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Online Dating Sites Not Better Than Meeting Stranger in Bar: Study

By Cristina Merrill

Online dating sites aren't any better at matchmaking than randomly approaching a person in a bar, according to new research.

Matchmaking has a rich history - from Indian arranged marriages to Shidduch in Orthodox Jewish communities to Ireland's 150-year old fall singles mixer in Lisdoonvarna.

Most recently, online dating services promised a more scientific approach to matchmaking, allowing singles to mesh their interests with algorithms promised to have mathematical precision.

"To date, there is no compelling evidence that any online dating matching algorithm actually works," [Eli Finkel](#), social psychology professor at Northwestern University and lead author, said in a [statement](#). "If dating sites want to claim that their matching algorithm is scientifically valid, they need to adhere to the standards of science, which is something they have uniformly failed to do."

The study will be published in a forthcoming issue of the journal [Psychological Science in the Public Interest](#).

Finkel and colleagues examined the three main services online dating promises: access to partners through profiles, computer-mediated communication and, most importantly, matching algorithms that bring up a list of potential matches based on criteria such as religion and interests.

Researchers argue that this method is not all that effective in generating one's best matches. Finkel said that while online dating is a good way of meeting potential romantic partners, those who are looking for love shouldn't base all their judgment solely on a person's online profile.

"In general, online dating is terrific," Finkel wrote in an email. "But the emphasis on profiles is misguided because people can't actually assess their romantic compatibility with partners from profiles."

Finkel advises people to quickly browse profiles and set up a meeting as soon as possible.

"The best way to date online is to learn about available partners through a quick skim of the profiles and then arrange a quick, safe, face-to-face meeting - a 20-minute coffee date, perhaps," Finkel suggested.

His advice of setting up a meeting quickly is not unfounded.

Dating and relationship expert April Masini of the Web site [AskApril.com](#) noted that some of the people who have come to her for relationship advice regarding a partner they met online sometimes reveal a startling fact: they have never met that person in person.

"For those who are just plain lazy and don't want to figure out what they want in a date or what they have to offer a date, the internet and dating sites are a playground for Mr. or Ms. Right Now Purgatory," Masini wrote in an email.

But those hoping to find true love via online dating shouldn't despair, relationship experts say. And for those who are skeptical of online dating entirely, experts say don't knock it before you try it.

Dating coach [Evan Marc Katz](#) believes that skeptics of online dating need to take a good look at their options before deciding to forego it entirely. What are their alternatives? How many people are they meeting in real life?

"I would just hold up the mirror to them," he said.

Kevin George of [Imago Relationships International](#), an organization that provides training for therapists and referral services to couples and individuals seeking therapy, noted that the method of meeting someone has nothing to do with whether a relationship will survive in the long run: "Technology cannot influence the complex psychology at play in human relationships, it may only make dating more efficient."