

Do Opposites Attract?

Podcast Script #1

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Person 1: Do opposites attract?

Disclaimer: Although there are genetic, social and behavioral theories of explanation for mate selection, our main focus will be on behavioral theories of mate selection.

PERSON 1: Peanut butter and jam sandwiches, salt and pepper wings, sweet and sour chicken. What do these things have in common? They are opposites that pair well together. But how well does the pairing of opposites work for romantic relationships? Do opposites really attract?

PERSON 1: According to recent research, there are two main theories of mate selection. The complimentary hypothesis suggests that when looking for a partner we want someone different from ourselves.

PERSON 1: This theory suggests that opposites attract because they can make up for each other's weaknesses, ensuring security and resources that they may not have the skills to obtain independently.

PERSON 1: From an evolutionary perspective, mating with an opposite partner is an effective way to avoid inbreeding, especially in smaller social groups and can be an effective way to gain resources that one may be unable to obtain alone.

PERSON 1: If you are an individual with limited resources, it would be in your best interests to find a mate with resources to offer you. In reality, this isn't always the case. Individuals are more likely to search for a mate within or above their own social class...after all, the Cinderella Story is just a fairytale.

PERSON 2: The second theory of mate selection is the similarity-attraction hypothesis. The similarity-attraction hypothesis suggests that we are more likely to select a mate similar to ourselves as a way to reinforce shared values and ideals and work towards a common goal.

PERSON 2: From an evolutionary perspective, finding a mate similar to you produces higher quality offspring because parents share a mutual investment in offspring investment and survival. This increases reproductive success for both parents and the offspring produced. Recent research indicates that children of divorced parents have less access to educational and recreational resources during childhood due to the limited income of a single parent home. Children were found to be less emotionally attached due to poor parenting. These children had more conflict and lower quality relationships with their parents, which carried into young adulthood, causing them to be less successful in personal relationships.

PERSON 2: Our ancestors lived in smaller social groupings where mate selection likely occurred within tribes or between closely cooperating tribes. So couldn't this result in excessive inbreeding?

When looking for a mate in these social groupings you are likely to avoid mating with direct relatives, but still look for someone with traits similar to your own. This strategy would allow our ancestors avoid excessive out-breeding and inbreeding. Optimal out-breeding allows and individual to avoid mating with direct relatives while finding a mate with similar non-heritable traits.

PERSON 2: So then what exactly do we look for in a mate? A recent article from David Buss, a professor of evolutionary psychology, surveyed 760 undergraduate students on the Five Factor Model of personality and found that personality is one of the most important things we look for in a mate.

PERSON 2: The participants were then asked to complete a second survey to establish the personality traits desired in an ideal mate. The researchers found that when looking for a mate they tended to choose someone with a personality similar to themselves.

PERSON 2: However, when the participants were asked directly what type of mate there were looking for 86% answered that they were looking for someone with an opposite personality.

PERSON 1: Dick Barelds, an evolutionary psychologist at the University of Goningen in the Netherlands, suggests that this contradiction of beliefs about our ideal romantic partner may be a result of exaggerated and unrealistic romantic attraction in modern movies and media. These popularized ideas of romance portray relationships between opposites as more exciting and fulfilling.

PERSON 1: Although we may idealize the idea of a partner opposite ourselves, it has been shown to be the less successful strategy in the long run. In a recent study of failed marriages more than 40% of divorcees cited mismatched personalities as the reason for their breakup.

PERSON 1: It is very unlikely that any one person holds all the traits that we may be looking for in a mate. When selecting a mate you may need to compromise, having a preference for some traits over others. So although some couples would appear to be complete opposites they actually hold similar ideals and values that create a strong bond to overcome the lesser differences.

PERSON 1: So what does make an ideal couple?

PERSON 1: Dick Barelds found that marital success is positively correlated to similarities between partners and is the strategy most commonly used in mate selection. Even popular dating sites, such as eHarmony, match couples using similar personalities. While opposites can attract, relationships between partners with similar personalities are found to be more successful over time.

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See what type of person you attract! Take a quiz.

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