

# Five myths about love

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## *The Washington Post:*

Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is...detectable on an fMRI scan? Poets have written about love for millennia, but only recently has it become a subject of serious scientific pursuit. Psychologists, biologists, economists and anthropologists are all investigating the role of love in our lives and our culture. The poets, it turns out, have gotten a lot right (for example, the metaphor of love as a kind of madness gained credence when one study found a chemical resemblance between romantic love and obsessive-compulsive disorder ). But we still have a lot to learn. Maybe love will always be part myth, but it's worth debunking a few of our more outdated ideas.

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All of this makes sense: We like people who are like us. But psychologist Ty Tashiro argues that we should be “rethinking our views about what really matters in a romantic partner.” He points out that personality traits (such as agreeability and kindness) have a much bigger influence on long-term happiness than demographics.

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But he might be the voice of a generation that expects more from relationships than ever before. As psychologist Eli Finkel explains, we have entered an era of the “self-expressive marriage,” whereby we rely on our relationships for self-esteem and personal growth.

In truth though, most of us don't find a “perfect” pairing. And that's okay. In fact, being with your “soul mate” might make you less happy in the long term. One study suggests that people who believe in the concept tend to be less committed to their partners. They're also more anxious in relationships and less forgiving of their significant others. Additionally, we don't need a partner with whom we never argue: Fighting is inevitable. Psychologist John Gottman points out that even the happiest relationships have unresolvable conflicts. According to Gottman, conflict is okay as long as it's supplemented by kindness and empathy.

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