if you are compatible. It may take many months or even years. It means that you need to be aware of each other's faults. Since both of you initially are "*putting your best foot forward*," it will take some time before you are aware of potential problem areas.

Because partners are not aware of problem areas or don't deal with them before marriage, too many marriages end in divorce. Don't expect to change these shortcomings after marriage! You may need to decide if the positive aspects of your partner are worth living with their imperfections. On the other hand, any relationship requires some changes in *your* style of living. Are you willing to make these changes to keep the relationship?

---

\* Adapted from Scott Sleek's articles, "Singles look for love in a bear market," and "Personal ads shed light on the science of attraction," [\*APA Monitor\*](#), May, 1995, pages 36-37.