

Medical Daily

Do Opposites Attract Or Does Like Attract Like In Relationships? Understanding The Science Of Love

By [Lizette Borrelli](#) | Apr 15, 2014 05:24 PM EDT

When it comes to relationships, finding the ideal partner could be easy for some and difficult for others because it's heavily dependent on the characteristics we value most in a mate. The answer to whether opposites attract, or like attracts like, has been an ongoing debate that has both passed and failed the test of time. People are often interested in whether couple similarity, or complementarity, is indicative of relationship outcomes — satisfaction and quality, for instance. It puts into question if birds of a feather who flock together are better off than partners comparable to oil and vinegar.

Opposites Attract vs. Like Attracts Like

“Likes” may attract better than “opposites” when it comes to settling down and finding a mate, since people subconsciously seek out mates who have similar traits as themselves. Although there are successful pairings of opposites, such as TV couples Ted and Robin from *How I Met Your Mother*, or Jay and Gloria from *Modern Family*, it is not unusual for couples to have a tall and short, or loud and soft-spoken dyad, but this starts with a match. Initially, we like those who like us in return, says [Psychology Today](#), which suggests we prefer consistency in our desires, thoughts, and attitudes. We are drawn to those who are similar to us because it affirms our own characteristics are normal, or desirable.

[Dr. Stacy Lynn Harp](#), clinically trained marriage and family therapist in Tennessee, believes most of us attract people we have things in common with. “Likeness attracts likeness. It's actually a myth that opposites attract,” Harp told *Medical Daily* in an email. “Those who are seeking people who are similar understand that long term compatibility is more likely with someone who is like themselves.”

A 2008 [study](#) published in the journal *Evolutionary Psychology* found individuals desired a partner who resembled them in terms of personality, and also desired a complementary partner instead of a similar one when it came to general preferences. People may be attracted to those who have similar attitudes, values, and beliefs, and may even marry them based on this similarity since attitudes are highly visible and fundamental to the way people live their lives. Personality-related characteristics, however, take much longer to unfold and may not play a substantial role until later in the relationship.

The Formula for a Happy and Healthy Couple = Shared Values & Beliefs

“The best formula for a happy and healthy couple is: you both share common values and ethics, you share a common core—not details-of issues from your family of origin such as you were both mistreated or you both were the least or most favorite - and you have different, complementary styles and personalities in approaching life and solving problems,” [Dr. LeslieBeth Wish](#), psychologist and licensed clinical social worker in Florida told *Medical Daily* in an email. It is when couples find those commonalities, especially if they are not apparent on the surface, is when they feel they've found a potential life-long partner. We tend to seek out people who think and act like us, or some of us may even be seeking our own mirror image, which has been found to contribute to relationship satisfaction.

Newlywed couples are found to have happier and satisfying marriages when they have more in common personality-wise, as opposed to attitude-wise. A 2005 [study](#) published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* investigated attitude similarity — having the same religion, or personal belief system — and personality similarity — qualities like anxiety, agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness

— between newlywed couples to determine what makes two individuals choose to be with each other rather than with one of many other potential partners. The study supports the belief that like-minded people validate each other's beliefs and views, and therefore, this results in fewer conflicts.

How to Find a Compatible Partner

Now that we know people seek partners with their same qualities, despite the claim they want someone who is different, we ask: How do we know if we're compatible with our prospective partners? [April Masini](#), relationship expert at AskApril.com, believes the trick to finding compatible partners is to first and foremost, know yourself. "The biggest problem I see in relationship queries that are sent to me for expert advice, are from people who've gotten invested in relationships without knowing what they want in a relationship — or even if they want one at all," Masini told *Medical Daily* in an email. Sometimes these people get involved with people who aren't compatible, and rather than accept the fact, they try to desperately change the other person, which ends up going nowhere. Masini also believes that although chemistry is great, it's not enough to make a relationship go the distance. Rather, values, similar goals, and similar lifestyles are much more valuable when seeking a long-term relationship.

In short, we like a balance of similarities and differences, but overall we're drawn to those who possess the qualities of what we would want our ideal selves to be. We may express interest in someone who has a different job or interest than us, but this could be because they are interests we would desire ourselves to attain. Sharing values regarding money, children, education, and lifestyle, along with the desire to love, can lead to a fulfilling and lasting relationship.

Sources:

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