

VITALITY

Love And Marriage In Reality TV: Can 'Married At First Sight' Really Lead To Happily Ever After?

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Can a social experiment based on scientific matchmaking, “Married at First Sight?”, really find “the one” for you? *Photo courtesy of Shutterstock*



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In childhood, we often chanted the popular nursery rhyme “First comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in a baby carriage!” among our peers in puppy love. This playground song has become an oral tradition that reflects societal norms of relationships, but what happens when you skip love and go straight to marriage? [FYI’s](#) hit reality TV series [Married at First Sight](#) sets up couples through scientific matchmaking and have them get married without getting to know each other to achieve marital bliss in 30 days, but does this really work?

MARRIED AT FIRST SIGHT: FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

The social experiment of this reality TV series sells the idea that a modern couple can marry their one and only without knowing each other before the wedding. Six random singletons are chosen and arranged into three marriages based on their potential compatibility. The participants meet their chosen spouses (based on scientific matching) and exchange vows as they begin life together as husband and wife by moving in together.

The program’s panel of experts, including a psychologist Dr. Joseph Cilona, sociologist Dr. Pepper Schwartz, sexologist Dr. Logan Levkoff, and spiritualist Greg Epstein provide counseling

for each couple along the way. They have 30 days to determine whether they want to continue their marriage or call it quits. This laid out premise brings into question if the courtship process is necessary or can we simply hire experts to lead us to the one without the exposing too much emotional vulnerability?

MARRIED AT FIRST SIGHT: AN "ARRANGED" MARRIAGE

The participants on *Married at First Sight*, similar to an arranged marriage, are matched up based on their compatibility such as interests, tastes, but without compatibility there is no success in the marriage or the relationship. However, the difference between *Married at First Sight* and traditional arranged marriages is the motivation of the arranger. [April Masini](#), relationship expert and author, told *Medical Daily* in an email: “In many cultures, the arrangement is intended to proliferate the culture, the religion, the family line, or business. In a television show, the intention is to proliferate ratings. As anyone in Hollywood knows, happy endings are balanced with the rubbernecking viewers do when drama unfolds.”

She does provide a beacon of hope and suggests if both people in the marriage want the process to work, and have chosen it after careful consideration (with the support of family and friends), then the process can work. “But that’s a tall order,” Masini said.

A 2012 study published in the journal *Ammons Scientific* found U.S.-based arranged marriages lead to love, satisfaction, and commitment in a similar fashion as love-based marriages. There was no difference between arranged marriages and those in free choice marriages, which suggests spouses were happy with their relationships. Dr. Jane Greer, marriage and family therapist and Shrink Wrap media commentator, agrees arranged marriages/marriage at first sight can certainly work, and believes a lot of times the compatibility can breed physical chemistry and desire — but not always. Greer told *Medical Daily* in an email: “It remains to be seen how many of these couples will in fact match up not only in values, tastes, etc., but also attraction and desire.”

HAPPILY EVER AFTER: THE 30-DAY SCENARIO

The concept of marriage at first sight is already unusual, but a 30-day time frame to decide the success of a marriage is unrealistic. The success of marriage has little to do with the number of days a couple spends together, but how well each person knows themselves, and how honest they are with their partner. Moreover, this 30-day clause agreement can cause some couples to think they can still back out of the marriage even after they say “I do.” A 30-day window to measure the success of marriage is impractical since most U.S. marriages last at least five years, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

Brain Chemistry

Before the TV couples decide whether or not they want to stay marry or divorce, the brain has to initially bond with the other person first. David Bennett, a dating and relationship expert working with the largest matchmaking services in central Ohio, *Dating Directions* and *Affinity Matchmaking*, told *Medical Daily* in an email: "In the initial "in love" phase the brain is being flooded with dopamine and norepinephrine. This creates a "halo effect" where in-love people are literally unable to see the faults in the other person."

A 2012 study analyzed MRI scans of in-love individuals and found the decision making part of the brain shuts down in relation to the other person. The frontal cortex deactivates when someone is shown a picture of the person they live, which means they suspend all criticism and doubt. The researchers believe the brain acts this way for "higher biological purposes" to make reproduction more likely.

This "in love" chemistry lasts a year or a little more, according to Bennett. He added: "Based on this, thirty days is NOT enough time to get a realistic picture of another person. Your brain is ensuring you see the person in the best light, and ignoring his or her faults. These faults will come to light later, when it is "too late."

MARRIED AT FIRST SIGHT: SIX MONTHS LATER

Despite the long list of reasons why marriage at

first sight can end in disaster, there are some success stories — for now. After airing season one, *FYI* followed up with three couple six months after the finale to find out if they'd stayed together or fell apart. Season couples Monet and Vaughn did not stay together, while Jason and Cortney and Jamie and Doug are still holding strong since last September. However, Jamie saying “I love you” to Doug for the first time in front of cameras seems too scripted and poorly executed. Or perhaps they did find love in a hopeless place — reality TV.

Currently, *Married at First Sight* is on its second season and has couples moving from the honeymoon phase into living together as husband and wife. Davina and Sean, Jaclyn and Ryan, and Jessica and Ryan D. are this season's couples who aim to beat all odds and divorce rates and end up in marital bliss after the show airs. The “Moving In” episode airs April 21 on FYI.

As for the rest of us in the real world, Masini suggests waiting just a bit longer. “I advise that people who want to marry date someone for three months before deciding if they even want to continue seeing each other. If they do, they should use the second three months to decide if they want to be monogamous,” she said.

This time frame will allow couples to really get to know each other, for better or for worse.



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