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Love is in the genes, experts say

Dating agency using DNA for matchmaking

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Forget singles bars: a Montreal dating agency says your perfect match could be just one swabful of spit away.

Intermezzo Montreal claims it can help people find the perfect mate -- and a better sex life, higher fertility rate and healthier offspring -- by analyzing DNA taken from a mouth swab to check for "genetic compatibility."

Company founder Tamara Brown explained in an e-mail that her service was inspired by her own romantic experience. She met her husband through an online dating site, although that was before the DNA compatibility test had been developed.

"If the chemistry is lacking, this kind of blind dates can be very disappointing," said Brown, who became enthused by Swiss biologist Claus Wedekind's famed 1995 study known as the "sweaty T-shirt study."

Men wore their shirts for two days before female volunteers were asked to sniff and rate the odour for sexual attractiveness.

Women, Wedekind found, were attracted to the scents of men who were the most genetically different from them.

Armed with a PhD in genetics, Brown said she developed her formula for attraction between 2003-07 at the Swiss Institute for Behavioural Genetics, whose website claims it is a non-profit research organization and its sole research project is HLA-matching.

It fails to provide links to published results.

Once saliva samples arrive at GenePartner, a Swiss company, for biological matchmaking analysis, they are coded and the numbers are plugged into a computer for analysis.

Brown points out biology alone isn't sufficient for a successful relationship; you also need social compatibility.

"Two people can be a perfect biological match but there might be 40 years of age difference between them."

But can genes actually help pick a mate?

Maybe on an evolutionary basis but not individually, said human pheromones expert Johan Lundstrom, who heads the Cognitive Neuroimaging Laboratory at the Monell Chemical Senses Centre in Philadelphia.

While it is true that people prefer mates with different HLA genes from their own, a partner that is completely dissimilar is not the sexiest, he said.

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