The science behind attraction and other Valentine’s Day reflections

New studies look at whether opposites attract and relationship commitment.

As Valentine’s Day approaches, one of the long-held beliefs about love is that opposites attract. Research published in the journal ‘Nature Human Behaviour’ is here to debunk the myth about romantic relationships.

Birds of a feather?

Researchers at the University of Colorado Boulder in the United States analysed data spanning over 100 years that included millions of same-sex couples. Of the more than 130 traits examined, up to 89 % were similar among partners. “Birds of a feather are indeed more likely to flock together,” first author and psychology PhD student Tanya Horwitz told ‘The Guardian’.

Traits with the highest correlation included political and religious beliefs, education level and substance use. Only very few traits had little correlation: hearing difficulty, having a twin, whether they were morning or night people, and whether someone was right- or left-handed.

Surprisingly, one trait that had little bearing was extroversion. This meant that an extrovert was just as likely to end up with another extrovert as with an introvert.

“We’re hoping people can use this data to do their own analyses and learn more
about how and why people end up in the relationships they do,” Horwitz explained in the ‘New York Post’. “These findings suggest that even in situations where we feel like we have a choice about our relationships, there may be mechanisms happening behind the scenes of which we aren’t fully aware.”

Two’s company, three’s a ...

Valentine’s Day universally symbolises romantic love. However, a study led by Swansea University in the United Kingdom (UK) and published in the ‘Archives of Sexual Behavior’ has some interesting findings on romance and devotion.

Researchers asked nearly 400 heterosexual men and women in the UK how they felt about a committed partnership in which they shared their partner with someone else. They found that 33 % of men were open to the idea of multiple wives or long-term partners.

In contrast, only 11 % of women were open to legal and consensual polygamous relationships. About 9 % of men said they would share their partner, as opposed to 5 % of women interested in such a relationship.

“Committed non-monogamy has received a lot of attention recently. It’s a hot trend with more and more couples talking about opening up their relationships to include other people, commented lead author Dr Andrew Thomas in a news release. “This study shows that a sizable minority of people are open to such relationships, even in the UK where such marriages are prohibited. Interestingly, many more men are open to the idea than women – though there is still interest on both sides.”

Keywords

Valentine’s Day, love, attraction, opposite, trait, partner, relationship, romance, couple

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