Computer dating in the 1970s: dateline and the making of the modern British single

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Abstract:

The British matchmaking industry expanded sharply after 1970. This article focuses on the formative years of its most successful representative, the computer dating agency Dateline. Through attention to Dateline's marketing in the late 1970s, I explore the ways in which new vocabularies of 'scientific' expertise were used to forge a 'modern' romantic sensibility. After setting Dateline's success in the context social-sexual change, I explore its two main claims to authority – the computer and the empirical insights of psychology – suggesting that the invitation to embrace but also to control fate foreshadowed the pressures facing singles into the 21st century.

Keywords: computers, courtship, 1970s, divorce, singleness, therapy culture

Machines have been used to aid the romantic quest since at least the late 19th century, when the printed matrimonial press and love between telegraphers garnered widespread attention.[1] Three-quarters of a century later, a new and more sustained pairing of technology with the search for love found form in computer dating. The dawn of computer dating in the late 1960s drew together imported expertise from technology and social science in new ways, fusing them into a bridge between the 'old, old story' of love and the realities of an increasingly sexually liberal and by many accounts more lonely Britain.[2]

This article examines the way in which Dateline, Britain's most successful computer dating business, forged such a bridge. Dateline's marketing materials and reach – both in terms of brand and customers – went far beyond that of rival matchmaking businesses, both computer and traditional. Moreover, its claims to different types of expertise, most notably from computing and psychology, were brought to bear on questions of romantic need and human nature in a number of formats, and with an intensity unrivalled by its siblings. Dateline thus presents a case study in how the wisdom of the old (the heart that would reveal itself in authentic 'chemistry') and the expertise of the new (the skilful deployment of psychology and engineering to contain and direct the irrational, depressed self) were knitted together in new ways. Attention to its interweaving of dating discourse and various types of 'science' offers

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[1] Harry Cocks (2013). 'The cost of marriage and the matrimonial agency in late Victorian Britain'. *Social History* 38 (1): 66-88. Harry Cocks. *Classified: The Secret History of the Personal Column*. London: Random House, 2009. Tom Standage. *The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's Online Pioneers*. London: Phoenix, 1999: 63. Romance between telegraphers was much-storied, particularly in America, e.g. 'Romances of the Telegraph'. *Western Electrician*, 5 Sep 1891: 130-131 'Making Love by Telegraph', *Western Electrician*. Chicago: Nov 21, 1891, and 'The Dangers of Wired Love'. *Electrical World*. New York: 1886. See also novel by Ella Cheever Thayer, *Wired Love – A Romance of Dots and Dashes*. New York: W.J. Johnston, 1880.

[2] 'Old old story', Thayer, subhead of *Wired Love*.

new insight into anxieties surrounding romantic status in post-1960s Britain, and the types of reassurance those anxieties required.

Through Dateline, this article offers an account of modern matchmaking by machine, revealing the sources of its authority in a late 1960s and 1970s landscape of social and sexual upheaval. It speaks to literatures on 20th century selfhood, psychology and love; and on mid-period computing and pre-Internet technology, using these to move towards a framework for thinking about loneliness and romantic isolation in late 20th Britain. The article also fits within broader histories of mediated matchmaking and courtship, for example those by Harry Cocks on British print personals culture and marriage bureaux since the 1880s and Beth Bailey's classic work on the social economics of dating in mid-century America.[3] Thanks to these historians, we now know about the meanings and practices attached to forms of dating including print personals and high school liasons over the past 150 years and about how and why people used print platforms to help them find a partner. But we know much less about the ways in which technology and discourses of love and romance intersected in the decades before internet dating: this article is intended to help remedy this.[4] Moreover, while the history of mid-to-late 20th century computing is well attended to and the historiography of 20th century courtship, particularly in the early to mid century, is also expanding, historians have not yet looked at them in tandem in the British context.[5]

What follows is divided into three main sections, each offering a different dimension of Dateline's self-positioning strategy, and its ties with wider anxieties about emotional life in the period. After offering an account of Dateline and its origins, the first section will brooch the agency's engagement with the perceived need for pragmatic matchmaking aids like its own, and the hunger for order in times of social and emotional uncertainty. In the following section I will introduce the workings of the computer and the way in which the algorithmic machine became welded to the concept of dating, stressing that the promise of the rational, instrumental, efficient machine was tempered by an undercurrent of fear about anonymity and indifference. Section three will examine the role of softer, popularised sciences such as psychology and astrology in allowing the computer to work alongside more therapeutic discourses promising forms of meaning and fulfilment. Taken together, these sections offer a picture of how different types of expertise were used, linked and made integral to the promotion of a late 20th century romantic landscape in which ideas of rationality and serendipity were brought together in novel ways. Dateline, I argue, can be seen as a

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[3] Harry Cocks. *Classified;* Beth Bailey. *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988.

[4] American computer dating has attracted more attention, but mostly by journalists rather than academics. An exception is Marie Hicks (2016), 'Computer Love: Replicating Social Order Through Early Computer Dating Systems', Ada: A Journal of Gender and New Media & Technology, 10, adanewmedia.org/2016/10/issue10-hicks/. Hicks discusses the early history of British computer dating as well, from a social scientific concern with the encodedness of sexual conservatism and hegemonic masculinities in technology rather than from a historical perspective on selfhood, psychology, and other forms of expertise. On early American computer dating, see also Nathan Ensmenger, 'Computer Dating in the 1960s', March 5, 2014, blog post, thecomputerboys.com/?p=654, Dan Slater. *Love In The Time Of Algorithms: What Technology Does To Meeting and Mating*. New York: Penguin, 2013; Aziz Ansari. *Modern Love: An Investigation*. New York: Penguin, 2015..

[5] For computing, including British, see Briggs and Burke, *A Social History*; Juan Pablo Pardo-Guerra, 'Computerising gentlemen: the automation of the London Stock Exchange, c.1945-1995'. PhD thesis. University of Edinburgh, 2011; Tom Lean. *Electronic Dreams: How 1980s Britain Learned to Love the Computer*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016; Nathan Ensmenger, *The Computer Boys Take Over: Computers, Programmers, and the Politics of Technical Expertise*. Cambridge: MIT Press. For 20th century courtship, see Cocks, *Classified* and Bailey, *From Front Porch* and Claire Langhamer. *The English In Love*. Oxford: OUP, 2013.

laboratory in which sources of authority beyond the self – science, technology, psychology and spiritualism – were knitted together in the service of commercial romantic aid, in ways that both reflected the intellectual and emotional preoccupations of its heyday and set the stage for the tensions and expectations of contemporary digital courtship.

The themes explored below are underpinned by scholarship that places the expansion of psychology and the emergence of a 'therapeutic discourse' at the centre of social and cultural change. Nikolas Rose has identified the rise of 'psy' disciplines, attributing to their success 'the promise of personhood'. [6] Claire Langhamer has offered purchase on how this 'promise of personhood' was increasingly linked to romantic intimacy in the middle century. [7] And using post-Freudian motifs to think about the 1960s and 1970s, Eva Illouz has argued that the 'promise of personhood' represented a thickening paradox. Attaining full personhood, equated with true 'health', required healing. Healing entailed emotional damage, and by the 1970s, relationships had become a classic site of such damage, as well as an opportunity for 'growth'. 'In the 1970s,' according to Illouz, 'a new ghost came to haunt popular culture, namely the ghost of the absence of intimacy….' [8] Dateline deployed many of these vocabularies, especially those of destiny, emotional health and self-quest. In doing so, it made clear that singles themselves had to take an active approach to personal emotional labour, and to take responsibility for the process with which they might find fulfilment. The emphasis on these types of labour in Dateline's material foregrounds their centrality to the internet dating landscape that emerged 20 years later, and is therefore helpful to historians keen to better historicise the practices of contemporary British intimacy. [9]

In the absence of a Dateline archive, my key sources here are the marketing materials of Dateline, in particular full-page, text-heavy adverts in mainstream media and in Dateline-owned *Singles* magazine, along with a series of self-promoting, extensive features in *Singles*, media coverage of Dateline, and media reactions to computer dating more generally in newspapers and television docu-films. [10] These span the 1970s, while the richest of Dateline's full-page adverts, which is drawn on heavily here, appeared in *Singles* in August 1980. The cusp of the new decade provided an ideal vantage point from which to look back over the trends of the 1970s while pushing a vision of the future. Dateline used the 1980 advert to do both, outlining what it saw as the key social shifts of the previous decade such as rising divorce rates, increased mobility and changing norms around heterosexual intimacy, while proposing itself as an adaptable and realistic helpmeet for the forward-looking single of 1980.

A final introductory point relates to terminology. The article turns on the question of what it meant to be both single and 'a single'. Such terms require some historical contextualisation.

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[6] Rose. *Inventing Ourselves*. 88. See Rose also for the '[insistent]' insertion of psychological science into 'modern reality'. *Inventing Ourselves*. 84. Richard Sennett saw 'the fall of public man' since the 18th century in instrumentalised languages of intimacy, aided by therapeutic discourse. Richard Sennett. *The Fall of Public Man*. London: Faber, 1986. It should be noted that these sciences were not to the exclusion of the spiritual realm, particularly astrology, itself considered a 'psychological tool' by some, e.g. Shoshana Feher. 'Who Holds the Cards? Women and New Age Astrology'. James Lewis and Gordon Melton (eds.). *Perspectives on the New Age*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1992: 179-188: 181.

[7] See, in particular, Langhamer. *The English In Love*. Langhamer (2007). 'Love and courtship in mid-twentieth-century England'. *Historical Journal* 50 (1): 173-196; Langhamer (2012). 'Love, Selfhood and Authenticity in Post-War Britain'. *Cultural and Social History*, 9 (2): 277-297.

[8] *Saving the Modern Soul*: 130.

[9] For discussion of the emotional and other forms of labour associated with online dating, see Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Cambridge, 2007.

[10] Ongoing efforts to locate a Dateline archive, including extended cooperation with one of Dateline's former owners, have not yet yielded a result. According to her, an archive exists in Milton Keynes but I have been unable to track it down either through her, the names she has provided, or through online research.

'Single' began to phase out the gendered labels, particularly 'spinster', from the late 1960s, gathering pace in the 1970s in adverts for 'singles' societies, singles' wine bars, and in national newspaper and magazine reports.[11] There was, however, a much more marked awareness of and discomfort with the more clearly American import 'dating', although – as analysis of the Mass Observation directive, Courting and Dating (2001) shows – this discomfort could be regional, shaped by local vocabularies for courtship. However, most respondents to the directive began by declaring that while the word 'courtship' seemed awkward and ancient, the words 'dating' and 'date' felt false and American. Yet while phrases such as 'seeing' and 'going out with' persisted, no alternative for the more material 'date' itself caught on, and both 'dating' and 'date' were increasingly seen in first person testimonies and media reports throughout the 1970s. By the mid-1980s the terms were established and embedded in dating discourse, used in step with the idea that dating was no longer necessarily a means to marriage, but part of a lifestyle that might also include dinner parties and sexual experimentation.[12] This article explores a moment in which the term 'single' was hardening into a familiar identity, a word used widely by singles themselves and throughout the media's widening coverage of singleness and dating. Crucially, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the 'single' state was increasingly discussed as a site of convergence of many of the pressures perceived to belong to 'modern' life, some of which are discussed below.

DATELINE

Dateline International – as it was technically though inaccurately called – was set up in 1966 by John Patterson, a bon vivant entrepreneur.[13] Patterson hedged his bets on the wonders of computation with a sound spread of low-tech business in print and holidays. Dateline's successful national offshoot magazine *Singles* – whose editorial voice was Patterson's – a nation-wide web of singles societies and a singles holidays business completed the lonely hearts empire, though Patterson had at some point started nine other businesses all of which had closed by 1982.

Patterson had been smart to pursue this line. By 1970, Dateline had become the UK's most successful dating agency, among both computer-based and human matchmakers.[14] It ran under the same owners, Patterson and his wife, Sandy Nye, from 1966 to 1998, only beginning to ail and finally dissolve after its sale to Columbus Publishing in 1998. By 1982 it had 44,000 customers, and with its well-known Tube adverts and the relative success of *Singles*, it had clearly pulled ahead of its rivals by the mid-1970s.[15] Late 1970s and early 1980s television appearances enhanced its appearance of success.

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[11] For an exploration of earlier treatments of romantic solitude, see Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914-1960*. Manchester, 2007. For discussion of the post-1960s lexicon around singleness, see Author (2017), 'The matchmaking industry and singles culture in Britain, 1970-2000', PhD thesis, University of Sussex

[12] Despite its title, Linda Sonntag's *Finding The Love of Your Life Using Dating Agencies and Ads* examines casual use of dating services. London. 1989. For fuller analysis, see author's PhD thesis, *The Matchmaking Industry*.

[13] Patterson often expressed his love of wine in Dateline's magazine, *Singles*. e.g. issue 26 (July 1979): 18.

[14] By 1976 it was seen as 'Europe's largest computer dating service', but also its best-known dating service, in 'Science of love helps comrades'. *The Guardian*. 24 May 1976: 20. Account of the company's decades of success also in 'Dateline, 32, gets hitched'. *The Guardian*. Aug 13 1998: 20.

[15] 'Why lonely hearts clubs went broke'. *The Guardian*. 23 May 1982: 4.

Dateline's origins lay in a combination of American trend-watching and the growing role of computers for commercial purposes. Following wartime developments, computers gained institutional reach in the 1950s, expanding into the commercial sphere in the 1960s, and rapidly extending further in the early 1970s.[16] Meanwhile, dating services also began to proliferate in Britain and the US in the late 1960s and to accelerate their growth in the 1970s, with the expansion of lonely hearts platforms, such as *Time Out*'s iconic section launched in 1972, and introduction agencies or 'marriage bureaux' as well as computer dating services.[17]

The story of computer dating is trans-Atlantic, with its origins in the US. Patterson was not the first to see the potential of computer algorithms for matchmaking; he got the idea for Dateline after a visit to Harvard in the mid-1960s, where he observed the success of Harvard's Operation Match.[18] Operation Match was claimed by its founders to have matched 1m people in three years, for $3 each.[19] Customers filled in and returned non-scientific questionnaires assembled by the undergraduate founders. The data was transferred to punch cards, then fed into the computer which, running a programme written by a friend of the founders, would eventually produce a match list for each person.[20] Operation Match in turn borrowed from Stanford's 1959 Happy Families Planning Service, which matched 49 men and 49 women using an IBM 650.[21] It thereafter spread beyond the campus and became a noted feature of America's rapidly evolving, and widely observed dating landscape.[22] Patterson saw a sound opportunity. Dateline too would issue questionnaires, only these ones would claim to be bespoke, and written by experts, with a series of boxes to be ticked relating to personal traits and desires in a partner. On receipt of the forms, it would 'feed' them into the computer, programmed according to a secret matching algorithm. For a fee of £45, the computer would then 'spit' out six names, addresses and numbers that were apparently encoded with similar desires and information.[23]

The company pitched itself as a novel intervention, and therefore potentially free from a host of unpleasant associations with older technologies of matching in Britain such as the print ad. Harry Cocks has shown that from the late 19th century in Britain a surge in demographic and social change powered the growth of the matrimonial ad and later, through wartime correspondence clubs, the lonely hearts advert.[24] There was even a moment, for advocates of rational reproduction and marriage reform, in which matrimonial agencies seemed a possible solution to the problem of mercenary marriage, and unhealthy enforced class homiphily.[25]

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[16] Asa Briggs and Peter Burke. *A Social History of The Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*. Cambridge: Polity, 2002.

[17] 'The Lonely Hearts Merry Go Round'. *Daily Mail*. 2 Nov, 1970.

[18] *Singles*. 18 (October 1978): 41; 'John Patterson: obituary'. *The Times*. 1 Feb 1997: 25.

[19] 'Operation Match'. *The Harvard Crimson*. 3 Nov 1965.
http://www.thecrimson.com/article/1965/11/3/operation-match-pif-you-stop-to/ [last accessed 29 July 2016].
'New Dating Craze Sweeps the Campus', *Look Magazine*, Feb 1966: 30-35.

[20] 'Operation Match'. *The Harvard Crimson*. 3 Nov 1965.

[21] C. Stewart Gillmor. 'Stanford, the IBM 650, and the First Trials of Computer Date Matching'. *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing*, 29, (1) (2007): 74-80 (2007).

[22] See, e.g. 'New Rules For The Singles Game: Helping Girls Meet Boys, And Vice Versa, Becomes A Lively U.S. Industry'. *Life Magazine*. 18 Aug 1967: 60-66.

[23] *Singles*. 45, Feb 1981: 17.

[24] Cocks. *Classified*.

[25] Annie Swan was a particular advocate of marriage bureaux. *Courtship and Marriage and the Gentle Art of Home-Making*. London, 1893; see also discussions about their advantages in the short-lived radical magazine *The Adult*, e.g. 'Should Sex Reformers Establish an Introduction Agency?'. October 1898: 270. Read Murphy.

But the endurance of certain anxieties associated with the personal ad is also striking. Lasting right up to the internet dating of the present is a discourse of fear about violent crime against women, fraud and a decline in sexual morals.[26] Matchmakers themselves, operating from various private parlours around London, were also frequently seen as unscrupulous and exploitative, as well as ridiculous.[27] Matchmaking computers were not immune to parody either, as, for instance, in the Carry On film *Carry On Loving* of 1970, which featured a scamming marriage bureau, The Wedded Bliss Agency. Hapless solos were conned into parting with £5 after Hetty Jacques and Sid James flaunted their own seemingly blissful marriage and a magical (though fake) computer matching system.[28]

Yet from all this Dateline tried to stand apart, insisting it was modern in both method and in social purpose. Distanced from the mire of lonely hearts and the tricks of human matchmakers, Dateline proposed itself as a modern solution to a modern situation. As it consolidated its market lead with advertising campaigns that plugged into contemporary concerns about modernity, romance and urban alienation, it did seem increasingly able to provide an alternative to the laughable, sometimes dangerous services of both cultural imagination and news report. By 1977, it had claimed its 10,000th marriage and had generally managed to avoid negative press.[29]

BRAVE NEW WORLD

Dateline marketed an upbeat vision of the 'modern', 'new-world' society it claimed to serve. This image of Britain was that of a 'shifting' society, its citizens living a far more 'varied life…now we're in the Space Age.' The 'new generation of young people' had left behind the 'the older generation…[who] spent their lives more or less in one place'. The singles of this society were newly 'independent of their home backgrounds' and 'able to change jobs and locations'. [30]

In fact, as the commentary and letters in *Singles* magazine made abundantly clear, many solos in the Dateline sphere were financially struggling, rooted to suburbs or struggling towns, heavily committed to family obligations, divorced, and far from feeling mobile. The reality was that Dateline served a population that had fresh reasons for needing help, for whom the

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Beyond the Ice: Being a Story of the Newly Discovered Region Round the North Pole, Edited from Dr Frank Farleigh's Diary. London, 1894.

[26] E.g. 'Loves comes last as the men on the dole go hunting for a bride'. *Daily Mirror*. 19 Oct 1971: 9. 'The Lonely Hearts Monster'. *Daily Mirror*. 24 Nov 1979: 11. Unsurprisingly, murders were treated with particular interest as in the murder of GP Ann Mead by an unemployed council worker she met in the New Statesman lonely hearts. The Danger Lurking In the Lonely Hearts Ads. *Daily Mail*. 7 July 1994: 37.

[27] As late as the 1990s this image held, inspiring novels like the Frances Fyfield thriller *Blind Date*. London: Bantam, 1998.

[28] Similar anxieties have continued into the internet dating age, e.g. 'How online chatbots are already tricking you'. *BBC News*. 9 June 2014.

[29] 'Computer Cupid Clicks 10,000th Marriage'. *Singles*. 10 (April 1977): 19. There were some exceptions to Dateline's generally good press. In an investigative story on dating agencies, Dateline was thumbed as having paired a Jewish woman with a Palestinian man, to their mutual consternation: 'Not the way to make a match'. *The Observer*. 4 Jan 1976: 16.

[30] 'We'll make you a believer in computer dating' advert. *Singles*. 39 (August 1980).

limits of 'sexual liberation' were very clear and yet for whom old assumptions about romantic security were dissolving.[31]

While the numbers of spinsters and bachelors had for centuries fluctuated significantly, due to factors such as war, emigration and demographic quirks, the period after 1970 saw an upsurge in both male and female solos for different reasons.[32] The number of single people – defined as single person households – increased from 17 per cent of the total population in 1970, to 22 per cent in 1981, 24 per cent in 1985 and 31 per cent by 1998.[33] It was by far the fastest-rising type of household in the period.[34] The reasons for this were demographically complex, with longer life spans creating more widows and widowers, and a mixture of social and legislative factors affecting younger people's life choices, including geographic mobility shaped in part by the expansion of higher education, and the loosening of ties between sex and marriage. A highly significant boost for singles' businesses in the 1970s came from soaring divorce rates following the 1969 Divorce Reform Act, with 50,000 divorces in 1970 to 150,000 roughly a decade later.[35]

Scholars have tussled over the degree to which 'permissiveness', which commanded a dedicated cultural discourse, shaped the lives of ordinary people.[36] The connection between cultural ideation and social reception is hard to pin down, as Adrian Bingham has made clear in relation to newspapers and readerships.[37] But there is some evidence to suggest the uptake of a wider range of alternatives to committed coupledom after 1970: marriage ages began to rise, cohabitation became much more common and the age of first sexual intercourse sank, indicating greater fluidity in relational models.[38] Once the Pill and abortion provision had helped sever sex from parenthood and marriage, singleness – provided it involved sexual

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[31] The picture was complex, with statistics relating to divorce, contraception, abortion and marriage rates suggesting a 'sexual revolution' in British courtship and households in the 1970s; however, such statistics co-existed with the endurance of the heterosexual monogamous ideal, so that those outside of it could still feel like misfits. For general discussion of the complexity of the apparent 1970s sexual 'revolution', see Brian Harrison. *Finding A Role: The United Kingdom, 1970-1990.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2010: 209-242, and Adrian Bingham. *Family Newspapers: Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-1978.* Oxford: OUP, 2009. Further discussion of the effects of sexual liberalisation on singles follows.

[32] Avner Offer. *The Challenge of Affluence: Self Control and Well-Being in the United States and Britain since 1950.* Oxford: OUP, 2006: 317, table 13.11.

[33] David Coleman and John Salt. *The British Population: Patterns, Trends and Processes.* Oxford: OUP, 1992: 217. From 1981 Census Household and Family Composition England and Wales (1984); 'Families and Households' (2014). ONS: 10; Offer. *Challenge*: 332.

[34] See 'Households, families and people. General Lifestyle Survey Overview – a report on the 2011 General Lifestyle Survey. Office For National Statistics. 7 March 2013: 2, ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171776_302210.pdf [last accessed 2 April 2016].

[35] Thorough overview of divorce in the period in Jane Lewis. *The End of Marriage? Individualism and Intimate Relations.* Cambridge: CUP, 2002. 'Divorces in England and Wales, 2010'. Office of National Statistics. [http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_246403.pdf]: 2.

[36] E.g. *The Permissive Society: The Guardian Inquiry*. London: Panther Books, 1969; for overview see also Marcus Collins (Ed.). *The Permissive Society and its Enemies: Sixties British Culture*. London: Rivers Oram, 2007, introduction.

[37] Bingham. *Family Newspapers*, 10.

[38] For comprehensive statistics, see Coleman and Salt. *The British Population*: 188; AH Halsey and Josephine Webb (eds). *Twentieth Century British Trends*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000: 59; also Harrison. *Finding A Role.*

experimentation – could in fact become a key rite of passage for people in their teens and 20s.[39]

The reality was a set of disparate but pronounced forms of loneliness that affected metropolitan singles most obviously. London in particular had become the destination for a wide range of young people seeking work and excitement, their numbers swelled by the new class of graduate job-seekers. Following the Robbins Report (1963), between 1963 and 1970 the numbers of students doubled by 1980 there were 300,000 in 46 universities and many would move to the capital after graduation or to study.[40] But separated from home and the collegiate environment, many found that life was a dull daytime job, financial worry and solitary evenings in the bedsit, particularly as the economic gloom of the 1970s spread.[41] Loneliness became a talking point, with experts often invoking the term 'epidemic' – agony aunts Marje Proops and Irma Kurtz both wrote extensively about its affect on moderns, while Jonathan Raban, in his classic study of London, saw the city saturated in alienation, with dating agencies a key indicator of such malaise.[42] Dateline's own in-house psychologist, Tony Lake (whose influence was mostly felt in *Singles*), conducted a five-part social survey into loneliness on Dateline's behalf, finding scores of desperately alone Britons of all ages buffeted by new economic, social and sexual pressures.[43] Although its readership was national, with just two out of eight letters coming from London in an average issue of the late 1970s and early 1980s, *Singles* attended sharply to the plight of London singles. Patterson flagged up figures from the 1979 National Housing and Dwelling Report, which found that despite a falling population in the city, there were more and more singles, with 25 per cent compared to 20.6 elsewhere in the country.[44] Most (365,000) were over 60, but 'the rest include youngsters attracted to London by the search for work, play and education' and there were many divorcees (10 per cent of single-person households compared with 6 per cent elsewhere). The situation of singles in London was more perilous because of constricted rental stock; the capital had 'for some time been the graveyard of flat-hunters', and as Jerry White has shown, London had entered a period of massive upheaval through vast turnover of populations, disruptive redevelopment and a sense for many that old neighbourhoods had

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[39]As Ben Mechen has explored, the liberalisation of contraception and sexual discourse contributed to pressure on people to become sexually exploratory, often before settling down. Ben Mechen. *Everyday Sex in 1970s Britain.* PhD Thesis. UCL, 2016.

[40] Geoffrey Walford (1991). 'The Changing Relationship Between Government and Higher Education in Britain'. In Guy Neave and Frans. Van Vught (eds). *Prometheus Bound: The Changing Relationship Between Government and Higher Education in Europe* (Oxford: Pergamon Press). Stefan Collini. *What Are Universities For?* London: Penguin, 2012: 31.

[41] Sociologist Peter Townsend found that those hardest hit by economic and social malaise in the 1970s were single and poor: Peter Townsend. *Poverty in the United Kingdom Poverty: A Survey of Household Resources and Standards of Living* (1979), digital edition: 902.

[42]Following a decade of worry about Anglosphere loneliness in, for instance, Ira Tanner. *Loneliness: The Fear of Love*. New York: Harper Row, 1973; Suzanne Gordon. *Lonely in America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976, and Irma Kurtz. *Loneliness*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983. British amateur social investigator John Cockburn reflected at the end of the 1980s that loneliness was still 'one of the great uncrecognised epidemics'. John Cockburn. *Lonely Hearts: Love Among the Small Ads*. London: Futura, 1988: 5; for dating agencies as sign of the lonely times, see Jonathan Raban. *Soft City*. London: Fontana, 1975: 147-150.

[43] 'A *Singles* research project by Tony Lake' announced in *Singles*. 1 (May 1977): 15.

[44]*Singles*. 28 (Sep 1979: 12; National Dwelling and Housing Survey, Department of the Environment (London: HMSO, 1979)**.**

become alien.[45] A Thames TV survey of 1977 claimed that 'more than half of people living in London would like to move out because they do not like the neighbourhood.'[46]

Yet Dateline focussed on the virtuous circle of its own promising role in a promising society. Its strongest claims about its suitability as a pragmatic, convenient aid for modern loners were sociological rather than technological: it was 'the most significant advance in modern relations between the sexes since the granting of the vote.'[47] Dateline's marketing skilfully toggled between positive and the negative, indicating the company's awareness of widespread loneliness on one hand and on the other, offering the bouncy promise of 'the new lifestyle'.[48] Underpinning both poles, however, was an eagerness to display the organisational power of both the expert-honed algorithm and the expert-honed matching test. Thus it appeared that the erstwhile missing link in singles' struggles against loneliness came down to one key: data. Companies like Dateline could marshal more of it, and users were also expected to produce the right information. Certainly, such a conclusion echoes the observations of the prolific sociologist Maurice North, who in 1972 connected the lust for productive organisation through expertise to what he called the age not of technology but of 'technique'. The age of 'technique' was defined by the prized value of '"know-how"', the ultimate commodity increasingly brought to bear on a range of ends.[49] The paid-for assistance of a 'Cupid computer'– tasked with applying 'science to nature' – can be counted as one. But Dateline also demonstrated the increasing elasticity of 'know-how', with that of the mechanical sphere migrating into the emotional, subjective realm. Thus the agency pointed to the intensification in the final decades of the 20th century of the relationship between the human and computer, presaging the fact that by the 21st century, many aspects of emotional life would be both catered to and problematised by the world of internet and algorithm.

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Expertise – technological, psychological and relational – was central to Dateline's sense of being fit for a modern audience. Promoting the authority of the computer expert, the experience of the matchmaker and the tools of psychology, it attempted to provide a complete and convincing service that was verified, as it repeatedly claimed, by 'science'. Its promotional materials gave the firm impression that expertise was in itself salutary, and that the more areas in which it was applied the better. The computer was a 'variation on the systems used for launching missiles and rationalising the operations of banks' and was 'programmed and operated only by our own experts'. Its questionnaires used the 'most up-to-date research of British and American universities'. By merging expertise across registers, from the technological to the psychological, Dateline saw itself as a 'new-world' solution to the quest facing people since 'the earliest times'.[50]

Dateline's reverence for the expert placed it firmly within the postwar Anglophone model outlined by Matthew Hilton, Nikolas Rose and Eva Illouz.[51] The company's strategy

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[45]*Singles*. 27 (Aug 1979): 17; Jerry White. *London in the Twentieth Century: A City and Its People*. London: Vintage, 2008: 153, 154.
[46]Among wealthier people in gentrifying areas, however, threats of demolition and other London issues could foster community feeling; Jerry White. *London*: 155, 161.

[47] 'We'll make you a believer in computer dating'. *Singles*, 39.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Maurice North. *The Secular Priests*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1972: 185.
[50] 'We'll make you a believer' advert.
[51] E.g. Matthew Hilton (2011). 'Politics is ordinary: non-governmental organizations and political participation in contemporary Britain'. *Twentieth Century British History*, 22 (2). Matthew Hilton, James McKay, Nicholas J.

particularly fits with Rose's observation that expertise in the mid-to-late 20th century became fundamentally mutable. So long as the expert's 'values …are grounded in truth, not politics' and her 'credentials come from the academy and the professional organisation and not from the civil service or the secret police' then she is part of a cadre moulding everything from institutional behaviour to the private 'desires' of the citizen.[52] If Rose's model of expertise applies to institutions and government, and Hilton's focuses on NGOs, more apt is Eva Illouz's insight that the mobilisation of expertise – particularly psychological – in organizational life shaped the newly analytical languages of intimate life. In Illouz's analysis, the management skills and emotional competence increasingly demanded in the mid-to-late century workplace created a relational domain in which the same qualities were expected: relationships too were now 'amenable to rules and techniques of management'.[53] Dateline's emphasis on expertise made clear that its customers needed tools and techniques as well in order to progress as 1970s singletons. They needed tools to meet each other, tools to assess each other and themselves, and tools to make a go of it – Dateline catered to the latter by offering a range of communications workshops 'especially for singles' designed to help romantic life by raising 'awareness' and offering key skills, run by interpersonal communication gurus.[54]

More widely, Dateline's marketing contained an intriguing mixture of pressure points spanning destiny, stars and empiricism, which did not always work comfortably together. While the Tube adverts of the 1970s focussed simply on the idea of an active approach to dating ('Are you sitting next to the new man in your life?') the print ads were wordier and more earnest, working around a hoped-for double punch: the awe of modern machinery paired with the wisdom of human insight. While it generally managed this double act well, Dateline also had to acknowledge some brakes on the speed of social change, and that computer interference in matters of the heart was not an entirely smooth sell. 'It's just possible you might feel a certain hesitation about joining Dateline' – observed the company, mindful both of the general stigma surrounding commercial third-party romantic assistance, and more specifically of a possible suspicion of the computer.[55] However closely they had witnessed the impact of no-fault divorce and the dissolution of old sexual norms, some singles might cling to 'something of the old idea that true friendships are made in heaven'.[56]

Dateline tackled this problem energetically, using the language of faith: it vowed to make you 'a believer in computer dating'.[57] What followed, however, eschewed leaps of faith, instead enumerating all the advantages of instrumentalism that Dateline supplied: knowledgeable humans, an infallible computer, and hopefully, a helpfully pro-active customer base, all of

Crowson and Jean-Francois Mouhot. *The Politics of Expertise: How NGOs Shaped Modern Britain.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Jon Lawrence (2013). 'Social-science encounters and the negotiation of difference in early 1960s England'. *History Workshop Journal*, 77: 215-39; Nikolas Rose. *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood.* Cambridge: CUP, 1998, and Rose. *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self.* London: Free Association Press, 1999; Eva Illouz. *Saving The Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

[52] Rose. *Inventing Ourselves*, 122.
[53] Illouz. *Saving*, 122.
[54] *Singles*. 14 (July 1979): 15; see also 'Be yourself and also make friends!'. *Singles*. 31 (Dec 1979): 38; and 'improve your social skills'. *Singles*. 47 (April 1981): 21.

[55] 'We'll make you a believer'. 1980.
[56] Ibid.
[57] This phrase recurred throughout its advertising, for instance in a shorter version, which urged singles 'to take the first step to becoming a believer' by taking its 'free test' or questionnaire, *Singles*. 54 (Nov 1981).

which could help make those friends in 'heaven', a heaven that, after all, 'has always been given a bit of help'. For all that they might yearn for the decorousness and the serendipity of days gone by, the assumption was that customers wanted a service socially and technologically 'modern'. This did not require dismissing the past, but rather cherry picking from it. A whole paragraph in the 'We'll make you a believer' full-page advert was devoted to a description of 'graceful Edwardian days' in which communities reassuringly oversaw the courtship process, producing the 'charming custom' of romantic balls. Dateline promised to fulfil that introductory role, but 'cutting out the antique language and the long ball-gowns'. Thus, equipped with its advanced methods of selection, from both past and present, Dateline 'combine[d] all that is new and socially advanced'.

COMPUTER POWER

While its marketing covered a range of themes, the twin transatlantic computer motifs of power and mystique were integral to Dateline's self-positioning. Although the use of computers in a range of business applications was not a new concept, Dateline sought to dazzle, making the most of its relatively low-range machine. 'In a single flash of electronic brilliance [the computer] provides a supply of partners who are absolutely right for you', ran one version of its ambition claim.[58]

Patterson was not alone in using such language. He had entered dating market at a time when the language surrounding computers took on frenzied tones, partly because only well-resourced businesses and hefty institutions had access to them. The year Patterson founded Dateline, 1966, the American Gene Shalit, one of the first journalists to cover Operation Match, called the matchmaking machine 'the great God computer'.[59] Meanwhile, the sense that computer people were a group as powerfully clever as they were socially awkward and secretive, was firmly in place by the late 1960s.[60] A decade later, when the personal computer began to be mass-produced, the lines of power would be redrawn and ordinary people – rather than companies with exclusive technical resources – would increasingly operate and manipulate the machines. Some of the computer's mystique would go, but as dating companies would continue to stress, individuals could not recreate the numbers game of big networks, nor the algorithms that emerged from them. In Dateline's first 13 years, however, the novelty and inaccessibility of the machine played a central role in its claims to authority.[61]

Much of the language surrounding computers in the late 1960s and early 1970s mirrored what Sherry Turkle described as 'equally shrouded in superstition as well as science'.[62] Belief-talk demonstrated both the machine's growing paradigmatic and its still unintegrated quality. If Dateline promised to make the potential customer 'a believer' in computer dating, then similar language was used in relation to Dateline rival Com-Pat's head, Joan Ball, who was said to have expressed 'messianic enthusiasm' in *The Times* for the intervention of machine-

[58]Ibid.
[59]Gene Shalit. 'New Dating Craze Sweeps the Campus'. *Look Magazine*. Feb 1966: 30-35.
[60]Nathan Ensmenger. *The Computer Boys Take Over: Computers, Programmers, and the Politics of Technical Expertise*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010: 2.
[61]For mystique and different ways of seeing computers in the 1960s and 1970s, see Sherry Turkle. *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit*. London: Granada, 1984; Joseph Weizenbaum. *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgement to Calculation*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979; Ted Friedman. *Electric Dreams: Computers in American Culture*. New York: NYU Press, 2005; Hubert Dreyfus. *What Computers Can't Do: The Limits of Artificial Intelligence*. New York: Harper Row, 1972; Fred Turner. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, And the Rise of Digital Utopianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
[62] Turkle. *Second Self*: 2.

aided dating.[63] And for those who had absorbed the wisdom of popular psychology, with its emphasis on emotional exegesis, using the computer to find love could be seen as part of a holistic programme of 'self-help'.[64]

Dateline made a vague attempt at demystification through the label 'the friendly computer' but swiftly went on to claim the marvellous power – 'thanks to modern computer science – of finding the few-in-thousands who can communicate with you at a deep level of understanding'.[65] Whether stressing the machine power or the human ingenuity harnessing it, the evangelists of computer dating were committed to the idea of exerting organisational power over frayed contemporary hearts. Rationality and destiny now co-existed rather than opposed each other: providing the former, the computer helped bring about the latter. Embedded in Dateline's cheery commercial wrapper, the machine was able to take social and psychic chaos and impose order, turning a mini-metropolis of 50,000 hopefuls into a neat list of six names and numbers for under £50 a pop.[66]

However, the raw power of the computer took on sinister aural and visual components. These had been widely deployed in sci-fi films of the period, and were amplified in two documentary films about computer dating, *Lonelyhearts,* (Thames Television 1977), an investigation of singles in London using dating agencies, computer dating firms and lonely hearts ads, and *The Love Tapes*, an hour-long Dateline info-mercial of 1979.[67] Rather than play to the upbeat possibilities of machine-aided contemporary life, these emphasised the alienating potential of being single in the city. The computer did not appear so friendly; instead, the parallelism, rather than the convergence, of the machine world with the human one was emphasised. *Lonelyhearts* – free from any promotional strings – more explicitly welded the imagery of the computer to the alienation of modern city life. The emphasis on the computer's ceaseless whirring and clacking was a dystopian update of the technological din, the 'cacophonies' of modern life, that so stirred 19th century commentators.[68] The noisy industry of the computer was paired with long panning shots of London at night, with empty

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[63]'Marriage: Cupid from the Computer'. *The Times*. March 25, 1972.

[64]Lucky Strike With the Matchmaker'. *The Times*. Sep 14, 1982.

[65] 'We'll make you a believer'. 1980. The 'friendly computer' presaged the tone of The Pet, the cuddly name of one of the first PCs in 1979; see Angus Robertson (Ed.). *From Television to Home Computer: The Future of Home Electronics*. Poole: Blandford Press, 1979. The personification of the computer continued as a central motif in the 1980s, marking a long distance travelled from machines called inhuman names like The Colossus and Eniac; in 1989, Kate Bush would write Deeper Understanding, a song about the ever-closer relationship between humans and computers.

[66] Central to Nikolas Rose's concept of 'human technologies' – which he deems a fundamental feature of 20th century political and institutional organisation – is the ability to impose productive order. Rose. *Inventing Ourselves*: 88. The concept of order can also be seen as relational, sexual and social; in the case of the 1970s, as Ben Mechen has argued, the forging of the 'liberal heterosexual subject' in the decade saw the appearance of a 'range of increasingly impermissible alternatives' included the single mother or the person who was not sexually exploratory: Dateline was one element working against such outcomes, expounding a social vision described below. Mechen, *Everyday Sex*: 5; for pressure towards achieving normal heterosexual organisation in the earlier 20th and 19th centuries, see Katherine Holden. *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914-1960*. Manchester, 2007; Sheila Jeffreys. *The Spinster And Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930*. London: Pandora, 1985.

[67] See, for instance, the computer in *Colossus: The Forbin Project*, or the orgasmatron in Woody Allen's *Sleeper*; see also *Desk Set*; by the 1960s, 'the malevolent computer' was increasingly replacing the 'rebellious robot', Friedman. *Electric Dreams*: 66.

[68]See David Hendy. *Noise: A Human History of Sound and Listening*. London: Profile, 2013, for a discussion of responses to the changing noises of mechanised society, from clanging iron to the ' "flat line" industrial drone': 222.

streets, solitary traffic lights and lonely, unknowable rooftops erratically lit by sallow lights. Here, the anonymity of modern technology and the unfeeling night-time metropolis were powerfully linked.

In *The Love Tapes* too*,* shots of churning reels and pulsing wires by the roomful regularly punctuated the narrative. In several set pieces in both films, spinning computer reels were followed by close-ups of Dateline questionnaires being presented to the computer by a barely visible human hand. The forms were spat back out as pages of names, with an exaggerated violence that riffed on the rhythms of the factory assembly line. There were light-hearted depictions of computer noise too. In talk show Russell Harty's 1982 programme on Dateline, which attempted to match several guests using the computer, each scene was introduced with a comically urgent monotone bleeping as singles' data was tapped into an input screen.

In all three samples, however, the computer represented controlled machine power, harnessed to the needs of people. Some saw other possibilities, and were unsettled by the idea of outsourcing human fundamentals to impersonal machines. An academic at the Cybernetics Research Laboratory at the University of Kent warned that 'no one in the world knows what chemistry is at work when two people fall in love, least of all a machine'.[69] Other commentators, such as the feminist Jill Tweedie, also expressed hostility towards the combination of machine and heart. In a 1970 *Guardian* piece entitled: 'Stick that in your data dating programme' she wrote: 'I've watched with astonishment the [way] the computer has moved into the [realm] of love. To begin with, no computer – however flashy its innards – can introduce you to anyone whose details [it hasn't got] already in its maw…'[70] In his influential 1974 study of London, *Soft City*, Jonathan Raban saw the malignancy of anonymity and alienation in the rise of computer dating.[71] Considering that in 'the last two or three years the computer-dating industry has mushroomed spectacularly', he noted the way it 'boldly exploits the shame of loneliness, and answers to the peculiarly big-city condition of sexual isolation'.[72] The city and the computer had much in common, since both were 'mysterious and impersonal' – but the computer, commercially programmed to profit from alienation, lacked even poetic grace.[73]

To counter such sentiment, the computer could not seem to be usurping the whole process, and a careful balance between technological efficiency and humanity was put in place. Dateline vowed that 'by taking careful note of what you are like and following your guidance…*we* select…exactly those who are right for you' [my itals]. In *The Love Tapes*, the mechanical process was warmed with the idea that – without proper human input – the computer could not be perfect. If the viewer was first dazzled with the narrative of technological wizardry: of the '75 highly complex programmes' that 'compared [Barbara's information] with that of thousands of members of the opposite sex', her doubts were then soothed with an honest moment of reflection. 'How good a matchmaker is a computer? After all, no machine is infallible. Can't a computer make mistakes? Well, the experts reckon that it can't. But there's always the human element, and in the case of a computer, its efficiency depends entirely on the information fed into its memory banks.' The stress on the human hand here was not entirely comforting; it also carried an implicit warning and an imprecation. It wasn't just Dateline's operatives that needed to efficiently process the data. Barbara herself

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[69]'Danger when computer plays Cupid'. *The Times*. 23 Aug 1973.
[70] 'Stick that in your data dating program. *The Guardian*. 28 Dec 1970: 7.
[71] Jonathan Raban. *Soft City*. London: Fontana, 1974.
[72] Ibid.:137.
[73]Ibid.:139

needed to put effort into her self-representation. The results could only be as good as the accuracy and extent of her self-knowledge.

Humour was another approach to the dissonance between heart and machine, as in the 1977 Dateline Tube advert featuring the single word 'Romancipation', a cheeky turn on the emancipatory movements of the 1970s that so strenuously critiqued the institutions of heteronormative romance. The stitching together of the two components also played on the idea of efficiency so integral to the computer. Elsewhere, marketing literature tried to disrupt negative assumptions. 'Who said computer dating takes the romance out of life? People who haven't tried it – that's who!' read Dateline's advert.[74] And for those who paid close attention, it was evident that behind the computer there were well-meaning, experience-honed experts in matters of the human heart: Dateline was a 'we' who understood that 'there is only one computer dating agency currently operating although since 1966 more than 100 have been founded'.[75] The office's address was listed widely on its marketing materials and in *Singles*, and customers could expect to get through to an employee, including Nye, Patterson's wife.[76] However, leaving the personal face to its sister businesses, Dateline preferred to emphasise the human qualities of the artfully-programmed computer. The computer was 'friendly', 'amazing' and obliging. The language of personification seems to have lined up with customer conceptualisation of computers: one client, considering Dateline in relation to its non-electronic competitors, wrote that the computer 'certainly tries hard'.[77]

Ultimately, however, the elixir of love was not the avuncularity of 'the Dateline family' but the fact that you could not get more 'accurate or more impartial than [Dateline]'.[78] More particularly, the computer's 'unique power' was its algorithmic efficiency, a trustier helpmeet for modern romance than wayward human chemistry. Technology here was not a subtle aid to serendipity, like a tactful aunt, but undercut it instead. It did so by denuding life of the randomness that – when it worked well – made people's heart flutter, but which, it was implied, all too often left people alone night after night in chilly bedsits.[79] Dreams of Cupid were what drove people to seek remedies like Dateline, but Cupid was also a red herring, a chimera in the context of contemporary life. 'Some enchanted evening you will meet a stranger, it's a myth that most of us like to believe, a myth reinforced by the songwriters and romantic novelists of our time,' intoned the narrator, played by the actor Joss Ackland, in Dateline's promotional docu-film *The Love Tapes* (1979). 'But fate, when it comes to providing a mate, can too often fail to deliver.' Boldly setting up a dichotomy between the new and the 'scientific' against the 'old' tangles, with not fewer than seven terms from the 'modern methods' camp, it claimed: '*Modern technology* is bringing *new* and *scientific* ways

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[74] 'We'll make you a believer'. *Singles*. 1980.

[75] 'Marriage and friendship bureaux – the facts'. *Singles*. 45 (Feb 1981): 16.

[76] Sandy Nye, interview with author. Rochester, England. 18 February 2016.

[77] *Singles*. 22 (March 1978): 9. For theorisation of the computer as both extension and usurpation of the human mind and body; eg Donna Haraway. 'A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century'. Donna Haraway. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991: 149-183; Sherry Turkle. *Life on the Screen*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995; Sherry Turkle (1997). 'Computational Technologies and Images of Self'. *Social Research'*, 64 (3): 1,093-1,112; Sadie Plant. *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women + The New Technoculture*. London: Fourth Estate, 1997.

[78] *Singles*. 39 (August 1980): 41.

[79] Both *Lonelyhearts* and *The Love Tapes* depict lonely singles in bedsitters; in the absence of available figures relating to bedsitter occupancy in this period, the best-selling popularity of Katherine Whitehorn's 1963 *Cooking In A Bedsitter*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963 points to their widespread reality in post-war London.

towards *solving* one of society's oldest problems – and *nowadays* it isn't always cupid who brings couples together, it's just as likely to be a *computer*' [my itals].[80]

The assertion that technology was required to harness Cupid was made even more explicit in Dateline's full-page advert of 1980. Once again, serendipity, the erstwhile catalyst for love, was bracketed as the problem. Dateline was good because it 'takes the chance element out of man-woman relations …' Another advert ran the taglines, 'Don't gamble on finding your ideal partner' and 'Dateline leaves nothing to chance'. Such language also echoed the logic behind rival service Pact (Psychological Assessment of Compatible Traits), one of whose directors told *The Times* in the summer of 1966 that people would answer the company's 207 question questionnaire because 'a computer, and not a person, will deal with them'.[81] Intriguingly, this comment offered a glimpse of how singles themselves saw the machinery, suggesting that some may have taken comfort in the genuine anonymity of the computer, which was incapable of judging them romantic failures. Support for the computer among potential users, rather than marketers, also came through the same year in a review of a short-lived British outpost of Operation Match, printed in the West One polytechnic student union newspaper. The student writers agreed that 'computer matching…provides a far better way of meeting people than the present haphazard system'.[82]

Dateline made a number of claims for the superiority of its computer based on its efficiency, its accuracy, its ceaseless and methodical hard work and its advanced programming. It is important to note that these claims were as much about lingo as reality. Dateline did have a computer at a time when most households did not, and the computer did run an algorithm capable of processing, in some form or another, thousands of pages of questionnaire data. It reeled off an impressive-sounding description of what the matching computer did: 'a PDP 11/34 with two 40 million byte disk drives will search through the personality profiles of tens of thousands of other Dateline members'.[83] But Unlike Operation Match, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dateline used basic-range machines, such as the IBM system 3, designed for businesses without the money or expertise to run a big powerful mainframe.[84] The System 3's main innovation was round rather than rectangular punch-card holes and it wasn't substantially faster than others on the market. In contrast, by 1969 the American computer dating company Compatibility (an outgrowth of Operation Match) could boast a state-of-the-art machine, the IBM 360/40, the first IBM to cover the whole range of small and large applications. 'We fear,' wrote Compatibility in a full-page promotional feature in *Life* magazine of 8 August 1969, 'that some so-called computer dating firms get no closer to a computer than a fancy-sounding card sorter'.[85] The insult would have hit home had Patterson seen it.

Nonetheless, in a private interview, Nye captured the excitement and consequent commercial entitlement of running a computer in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Britain. 'Well of course [when John Patterson came from his trip to Harvard] back to England, nobody had computers. We had IBM computers, other than that, you couldn't get your hands on a

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[80] *The Love Tapes*.
[81] 'Seeking a mate by computer'. *The Times*. 14 July 1966: 14.
[82] 'Computer Love'. *West One: The Journal of the Polytechnic Student Union*. 1. No. 4 (1966): unpaginated. RSP/8/1/11/4.
[83] 'We'll make you a believer'.
[84] System 3 IBM Product Announcement. 30 July 1969: 1.
[85] 'How to be comfortable with computer dating'. *Life Magazine*. 8 August 1969: 11.

computer'.[86] Dateline struck at the right time, technologically and socially, and its marketing paid dividends. In a 1982 article, *The Guardian* reported numerous matchmaking firms shutting down amid false promises, but noted that Dateline was thriving with 44,000 members.[87] And with Dateline as the jewel in his corporate crown, John Patterson had amassed several millions of pounds by the time of his death in 1997, lucre he used to fly planes and to buy a vineyard in Hampshire. However successful, however, Dateline remained family-run and continued to stress that it was a 'we', sometimes even including the computer in the family embrace.

PSYCHOLOGY

Dateline's vision required the integration of 'electronic brilliance' with the human – the psychological, emotional – side of singleness. As an alloy to the instrumentalism of the machine, then, Dateline deployed the language of psychological know-how as well as, more erratically, astrology and popular romance. So long as it worked alongside other more therapeutic discourses, the computer offered a service not simply 'friendly' or efficient but meaningful too. Indeed, a holistic combination of expertise fit a customer base that needed the upbeat pragmatism of the machine, but who were also falling between the faultlines of contemporary understandings of emotional health, lacking the self-actualising vehicle of a romantic relationship, and cut off from their romantic destiny.

By the time Dateline began its ascent, 'the promise of personhood' had become an important part of the sale of the romantic quest. The personhood Dateline offered sat evocatively alongside its promotion of a machine which, in Sherry Turkle's early estimation, could help clarify the 'link between…who we are and what we might create, between who we are and what, through our intimacy with our own creations, we might become'.[88] Dateline gave the machine a prominent part in its understanding of 'who we are'. But 'what we might become' was happy and healthy in a 'a rich, meaningful relationship with the opposite sex.'[89] For this more tools were needed than simply the computer.

Dateline made clear it was part of the late 20th century's expansion of faith in psychological expertise. Patterson employed several in-house psychologists over the years, with up to three at any one time, and others that wrote weekly columns in *Singles*.[90] Its questionnaire had been 'carefully compiled with the aid of experts in psychology and social science'.[91] The psychometric approach to matching also fit with the emergence in the 1970s of psychotherapeutically-inclined relationship gurus whose 'business' was the anatomisation and streamlining of the relational capacity, as well as the increasingly important field of sexual improvement.[92] The field's gurus included the psychologists of 'love' William and

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[86] Sandy Nye. Interview with author. 18 February 2016. Nye's suggestion was not quite accurate: British company ICL were one of the most prominent producers at the time.

[87] 'Why lonely hearts clubs went broke'. *The Guardian*. 23 May 1982: 4.

[88] Turkle. *Second Self*: 2.

[89] 'We'll make you a believer'.

[90] Nye. 18 Feb. These included psychiatrist Colin Brewer, who was struck off the General Medical Council in 2006 for inappropriate drug prescriptions; afterwards he helped assisted seven patients in suicide. *Daily Mail*. 14 Dec 2014. Colin Brewer and Michael Irwin, eds. *I'll See Myself Out, Thank You*. London: Skyscraper, 2015.

[91] 'We'll make you a believer'.

[92] Mechen. *Everyday Sex*; see also Marcus Collins (1999). 'The Pornography of Permissiveness: Men's Sexuality and Women's Emancipation in Mid Twentieth-Century Britain'. *History Workshop Journal* (47): 99-120

Elaine Hatfield and Dr Alex Comfort, alongside 'the growing cadre' of experts sustaining institutional organisations such as the Family Planning Association and the Marriage Guidance Council.[93] While Dateline-specific advertising stuck to avowals of 'scientifically-based' probability and personality matching, *Singles* brought in a range of relational experts in the form of agony aunts, representatives of the Pregnancy Advisory Service, psychiatrists and sexologists.

The way in which Dateline channelled language from the terrain of modern psychological 'science' set the stage for what would eventually become the backbone of major dating sites such as Eharmony: personality matching. The latter emerged from a longer fascination with personality testing, out of which emerged an interest and belief in the 'compatibility' of partners.[94] By 1964 there were over 700 books and articles on family research published per year, of which 87 per cent were in English with contemporary issues of mate selection, marriage and divorce, sex and fertility dominating the field.[95] By the early 1970s, numerous attempts were being made to quantify the secret sauce of attraction, to weigh up the role of pragmatism in courtship, and to taxonomise love.[96] This scholarly activity appeared to keep pace with the popular feeling Woodside and Slater had observed as far back as 1951, in which personality compatibility had become as important as material security in choosing a partner.[97]

According to Nye, Dateline's questionnaire incorporated elements of the (widely critiqued) Lüscher colour test, devised in 1969 and based on ascribing significant personality information to colour preference.[98] However, the Dateline questionnaire provided in *Singles* from 1977 onward did not have a colour-based section. Sections 1 and 2 were entitled 'Yourself' and 'What kind of people do you want to meet?' Customers were to tick dozens of boxes, many of which were focussed on class indicators (still regarded as a cornerstone of mate choice in digital forums).[99] 'Educational attainment' was a finely graded section with

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[93] Mechen, *Everyday Sex*: 40; Elaine Hatfield and William Wallster. *A New Look At Love*. Lanham: London, 1978.

[94] Personality testing had taken its part in a longer tradition – from the criminological to the intelligence-measuring – that asserted that the 'true' person lay hidden behind a façade that could be located, drawn out, described and controlled through tests. Personality testing and matching was increasingly applicable across professional as well as romantic spheres. See See Geoffrey Bunn. *The Truth Machine: A Social History of the Lie Detector*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012. Elaine Showalter. *The female malady: women, madness and English culture 1830-1980*. London: Virago. 1987. Stephen Jay Gould. *The Mismeasure of Man*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984: 204-263.

[95] Wesley R. Burr et al (eds). *Contemporary Theories About Families: Research-Based Theories*, 1. London: Collier MacMillan, 1979: 5.

[96] E.g. Bernard Murstein. 'A taxonomy of love'. Unpublished manuscript. Connecticut College, 1977: ED 149 258. The idea was developed further in the 1980s. Bernard Murstein. 'A Taxonomy of Love'. Robert Stern and Michael Barnes (eds) *The Psychology of Love*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988: 13-37. Zick Rubin (1970). 'Measurement of romantic love'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 16: 265-273. For the runaway growth of personality testing in contemporary society, see Annie Murphy Paul. *The Cult of Personality: How Personality Tests Are Leading Us to Miseducate Our Children, Mismanage Our Companies, and Misunderstand Ourselves*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005.

[97] Eliot Woodside and Moya Woodside. *Patterns of Marriage: A Study of Marriage Relationships in the Urban Working Classes*. London: Cassell, 1951.

[98] Nye. 18 Feb. The Lüscher test was widely critiqued as invalid, e.g. Claude M.J. Braun and James L. Bonta (1979). 'Cross-Cultural Validity, Reliability, and Stimulus: Characteristics of the Lüscher Color Test'. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 43 (5): 459-460.

[99] Jan Skopek et al. 'Whom contacts whom? Educational homophily in online mate selection'. *European Sociological Review*, 2010. doi: 10.1093/esr/jcp068. Andrew T. Fiore and Judith S. Donath. 'Homophily in Online Dating: When Do You Like Someone Like Yourself?' Short paper, ACM Computer-Human Interaction Portland, Ore, 2005.

six possibilities – the same number of options as on Match.com – from 'no GCE' to 'university degree', while 'type of school attended' proffered 'grammar', 'comprehensive' or 'public'.

But the key to making a good match came from the third section, 'Personality'. Instead of a colour test, there was a 'picture projection test developed especially for Dateline', which asked people to turn a series of shapes into a picture using a pencil or pen. The method was promised to 'show up the personal differences which make each one of us into a separate unique individual'. Relying on self-description, there were 24 boxes denoting traits from 'ambitious' to 'suspicious' to 'couldn't care less' on a scale from 'most of the time' to 'never'. To illustrate how lasting such classifications would be in dating, Match.com has 20 options in the self-description list (though as of 2016 they are rigged around the concept of 'imperfections'). For Dateline, this section was to 'help us choose for you only those people with whom you are most likely to be compatible'.

Personal growth, encounter and therapeutic movements were also co-opting a quasi-scientific attitude to the explication of love and sex. The tenor of personal growth discourse combined the latest from compatibility research with a strong belief in the virtuous circle of finding a partner, experiencing personal growth and attaining happiness, increasingly through sexual exploration.[100] Meanwhile, though it focussed on anti-rational 'intuition', the New Age movement of the 1960s and 1970s also deployed the language of 'the new science' in its quest for personal and relational depth. Their spiritual physics entailed talk of 'paradigm shifts, quark symmetries, fractals, chaos theory, the implicate order and Gaia' as well as of 'biology' calling on, for example, 'the reprogramming of DNA' to help liberate the Self.[101]

Francis Wheen and Paul Heelas have argued that the 1970s saw widespread interest in superstition and the occult.[102] But despite its references to stars, soulmates and imprecations to merely 'believe', Dateline's destiny took labour, concentration and money to achieve. These costs were described in the adverts for self-development and communications workshops, in the detailed instructions for how to best fill in questionnaires, in payment forms and *Singles* subscription slips. Daters were told that deep-level fulfilment took sustained effort: 'By the laws of probability there are certainly people in the world who are physically and mentally right for you, just as there are stars in the universe similar to ours. All one has to do is find them.'[103] This was not an insensitive line to take, and allowed

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[100]The sexual rewards of spiritual heterosexual union and personal growth were evident in *Man & Woman: The Marshall Cavendish Encyclopaedia of Adult Relationships*. London: Marshall Cavendish, 1970. Wallster and Hatfield. *A New Look At Love*; Alex Comfort. *The Joy of Sex: A Gourmet Guide to Lovemaking*. London: Quartet Books, 1974. Illouz is particularly adamant that the period around the late 1960s accelerated the 'depoliticization of the cultural arena because sexuality, self-development, and private life now occupied the center stage of public discourse…[these movements] helped focus collective attention on personal well-being and sexuality'. *Saving the Modern Soul*: 161. See Matthew Thomson for discussion of encounter groups. *Psychological Subjects: Identity, Culture and Health in Twentieth-Century Britain*. Oxford: OUP, 2006: 275-284.

[101] Paul Heelas. *The New Age movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996: 5 and 102; for deeper exploration of New Age use of, in particular, theoretical physics, see Wouter Hanegraaff. *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*. PhD thesis, Universiteit Utrecht, 1995. New Age practitioners often blurred distinctions between scientific and spiritual or folkloric interpretations, using one to explain the other. Hanegraaff. *New Age Religion*: 56. See also Maurice North on science turning into religion in the hands of psychotherapeutic ideology. *The Secular Priests*: 25-6.

[102]Francis Wheen. *Strange Days Indeed: The Golden Age of Paranoia*. London: Fourth Estate, 2009; Heelas, *The New Age Movement*.

[103] 'We'll make you a believer'. *Singles*. 1980

Dateline to play to the needs of those solos trying to interpret the present through the idea of fate with promises to find 'exactly those who are destined to be your kindred spirits', while shrewdly allowing for the possibility that there might be several winning types; all one had to do was find 'them', the 'few in thousands' suitable.

Not all singles wanted empirical measures of compatibility: some preferred astrology.[104] Indeed, Dateline's more astrologically-inclined customers offered a kind of rebellion against the logic of the computer and the psychometric test – as numerous letters to *Singles* made clear, many reached for 'star signs', not computers, in their quest for mates. A well-responded to Singles feature on 'air signs', by one Jill Moore, DF Astrol., suggested that to become 'balanced human beings' required 'reflections of yourself' via 'an individual birth chart' to help determine choice of relationship.[105] This feature was rooted in the esoterica of the evasive Self, not the pragmatic power of the rational machine. *Singles* was also a popular advertising venue for mystic communities like the Rosicrucians, and for computer horoscope services like the one run by one Dianne Denderhah. 'Zoom! You're on your way. You can know!' ran the advert, which asked for birth data and star signs (£7.30 for one, analysis £14 for 'both of you').

Such esoterica was kept to a secondary strand running through the Dateline portfolio, most notably in *Singles*, but the persistence of the New Age paradigm nonetheless alerts us to wider dynamic. Rather than running counter to the computer, it reinforced it, in the same way that psychology and the insights of relationship gurus did. All three – psychology, astrology and the computer – promised order. The latter two urged the help of a bigger objective force outside of the self – computer or star sign – to aid in understanding of that self, while psychology testified to the reassuring presence of 'science' more generally. All came with narratives of destiny and fate; the computer was aided by well-programmed machinery and the 'science' of matching to pluck romance from chaos, while New Age intuition would unearth the real person, transforming her through self-discovery into a lovable person of romantic agency. 'Zoom!'

CONCLUSION

When Dateline was sold in 1998, it had made a quiet but unsuccessful transition to 'cyber' dating. Its name is now affixed to a white label (generic) dating aggregate service: no marketing, no literature, no USP. This is an ironic fate for a company that had been the first in Britain to have deployed many of the logics and rhetorics of the coming cyber age of romance. Its success was bound up with the specifics of the technology and the time. Its high-flown machine-age promises of pragmatism and efficiency as well as of destiny suited a transitional moment in both computing and in heterosexual intimacy. Judging by its prolonged period of success, the computer's unfamiliar power was the right helpmeet for an unfamiliar social climate, and offered a brave new toolbox for a world in which traditional romantic bonds seemed to be sliding out of view for many.

Dateline's rich advertising materials of the 1970s and early 1980s display the hesitations and qualifications that hedged the new era of the romantic machine, showing how one form of impersonal know-how – the programmed computer – was underpinned by other, more

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[104] A variety of astrology matchmaking services existed. One *Singles* reader described star signs as 'a very reliable way of finding a compatible partner'. *Singles*. 22 (March 1989): 9. In *Man & Woman,* articles included 'Sex and the Supernatural' 17 (85): 2353 and 'Sex and Mythology', 7 (94): 2605. London: Marshal Cavendish, 1970-1972.

[105] *Singles*. 45 (Feb 1981): 24.

therapeutic, human science. As Mathew Thomson and Ben Mechen have made clear, psychology in the period was a broad church, and Dateline set its empirical interest in precision matching of personalities alongside the new crop of more entrepreneurial, self-appointed experts on love, attraction and sex. The empiricism – Lucher colour tests; questionnaires developed by cutting-edge research from Anglo-American universities – seemed to offer methods for attaining romantic fulfilment as precise as the computer's. Away from the personality tests, the matchmaker's nous and modern sensibility hovered in the fine print, in the reassuring form of Dateline's 'years of experience' and 'our own team of experts'. It thus tried to combine the best of 'modern society' with an awareness of the seemingly atemporal desire for love, and a more specific idea of decorousness of the past (in the form of the Edwardians), to persuade modern society's emotional strays of its use in advancing them towards happiness. The Edwardians offered a systematic, reassuring and rewarding system of courtship that, Dateline promised, it took seriously, and whose spirit it deployed against the formlessness and confusion of contemporary romantic configurations.

Dateline's emphasis on active provision: of expertise, efficiency, results, computers, questionnaires and psychologists was not entirely top-down. Constantly implicit was the invitation to the customer to take an active role in their own romantic felicity. In this way, Dateline anticipated the increasing integration of customer labour in the streamlined matchmaking landscape of contemporary Britain and America, in which daters are daily encouraged by the sites to enter more information and more preferences. From Barbara in *The Love Tapes* to the Tube advert 'Romancipation' (romancipate yourself) to the fine print in its lengthy promotions, Dateline made clear that all its efficiency and promise was only as good as the efficiency and honesty of its clients. In the context of Dateline's enthusiasm for the self-provision of data, we might consider Nikolas Rose's reading of the 20th century in which 'each of us has become a psychologist, incorporating its vocabulary into our ways of speaking, its gaze into our ways of looking, its judgements into our calculations and decisions…'.[106] However, while suggestive, this is not entirely applicable to Dateline, which was apparently more interested in self-fashioning (making, as the advert said, 'a fresh social start') than self-regulation. Instead, Dateline's imprecations not only to complete forms as fulsomely and accurately as possible, but to snap out of the gloom of shyness by positive steps, seems closer to Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotional labour, in which attainment and presentation of a particular emotional state (smiling in the case of the flight attendants she studied; positivity and faith in the case of Dateline singles) was just as key to the efficiency of the job as its mechanics.[107]

Dateline's first 15 years coincided with a significant reordering of heterosexual relationships and sexual attitudes and its recognition of itself as part of 'the new life style' was central to its marketing and success. Taking the chaos of emotional life around 1970 as its starting point, Dateline built a modern solution with both modern machine and modern psychology at its heart. Dateline's early recognition that psychological expertise would become a lynchpin of dating services was also canny: Eharmony, one of the most successful sites in the world, is based around a special questionnaire conceived of by a 'team' of psychologists.[108] More broadly, Dateline's triangulation of computers, isolating modern conditions, and the language of selfhood would come to underpin the economy of intimacy of the internet age. In 1970, facing a raft of singles newly liberated, confused and alone, Dateline saw the way discourses

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[106] Rose. *Inventing Ourselves*: 123.
[107] Arlie Hochschild. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization Of Human Feeling*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
[108] 'Online dating's age wars: Inside Tinder and eHarmony's fight for our love lives'. *Washington Post.* April 6, 2015.

of self and machine could work along side each other. Foreshadowing the self-improving spirit of the internet age, with its invocations to sign up, fill in forms and pay for more perks, Dateline repackaged the biting alienation of solo life as a unique invitation to embrace, and control, fate. Romantic felicity required initiative on the part of the single, and Dateline's business benefited from loneliness. Glossing this uncomfortable duality effectively would become the model for the global dating industry in the years to come, and set the stage for the range of pressures shaping single subjecthood into the 21st century.