

«Pi mal Daumen» – Frühlings-Faustregeln

RUDOLF M. SCHREIER — WHAT HAS TWO THUMBS AND SPEAKS FRENCH?

It's spring, the sun is shining, and hormones are in the air: Take these handy tips for survival and better living, easily calculable or executable without the aid of a calculator.

Disclaimer: When the editor writes „they“ and „their“, he does not endorse nor condemn polygamy. The terms are purely used for gender correctness.

Half-plus-seven rule

A controversial concept, the half-plus-seven rule supposedly establishes limits of socially acceptable age disparity in romantic relationships. It is based on a simple linear equation and its inverse:

$$x = y/2 - 14$$

$$x = 2y - 14$$

Here, x and y denote the ages of the older and younger partner, respectively. By exchanging these variables, one can derive the pair of the lowermost and uppermost lines depicted in the graph.

The innermost line is the identity line and serves as an orientation; the two remaining lines are purely product of the author's personal feelings. It seems that for sake of simplicity, i.e. choosing only the simple divisor 2, the inclines are somewhat too level and steep, respectively. The reader is instigated to make their own judgement about the correctness of this formula.

The German-speaking reader might also find that one of the upper lines delimits the region in which you would still call someone “Du” instead of the more formal “Sie”.

Thirty-seven-percent or “try-a-dozen” rule

Given an overly large set of n products, and the task of finding the one of highest worth, the obvious solution unfortunately also has a runtime of n . Finding a heuristic – i.e. a method of finding a over-proportionally “good” result using a fracture of the spent resources – is obviously a very interesting problem.

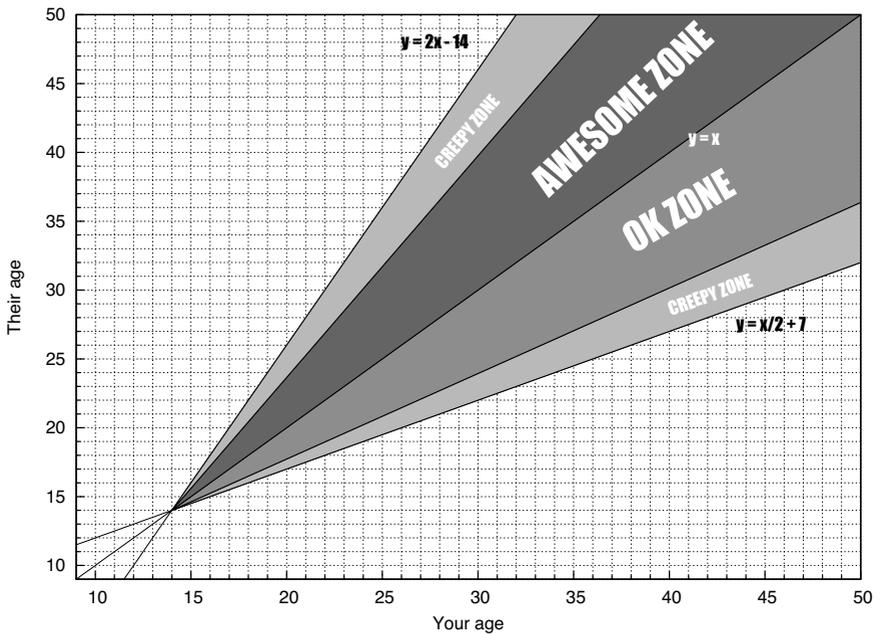
The method proposed here consists of sampling a certain random subset – the eponymous 37 percent or a dozen samples – and, after remembering the maximum worth in the initial subset, choosing the first sample from the remaining products that exceeds it.



While this seems an exaggerated thing to do for items the worth of which can be judged very quickly, this method has also been suggested as a principle in human mating strategies. After all, getting to know a prospective partner is much more complicated than choosing a new couch. It also appears more logical that this would be an intrinsic function of the human mind, as this heuristic is highly trivial compared to a more complicated sample analysis. For further details, I refer the such-inclined reader to [1].

The interested programmer might want to try this out using a scripting language with good permutation/selection features: Yours truly tried this in Java, and the results were really astonishing. For example, for the “try-a-dozen” rule, the method selected a worth of 95 (out of a maximum 99) after only sampling 23% of the worths. Hopefully these numbers will cheer up anyone who would like to believe in “soul mates”, but is discouraged by its statistical improbability. ①

[1] Geoffrey Miller: The Mating Mind (2001), ISBN 978-0385495172.



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