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What are the chances of falling in love? Allan Taylor tackles the illogical game of love through hard maths

apocalyptic ~~asste~~ asteroid
roying all chances of love

Maths, whether you loved or hated it at school, always seemed to offer a very simple solution to problems. You knew the value of x was somewhere in the question, all you had to do was insert the right numbers to make the sum work and you would be able to find it. Fast-forward a few years and it may appear that simplicity isn't so easily applied to life's big conundrums, especially when it comes to relationships. However, for those of you who didn't pay attention in class, a few simple numerical concepts can point cupid's arrow in the right direction – and even help you figure out why love doesn't come easily.

You may think there is a huge difference between the hot passion of love and the cold rationale of maths, but the two bear such similarities it's difficult to brush aside. For example, you can take any circle in the world, any size, divide its circumference by its diameter and you'll always get the same number – pi. This is a number we describe as irrational and, as far as we know, it goes on forever without repeating itself. Although every circle is different, the intrinsic value within is identical, wherever you may look.

Exactly the same principles apply to love: it completely defies all logic, doesn't follow any specific set of laws and can vary vastly from person to person, but in all its forms its internal significance is universal and alike. Approaching love with this more logical frame of mind means that you stop looking at dating as a game of skill. It's not about playing the field, "scoring" or making up "rules" as you go on. The plain truth is that love is a game of chance.

As any good gambler knows, chance is just a statistic – it's Chaos Theory, it's the way the world works. However, being the competitive sort I've always wanted to know what the odds are before I even begin to play that way I know how much to bet, or what and when. We'd all rather go through the game holding a royal flush than try to argue your way through with a pair of queens, so to speak. The probability of falling in love is, in essence, a numbers game.

And when people talk about love, they're always using numerical concepts like single figures, double dates and "other halves". Surprisingly, everyone concentrates on a very solitary value – one. Or, you know, "The One" and to me this just seems a bit too unlikely. I mean, that's one in seven billion other people on this planet: I'd have better luck quitting my job, staying at home, playing the lottery every weekend and hoping for the best. Chances of winning the lottery? One in 14 million. Chances of finding "The One"... Well, I know where my money's going this weekend.

But when you start to really crunch the numbers, the odds get a little more remote. If you're hoping to bump into the love of your life in a club on a random Friday night out, even when you take a massive metropolis like London with its population of roughly 7,512,400 people, it appears that the possibilities could be endless. However, only 6% of those describe themselves as homosexual (so, the next time a Daily Mail reader says that we're popping up everywhere nowadays, that may be the case but we're having a bloody hard time trying to find each other) and – depending on how open-minded you are – only 14% of those will be within your specified age range. That shaves a hefty amount off the figure, leaving us with just 10% of the population – one in 75,124.

Sounds like plenty of potential dates are in the offing, but the odds of finding the one in that number are the same as dying in a horrific motorbike accident (though I still haven't figured out which is worse; a gory death or an excruciating heartbreak). It also happens to be the same amount of people in prison across the UK and there's a partially romantic notion that the reason I haven't found "The One" yet is because he's waiting for me – doing time. It's partially romantic; the other part of me is scared to death and just prays he doesn't own a motorbike.

This is just the tip of the statistical iceberg: as we introduce other factors, the quest for love becomes even more impossible. For example, music is such an important part of my life that the person I end up with would just have to love indie music. The Association of Indie Music (yes, it exists – Google it) claims that 30% of record sales come from this genre, so that shaves another two thirds off the figure, leaving me with just 21,754 latent lovers.

As we get closer to the magic number, we have to factor in the amount of people you could potentially meet in one night and given that I only frequent three or four venues regularly – and if each of those venues has a capacity of 200 people – that's only 800 people I could bump into. Additionally, if I only find two in five of those attractive (and believe me if you've been out on a Friday night in London then two in five is a very generous figure), that leaves me with just one in 320.

And if I take away the people I've already slept with or dated or been otherwise romantically involved with that leaves me with... Less. A little less than 320.

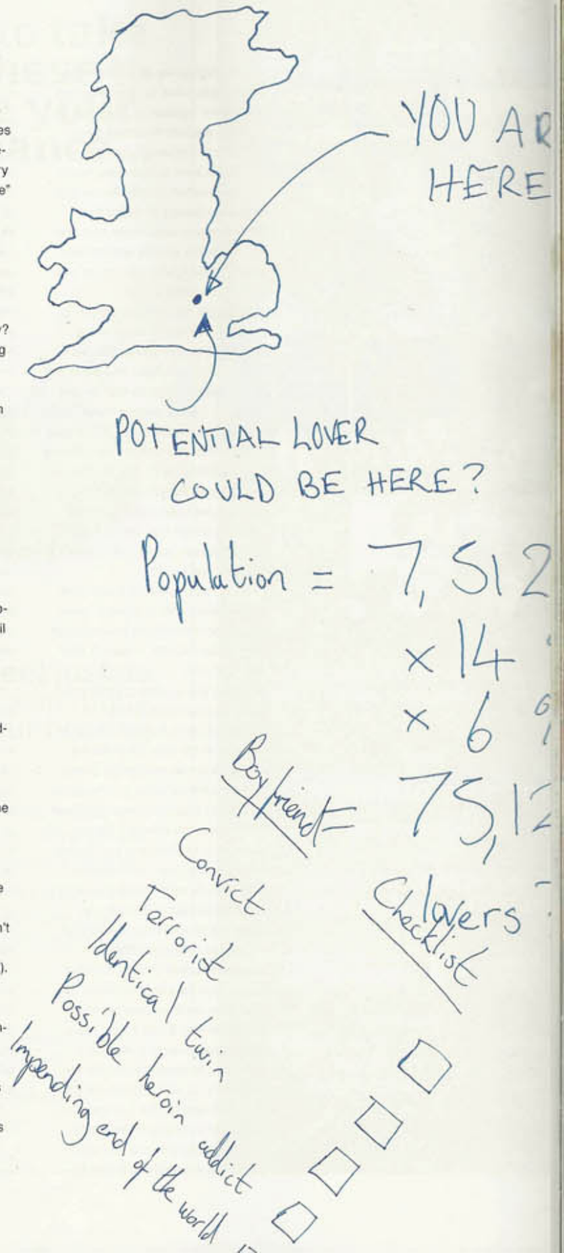
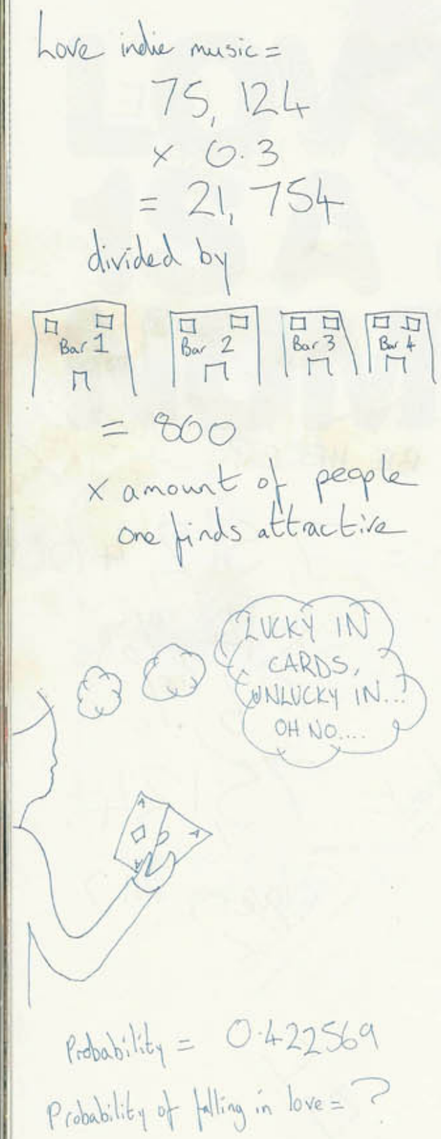
To give you an idea of those odds, Earth has the same amount of chance of being blown to bits by an asteroid in the year 2029. It's the same odds a woman has of giving birth to identical twins. It's the same number of suspected terrorists living in the UK at the moment. It's the same level of chance of contracting HIV from a second hand needle.

So already we're building up a fabulous portrait of the man I'm likely to end up with: an ex-convict – possibly convicted of some terrorism-related crime – who has an identical twin and, for some reason or another, uses second-hand needles. It may sound like a desperate situation, living with a right-wing fundamentalist who is a habitual drug user, but let's face it; in the eventuality that I do find The One, then in 18 years time we're all going to be blown to bits by an oncoming asteroid so I guess I should enjoy the short time we have together while it lasts.

The reality is that if destiny conspired so that if I were in the same place at the same time as this guy, would we even notice each other? Would he stare at me for that fraction of a second longer than is normal? Would we smile at each other? Would I even be brave enough to go over and say hello? Would he laugh at my jokes, even if they weren't funny? Would we kiss? Would we go home together? Would it be for the long haul, or would I wake up in 15 years time and find that he had gone?

You see, each new question is another roll of the dice and the odds start all over again because love is all about statistical possibility. It's a game with very high stakes – often we have to be willing to go all in and quite often we have to be prepared to walk away with nothing. It's a game with many different players, like the hopeless romantic, always placing everything on one number and hoping for the best. He stands to incur the most debt, but when he wins it covers all the losses he ever made in his life.

Friends ask me if I ever feel depressed in the knowledge that my odds of finding love are relatively small. The answer is no – in fact, I feel quite the opposite. Knowing how statistically unlikely love is makes you appreciate that it is indeed very special and rare, not to be taken either lightly or for granted. For all my faults and cynicism throughout these jaded years of homosexual life, there is one thing that we as humans share that keeps us going: hope.

Because you just never know, do you? I could walk down the street tomorrow and find the man of my dreams. That's Chaos Theory – it's the way the world works. I have to believe that. That is the thought I live with every day.

But you tell me – what are the chances? ■