Despite the love–hate relationship many have with online dating, after 20 years, not only is it here to stay, soon it may boast the best odds for finding a match. For starters, research indicates that online dating is no longer taboo – more people are doing it, more people are talking about it openly, more people are having success with it. According to Pew Research, the public opinion of people who search for love online has much improved over the past five years. That’s likely no surprise to younger generations; however, for those who didn’t come of age with the Internet, it would have been scandalous to follow suit with 1998’s “You’ve Got Mail” and use AOL to meet someone irl. (You might get hacked up by a crazy person!)

Pew also reports that 5 percent of marriages and committed relationships stem from online dating. While that doesn’t sound like much now, it stands to reason that with 32 percent of adults ages 18-35 engaged in online dating, the percentage of marriages and committed relationships spawned from online dating will only continue to grow, perhaps becoming the norm for how couples meet.

Dating websites and apps employ complex algorithms via user-friendly technology to help users find partners for love, lust, and even platonic friendship. But are these digital matchmakers any better than the traditional methods of meeting people – set-ups by friends or family members, chance encounters (read: meeting in a bar), happy accidents in the check-out line at the supermarket (which, let’s face it, never really happens)? If anecdotal experience and academic research are any indication, the answer is no… and yes.

Online dating tools come in a variety flavors: web-based, app-based, swipe-based, substantive profile, limited profile, LGBTQ, kinksters encouraged, seniors only, farmers only (yes, really), beautiful people only (yep, that’s a thing too), and so on. Basically, if you can think it up, it’s probably out there.

So, what’s the right dating app for you? How can you achieve success through online dating? Well, the few hundred people we asked about their experiences with online dating may be able to help you. We began
conducting our survey before some of the newer entrants had much traction, so we apologize if you’re curious about Bumble and Hinge. Guess you’ll just have to try them out yourself to see if they’re a good fit.

Among the options presented in our survey (Tinder, OkCupid, Grindr, Match, and eHarmony), the most popular digital matchmakers by far were Tinder and OkCupid, which is in line with active user numbers reported for these platforms. Our survey also indicated that tech savvy Millennials seem to be utilizing their devices to cast a wider net for potential mates by using a number of dating apps, instead of just one. Columnists and researchers agree; a wide net is the greatest benefit of online dating.

Online dating advice gurus recommend an outgoing spirit in the quest for online love. Our survey showed that while the majority of online daters averaged fewer than six new attempts to connect per day, those who sent more messages (either initially or in reply to messages received) ended up in relationships more often than those who did not engage in communication. Though the majority of correspondences lasted less than a week, increased interactions seem to be linked with higher success rates for winding up in relationships (of any duration).

While common interests and shared experiences are the building blocks of making a connection, being too specific may be a recipe for failure. Online dating sites are great for widening your sphere of potential dates, but if your preferences are too narrowly focused, you may limit that advantage if you’re reluctant to communicate with or meet up with potential matches.

Based on our survey, well over half of those who use online dating sites and apps reported that they ended up in relationships for at least some period of time. Of the mainstream online dating tools, eHarmony scored the best for the most relationships formed, at 57 percent with 28 percent of those relationships lasting longer than one month. However, Match scored the best in terms of
relationship longevity, with 33 percent lasting over six months. Roughly 32 percent of OkCupid users ended up in relationships lasting longer than one month, with 20 percent of total users making beyond six months. Tinder users reported the least success with ending up in relationships of any duration and trailed the other platforms in terms of longevity, with only 13 percent making it past the one-month mark.

Survey respondents who reported using Grinder and dating sites not listed in our survey (including Scruff, Coffee Meets Bagel, Plenty of Fish, DateMySchool, and MeowChat), reported having greater success in finding relationships (short- and long-term) than the other sites we included; however, too few respondents listed those sites for us to glean anything meaningful from the data. (We know. Boooo! We really did try though.)

When it comes to feelings of harassment, survey respondents were all over the place; however, user experiences did appear to run along gender lines. Roughly 57 percent of female respondents, versus only 21 percent of male respondents, reported experiencing feelings of harassment, ranging from a response of “Once or Twice” to “Always.” The highest reports of harassment came from Tinder and OkCupid users at 39 and 38 percent respectively.

In more general terms, online dating has provided scientists and sociologists a look at the inner workings of love and other social structures. For example, based on OkCupid’s data blog, men have a tendency to message the most attractive women on any given page only. Ethnicity can also shape what users look for in a partner and what they see when reviewing potential matches. Online dating has also affected the way we date, in some cases leaving many of us with an “unlimited options” problem – either we can’t choose or have trouble being satisfied when we do. One thing is certain; we won’t be swiping online dating left any time soon.