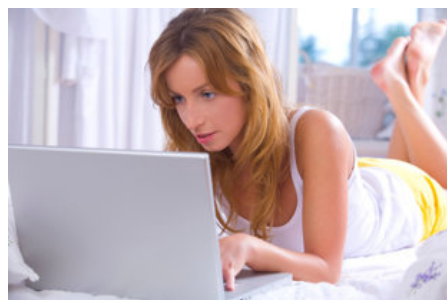


Does Online Dating Really Lead to Better Marriages?

By Elise Solé, Shine Staff | Love + Sex – Thu, Jun 6, 2013 11:31 AM EDT



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We've all heard horror stories about Internet dates—they usually involve someone lying about their age or height, being a bad tipper, or ditching the evening entirely.

So it may surprise you to learn that couples that met online reported slightly happier marriages than those who met offline, according to a study published this week in the [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#). In a survey of around 19,000 participants, researchers found that 6.7% marriages that started offline ended in separation or divorce. Meanwhile, only 5.9% of marriages that began through dating sites ended in separation or divorce.

It may seem like a small difference, but it's just the beginning of tracking long-term effects of the Internet on our personal lives. Because online dating is still so new to our cultural framework, we're only just starting to measure the impact it will have on marriage and, perhaps,

divorce. According to the Center for Disease Control, the country's current divorce rate is an estimated 44% -- but this figure encompasses a longer time period than the study. We don't know if online daters will maintain their lower divorce rate, given another 10 or 20 years. This latest study does raise questions about the new ways we decide on partners and how it may affect our compatibility in the long term.

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The study was led by John T. Cacioppo, a psychology professor at the University of Chicago's psychology department. Cacioppo, who could not be reached for comment, found that 30% of couples that tied the knot between 2005 and 2012 met online (45% of them through a dating site, and the rest through social media, chat rooms, instant messaging, and other venues). Even more interesting: Couples that met online tended to be more educated and employed, and had longer marriages than couples that met offline. Despite the encouraging findings for online daters, the research has been met with skepticism, considering its financial backer is the online dating site [eHarmony](#). Still, the research was overseen by independent statisticians and is being considered a significant contribution to research on marriage and the Internet.

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So, how could an online profile promise a lifetime of happily ever after? "It's a bit of a mystery to us, but it could be because people who sign up for online dating are more goal-oriented toward dating in the first place," says Grant Langston, vice president of customer experience at eHarmony. "Unlike, say, meeting at a bar, people who join an [online dating service](#) may be more serious about finding love. They may also meet people they're more compatible with from the start. For example, at eHarmony, customers fill out an extensive personal questionnaire so we can best match them."

There's also the idea that people tend to be more relaxed and candid when they're not in person and contending with facial cues and body language. "When people aren't anxious, they may fill out their profiles more honestly," says Langston. And that transparency can save time when weeding out potential suitors.

As for sticking it out for the long haul, Langston said when couples make their match in a more thoughtful manner from the get-go, the the odds for a stronger, long-lasting marriage are better.

However, according to Paul [Hokemeyer](#), PhD, a New York City-based licensed marriage and family therapist, online dating can offer its share of complications. "There are some people who are committed to the hunt of finding a relationship, but are not necessarily interested in maintaining it," he says. "Someone may put lots of effort into creating an online dating profile because they get a thrill from the possibility of new relationships. To them, online dating is a numbers game, rather than a method for finding true love.

"There are many reasons to try online dating—maybe you live in a remote area, are too busy to go out and meet people, or are shy in social settings—but you may not want to put too much stock into how you met a person," says Hokemeyer. "Some relationships flourish based on qualities that a dating algorithm can't measure and nothing beats the magic of locking eyes with someone for the first time."

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