



# TV's arranged marriages

Martin Ottenheimer says finding love via television program not as unusual as it appears

Something old, something new; something borrowed, something blue.

When it comes to the faltering, but inexhaustible genre of reality television shows, there seems to be a boundless assortment of people hungry to get hitched — or have their 15 minutes of fame.

"Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire," "The Bachelor/The Bachelorette," "Married by America," "Who Wants To Marry My Dad?" The menagerie of shows is different, but the basic premise is the same: The American viewing public, show's producers, other participants and sometimes even family members will play match-maker, selecting couples to get engaged and eventually walk down the aisle, possibly toward happily-ever-after via an arranged marriage.

What happened to freedom of choice? What has happened to the American ideal of finding one's own mate?

Nothing, according to a K-State anthropologist. The spate of reality shows for the lovelorn is merely a

new spin on an old and still very much-used practice of matchmaking. According to Martin Ottenheimer, an emeritus professor of anthropology, arranged marriages are still a preferred form of marriage in a number of places around the world — including the United States. And the practice is more common than you think, depending on your definition of an "arranged marriage."

"People in various parts of the world today choose to have arranged marriages," Ottenheimer said. "In the United States, for example, there are people with a service for wealthy professionals who wish to marry but don't have the time or desire to spend time in bars, parties, etc., looking for the right person. The service provides, for a rather large fee, a means for selecting partners.

"Think of those individuals who belong to a church and ask, 'what pressures does membership in the church place upon the individual to marry someone else from the same church?' Or the same race, the same ethnic back-

ground, the same social class, etc. When you think about this you begin to realize that most individuals have, to some degree, an arranged marriage."

Ottenheimer said this form of "arranged marriage" is commonly found around the world.

"It is just a question about who or what group provides the service," he said.

A common thread in most of these reality shows is that rarely is there a "happily ever after." To date, only one relationship from one of these reality shows has culminated with a trip down the aisle. In real life, as with the reality shows, Ottenheimer said ultimately viewers have found that the choice to marry remains with the individuals.

"Nothing has happened to the 'American ideal,'" Ottenheimer said. "I would think that it still exists but that TV and contemporary life are making people more aware of alternatives. Furthermore, if you think of an 'arranged marriage' as simply the situation in which parents select the marriage partners without giving the children some choice in the selection, then you are narrowing the meaning to something that occurs only in relatively rare cases." ♦