



## **The Psychology of Seduction - Is life a seduction?**

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Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I am really delighted to see so many of you here. My name is Raj Persaud. I am a consultant psychiatrist at the Bethlem Royal & Maudsley Hospitals in South London, and I am the Gresham Professor for Public Understanding of Psychiatry.

This is my final of my series of lectures in this academic term. As many regulars will know, I like to observe that we are very privileged, those of us who are able to live in London and come to these lectures, to take part in this tradition of these lectures that have been going on for 400 years. I do think that is very important, that we do not take that for granted. Previous Gresham professors include Sir Christopher Wren and Robert Hooke, and it is wonderful, I feel, to be part of this marvellous tradition going back so long. I also am very honoured to be a consultant at the Bethlem Royal Hospital, where the word “bedlam” comes from. It was originally founded in the 13th Century in Bishopsgate, so again, it is a great privilege to be able to be part of two such great historic traditions.

The thing I want to talk about this evening is the psychology of seduction. You may wonder why I, as a psychiatrist – I am used to treating people with delusions, hallucinations - why am I interested in this subject, being a happily married man. Well, my experience as a psychiatrist has led me to be interested in the nature of human unhappiness and why people are discontent, and I do notice that there is a strong link between the reasons why many people are unhappy and their relationships. As one of my patients said to me, very evocatively and in fact was the inspiration for my next book, she said to me, “Dr Persaud, I don’t need Prozac; I need a boyfriend!” I thought that was putting the problem very well. The problem is of course, sometimes you get a boyfriend, and the boyfriend is very stressful and the boyfriend makes you start taking Prozac in an attempt to cope with the stress. So another problem is that even if you successfully ‘pull’, to use the common vernacular, how to pull the right person, someone who actually not brings stress to your life but make you genuinely happy.

The statistics on this are really interesting. If you are in an unhappy, long term relationship, like a marriage, your chances of developing clinical depression do not double, they do not go up by a factor of 5, or a factor of 10; they go up by a factor approaching 30. You are 30 times more likely to get clinical depression if you are in an unhappy marriage. So one of the key decisions we make in our lives, that is actually going to be the decision that is going to predict your future mental health, more than any other decision, is who you decide to spend your life with. I fundamentally believe that is a key decision, and that is one of the reasons why I am interested in how to help people make a better decision or improve their decision making in that area.

Just another example of how powerful this is: there is the classic clairvoyant’s trick that happens in fairgrounds, when you go to see someone who read palms or gazes in crystal balls, and they are uncannily able to spot what is troubling you, and how do they do that? Well, the clairvoyant or the palm reader is using some very basic psychology. They know that the things that trouble people, that can appear to be a universe of possibilities, actually boil down to three key possibilities, and these are basically money,

financial problems; relationships, and your health. Those are the three key areas, and if you are going to see a clairvoyant, or someone who reads palms, then the palmist has worked out, or realised, that probably something is troubling you. So you walk through the door, and the clairvoyant makes a quick assessment of you as you walk through the door, and they think to themselves, “Is this person young or old?” If they are old, they are probably likely to have some kind of health problem. If you are young and you come in through the door, they rule out the possibility of a health problem. Then they make a quick assessment of how moneyed you are, from your appearance and your clothes, and they work out that if you appear fairly well off, it cannot be financial things that perhaps are troubling you, and that leaves relationships. So you hold out your palm, they look in your palm, and they say, “I think you are unlucky in love.” You say, “Blimey, how did they do that?!” That’s just astonishing!” That is the classic clairvoyant trick, which, basically, is about psychology.

That is the reason why I think this is a very important subject – relationships and how to improve the way we conduct them – but why do we need psychology to help us in this area? Surely nothing can be more natural than falling in love? Why do we need a psychiatrist or a psychologist to give us advice on how to improve that side of our lives?

I think the modern age is really the answer to that question. You see, 200 years ago, we all lived in villages which consisted roughly of 150 to 200 people. So that meant you were born in that village, you lived there, you died there. That meant that the number of possible eligible members of the opposite sex with whom you could mate was roughly around 20 or 30. So your choice, first of all, was massively constrained, and that eliminates a lot of the problems that we have when you live in a city like London of 12 million people, where you have a choice of roughly 6 million members of the opposite sex.

There is another problem that we have today which we did not have back then. Today, the modern media picks out the most attractive members of the opposite sex and puts them on the cover of magazines and in television programmes, and we find ourselves comparing ourselves to these very desirable, physically attractive members of the opposite sex, and we feel insecure as a result of that comparison and we feel unhappy about ourselves.

Two hundred years ago, you were born in this village, with only 150 or 200, other people, out of which there might be 20 eligible members of the opposite sex, so you only had to compare yourself with 20 other people, and the likelihood is that comparison is not likely to leave you feeling very insecure. Sure, you might have the bad luck to be born in the village that Brad Pitt and Michelle Pfeiffer happen to be born in, but you would be very unlucky if that happened to you! Generally speaking, that would not happen to you and you would not feel insecure.

The other thing that happened 150 years ago was that you knew everything there was to know about other members of the village, because you were born there, you lived there, you died there. You grew up with these people, so you knew what they were like, and you could make your decision based on a huge amount of information about what they were like. Today, you meet people in the transient, mobile place that London is – how do you really know them? That, I think, is a key problem.

You can see this in this genre of “Meet the Parents” films that we see so much of now. The very fact that meeting the parents is such a big issue today tells us about the lack of information we have about other people and their families and how we are trying to discover what people are really like in order to make the decision. We did not have that problem 200 years ago.

So, given the problems we have in a modern society, where we are surrounded by strangers, and we have to make this decision about who is right for us, you then have to have what we would call in psychology and economics “a search strategy”. You have to have a strategy about how you are going to track down

the right person. If you are going to have a search strategy in a city like London, with 12 million other people, then you begin to attach costs to this search strategy. It takes time and energy to look. After a while, what is very interesting, people come to start thinking to themselves, the person I have found, are they good enough, because it is so exhausting and costly to keep looking. Again, you would not have had that problem 200 years ago. Because there are costs now to searching, people do what economists call “bundle the costs”.

For example, you see a lot of this going on in nightclubs and bars around the City: large groups of single sex groups of people, hunting in packs. You go out with your friends, all of the same sex, and you are hunting in packs, and what you are doing is bundling the cost of being with your friends, because that takes time and energy and effort, and you are bundling that up with the cost of looking for a partner. You are trying to combine the two things in the one go. Of course, there are problems with that. Often, it is a very difficult situation to go and chat up a member of the opposite sex in this kind of environment.

As many of you will have come to expect from my previous lectures, I am going to be providing some manipulation tips that might help you, using psychology, to gain the upper hand in this game of love, and of course I always have to put this important caveat in: in relating these manipulation tips, I am not in any way endorsing them; I am just giving you the information, and you have to decide what you are going to do with it.

We know that classically in a bar, or ‘hunting in packs’ type situation, we often find ourselves surrounded, unfortunately, by very attractive members of the same sex. The psychological research evidence is that this makes us feel insecure. If I was in a bar and I suddenly found myself surrounded by the Chippendales, let’s say, I would begin to feel insecure about my appearance. The research evidence is that if a woman was to come up and try to chat me up at that moment, and ignore the Chippendales all around me, I would find her much more attractive, because I would be suffering self-esteem threats surrounded by these towering members of the Chippendales. So, one little tip right there is, if you want to target someone, get them interested in you, get them surrounded by extremely desirable members of that sex, and then create a situation where you are the only one paying them any attention in the room. You will find that softens them up remarkably.

When we are thinking about a strategy and a strategic approach now, there is an acronym that I have coined called AIM for thinking about targeting people. The acronym AIM stands for Attention, Interest, Maintenance, and these are the three key phases in a relationship, particularly in a busy place like London. “Attention” is the fact you have to get their attention first of all. You did not have to do that 200 years ago when you were all born in the same village. You did not have to get their attention, because you were born with them, you lived with them, you died with them. Today, you walk into a busy tube train, or into a busy bar, and there is lots of competing stimuli. You have to get their attention first. Then you have got to move into the “Interest” phase in the relationship. You have to maintain interest. So you have got their attention, they are chatting to you now, they have picked you out of all the other people in the bar, but you have to sustain their interest in you for the next hour or so, or the next few days. And then you move into the “Maintenance” phase of the relationship, which is to maintain the relationship beyond the initial interest phase. So AIM is a key acronym that you might find useful to remember.

But now that we are thinking about strategy, people get very uncomfortable with this, with these acronyms and these strategic approaches. They say, “Oh, I don’t know about this. It feels like you’re treating love like a game, a game people play, a game with rules, and it should be so much more spontaneous, shouldn’t it, and romantic than that?” Again, I’m not formulating a strong endorsement of the game playing approach to love, I am leaving it for you to decide, and we will discuss various strategies this evening, but people often get very angry and upset by the idea of game playing when it comes to love. I am not advocating, when I discuss these, the idea that one should embrace them entirely, but I do notice that most of us engage in a little bit of game playing now and again, combined with the “I’m just going to be myself” type approach.

Where are we going to get the advice from psychology? It is going to come largely from a branch of psychology called evolutionary psychology, which argues that basically we are biologically wired up to find other members of the opposite sex attractive, and this occurs for biological reasons, to do with the fact we have to mate with members of the opposite sex to promulgate the species and to keep it going, and so we are biologically wired up to find members of the opposite sex attractive, because this is good for the species. So basically, it is all about moving your genes on in future generations. If it is about that, and if we are biologically wired up to fall in love for these biological reasons, then may be there are biological rules at play, often operating below conscious level – and let us just discuss one or two of these.

A recent finding in archaeological digs of human civilisation going back into prehistoric times, 75-85,000 years ago, has found the mud ochre which clearly was being used by women 100,000 years ago as blusher or rouge to put on their skin, so women were using make-up 100,000 years ago. Why is it that putting blusher on your skin, giving your skin a slightly red tinge, why might that be a strategy that women might use in order to attract members of the opposite sex? It does seem mysterious. Well, there has been a recent finding that when women are ovulating, their capillaries in their blood vessels dilate, so their skin is slightly redder at the time of ovulation. So there is a biological theory, a genetic theory, that men are programmed to be more drawn to women whose skin is slightly redder, because at that moment, the woman is ovulating and therefore if you were to mate with the woman at that moment, you are more likely to pass on your genes to a future generation because you are more likely to fertilise her at that moment. So it may be that what is happening when women put blusher on their skin, according to the biological, evolutionary psychology theory, is they are trying to confuse men as to whether they are ovulating or not. So it is a confusion strategy, because if you cannot be sure that she may or may not be ovulating, you might as well mate with her. That is one possibility.

Another possibility is it is basically a straight deception strategy, because the women noticed that all the women whose skin was slightly redder – maybe they noticed this at an unconscious level – were the ones getting all the male attention, and so they decided to deceive the men into thinking that they were ovulating by putting on blusher on as well. But obviously all this is going on at an unconscious level.

When we do research into what it is about the male body, the male figure, that women are most attracted to, a couple of very interesting findings, which evolutionary psychologists believe they can explain, occur. One is that women are very attracted to what is called the v-shaped torso male shape: a man with a very well-built chest but a thin waist, so a v-shaped torso. Why should that be found attractive by women? Well, what do you use your pectoral muscles for, which are the main things that make up the chest? Basically, what you use them for is for throwing a punch. So at an unconscious level, what is going on, the evolutionary psychologists would argue, is women are looking for men who are good in a brawl. Why might that be? Well, may be 100,000 years ago, way back in our pre-history, a key concern for women was that since a favourite Saturday afternoon activity for a lot of young men was a bit of raping and pillaging, that you needed a guy who was going to protect you from all these rapists and pillagers, and therefore you wanted a guy who had this v-shaped torso, who was good in a fight, and he would defend you and protect you from invading tribes and so on. That would be the evolutionary psychology theory.

Whenever you come to a lecture given by a doctor, things do get a bit graphic, so you have to brace yourself for this next evolutionary psychology theory. One of the other interesting key findings about what women find attractive in the male body shape is they like a muscular bottom. Women like a man with a muscular bottom. Why should that be? Interestingly enough, the muscular bottom of the male body is made up by a muscle called the gluteus maximus, and that is the muscle the man uses when he is thrusting during sex. So at an unconscious level, the evolutionary psychologists argue, what is happening here is the woman is going for the guy who is most likely to thrust most deeply and therefore perhaps fertilise her more successfully. That is what evolutionary psychologists are arguing in terms of explaining what it is we are attracted to in each other, and it is often going on at an unconscious level.

I made the claim that if you use psychology and use some of these findings – and it was a very grandiose claim – you could make anyone fall in love with you, if you used these tools, and you had long enough and threw enough resources at it. You could make anyone fall in love with you. I was making the claim because I believed that psychology had uncovered the laws of attraction which, if you followed, people were trapped by, and actually the whole idea of romance, and the chemistry and the mystery of love, had now been revealed to be explained by various mechanisms at a psychological level.

The BBC came to hear of this claim, and they challenged me – and some of you who came to my lecture last year will know this anecdote, but I had lots of emails asking me to repeat it, which is why I am going to tell the anecdote again. The BBC approached me and challenged me to back up my claim that using psychology you could make anyone fall in love with you by asking me to go speed dating, and challenging me to use these various techniques to see whether I could actually prove that I could influence how attracted women were.

I need to explain to some of you who may or may not know this, because when I ask people, “Do you know what speed dating is or have you been speed dating?” people always vigorously deny knowing anything about speed dating. Basically, when you go speed dating, what happens is there is an organisation that sets it up, at a bar or a club or a pub, and you get equal numbers of both genders, normally 9, 10, up to 30 or 40, and the women often sit at various tables, and the men move along from one table to the other, and they get three minutes normally with each woman in which to have a quick chat, and then a whistle is blown and then the men move on to the next woman. At the end of the evening, you fill out a form indicating, ticking some boxes, as to which of the men or women that you saw that you would want to meet again for friendship, which of them you would want to meet again for romance, or which of them you never want to see again. Then the organisation matches you up with emails and phone numbers depending on what boxes you ticked. So it is a fairly rapid way, and the BBC felt a fairly reliable way, of getting some measure of how attractive a person is found, in terms of how many times at the end of this speed dating experience your box has been ticked.

I was very nervous that the BBC should approach me with this, because I have to confess now that my previous experience with women up until this point had not been dramatically successful. Remember, at this point they approached me, I had been married to my lovely wife, Francesca, for about 10 years, and Francesca and I had been dating for about five years before we got married, so I had been off the market for 15 years. So first of all, I was feeling a tad rusty on this front, and the second thing is, I have to confess that before I met Francesca, and she hates it when I tell people this, I was spectacularly unsuccessful with members of the fairer sex. Whenever I would make an approach, for want of a better word, the favourite response that women would give me would be, “Beat it, loser!” So, with this kind of refrain ringing in my ears, I was very nervous at the prospect of the speed dating experience, thinking back to the “Beat it, loser!” statements of my adolescence. I was thinking, “Blimey, there’s going to be millions of viewers watching various women saying, “Beat it, loser!” to me,” and it was a terrifying prospect. So I was very nervous about this, but I undertook the challenge of the BBC recording this experience of the speed dating.

The people taking part in the speed dating were taking part in a genuine speed dating exercise, but they knew some of it was being recorded for a BBC programme. Now, before we started the speed dating, I met some of the men who were going to take part at the bar, who were downing quite a few drinks to pick up some Dutch courage before starting the enterprise. Being a psychologist and interested in how other people were going to approach this task, I asked them what strategy and tactics they were going to use that evening. All the men gave me a very blank look and said, “Strategy? Tactics? We’re just going to be ourselves.” I had to hold myself back from saying, “Have you ever wondered why you are single? You are single because you are being yourself! Time to use some strategies and tactics I think!”

I met nine women that evening. One of the women was quite interesting. During the three minutes that I had with her, I asked her what sort of guy she was looking for. She was from Turkey, and she said basically she wanted a man with a British passport! So right there, let me give you a big tip when you go

speed dating: sometimes you will meet people for whom even three minutes is too long! So take your own whistle with you, and blow it after just a few seconds so you can move on quickly! It was a very nerve-racking experience. The producer of the programme collected all the forms at the end of the evening, and I was meant to ring in the next morning to find out what the score was, in terms of how many of these nine women I had met ticked the box saying they wanted to meet me later for romance.

Incidentally, there was a bit of marital tension, because I said to Francesca, "I am going to have to take my wedding ring off for this speed dating experiment." She got very tense about that, for some reason, but you know, I had to explain to her, "This is all for research purposes!"

Any way, the next morning, I am not saying that I was anxious or anything about the result, okay, but I rang at 9.01 am, and the producer picked up the phone on the fifth ring – I mean what was that about?! So I said to her, "So how did it go?" She said, "Oh, I think it's going to make a really interesting programme." I said, "Forget that! How many women ticked the box saying they wanted to see me again for romance?" I won't keep you in suspense, but basically 9 out of 9 ticked the box for romance. So I moved from a level of "Beat it, loser!" right, to 9 out of 9, employing various psychological tactics, which we will discuss for the rest of the lecture at various points, and I will invite you to guess which one I used, and which I used when. But one point I want to make about the 9 out of 9 is interesting, because I think it backs up my claim that we are dealing with certain laws of attraction. So it wasn't 8 out of 9, or 6 out of 9 – it was 9 out of 9. My point is that if you do certain things, I think human beings obey certain laws of behaviour and you can produce a result like that, if you want to devote the energy and the time and resources to it.

One of the interesting findings from the psychology of attraction literature is that what is important for women when they are drawn to a man is what profession the man is following. That is much more important to women than it is important to men in terms of what they are drawn to in a woman. The other thing that men often get wrong about this is often, to a woman, it is not actually that important so much precisely what the man does, but the favourite agony aunt expression that we use in this situation is "Women are after a man with a plan." So they are often interested in a man who appears to be going somewhere in terms of his career, has some direction to his life. They are not necessarily looking for Bill Gates, but they are looking for someone who appears to have some kind of ambition and some kind of leaning towards improving himself in terms of his career. We will come back to the evolutionary psychology theory about that, but there are three key aspects of career that women are interested in: there is status; intelligence; and what psychologists call "resource allocation" but other people would know as financial power or resources. Those are three different things to think about, because you could be a member of the House of Lords, let's say, and have lots of status, but you may score low on intelligence and may not be that wealthy. You could be a professor of a university and score high on intelligence, but may be low on status and low on financial power.

Some of you will know the answer to this but, tactically speaking, to explore this interesting issue of what women are attracted to, I, depending on the woman I was talking to in the speed dating exercise, changed my profession. The profession that I picked that I thought would maximise female attraction was paediatric heart surgeon. Listen, I was anxious and I was nervous about the results – you have to bear that in mind! So I said I was a paediatric heart surgeon and I spent my day mending tiny broken little hearts! I'm not proud of it, but I was deploying what we know from the psychology of what women are most drawn to. The other thing I said was that at weekends, my hobby was I liked to fly aeroplanes. I said, "I've only got a small aeroplane, just enough room for two and an overnight bag." In fact, I said to one of the woman, "Would you fancy flying down to Nice on Saturday for lunch?" She said to me, "Sounds a bit much for a first date!" which I thought was a very good response.

One of the things that interests psychologists is why is it women are placing quite a lot of store, for example, on intelligence. Intelligence matters a lot to women in terms of what they are drawn to in a man, and the research evidence indicates that if you give women various choices, like "What's the lowest IQ in a man you're willing to tolerate for someone you might marry, someone you might entertain for a medium-

term relationship, or someone you might entertain for a one-night stand?” what happens is that the level of IQ that women tolerate for any of those three situations actually stays more or less the same – it does not actually change. Now, when you ask men, what’s the lowest level of IQ they’re willing to tolerate, for marriage, it’s pretty high for men; then it drops significantly for medium-term relationships; and when you get to a one-night stand, it is anything with a pulse, basically!

The theory of what is going on here, from an evolutionary standpoint, is that women are interested in IQ because they may be someone who is intelligent will, as a result of their intelligence, for example, will hunt more expertly and bring more meat back to the village, in terms of thinking about prehistoric times, and so that could be important.

How do women gauge your intelligence as a man? One of the things we know from research in “Lonely Hearts” columns, is that what women are particularly drawn to, is the famous acronym “GSOH” or “Good Sense Of Humour”. Why is it that women are so drawn to a good sense of humour in a man but it does not seem to work the other way round? Men are not drawn to that in women. The theory is that because IQ was placed in such great store by women, women are using being witty, or humour, as a proxy measure for IQ. So in fact, at an unconscious level – the woman does not realise this perhaps – but the man that entertains her and makes her laugh is demonstrating, perhaps, his intellectual prowess in doing so.

We explored this idea with a mega-lab experiment I did with the BBC on “Tomorrow’s World”, where we set up a dating situation where the members of the public could ring in or vote via the web site or vote via the newspapers, and we picked for them two members of the opposite sex, one of whom was quite definitely physically less attractive than the other in terms of appearance. We asked the public to pick who they would like to go on a weekend away to a Caribbean island with, on a date over a weekend, and they had to choose between these two members of the opposite sex, and there was a definite difference in physical appearance in terms of desirability.

But the other thing we did was we put a little “Lonely Hearts” column at the bottom of the picture, where the person in the picture is writing some blurb about what the weekend is going to be like to invite you to come. The blurb is something like, “Please come with me on this wonderful weekend and we will swim in the blue Caribbean Sea,” and we will do this and we will do that. The second blurb, I changed only one or two very small words, so that people would not notice the difference at a conscious level. For example, instead of the word “blue” sea – “Come and join me; we will swim in the lovely blue Caribbean Sea” – I changed it to the “azure Caribbean Sea,” azure being a much more rare word for “blue”. What we were working on was the idea that, consciously, people wouldn’t notice the difference, because the meaning was exactly the same and most of the words were the same, but the signal that would be occurring with the use of the word “azure” was “here is someone with a more complex, sophisticated vocabulary” and therefore “here is someone perhaps with higher educational attainment or perhaps higher IQ”. We were exploring actually whether that would have an impact on people’s decision. Would it overwhelm, for example, the drawing to the more physically attractive person, because we made the less physically attractive person the one who was saying the word “azure” – “Come and join me and we’ll swim in the azure Caribbean Sea.”

The really interesting finding was that both genders did swing significantly towards the use of the “azure” word, but men swung much more than women. Men were more drawn to the women using the “azure” word than women were. It was almost as if women were putting much greater loading on physical desirability than men were. We had to scratch our heads to explain this result, and one theory we came up with was as women become more financially independent, maybe they do not require men to be that intelligent any more, and that all women are basically looking for is a bit of eye candy to have on their arms when they go out for an evening. That was one theory we came up with. But whatever theory you come up with to explain this, it is very interesting that this use of the word of “azure” should dramatically influence people’s attractiveness. Even to this day, when I am talking to people, I casually drop in the word “azure” now and again, to just see if I can generate a bit of attraction!

One very interesting tactic that you can employ on a speed date, that comes from the literature, is a very famous experiment, and I think perhaps one of the most interesting experiments in terms of psychology of attraction, which was done in the '60s, was the experimenter sent out members of both sexes to go out on dates, and these people were confederates of the experimenters so they knew they were taking part in an experiment. They were given an instruction by the experimenter, which was, throughout the date, to agree with everything the other person says. In the second condition, you go out on a date, and you are instructed by the experimenter to disagree with everything the other person says. So that's a bit of a nightmare date! "Did you enjoy the meal?" "No, I thought it was terrible." "Nice weather today?" "No, don't like the weather." It comes as no surprise to know that the people who were experiencing the disagreeing date rated them as significantly less attractive to be with than the people who spent the whole date agreeing with everything you said. But then the experimenter threw in a third really interesting condition: the experimenter asked people to go out on a date and start off the date disagreeing with everything the other person said, then switch halfway through the date and start agreeing with everything the other person said. In this condition, you were found most attractive of all. You were found much more attractive than if you simply spent the whole date agreeing with everything the other person said. Why should that be? There is a lot of controversy in psychology to explain this experiment. Why start off disagreeing and then switch to agreeing?

The answer from the audience is that the person might think, because you switched from disagreeing to agreeing, that you have been won round in some way. That is a good thought. So maybe what is going on here is that you feel you have had an impact on the other person, and the notion that we have had impact is something very seductive, and maybe that is one of the things that is going on.

There is another very interesting theory though, which is if you go on a date, and the person starts off a date disagreeing with everything you say, you find this a nightmare date, and you get very stressed and anxious. And then, lo and behold, the person switches and starts agreeing, and you feel relief flooding over you as you think, "Oh, this is not going to be such a nightmare after all!" And then you mistake the relief for attraction. That sounds like a really weird idea. It is called the mislabelling of emotions idea, that we mislabel emotions, and I will come back to that idea.

The experimenter threw in another condition later on; he asked people on the date to start switching later and later in the date, so you spend longer and longer disagreeing and then switching later and later in the date to agreeing. Interestingly, the later you switch to agreeing, the more attractive you are found. That suggests a little bit the stress idea, because the stress is really mounting as the date progresses and the disagreement continues, and then the sudden relief at the agreement at the end seems to collude finding you very attractive indeed. Now, we need to make this point particularly to men in the audience, because they often take the wrong message away from this experiment. You do have to switch, right! Some people forget to switch; they spend all their time disagreeing, and then they forget the switching bit at the end, and they say to me, "Why did it not work out like you said it would, Dr Persaud?" So, you do have to remember to do that switching thing!

This stress idea, the idea that you create stress and then you take it away and that leads to attraction, is further backed up by other psychological experiments. In the experiment, you ask someone to cross a bridge. In one condition, the bridge is a very safe bridge, over a very low drop, and they meet a woman at the other end, and then they are asked to rate how attractive they find her, the men crossing the bridge. In the second condition, they cross a rickety bridge, over a big drop, over a large chasm, and this is a very anxiety-provoking bridge to cross, and they meet the same woman at the other end, and in this condition, because they are so anxious crossing this rickety bridge, they find the woman much more attractive. So there is something about being stressed that seems to increase attractiveness. This feeds in with the idea that we know at wartime, when people are often under a lot of stress, that seems to be a very romantic time, and people often marry more around wartime.

Why is it that stressing people seems to improve attraction? One theory is you are emotionally aroused, and adrenalin surging through your body seems to contribute to passion and love. Another theory is your genes wake up and suddenly realise there is danger around, we may not be around for much longer, best start bonding and affiliating with people so we can procreate our genes, because it looks like the time horizon for which we have got a chance to start mating might be very constrained.

What is really interesting about this is that it gives us a counter-intuitive notion about what to do when you go on a date. When most people go on a date, they try to find something nice and relaxing to do. What this experiment suggests is you do something quite stressful and arousing, perhaps even something rather dangerous. It may be, for example, that the adolescent interest in going to horror films might be a replication of this experiment at some level; that going to a stressful film, where death is on the screen, makes people anxious and raises their adrenalin levels, and they start bonding more – they hang on to each other through the horror film. So you want to think about Friday the Thirteenth the next time you think about going on a date and forget the very sophisticated art house film you were thinking of impressing your date with! It also explains why going on a rollercoaster, for example, is an activity, because it gets the adrenalin going, which might lead to more attraction.

Those are tactics that often you could use with anyone and might produce some helpful result, but the other thing that is important to understand is that it is very important to individualise your tactics or strategies, psychologically, to the particular individual that you are dealing with.

For example, there was a very interesting finding where some psychologists looked at which female actresses in Hollywood men throughout various decades, since the last War, found most attractive. They found that it depended on the economic cycle the economy was going through. When there was a boom cycle, and men therefore were wealthy, they had money in their wallets, they tended to go for actresses who had what was called by psychologists “baby faces” – they had big eyes, small chin, and they looked baby-faced, and they thought they conveyed a sense of dependency. If you were feeling very wealthy, you could cope perhaps with the notion of a dependent woman, a woman who looked dependent and baby-faced. The researchers also found though that at times of economic recession, when men did not have any money in their wallets, they tended to be more attracted to the actresses that looked to have more angular features, who looked less baby-faced and looked more like women that could look after themselves and would not need a lot of looking after. But my key point about this experiment is that no one tactic is going to work with everyone; you need to understand the context the other person is in, and supply a tactic that is tailored to that.

I will just give you one example of that, and this is a kind of experiment I often set up to test people’s dating skills. One of the things about dating and flirting is the ability to flatter the other person. You need to be able to flatter in order to get attention – going back to the acronym AIM. So here is a dating experiment, a thought experiment, to think about. I would be interested to hear what your reactions would be. The full experiment is this: you walk into a bar, and the bar is completely empty, except there is only one person at the bar having a drink, and this person is someone who is the object of your affections, perhaps one of the most desirable people in the world. Let’s say it is Brad Pitt or George Clooney, or it is Michelle Pfeiffer or Julia Roberts, and they are completely alone at the bar and there is no one else in the place, so you have the chance to go over, order a drink at the bar, turn casually to Brad Pitt, say something to them casually, and it might start a conversation going and it might lead to something. What would you say to George Clooney or Brad Pitt?

When I set up this experiment and ask people what they would say, a lot of people say they would say to George Clooney, “I thought you were great in ER.” Now, the reason why that is not a great thing to say to George Clooney, even though I am sure he was great in ER, is that he has heard it a billion times before, and if he has heard it a billion times before, to say it to him now isn’t just not interesting, it is actually positively irritating. So what you say to someone, and the reason why I set up the experiment as being Brad Pitt or George Clooney is I want to pick someone who is used to flattery – how do you flatter someone

who is used to flattery? Well, the tactic is to pick some very obscure film they did, back in the early years of their career, which very few people would have seen, and make some comment about the work they did at that moment, and say, “You know, I really liked you in that film you did back in ’73 when you did that thing.” The reason why that is likely to be found much more seductive is you are displaying a particular intrinsic interest in that particular individual with the way that you have flattered them, and that is found very seductive – to say something that is particularly individualised to the person rather than a kind of chat-up line the person will know that you have used with many other people before.

So if you’re trying to seduce a psychiatrist, let us say – and I am not just throwing out this advice because I am hopeful after the lecture! – if you want to seduce a psychiatrist, one of the things this follows on from is to think about what are people’s favourite emotions? (This is another manipulation tip you may want to think about.) If you can supply to someone their favourite emotions, particularly supply it in a way they are not getting it anywhere else, then you will be found incredibly irresistible and seductive. So you need to tailor your tactics to the particular individual, think what that person’s favourite emotion is, and begin to supply it. How you make other people feel about themselves is at the heart of seduction. We fall in love with people who make us feel great about who we are, about ourselves, and that goes to the point we made in the lecture last week about power and great leaders. What makes a great leader is a leader who makes his followers feel fantastic about themselves.

Whether one agrees or not with Hitler’s politics, he made Germans feel proud to be German at a particular time when Germany was going through a very bad patch, and that is why, at a psychological element of understanding, he was such an attractive leader, he was so successful. The seduction that occurs between a leader and a follower is exactly the same technique you may want to employ when seducing an individual.

So, how would you seduce a psychiatrist? What is a psychiatrist’s favourite emotional state? You might say to the psychiatrist, “You are so insightful, Raj!” Any psychiatrist that is made to feel incredibly insightful when they are with you will find you very, very seductive and irresistible. I made this point on a television programme once, and a very famous male TV presenter said to me, “But Raj, I am always telling you how insightful you are. Does that mean you and I are going to have a relationship?” I said, “No, but I quite like your company.”

So, to conclude quickly, because we are running out of time, we talked a bit about seduction. Oddly enough, I want to put that to one side and now about how you can know that you have met the right person. In a way, I think how attracted you are to someone is not so helpful in this arena. I want to talk about something else which I think is much more important, which I am going to call compatibility or, more importantly, incompatibility. Various brain scanning research, looking at people when they are in the state of falling in love, finds what is very interesting is not the areas of the brain that light up and become active when you are deeply attracted to a member of the opposite sex and are falling in love with them; what is really interesting about that brain scanning research is the bits of the brain that get switched off. The bits of the brain that get switched off are the bits of the brain to do with planning and judgement. There actually is hard biological evidence at the brain scanning level for the notion that love is blind. We are genetically and biologically wired up, when we are passionately in love with someone, to suspend our intellect and act in a more visceral way. This is why we run into trouble because, in suspending judgement, we are not thinking clearly in a more calculating manner; we often end up making a mistake that we might regret later on.

The more rational, calculating approach is not to think about what attracts me to someone, but to think about what might drive me away from that person. What might repel me? That is what incompatibilities are about. It is very useful to have a good sense of what your key incompatibilities are, and an incompatibility is something that, even if it was Bill Gates and Brad Pitt rolled up into one, if they had any of these incompatibilities, you would not be able to sustain a long-term relationship with that person. It is very important to have a list of your own incompatibilities and a good sense of them. That does mean self-

knowledge here is important, because when I ask people “Tell me what your top five incompatibilities would be” often they say things like “Rampant infidelity.” Well, yes, rampant infidelity is obviously going to be an incompatibility, but it is for most people, right? Think about what your own particular incompatibilities might be.

I will just give you one of my own: I lead a very busy life and so I am very interested in efficiency. My wonderful wife, Francesca, is an incredibly efficient person, much more efficient than myself. I suspect one of my incompatibilities would be inefficiency, so if I met Michelle Pfeiffer in a bar and she was chaotic and disorganised, I suspect the relationship would not last very long. But that is a particular incompatibility to do with me and my own personality; you need to think about which ones are to do with you and your particular ones.

The interesting thing is people say, “How do I know when I have met the right person?” and what I am saying is you can never know that you have met the right person, but you can also know something which may actually be more useful: you can know when you have met the wrong person, and know that bit really clearly, because 99% of the equation of divorce is the idea that when you marry someone, that you think your attraction to them will overwhelm the incompatibilities. I am afraid to tell you that my clinical experience is that you just need one incompatibility in your top 10 or top 5, and that always, always, always overwhelms the attraction in the long run. So get the incompatibilities right and an interesting thing happens – love develops, love grows, when you are with someone, over the long term, with whom you are not incompatible. So despite me having spent a long time talking about attraction and seduction, I think there is an undue emphasis in that area, and we need to emphasise more our compatibilities and incompatibilities, and think about that. People say that is a rather cold, calculating way of thinking about relationships, it does not feel very romantic, but I think it is a better way in terms of thinking about them if you want to preserve your mental health in the long run.

One final point. People say, “Yes, but I know this person, I have met them, I am attracted to them, I do not detect major incompatibilities. When is the moment I should make the final decision? I could keep on just dating them or co-habiting with them and gathering more information. How do I know when to close the deal, when to make the final commitment?” I am going to give you a thought about this, which is that I think that the problem is, and one of the reasons why divorce happens, we spend a lot of the time seducing another person, and that means we spend a lot of time having a good time with them, and we use the very important psychological principle of association.

Why is it when we go out on a date with someone, we take them to a nice restaurant, we take them to see a nice film, we want them to have a nice time that evening? We want them to associate having a nice time with us, and that way attraction will develop and grow. That is a very powerful psychological principle. The trouble is, all that time you spend seducing someone, making sure they have a nice time, not burdening them with your anxieties and problems, is not a reflection of what real life is in the longer term of a relationship. The reality is crises happen, bad stuff happens, and you start needing emotional support from the other person, because of difficulties occurring, and then you discover, lo and behold, they are unable to provide the emotional support; they are not there for you.

I think you know more about who is right for you or not, not by having a good time with someone, but by having a bad time with them. In other words, going on a nightmare holiday, or being on a train that gets stuck in the middle of nowhere, and you are having a very stressful time – that is the way of knowing whether you are with the right person or not, not when you go out on a nice comfortable date with them. So here is my tip: you know when you are with the right person after you have had your first crisis together. A lot of people then say to me, “But we have not had a crisis. Do I just hang in there with the relationship and wait until a crisis comes along?” I say, “No – generate a crisis.” They say, “Well, how do you generate a crisis?” “Well, you can come and work in the NHS, like I do, because every day is full of crises, if you work in the NHS,” but you could go, for example, on a holiday which is unlikely to be the kind that you would find very relaxing. If you hate camping holidays, go on a camping holiday for a weekend, and see

how both of you cope when things are going really badly. Better you set up that artificial situation of things going badly and find out what that person is like in a crisis than discover the reality of what they are like in a crisis seven years down the line when your first crisis hits you. That is one tip I would give.

One very final point, going back to this principle of association, which is very important: you seduce someone, you go out on nice dates, you have a nice time with them, they associate you with having a good time, you get married, you have kids, you have a mortgage, the plumbing goes wrong. After all that is happening as you get married to someone and go on with that married life is you spend time together discussing problems: the kids are not doing well at school, the plumbing is not working, etc. etc. What happens is you begin to associate the other person with stress and bad stuff and, lo and behold, you fall out of interest in them, you lose the attraction, because the association stuff is now working the other way. You only associate them with bad things. I think that you need to continue dating your partner, all the time. One of the rules I give in my marital clinic is I say that people should continue to go on dates even after they are married. I often have to clarify for men that when I say that I mean dating your wife – I do not mean dating other people! So you need to keep going on dates. Once a week is the other thing I prescribe – you must go on a date once a week, and you must dress up like you would if you were seducing the other person, so dress up nicely, go and do a nice thing together. The other rule is that you are not allowed to discuss problems on the date. Because when you start off a seduction, you do not go in and discuss problems, on your first date or your second date, do you? What you do is you try to make the other person have a nice, rewarding time. So the rule is no discussion of problems.

When I gave this advice once on a televised 'phone-in, a woman rang in, complaining, and saying, "Yes, but what happens if there really is an emergency or a crisis, and the plumbing is broken and the kitchen is being flooded? You are telling me we cannot discuss that on the date?" No – if there is a nuclear strike, you are allowed to casually bring that up in the date, but it is very important, generally speaking, to observe the rule of no problems being discussed, and that powerful principle of association will still be deployed.

One final point. Economists try to value how much a marriage is worth, and they value this by working out how much it would cost you to go on the marketplace and buy all the services you get from a great marriage. They can then calculate what the annual value of a marriage is, a great marriage. So if you have to go and buy all the psychotherapeutic services a spouse provides, the cooking services, the house cleaning, the companionship services, if you have to buy them on the open marketplace – the sexual services, for example – what would it cost? It is interesting, as a little manipulation ploy, you might ask your partner how much they think it would cost, and that would be quite revealing, what they think it would cost. The economists calculate it is roughly about £100,000 a year. It is very interesting to me, if you think about having to spend £100,000 on something every year, you would really look after that thing, wouldn't you? You would take it out the garage and polish it carefully and drive it very carefully, and you would not let any old person get in it and drive it – you would cherish it and look after it.

We do not look after our marriages that way because I do not think we value them at that level, but if you have a great marriage, it is worth, according to the economists, £100,000 a year. I think they are wrong. I think a great marriage is invaluable. It is beyond price. It is the most precious thing any of us could have. That is why thinking about how to get there is useful, and I think psychology can be helpful. The bottom line is that you are going to have to continue with the seduction throughout your married life if you are going to make the thing work, so my concluding point is that life is a seduction.

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