THE MYTH LIST

Seven dating myths, *checked*

Things everyone “knows” about dating, checked against the strongest research we could find: studies that pool many studies, and large projects run across many labs and countries. Starting over? Most of these are myths about who to look for next.

7 MYTHS · 7 VERDICTS

THE EVIDENCE BEHIND IT — 11 sources

META-ANALYSES 6	LARGE LONG-TERM OR NATIONAL STUDIES 2
MANY-LAB OR MULTI-COUNTRY PROJECTS 2	EXPERT REVIEWS 1

4 Oct 2026 · numbers checked against published abstracts

Educational, not therapy or relationship advice

HOW WE CHECK A MYTH

Not every study *settles it*

A single study can be a fluke. Every verdict here rests on the strongest kinds of evidence we could find, and each one is labeled.

HOW STRONG

ROBUST A meta-analysis, or a preregistered many-lab or multi-country project

SUPPORTED Several studies, or one very large study following people over time

REVIEW Experts summarizing a thin body of research

HOW TO READ THE NUMBERS

r A correlation from 0 to 1. About .10 is small, .30 moderate, .50 large. A minus sign means the two move in opposite directions.

d A difference between groups. About .20 is small, .50 medium, .80 large.

β Like r, after other things are taken into account.

LINKED ISN'T CAUSED

Most relationship research follows couples who already formed, so it can't show what caused what. Every verdict says what the research can't tell you.

THE SEVEN MYTHS

1. "Opposites attract."
2. "Men care about looks; women care about money."
3. "The right checklist finds the right person."
4. "Your attachment style decides your relationships."
5. "Speak your partner's love language."
6. "Good couples don't fight."
7. "Money fights are about not having enough money."

MYTH 1 OF 7 VERDICT: MOSTLY FALSE

“Opposites attract.”

People tend to be drawn to people like them.

1

r = .47 how strongly actual similarity went with attraction, across 313 studies

Across 313 studies, people were more attracted to others who were like them, and to others they believed were like them (r = .39). Couples resemble each other too: across 199 studies, partners were most alike on political values (r = .58) and least alike on extraversion (r = .08).

The twist: actually being similar mattered most before people had really met. In existing relationships it no longer predicted attraction, but feeling similar still did.

Actual similarity (r = .47) and perceived similarity (r = .39) both went with attraction.

Montoya, Horton & Kirchner 2008 313 studies · 460 effects Meta-analysis ROBUST

Partners resembled each other on most of 22 traits, from political values (r = .58) to extraversion (r = .08).

Horwitz et al. 2023 199 studies · up to 79,074 couples Meta-analysis ROBUST

THE RESEARCH CAN TELL YOU

✓ That similar people tend to attract and pair up

IT CAN’T TELL YOU

✗ That matching more traits makes a couple happier. In three national samples of 23,250 people, couple similarity explained less than 0.5% of relationship satisfaction.

TRY INSTEAD

1. Notice whether you feel understood, not whether your hobbies match.

SOURCES Montoya 2008 Horwitz 2023 Dyrenforth 2010

MYTH 2 OF 7 VERDICT: TRUE ON PAPER, NOT IN PRACTICE

“Men care about looks; women care about money.”

2

When people meet real partners, the difference between the sexes mostly disappears.

r ≈ .40 how strongly attractiveness predicted romantic interest, for women and men alike

Asked about imaginary partners, men and women reliably say they weigh looks and earning prospects differently.

But across 97 studies of how people rated real potential partners, attractiveness mattered about equally for both sexes (r ≈ .40), and earning prospects mattered a little for both (r ≈ .10). The difference between the sexes was tiny and not statistically significant.

> Attractiveness (r ≈ .40) and earning prospects (r ≈ .10) predicted romantic evaluations about equally for women and men.
>
> **Eastwick, Luchies, Finkel & Hunt 2014** 97 studies Meta-analysis ROBUST

THE RESEARCH CAN TELL YOU

✓ That what people say they want and how they actually respond can be quite different

IT CAN’T TELL YOU

✗ Whether a relationship will last or be good. These studies measured attraction, not long-term outcomes.

TRY INSTEAD

1. Use your list to clarify your values, not to filter people out.

SOURCES Eastwick 2014

MYTH 3 OF 7 VERDICT: MOSTLY FALSE

“The right checklist finds the right person.”

3

Matching preferences predicts some liking, not a guaranteed match.

β ≈ .04 average effect of matching a partner to your ideals, trait by trait, across 43 countries

A registered report with 10,358 people in 43 countries tested whether people feel better about partners who match their ideals. Trait by trait, the effects were very small (average β ≈ .04).

Matching the overall pattern of what you want did a little more (β = .19), and less again (β = .11) once you allow for what nearly everyone wants.

Matching specific traits on people’s lists had very small effects on how they felt about real partners.

Eastwick et al. 2024 10,358 people · 43 countries Registered report ROBUST

THE RESEARCH CAN TELL YOU

✓ Small matching effects

IT CAN’T TELL YOU

✗ That values don’t matter. Whether you both want children, or want to live in the same place, is about sharing one life, and worth asking directly.

TRY INSTEAD

1. Keep three non-negotiables. Let the rest surprise you.

SOURCES Eastwick 2024

MYTH 4 OF 7 VERDICT: OVERSTATED

“Your attachment style decides your relationships.”

4

A real link, but a modest one. How the relationship actually feels matters more.

43 long-term couple studies pooled: how the relationship felt predicted satisfaction better than traits like attachment

Across 132 studies, insecure attachment went with lower relationship satisfaction, more for your own satisfaction than your partner’s, and the link varied with age, relationship length and region.

In a project pooling 43 couple studies from 29 labs, attachment was among the stronger individual traits. But it added nothing once people’s experience of the relationship was known: believing their partner was committed, feeling appreciated, sexual satisfaction, and how conflict went.

Insecure attachment was linked to lower satisfaction, more strongly for your own than your partner’s.

Candel & Turliuc 2019 132 studies Meta-analysis ROBUST

Relationship experiences predicted satisfaction; traits like attachment added nothing beyond them.

Joel et al. 2020 43 datasets · 29 labs Many-lab project ROBUST

THE RESEARCH CAN TELL YOU

✓ That insecure attachment and lower satisfaction go together, modestly

IT CAN’T TELL YOU

✕ How any one person will behave, or that a style is fixed for life

TRY INSTEAD

1. Watch what they do when you need them, not which box they fit.

SOURCES Candel 2019 Joel 2020

MYTH 5 OF 7 VERDICT: NOT SUPPORTED AS STATED

“Speak your partner’s love language.”

5

The idea’s three core claims haven’t held up in research.

3 of 3 of the love-languages model’s central assumptions lack strong research support

A 2024 review found little research on love languages, and what exists doesn’t strongly support the book’s three central ideas: that each person has one preferred language, that there are five of them, and that couples are happier when partners speak each other’s.

The authors suggest love works more like a balanced diet: people need the full range, not just one thing.

Little empirical support for a preferred language, for five languages, or for “matching”.

Impett, Park & Muise 2024 Review of the research Expert review REVIEW

THE RESEARCH CAN TELL YOU

✓ That the popular model’s core claims lack strong evidence

IT CAN’T TELL YOU

✗ That kind words, time, touch, help or gifts don’t matter. They’re all worth giving.

TRY INSTEAD

1. Ask, “What would feel most supportive this week?”

SOURCES Impett 2024

MYTH 6 OF 7 VERDICT: FALSE: IT'S HOW, NOT WHETHER

"Good couples don't fight."

What predicts trouble is a pattern of hostile conflict, not disagreeing.

6

d = −.41 how strongly negative communication predicted breaking up, across 64 studies

Across 64 couple studies, negative communication, such as hostility, contempt and withdrawal, predicted lower relationship quality later (r ≈ −.17) and breaking up (d = −.41). Positive communication predicted later quality (r ≈ .15), but not, significantly, whether couples split.

These are small-to-moderate effects of patterns over time. One bad argument tells you little.

> Negative communication predicted lower later quality and breakups; positive communication predicted later quality.
>
> **Kanter et al. 2022** 64 studies · 1,784 estimates Meta-analysis ROBUST

THE RESEARCH CAN TELL YOU

✓ That a lasting pattern of hostile or withdrawing conflict predicts worse outcomes

IT CAN'T TELL YOU

✗ That one fight predicts a breakup, or that there's a magic ratio of good to bad moments

TRY INSTEAD

1. After a disagreement, ask: did anything actually change?

SOURCES Kanter 2022

MYTH 7 OF 7 VERDICT: ONLY PARTLY

“Money fights are about not having enough money.”

Strain matters, but disagreeing about money predicted divorce more than money itself.

4,574 couples followed over time: money disagreements predicted divorce more than any other kind

In 4,574 couples followed over time, disagreements about money were the strongest type of disagreement for predicting divorce. Once those disagreements were counted, a couple’s financial well-being wasn’t linked to divorce.

Money pressure still matters: a meta-analysis of 34,007 people linked economic strain to poorer couple functioning ($r \approx -.24$).

Financial disagreements predicted divorce; financial well-being didn’t, once disagreements were counted.

Dew, Britt & Huston 2012 4,574 couples · Followed over time · SUPPORTED

Economic strain was linked to poorer couple functioning ($r \approx -.24$).

Falconier & Jackson 2020 29 samples · 34,007 people · Meta-analysis · ROBUST

THE RESEARCH CAN TELL YOU

✓ That how couples handle money matters, not just how much they have

IT CAN’T TELL YOU

✗ That income or debt says anything about someone’s character. Strain is often structural.

TRY INSTEAD

1. Talk about spending, saving and debt before you share costs.

SOURCES Dew 2012 · Falconier 2020

SO WHAT DOES PREDICT IT?

The honest *answer*

The largest project on this question pooled 43 long-term couple studies from 29 labs. The strongest predictors of how satisfied people were weren't traits, types or matches. They were how people experienced the relationship:

THE TOP FIVE

1. Believing their partner was committed
2. Feeling appreciated
3. Sexual satisfaction
4. Believing their partner was satisfied
5. How conflict went

THE HUMBLING PART

How satisfaction changed over time was largely unpredictable from anything people reported at the start. Nobody, including us, can predict your relationship from a list. What you can do is watch what keeps happening, and decide from that.

WANT A STRUCTURE FOR THAT?

The Partner Blueprint is our evidence-based plan for women dating men, with one edition for each situation: worn out on dating, can't tell where it's going, the same story with new people, moving in, a big step, a relationship that feels off, and moving on. Each starts with a private Safety Check, then one page a week, and every step shows the studies behind it.

Your edition is $19. Guided adds a weekly check-in email for $37, available now for two situations. Both come with a 30-day, no-questions refund. scienceoftogether.com

These are our own products, and we earn money if you buy.

If something in your relationship scares you, you don't need a guide or a quiz. Confidential support (US): National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-7233 · text START to 88788 · crisis line: call or text 988 · emergency 911 · outside the US: findahelpline.com · free safety steps: scienceoftogether.com/support

SOURCES Joel 2020

THE RESEARCH

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