

Married at First Sight: valid social experiment or recipe for disaster? (Extract)

“The only true love is love at first sight,” wrote the 19th-century novelist Israel Zangwill. “Second sight dispels it.” His thoughts on marriage at first sight were never recorded so succinctly.

On Thursday evening, however, people will be able to make up their own minds as Channel 4 brings together couples who have never met based on analysis of their supposed compatibility.

It is a well-trodden path for television dating shows – but then comes the twist: the first time they meet will be their wedding day. After legally marrying, Channel 4’s couples will head off on honeymoon, before moving in together and being given five weeks to decide whether to remain married or to divorce.

It is, the show’s producers claim, a “groundbreaking social experiment”. To others, however, it is a recipe for disaster that betrays a remarkable lack of understanding of the nature of commitment and marriage.

Based on a Danish show, ‘Married at First Sight’ has also caused a stir for broadcasters in countries including the US and Australia.

And, while none of those couples married for the Danish original stayed together, as of March this year two partnerships from the American version are still going strong, while one couple matched by the show in Bulgaria, another in Germany, and two in Finland reportedly remain a couple.

Perhaps one of the most surprising successes in the US was Jamie Otis’s marriage to Doug Hehner. During the programme, Otis was visibly upset at meeting her betrothed and said – repeatedly – that she was not attracted to him. But the couple decided to stay together.

“On our wedding day, I was certain I made the biggest mistake of my life. I was trying my best to be pleasant and friendly. Meanwhile, I was wondering why on Earth I ever thought it’d be a good idea to marry a complete stranger,” said Otis, who had also appeared on the dating programme The Bachelor.

“Now, we both look back laughing because it was absolutely insane to marry a stranger, but it was the best insane decision I ever made,” she told wedding planning website the Knot earlier this year.