

Speed dating was fun but it had its limits

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CALGARY HERALD

It's like a scene from *The Matrix*. "Why are you here?" she asks. "Y'know, the same as everyone else." "No, why are YOU here?" No answer. "Oh my God, you're The One! I heard about you! I heard you were going to be here!"

Pause. "What do you mean?" "They told me about you. They told me what you're doing. So what do you REALLY think?"

No answer. "It's pretty dumb, isn't it?" The girl questioning this reporter was a waitress at the cafe the speed dating session was held at, filling in for a date who failed to show up. She was the only person other than the organizers aware that a journalist would be sitting in to observe the sessions with Six Minute Dates.

What started out looking like a job fair with all the romance of a sperm donor interview turned out to seem anything but dumb.

Over the course of the hour — 10 dates, six minutes each — each of the 20 candidates — 10 guys, 10 girls — went out of their way to make the other comfortable. In the interest of respecting patrons' privacy, none of the participants have been identified.

At first it was like a junior high dance. The men showed up early and gathered in one corner of the cafe, talking about what men talk about in these situations.

Women straggled in later and leaned into the conversation.

The group was made up of the demographic the brochure advertised — young professionals with no time to meet dating partners outside work, people new to the city who were looking for friends, and singles who were fed up with the club/supermarket/laundry scene.

Most of my dates began with the standard, "So have you done this before?" Only one girl had. "That's why I'm late. I was with a guy I had met at the last session." How was that? "I wouldn't be here if that didn't go well." She said she found success last time with just one question — "What are you passionate about?" Others had similar screeners.

Few people had difficulty in carrying a conversation, at least not for six minutes. Everyone seemed happy with their decision to partake in the session, most said they were impressed with the choices they could make.

Most topics of conversation were picked from the following pool — What you do, Why you do it, What you do when you're not doing it, Why you're here (in the geographical, not philosophical sense), What you're looking for, and What your favourites in pop culture are. If the conversation ever dwindled, a standard set of questions had been propped up at each table, though no one at our session admitted to using them.

Everyone had the courtesy to at least feign interest in the participants they were least interested in. Everyone spoke about how great the service was and what a fun night out it was. Yet most were uneasy about it.

"If you see me outside, don't tell my students you know me from this service,"



Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald
Is this the start of true love?

an elementary school teacher told me. There was certainly nothing embarrassing or lewd about the evening, but there was a concern about the "desperate" stigma the participants may have to deal with.

But during the hour, everyone was comfortable. People made plans to go out for drinks at an adjacent bar immediately after, and a number of participants went along. Boom, instant social group. Tomorrow, when the results are e-mailed, maybe love?

A few people did match up at that session, we were later informed, though it is uncertain whether they are still dating.