



# The Science of Happily Ever After: What Really Matters in the Quest for Enduring Love

By Ty Tashiro

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In this playful and informative exploration of the science behind how to choose a great mate, acclaimed relationship psychologist Dr. Ty Tashiro explores how to find enduring love. Dr. Tashiro translates reams of scientific studies and research data into the first book to revolutionize the way we search for love. His research pinpoints why our decision-making abilities seem to fail when it comes to choosing mates and how we can make smarter choices.

Dr. Tashiro has discovered that if you want a lifetime of happiness—not just togetherness—it all comes down to how you choose a partner in the first place. With wit and insight, he explains the science behind finding a soul mate and distills his research into actionable tips, including:

Why you get only three wishes when choosing your ideal partner.

Why most people squander their wishes and end up in unfulfilling relationships.

How wishing for the three traits that really matter can help you find enduring love.

Illustrated using entertaining stories based on real-life situations and backed by scientific findings from fields such as demography, sociology, medical science and psychology, Dr. Tashiro provides an accessible framework to help singles find their happily-ever-afters.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"This engaging and thought-provoking book is highly recommended for readers seeking to learn more about romantic relationship dynamics..." - *Library Journal*

"Complete with exercises, quizzes, sound advice, and a practical yet supportive tone, Tashiro offers the closest thing to a roadmap for "happily-ever-after." - *Publishers Weekly*, Starred Review

"Five-Stars" - San Francisco Review of Books

#### About the Author

Ty Tashiro, Ph.D., is a relationship expert for the Discovery Network's Fit and Health Channel. He received his Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Minnesota and he has been an award winning professor at the University of Maryland and University of Colorado. Dr. Tashiro is often cited as an expert on relationship breakups, enhancing long-term relationships, and online dating. Visit him at [tytashiro.net](http://tytashiro.net)

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rWhy Happily <sup>1</sup> Ever After is So Hard to Find

I met Grant at a time in his life when he could not stop worrying. It would have been difficult to know from casual observation that Grant was beset by anxiety. Just a freshman, he was already revered by the engineering faculty for his ability to dismantle complicated scientific problems. His boyish looks, lanky build and crackling voice made his stunning intellect seem all the more precocious. Grant quickly made many new friends, who were endeared by his old-school politeness, good-natured temperament and even the occasions when he could be socially clumsy. However, when his mother passed away unexpectedly, the loss sent Grant into a state of constant anxiety. His high-powered brain spun his worries so rapidly and tightly that he found it difficult to move forward in his schoolwork and his social life. For some reason, the one thing that did not seem to worry him was the intern assigned to be his therapist: me.

I was beginning my second year of graduate school in psychology at the University of Minnesota, and Grant was one of my first clients. During our weekly meetings, Grant showed rapid progress as he dutifully followed the anxiety treatment protocols. For our sixth session, the protocol called for a public outing, and Grant suggested that we walk to a nearby coffee shop. We stepped outside into a blustering minus-ten-degree wind chill and pulled the hoods of our puffy coats tightly around our faces as Grant shared his good news.

Earlier in the week, while perusing old science books at a used bookstore, he saw an attractive young woman looking at old philosophy books in the same aisle. There are few social situations as anxiety provoking as trying to initiate a romantic encounter, and Grant's mental centrifuge started to spin. Before his anxieties could gain much momentum, she was walking toward him and asking about the book in his hand. They spent the next thirty minutes enthusiastically discussing philosophy and science. Grant was smitten. He was still describing the wonder that was Emma when he opened the door to the coffee shop, began walking inside and then suddenly stopped.

In one seamless motion, Grant whirled around, pushed me out the door and strained to whisper in his

crackling voice, "Sir! She's in there!"

*"Who's in there?"*

"Emma! She must work here."

*"Ah, jeez. What should we do?"*

"I don't know! You're the psychologist."

*"Right..."*

We sat down on a bench to regroup. In the cold air, I could see Grant's breathing following a cadence of three breaths in, four breaths out, the same cadence I had taught him to employ when dealing with oncoming panic attacks. As Grant's anxiety rose, I took a deep breath, turned to him and put my hand on his shoulder in the most fatherly way I could imagine. Having no idea what a skilled therapist might instruct a client to do, I asked, "You want to do this?"

Grant thought for a brief moment, and then he stood up. He pursed his lips with determination, straightened his puffy coat and in his Minnesota accent said, "You betcha." We marched inside and stepped into line. As we waited, I peered around the group of fraternity pledges in front of us to get a look at this mysterious Emma. She was an edgy sort of lovely. A hipster with black cargo pants, a well-worn Ramones T-shirt and big brown eyes framed by Tina Fey-like glasses. She was moving efficiently, handling the high-maintenance orders and simultaneously engaging in casual banter with her customers.

When the pledges turned away from the register, the most handsome and well polished among them lingered at the counter to flirt with Emma. He looked like an NFL quarterback: tall, strong and confident. For some reason, this situation sparked a primal instinct within me, and I felt compelled to tackle him. Yet, I knew Grant needed to be the one to attack, to be at the counter right now and intervene. When I turned to Grant, he stood frozen.

With only the primitive fighter-flight instincts of my hindbrain active, my reflexive thought was to kick Grant in the shin. So I did. Like a horse out of the chute, he burst toward the counter, and for a brief moment, I felt a sense of triumph. Here was Grant, charging forward with intent and momentum, on his way to winning Emma's heart, until he tripped. I gasped as he flew forward. When he finally landed, it was chest first on the edge of the counter. As Grant lay there in an awkward, angled plank position, trying to regain his breath, the pledge, alarmed by the social awkwardness of the moment, shuffled to the end of the espresso bar.

As Grant lay on the counter, I wanted to pick him up and try to say something to break the awkward silence, but it was not my place.

I could only wait and watch. I felt like a coach standing helplessly on the sidelines, watching as his freshman kicker lined up to attempt a game-winning field goal.

What happened next was simply clutch. Grant looked up, gazed directly into Emma's bespectacled eyes and spoke in the timbre of an evening news anchor. "Emma, I'm Grant. We met at the bookstore the other day. I am captivated by the book you recommended. It is brilliant."

Emma blushed.

Grant made some witty jokes, and she laughed. She made some jokes, and he laughed.

At the end of it all, Emma suggested, "We should talk sometime, Grant...you know, about the book."

After the debacle and the brilliant recovery at the coffee shop, Grant and Emma went on three dates over the course of two weeks. All three dates were filled with engaging conversations, ample laughter and a rapidly increasing mutual attraction. However, Grant had not dated much in his lifetime and so how to proceed in a relationship was unfamiliar to him. In our therapy sessions, he asked dozens of questions about love, but the most significant of these was a question he asked me after their third date.

*"I like Emma a lot."*

"You do."

*"I think I should kiss Emma."* "You should."

*"Well, before that, I guess... Am I falling in love with Emma?"* "Maybe, Grant. But being in love...it's pretty complicated."

## **A LIFE IN LOVE**

By the time I entered graduate school during the late 1990s, relationship science, the field devoted to the scientific study of relationships, was burgeoning after decades of researchers struggling against critics who argued that love was too complex to study or that love was an frivolous topic for scientific investigation. The University of Minnesota housed some of the best relationship researchers in the world, and under their guidance, I began to learn about the science of falling in love, staying in love and losing love.

My early research was focused on the endings of relationships- specifically, whether relationship breakups or divorce could lead to personal growth that might improve future relationships. In one of our first studies, Patricia Frazier and I asked ninety-two undergraduates experiencing a recent breakup to "describe what positive life changes, if any, have happened as a result of your breakup that might serve to improve your future romantic relationships." We found that the average participant reported five positive life changes, which included improved friendships, feeling more self-confident and learning how to better communicate. To our surprise, "will choose a better partner in the future" was one of the least cited types of growth.

Although supportive friends, self-confidence and communication skills contribute to healthy romantic relationships, a much stronger predictor of romantic success is the type of partner you choose in the first place. The traits that a partner possesses before you ever start dating, such as his or her personality and values, are among the strongest indicators of whether a romantic relationship will be happy and stable many years later. However, for people who say they will choose a better partner for the next relationship, the *intention* to choose a better partner does not guarantee that they will end up making better choices. How many times have you witnessed friends who are smart and effective people in most aspects of their lives repeatedly choose the same dysfunctional partners and then appear surprised when the relationship is a disaster a few months later?

Even if people do want to choose better partners, there is little sound guidance for this endeavor readily available from experts. For example, if I asked what you should do if you catch on fire or see a thief in your home, your response would be instantaneous. You would "stop, drop, and roll" to solve the first problem, and you would "call 9-1-1" to solve the second problem. Both responses are automatic and effective.

Luckily, the chances of catching on fire are only .002 percent, and of encountering a robber just .004 percent. By comparison, the chances of divorcing in your lifetime (50 percent) are roughly twentyfive thousand times higher than the chances of catching on fire. So, it is unfortunate that there are few sound strategies readily available to singles who want to make wise decisions when it comes to choosing a partner.

This lack of a clear and effective strategy for choosing romantic partners was made apparent to me by Meagan, a precocious sophomore in my Interpersonal Relationships course at the University of Maryland. She wanted me to distill the vast academic research on mate selection into some practical advice that she could use in her love life. Her whimsical framing belied the incisive nature of the question. "Let's imagine you are single and looking for Mr. Right when a fairy godmother appears and grants one wish for your love life," she said to me. "What would be the best way to spend that wish so that you live happily ever after?"

Admittedly, my response sounded remarkably unscientific. "The best thing to wish for," I said, "would be a crystal ball."

I was perplexed by the mystical nature of my response, but upon more reflection later that day, on my metro ride home, I realized that the concept of a crystal ball is exactly what singles need before embarking on the long journey to happily ever after. Imagine how much heartache could be averted if you could look into a crystal ball after every first date.

Instead of having to go through months of painful trial and error in the middle of the process, while trying to find out whether a partner would provide misery or happiness, with a crystal ball you would know from the beginning whether a partner was good for you or not.

Fortunately, advances in relationship science can make this wish for a crystal ball come true. Researchers are discovering how to predict what a relationship will be like years into the future by assessing the traits of the partners, such as personality, values and interests. Furthermore, these traits can be decoded in the early stages of dating, which can permit singles to predict with more accuracy which relationships will end up happily ever after.

However, the materials needed to construct this crystal ball are dispersed in a sea of thousands of scientific papers spanning a range of academic disciplines, including psychology, anthropology, demography and medical science. In the chapters to come, I will distill this massive research literature into a manageable framework for choosing better partners and will put you on the path to a lifetime of love.

This is not a prescriptive self-help book promising a soul mate in three easy steps. Love is too complex and too personal for a stranger to tell a unique individual like you precisely what to do with your love life. Instead, my goal is to help you clarify your version of "happily ever after" and then to provide you with the information needed to make wise decisions when choosing a partner. To achieve this, we will answer the following questions in the chapters to come:

- What does "happily ever after" really mean, and why do only three in ten people find it?
- Why do we get only three wishes for an ideal partner, and why do most people wish for the wrong things?
- What three traits should you look for in a partner if you want to improve significantly the odds of finding enduring love?

*The Science of Happily Ever After* is about making smarter choices. It's about learning to weed out the

undesirable traits and rethinking our views about what really matters in a romantic partner.

First, we need to take a closer look at the ultimate goal and determine what it really means to be happily in love and why being in love can become so complicated.

## THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

Like Grant, many people wonder what it means to be in love. Google has become an informal method for gauging what most people are searching for. Based on the most common searches, Google can anticipate what people might ask before they are done typing the full question. For example, "Am I in..." can be finished in dozens of ways, resulting in such questions as "Am I in trouble?" or "Am I in cahoots?" However, people are not primarily interested in their state of culpability or conspiracy, because when I typed the phrase "Am I in..." the top five results were:

1. Am I in love?
2. Am I in labor?
3. Am I in love with him?
4. Am I insane?
5. Am I in love with him quiz?

For most of the five thousand years that marriage has existed, deciding whether you were in love with a partner did not matter, because until the eighteenth century marriage was primarily an economic agreement between families. Stephanie Coontz is an anthropological researcher at the Evergreen State College who studies the historical context of marriage, and she explains that the potential for sons and daughters to fall in love was rarely the primary criterion used by parents when choosing their children's partners. Decisions were more often based on how much livestock or land could be exchanged for a daughter's hand in marriage.

A good illustration of how pivotal being in love has become in many contemporary cultures comes from a study conducted by Robert Levine at California State University and his colleagues affiliated with universities in Japan and India. They wanted to know if the importance of being in love for major commitments, like marriage, is universal across cultures. Participants from eleven countries around the world were asked, "If a partner had *all* the characteristics that you wanted in a partner, but you were not in love with him/her, would you marry him/her?" While 49 percent of respondents from Pakistan and 48 percent from India answered yes, only 2.5 percent of respondents from the United States said they would marry someone with whom they were not in love, even if the person had everything else they desired in a mate.

If the key criterion for deciding whom to marry is being in love, then how do people know when they are in love? In addition to consulting Google, singles looking for some guidance about the meaning of love sometimes ask their engaged or married friends, "How did you know when you had found 'the one'?" The typical answer is usually less than satisfying. "You just know." This is like asking a chef who has crafted a wonderful meal behind closed doors, "How did you make this?" only to have her or him respond, "You just cook it." What singles are looking for is something more descriptive of how the experience develops. They want the ingredients and the steps for combining those ingredients to create the final product.

However, love is difficult to define. English, unlike some other languages, has just one word for *love*. As



Ellen Berscheid summarized in a recent review of research about the meaning of love, there are many different situations, feelings and recipients associated with the concept of love. This confusion can make it difficult to think in precise ways about love and that ultimately makes it more difficult for us to find exactly what we are looking for. There is love associated with fellowship (companionate), support (compassionate) and sex (erotic), to name a few types, and there is love of family, friends, objects and sexual partners, to name a few possible recipients of our love.

## **Users Review**

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#### **Corinna Edwards:**

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