

Internet dating much more successful than previously thought

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Internet dating is proving a much more successful way to find long-term romance and friendship for thousands of people than was previously thought, new research shows. A new study of online dating site members has found that when couples who had built up a significant relationship by e-mailing or chatting online met for the first time, 94 per cent went on to see each other again.

Perhaps surprisingly, the study, by Dr Jeff Gavin, of the University of Bath, also found that men were more emotionally dependent on their 'e-partners' than women, and more committed to the relationship.

Old-fashioned romance isn't dead, however: among the survey's findings were that exchanging gifts was the best way to ensure commitment in the relationship.

Dr Gavin's research comes at a time when the numbers using internet dating agencies have steadily increased: around six million Britons are now believed to have signed up.

Dr Gavin, with Dr Adrian Scott of the University of Bath and Dr Jill Duffield of the University of the West of England, carried out an online survey of 229 people, aged 18 to 65, who have used UK internet dating sites, asking them about their main relationship that they had had online. Dr Gavin's paper will be read at an international psychology conference next month.

The research showed that:

- 94 per cent of those surveyed saw their ‘e-partner’ again after first meeting them, and the relationships lasted for an average of at least seven months, with 18 per cent of them lasting over a year.
- men online were significantly more likely to be committed to the relationship than women and were more dependent on their ‘e-partner’.
- the more the couple engaged in simultaneous online chat before meeting rather than simply e-mailing one another, the more they were found to depend on one another emotionally and the more they understood one another.
- those who exchanged gifts before meeting had a more committed and deeper relationship.
- the more the couple talked on the telephone before they met, the deeper the relationship.

Dr Gavin, of the University of Bath's Psychology Department, and his co-authors, found that people using the internet rarely used webcams, which allow computer users to see one another, because they preferred the greater anonymity of writing and using the telephone.

“This study shows that online dating can work for many people, leading to a successful meeting for almost everyone we surveyed,” said Dr Gavin.

“Given that the most successful relationships lasted at least seven months, and in some case over a year, it seems that these relationships have a similar level of success as ones formed in more conventional ways.

“We found that men tend to be more committed to the online relationships than women, possibly because the anonymity of writing gives them a chance to express their emotions more readily than in real life.

“We also found that people are shying away from using webcams because they feel it’s important not see their partners for some time – there is something special about text-based relationships.”

Dr Gavin believes that the reason that using the telephone and online chatting indicates a deeper relationship is that these are methods of simultaneous communication, whereas e-mails are more formal.

Of the relationships, 39 per cent were still going on at the time of the survey, and of these 24 per cent had been going for at least a year, and eight per cent for at least two years. Of the relationships that had already ended at the time of the survey, 14 per cent had lasted over a year, and four per cent had lasted over two years.

Source: University of Bath

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