

To be single, or not to be: that is the question

Coming to university in a relationship is hard, says **Sam Noble**, but for some Harry and Sallys it can work

I recently visited my cousin who is getting married in December. His house was filled with pictures of dresses, flowers, cakes, ornate invitations and various other paraphernalia. Saddled between a bunch of red roses and a pile of top hats was a thick hardback book titled *How To Do Just About Anything*. On opening it, I discovered that it contained illuminating entries such as 'How To Boil An Egg', and more emotive ones such as 'How To Deal With A Break-Up' and 'How To Survive A Long-Distance Relationship'. The latter two are evidently not an issue for my cousin, who has a fiancée who supplies perfectly-made cups of tea and evenly-buttered toast. They are, however, pertinent issues for freshers up and down the land.

The book rates the difficulty of each entry with little blue hammers; boiling an egg gets one, and the long-term relationship gets the maximum: five. As the book acknowledges, there is no way of avoiding the fact that long-term relationships are extremely tough. The most obvious cause of stress is not being around your loved one for long periods of time. You miss the daily routine, someone being nice to you for no reason, sex on tap and someone who understands your idiosyncrasies when - as happens during Freshers' Week - you are surrounded by people who you have only just met. They don't understand your crazy hair-do, your love for the Klaxons, your mannerisms, and so on. Most people I know who bravely undertook the long-distance relationship will nod sagely at the mention of the difficult first week, the nights spent pining after their darling, whilst everyone else on their corridor was out drinking themselves into oblivion. Having also come to university with a hometown sweetheart, I can identify.

The first term is the clincher for long-distancers. To establish a relationship where both your emotional and physical needs are sated in spite of your boy- or girlfriend being hundreds of miles away from you is tricky to the point of being almost impossible. Most people become a dribbling mess, espousing romance to anyone who will listen in order to justify to themselves, as much as to others, that it is really worth it. They tend to either nostalgically cling onto Danny-and-Sandy-style memories, or defer the heartache of missing someone by reassuring themselves that they'll be together in the end, strolling hand-in-hand into a glorious sunset with their very own happy ending.

It does get easier. It helps if you can establish a routine of phone calls, and get stuck in with new friends instead of wallowing in misery. Remember: whatever anyone tells you, taking yourself like a lamb to the slaughter into Ziggy's is not essential to the university experience.

Of course, surviving the long-term relationship is different for every Harry and Sally. I heartily congratulate and respect anyone who can survive three years or so of university with their hometown sweetheart. I also truly sympathise with anyone whose relationship dissolves. My friends who have split up with their significant others have done so for myriad reasons, from: "I want to notch that bedpost with nubile first years," to "we've just grown apart," to those three glorious words: "I was drunk!"

There is no easy answer to whether one should attempt the long-distance relationship. University life acts as a catalyst for change; either strengthening a pre-existing relationship or breaking it, and enabling you to concentrate on a new and exciting chapter in your life. Either way, in my cousin's book, 'How To Climb Mount Everest' also gets five hammers on the difficulty rating. So congratulate yourself, now you can probably climb a very big mountain.

There's fun to be had on the fresher dating scene - just be careful who you wake up with, warns **Sarah Foster**

Arriving at university footloose and fancy free, I was certain it would be a whirlwind of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Of course, I was mainly basing this assumption on *Animal House*. I was somewhat less than impressed with the reality.

While my Freshers' Week naturally involved copious amounts of alcohol, even that was not enough to prevent the realisation that the most convenient dating pool available to me, the boys in my block, really wasn't likely to offer up the goods.

Despite my friends and I deciding that none of the people we lived with possessed any potential as life partners, many of us were still tempted by alcohol and morbid curiosity. One problem: whilst half-hearted, half-conscious hook-ups are part of any decent university experience, the thrill of a one night stand is greatly reduced when you have to share a bathroom with your fling for the rest of the year.

If indulging in activity that you think you might regret in the morning, it is best to try and do it with someone that you will never, ever see again. For one thing, the rest of your housemates probably won't know who they are, so you won't be forced to sit through squawks of

'YOU KISSED WHO?!?'. If you are regretting a saliva swap, it really is the last thing that you want in the morning - and certainly not when you're also nursing a hangover from hell.

Of course, regrettable hook-ups are sort of what Freshers' Week, if not the whole of the first term, is for. I know that almost all the people who I now do my very best to avoid on campus are all casualties of that fateful first term; that period when you realise that not only are you living on your own for the first time, but you are also living with members of the opposite sex. And yes, there is also the amount of alcohol consumed to take into account.

Not all romances need end up as shameful inebriated memory blurs, however. While most of my first year at York was spent lamenting the apparent lack of attractive men in the whole of the North Yorkshire region, it must also be noted that these complaints were punctuated with dalliances with not entirely unattractive boys. You are unlikely to find the love of your life in Ziggy's - although there are those odd couples who seem perfect for each other. Instead, from personal experience, I would suggest two places which, to me, were a beacon of joy in the desolate ocean of fresher dating.

Firstly, look at the other people on your course. There is nothing more romantic than late-night study sessions in the library, and there is a mine of possible conversation topics, starting with your new lecturers. Unfortunately, if you happen to be, as I was, a female English student, or a male Computer Scientist, than the gender ratio is not really in your favour (although if you happen to be one of the few boys studying a subject with a high percentage of females, or vice-versa, you might suddenly find yourself in high demand).

My second tip would be societies. They exist to enable like-minded people to meet up and bond over things, which, with a little work, can be taken to a whole new level, if you know what I mean.

There are also those unions I would recommend staying away from. Block incest is one thing, but if you're going to throw randy STYCs into the equation, things are bound to get complicated. I would recommend that you do not go there. Sleeping with people who have volunteered to act as older siblings to you brings up an odd ethical question, and there are plenty of STYCs whose only aim is to 'check out the new talent'. Freshers beware; you have been warned.

