

A closer look at online dating's real-world consequences

## Key points

- Online dating is the number-one way for couples to meet in the U.S.
- Relationships form differently online than through conventional face-to-face dating.
- These changes to the ways couples meet may have large-scale implications.

Online dating is more than just a passing trend. In the U.S., most couples today meet online. Online dating has also become particularly popular among Millennials and Gen Zers, thanks in no small part to apps like Tinder and Bumble. As the first generations of adults to grow up with the internet, their willingness to embrace online dating is telling. In my own research, I've spoken with college-aged adults who have never had the experience of approaching someone for a date outside of an app—a sign of just how different dating is now compared to previous generations.

With all the changes brought about by online dating, research is beginning to explore its long-term implications. Here are five ways that online dating is making an impact, and reasons we should all be paying attention.

## 1. Greater Diversity, but Also Inequality

Online dating is designed to increase access to potential partners by connecting people with complete strangers. One benefit of encouraging people to branch out beyond their existing networks is diversity and the possibility for more interracial relationships. However, there are also concerns that the matching and sorting that happens in online dating could lead to even greater social stratification. For example, Bloomberg reported on how elite dating apps like The League could be worsening economic inequality by providing people with an effective means of “filtering out” potential partners from lower socio-economic standings. Either way, one thing that is clear is that online dating platforms have a tremendous amount of influence over what relationships will look like now and into the future.

## 2. A Higher Threshold for Commitment

Despite the ubiquity of online dating, the number of people who are single is growing. Having lots of choices should conceivably make it easier for people to [ItΓα -Euroopan morsiamet ovat todellisia](#) find a relationship using online dating. At the same time, however, knowing someone better may be just a swipe away might make it difficult for people to know

when to stop looking or commit to a relationship long-term. Social psychologist Eli Finkel has speculated that while the steady stream of options in online dating might not pose much of a threat to good relationships, it could mean people are less likely to stick around if things are anything less than perfect.

### **3. More Long-Term Satisfaction and Stability**

In the early days of the Internet, there was hope that online dating may one day lower the divorce rate by helping people make better decisions when choosing a long-term partner. Decades later, there is evidence that the industry may be making some progress toward that goal. In one widely cited study, Cacioppo and colleagues found that marriages between spouses who met in online dating were slightly more satisfying and slightly less likely to end in separation or divorce than those that originated offline. For those who do succeed in forming a committed relationship using online dating, it would appear that these platforms may confer lasting benefits.

### **4. Less Emphasis on Proximity**

Before the Internet, proximity was all but required for relationships to have any chance of working out. Thankfully, that is not the case anymore. With online dating, people are able to form relationships regardless of where they happen to be living. Yet considering that just over a third of Americans never move away from their hometown, it is noteworthy that online dating relationships may be driving some people's decisions to relocate. Online dating could also mean that people are opting into long-distance relationships at higher rates, which come with their own unique benefits and challenges.

### **5. Advances in Matchmaking**

Matching algorithms are essential for facilitating introductions in online dating, yet they also have implications for other industries. For instance, eHarmony's algorithm has been used as the basis for matching employers with employees and organ donors with recipients. Elements of OkCupid's algorithm have also been applied in rare disease research as a way of identifying matches between patients with similar genetic disorders. As these platforms continue to develop more sophisticated approaches to matchmaking, their algorithms could help drive innovation beyond online dating.