

Speed dating: the battle of the sexes

Do men and women look for different things when assessing a potential mate? Simon Crerar and Samantha Lyster went speed dating to find out

HIM

Can you tell if you fancy someone after three minutes? That was the challenge my colleague Samantha and I set ourselves last night as we nervously joined the Science Museum's Valentine's Day speed dating event.

Big Brother psychologist Dr Harry Witchell kicked off the evening by explaining that tell-tale signs of interest from a potential beau such as eye contact and hair flicks do not necessarily mean much at all, rather the mating dance comprises a whole montage of movements, not all of them what you'd expect.

Laws of attraction demystified, thirty men and thirty women then split in to two groups for three minutes of chat with 15 members of the opposite sex.

Does speed dating work? The rapid-fire format is certainly an interesting way to meet people. I tried hard to discover as much as I could about the person opposite me without dominating the conversation (tricky), and resisted the overwhelming temptation to describe myself as a firewalker, stuntman or sky dive instructor.

The unusual venue attracted a diverse crowd, without a bearded, jumper-wearing scientist in sight. The 15 potential partners I spoke to included girls from Macedonia, Sardinia, India and Denmark as well as English girls with parents from east Africa, Turkish Cyprus and Indian Kashmir. Sticking to geography seemed a safe way to pass three minutes: everyone comes from somewhere.

All 15 were perfectly nice, though sadly no one rocked my socks. This may be because I place rather too much import on looks, and although there were no research scientists in lab coats, there were

no real lookers either. Shallow huh?

Actually, I rather like the sound of a research scientist in a lab coat, particularly if she was wearing stilettos. Thankfully, I didn't share that insight during any of my three minute sessions. **SC**

HER

Having heard horror stories from friends of meeting fetishists and sleazy city boys out on the prowl, I didn't have high expectations for the men that would be rotating around the row of tables at the Science Museum.

Maybe my friends just had bad luck, or possibly, it was because the Science Museum attracts a more genuine crowd, but the guys who attended were all very pleasant. There was no one that I wanted to date, but then I didn't go there looking for a potential new boyfriend and that, I think, is the best way to approach speed dating.

If you go to one of these evenings looking for a soulmate, than I think you would be disappointed. The atmosphere is very forced. Mix in alcohol and only three minutes of conversation, and the result is an environment possibly not the most conducive to making good choices for dates.

I can see the attraction in speed dating for people on a serious search for love who want a bigger pool to fish in outside of work and their immediate social circle. It certainly brings you into contact with people you would not normally happen upon. This diversity also works well if you find that you've just moved to a big city and want an evening out where not knowing anyone in the room is the norm. There were quite a few international attendees including a guy from Hawaii.

Although I won't be repeating the experience, I do think that if you want an opportunity to network, talk to people you wouldn't normally meet or just practice your conversational skills – as the sweet Hungarian guy gave as his reason for attending – then speed dating can be an amusing and enjoyable evening out. **SL**

Speed Dating at the Science Museum's Dana Centre, London. The event is repeated on Wednesday 22 February, and is open to single people aged between 20 and 35.

<http://www.danacentre.org.uk>