

Fact or fiction? Psychologist debunks five common love myths

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"You'll know right away when you meet your true love" or "Opposites attract": These are persistent beliefs about love and attraction, but are they true? Researcher Iliana Samara investigates the dynamics of

attraction and explains which love myths we can let go of.

As a Ph.D. researcher at the CoPAN Lab, part of the Cognitive Psychology unit, Iliana Samara investigates the mechanics of attraction and how this affects the choices we make. When we like someone, how does this show in our physiology? And can we somehow predict this process, thereby avoiding some unsuccessful dates in the future?

These questions aren't that easy to answer because, Samara stresses, [psychological research](#) isn't always so conclusive. What does she have to say about these five commonly held beliefs about [love](#)?

1. We're often attracted to our opposite

Contrary to this popular belief, people tend to be more attracted to others who are similar to them, what is known as Byrnes law of attraction. Interestingly, research suggests that its not the actual similarities that matter, but rather perceiving similarities that has a greater impact on attraction.

In 2020, in collaboration with Quest magazine, my colleague Tom Roth and I conducted an online blind-date study in which we tried to match people with others that were similar or dissimilar to them in terms of personality. Our (preliminary) results showed that it didnt quite matter whether people were matched with similar or dissimilar others when it came to predicting if they would like to meet their [partner](#) again.

However, those who wanted to meet their partner again were more likely to indicate that they were similar to their partner, as well as complementing them. It could be that when were attracted to someone, were also more likely to see them through rose-tinted glasses and start seeing similarities when there arent that many.

2. Women are more critical in choosing their partner than men are

This one is supported by quite a few studies. Men in general are more likely to indicate they're attracted to or would like to go on another date with a potential partner compared to women. For example, in a recent speed-date study we conducted, we found that 26% of the women in our sample indicated that they would like to go on another date with a partner they met, compared to 44% for men.

It's been suggested that women are pickier because they carry most of the burden when it comes to childbearing and rearing, so, picking a person that is likely to assist with this is crucial, what is known as parental investment theory. However, most of the literature focuses on heterosexual participants, so it would be interesting to see more research with more heterogeneous groups on this topic.

3. Women are attracted to wealthy men, and men are attracted to young, beautiful women

Factors like age, wealth and [educational level](#) are only a few that might be considered when feeling attracted to or investing in a relationship with someone. Regarding the age stereotype, even though it's been claimed for quite some time, recent evidence suggests that it is more nuanced than originally thought.

Regarding [women](#) liking [wealthy men](#), it's indeed true that how much money someone makes is somewhat predictive of how attractive others find them. However, it should be noted that this is linked with other variables, such as educational level, intelligence, or social skills. But again, all these traits are just parts of a larger picture that people consider when looking for a relationship.

4. You'll know right away if you're the right fit for each other

This really comes down to what fit means. When you first meet someone, the only thing you can know right away is whether you find them attractive or not. That is usually the first step in deciding whether we are interested in going on a date with that person.

For example, [in a recent blind-date study](#), it was found that people could indicate within three seconds if they were interested in their partner and that opinion remained relatively stable throughout the whole date. So, knowing whether a person is someone we would like to meet again, yes, that can happen right away. But knowing whether we want to establish or maintain a long-term relationship, then we need to learn more about them before knowing they are the right fit for us.

5. In a long relationship, when attraction fades and gets replaced by 'durable' love, it's impossible to get that initial spark back

That initial spark that we feel when we first meet someone, or during the first few months of a new relationship, can indeed fade over time. Its not so much that attraction gets replaced, as in, we dont have to choose between feeling attraction or love towards someone. Maintaining that spark in a relationship just requires some consistent effort from both partners. For example, its been suggested that doing fun and growth-promoting activities together can help keep the spark alive in a relationship.

So, attraction and love are two separate things that people can experience simultaneously, and even though attraction might fade, it can be rekindled and maintained throughout a long-term [relationship](#).

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