You might recall the movie "A Beautiful Mind" where game theory scientist John Nash, played by Russell Crowe, is in a bar with friends when a group of girls led by an attractive blond walks in the room. His friends immediately start plotting how they each might be able to go home with the beautiful blond, at the expense of everyone else.

John says that none of them should go for the blond, because we'll all be rejected, and then we'll be rejected by her friends too because nobody wants to be second choice. Instead, he says we all should ignore the blond and only go for her friends, this way, everyone will get a girl instead of everyone going without.

His friends consider it a plot to get the blond for himself.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JDoQb6A2YI

The idea leads Nash into developing "Game Theory," which drastically changes the course of modern economics. He later receives the noble prize.

Maximizing Utility

Utility in economics is "satisfaction." When we consume goods and services, it increases our utility. Economics is all about maximizing utility. Yet true "utility" or satisfaction in life, doesn't come from goods and services, but from the quality of our relationships with other people. The problem is that most people tend to take the position of Nash's friends in relationships, making it difficult for those of us willing to play the game.

You probably have certain friends that you're compatible with, that you enjoy hanging out with, that increase your utility. If you have two strangers, without anything else in the equation, according to the game it's in both persons interest to embrace each other as friends and interact in the same way that gives you utility from hanging out with your best friends.

The biggest obstructions to the game include: 1) Competition for Status 2) Teeth 3) Shields 4) Male-Female Obstruction

Competition for Status

If people could theoretically be ranked in terms of status on a scale of 1-10, and you had a 1 stranger sitting next to a 5 stranger, would it still be in the interest of the game to embrace each other as friends?

Yes. If you were the 5 and rejected the 1, next time you might be sitting next to a 10 and be rejected. If you accept the 1, then next time if you're next to a 10, the 10 will subsequently embrace you, in accordance with the game.

If you were the 10, you should still embrace the 1 and the 5, because you might end up next to an 11, or you might end up next to a 10 who thinks you're a 5 when you're really a 10.

People prefer to be seen in the company of high quality people and avoid being seen in the company of low quality people. People rank status based on the company around you. This makes it in the interest of the 5's to reject the 1's, and the 10's to reject the 5's, and this runs contrary to the game.

In accordance with the game, you should avoid lowering the points of someone in the presence of 1's.

Teeth

Have you ever heard someone talking trash about someone else? It's fun to talk trash about other people. It helps uplift ourselves at the expense of others. The problem is that if the 5's are talking trash about the 1's, then the 10's are talking trash about the 5's, or maybe even the 5's are talking trash about other 5's.

In other words, if you're talking trash about someone else, then eventually another person will do the same to you. The consequences of social teeth are much more profound than this, they totally destroy the ability of the game to function.

The teeth are what cause the….

Shields

Shields are barriers to new friendships. If you go to the store or walk out on the street, everyone has their shields up to people they don't know. If you've ever gone to the first day of a new class at school where nobody knows anyone, and you can here crickets chirping outside, those are shields at work. Most people require repeated exposure to someone before they can warm up as friends.

Why do these shields exist? Because of the teeth.

You can let loose and have a good time in front of your best friends because you're not worried about them critiquing you negatively. You have to be conscious of your behavior around strangers, because they're judging you. The ability to let loose and be carefree around other people is where relationships give the most utility. The more people you can be carefree around, the greater the utility.

Therefore, in accordance with the game, you should reduce your teeth and subsequently your shields as well. Everyone else will do the same. You can do no wrong.

Alcohol and Drugs

Because everyone is walking around with teeth and shields on, alcohol and drugs is an attempt by people to put the game in action, and remove the teeth and shields, so that everyone can be friends with everybody else.

There are numerous flaws with this game however, besides the dynamics being imperfect, it's only put into effect for a few hours every Friday and Saturday night. It would be much more fun if it's always put into effect.

Implementation of the Game

While traveling abroad in England, I decided it might be fun to see what church is like in a different country. I'd never been to a church like this one. It was quite evident, that everyone was getting high on God's love.

Afterwards, all of the young people would get together in a party, where there were no teeth and shields, and everyone was extremely extroverted. If you were to enter these grounds with teeth and shields, you would find their extroverted behavior quite piercing and contagious, until you quickly lost your teeth and shields, and became a participant in the game. Most notably, these people could implement their free trade at anytime, not just Friday and Saturday night.

I've never seen the game implemented in a church I've attended in the States. Perhaps I haven't been to enough churches.

Male-Female Obstruction

The final obstruction that I can see to the game, is the divide between men and women. The conflict arises because if you're really friendly to someone of the opposite sex, it can be interpreted that you're coming on to them.

Rat Dogs vs. Video Games

Many things with one sex, have a bizzaro opposite amongst the other sex. Many women for example, don't enjoy video games or get annoyed when their boyfriends play videogames too much. The bizzaro opposite for women, would be rat dogs. These little accessory dogs that often look like giant rats instead of dogs, often annoy men as much as video games annoy women.

I've always thought that, to make things neutral say I were a tree, women would still be much more attractive creatures than men. The bizzaro opposite however, is that men would have much more interesting personalities than women. You may notice most comedians and late night talk show hosts are men. My experience at the British church however, has clearly proven me wrong with regards to the perceived duller personalities of women.

Why Women are Mean

Have you ever been nice to a guy only for him to take it as a signal that you're interested? It seems that many women have duller personalities than they otherwise would have, if not for the misinterpretations of men.

This created problems for Safeway Grocery Store Chain, which created a mandatory smile and make eye contact policy for all customers. The policy was rigorously enforced with undercover Safeway employees posing as customers. Employees that were caught not smiling and making eye contact were given remedial training, warning letters, or potentially terminated.

The policy worked fine when the employee was male, and the customer was either male or female. The policy also worked fine when the employee was female and the customer was female. However, when the employee was female and the customer was male, it created problems when certain problem customers would interpret it as flirting, in certain instances leading to harassment of the employee. Charges were later filed by the grocery union, stating that by not allowing any discretion of when to smile and make eye contact, it lead to a hostile work environment.

The male - female obstruction also discourages men from being extremely nice to women in social situations, but it doesn't seem to affect them to the same degree.

In a proper game, both men and women can be extremely nice to each other, without the possibility of misinterpretations. The high emphasis the church places on morals and restraint of sex until marriage, perhaps play a role in the absence of this obstruction at the British church.

Degeneracy of High Schools

A place that seems to be the complete opposite of the game, is high school. The extreme competition for status, seems to lead everyone to focus on themselves without concern for the benefit of the group. High School's are filled with teeth and shields. Like John Nash's friends in the bar, everybody goes for the blond and everybody loses.

Increase Your Utility

While a nice new house or fancy sports car might increase your utility or "satisfaction," you can increase your utility 10 fold over what money can give you by simply embracing the game.

Implementation of the Game

The great philosophical question that remains, is what do you do if you want to play the game and nobody else does?

Trade Deficits

When a person is being more extroverted towards someone than what they're getting in return, it creates a trade deficit. Some people are better able to handle these deficits than others. For some, the greater the deficit the greater the headache.

The Popular Person

You'll notice that the most popular people don't generally have shields or teeth, they attain their status by charming everyone. The trait that they do have however, is the ability to sustain large trade deficits.

Alcohol and drugs allow for temporarily sustaining large trade deficits. God's love apparently does also. Sales people and phone solicitors are also good at maintaining deficits. Are there other ways?

Don't Go for the Blond

While you might not be able to convince your friends not to go for the blond, you can outflank their positions by being nice to everyone. Expect to encounter large trade deficits however, to which you should either have alcohol and drugs, God's love, Tylenol and Advil, a phone solicitor training course, or mmmmmm, well I'm out of ideas.

Economically Backwards?

While society has made great leaps in the past century with regards to material wealth, if we look at "real utility" are we really so advanced?