

So how does the Datamatch algorithm work anyway?

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“Datamatch is the wildly popular Valentine’s Day matchmaking service that uses your survey responses, proprietary AI techniques, and two decades of data on the Harvard social scene to generate a list of your soulmates, or if your soulmates don’t go to Harvard, some generally chill people. Top matches are eligible for free meals sponsored by the Harvard Computer Society.”

At least, that’s what I put on the HUDS table tents.

Many of you know this already, but I run Datamatch. (“Run” is such a strong word; most of the time I feel like it’s running me.)

When I tell people this, I always get the same three questions.

One: So how does the Datamatch algorithm work anyway?

(Can’t tell you that.)

Two: So it’s just random, right?

(Nooo...)

Three: Ah...well, in that case...any chance you could code in a specific “improvement” for me? *:wink:*

(:sigh:)

I sound sarcastic, but I love getting those three questions, which just prove—in a good way—that we all want the same things. We all want to know:

One: *how* it works.

Two: *whether* it works at all.

And, **Three**, if it works, how *it can work for us*. (People will be people.)

Consequently, I have a confession to make: this speech isn't *really* about Datamatch. If it's about anything, it's about those three questions. Datamatch is dear to my heart, but at the end of the day I have to admit it's just college students throwing things at keyboards; these three questions are something deeper.

So, first: how does it work?

After working on Datamatch long enough, you get a sense of how people use it, and contrary to stereotype, Harvard students aren't *that* desperate. Most people use Datamatch just for fun, to see what happens.

Oh, there are the success stories: at least one engagement I know of, two blockmates still dating former Datamatches.

It's the little stories, though, that are far more common. The stories of new friendships, stories of meeting people you'd otherwise never meet.

These are the stories I think of when I think of love. Like, not the definition of love you might first think of when I say "Datamatch," but more like...what Raymond Carver once called a "small, good thing." A basic, warm kindness.

Whether this kind of love works, though? Is it possible to be kind in...times like these?

Here's a statistic: 72% of Americans report feeling lonely. 72%.

For all these people, this is where love matters most, as "a small good thing" to someone who needs it.

When you're lonely it feels like the world closes up around you.

When you're lonely, everything hurts, and if it gets lonely enough, you start trying to hurt yourself.

I know this because I was that lonely person once. I know this because I hurt myself.

At that time, it was the small, good things that kept me tethered. Love, the sheer act of human compassion, it worked for me.

It works universally.

You *never* know who needs love at just this moment. It could be your classmate, your roommate, heck, the person sitting right next to you right now. But *someone* needs to reach out.

That's how it works in Datamatch, too. The "Algorithm" can only do so much. Everyone keeps complaining to me: my match hasn't said they'd get free food yet!

Well...have you asked them???

Email, Facebook, elaborate smoke signals, it doesn't matter—you've got to reach out!

Love starts with hello.

That's the "How does it work for *you*?" moment, too.

For Datamatch, it comes back as—free food. In general? As *more love*.

That's the big beatitude: love goes around. That classmate, that roommate, that person sitting next to you? If you show them love, then they, too, will love, and the love will be, will be, *will be*.

I believe this more than anything else.

I believe it because love—the small, good thing—was there for me; and in turn, I will never, ever stop trying to give it back.

The *fourth* question I get about Datamatch is, why, after three years working on it, I still bother.

Is it resume building? So you can rig matches for yourself? Free waffles?

(Well. Yes.)

But most of all, because seeing from where I can see, how happy Datamatch makes people, how it connects them, how it fosters love on every level, I—I wouldn't spend my time any other way.