

Advertising Age[®]

JULY 21, 2008

U.S. \$4.99, CANADA \$4.99, U.K. £3.95

ADAGE.COM

'Making Love' (out of nothing at all) may be good reality TV

LENORE SKENAZY



MAKING LOVE ON TV. That's not just what Robert Epstein, former editor of *Psychology Today*, plans to have 10 couples start doing. It's the trademark name of his next project: a reality TV show that puts strangers together and heats things up.

Crass as that may sound, it isn't. Well, maybe it's a little crass. But it's also the only TV show I've ever heard of that has the potential to change the way Americans date and mate.

That's because the phrase "Making Love" has a very different connotation for Epstein. The Harvard Ph.D. believes in arranged marriage—marriage where two people start out as strangers and have to make love ... happen. Think Tevye and Goldie in "Fiddler on the Roof" (not to mention another billion couples in countries where arranged marriage still rules).

Epstein's wild idea is to try a Westernized version of the same thing: From thousands of hopefuls,

he will create 10 seemingly compatible couples, just the way Yente the Matchmaker would.

Relationship experts will counsel them on patience and caring, just the way parents (in 19th-century Poland) would. The couples will commit to trying to grow to love each other by signing a non-cheating "love contract" for the 10-week series. And then Epstein will put them through the kinds of experiences during which people tend to bond. Scary ones.

Emotional ones. Ones where they overcome temptation. At the end, Epstein expects maybe six couples to tie the knot on his show.

Now, obviously, a lot of people have come up with reality shows that never get on the air. Maybe this one won't. But the idea has such great potential, it's inspiring. It's also a product-placement bonanza. Let's talk inspiration first.

In his own search for love, the divorced Epstein grew fascinated by how well arranged marriages seem to work. "The love in 'love

marriages' starts out high and decreases very substantially after a year and a half or two years," he says. "But in the arranged marriages, it starts at zero and gradually increases. It surpasses the love in love marriages at around the five-year mark." By year 10, it's—on average—double.

Not only does arranged marriage seem to work well in the long run, it's also proof that you can find love without searching forever for your one, true "soul mate." In fact, Epstein has come to the conclusion that each of us has about 350,000 potential soul mates—including about 50,000 right here in the U.S.A.

With that many potential partners, our romantic myths make no sense. The idea that you can create love rather than waiting for it is empowering: Make it happen!

"More people are engaging life coaches and psychologists to help them through their relationships," notes Flutie Entertainment

President Robert Flutie, who is representing the show. That kind of behavior is almost the same as engaging a matchmaker: People are no longer leaving love to chance, which is why "Making Love" fits in with the culture of the times.

Perhaps wildest of all, "Making Love" will encourage viewers to do all the exercises the TV couples are doing: get counseling; go on a rollercoaster to feel vulnerable and scared together; bond in this or that romantic setting—which is where the product tie-ins come in.

A website that allows viewers to share their stories about "Making Love" could sell vacation packages, perfume, even counseling services. Meanwhile, those viewer stories become fodder for the show.

It's a match made in ... well, not heaven. It's an arranged marriage between reality TV, dating advice, ancient practices and probably some local hotels. Let he who is against it grab the remote.

lskenazy@adage.com