



Our Thinking Series:

Do Opposites Really Attract?

by Facet5 Global



We say “opposites attract”, but is it really true? What about “birds of a feather flock together”? Well, according to the results of our personality profiling survey, opposites do attract – well, most of the time.

The Study

The study was conducted after delegates on our Facet5 accreditation courses expressed an interest in seeing how our personality profiles may influence our choice of romantic partner. Despite Facet5 being an occupational tool, people were genuinely interested in what the profile of their partner might be, particularly when exploring the behaviours associated with each of the factors. It was also felt that inferences could be drawn from the results which would be equally applicable to relationships at work, be it manager and subordinate, peer to peer relationships or Business Partnerships.

For the study, we looked at the personality profiles of 173 couples and compared them against the same number of randomly selected pairs extracted from a large database, examining different aspects of their behaviours.

To ensure the results were as accurate as possible, the raw data had to be cleaned for missing information by substituting the sample mean for the item. All raw scores were then recalculated to allow research which was unaffected by different norm groups used. This allows us to conduct the analyses that were core to this work.

The study then looked at how the overall Facet5 personality profiles relate to each other both within the spousal pairings and as compared with the randomly selected pairs. Facet5 has five core dimensions. Will concerns a person’s drive and determination; Energy is their sociability and need for the company of others. Affection deals with trust and relationships, while Control reflects a person’s need to take an active role in what happens around them, their organisation, and need for structure. Emotionality is our overarching response to the world around us, our inner voice. Our Emotionality has a bearing on all the other factors, exaggerating or reducing the extent to which we under- or overreact to events around us.

So when it comes to love, which opposites will make the sparks fly in a good way – and which ones are the deal-breakers?

Once the data of all the participants was analysed, a clear trend emerged: that the couples’ profiles were on the whole more different to one another’s than the profiles from the randomly matched pairs. In other words, people who have chosen to be together in a relationship are often more diametrically opposed in terms of basic personality traits than any random selection of pairs.

In most cases, then, the data shows that successful relationships are more common between two people with very different personalities. It seems that introverts can rub along quite nicely with extroverts, and the really organised, structured types can cope with a bit of chaos in their lives.

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The creative and chaotic among us can welcome a little order, and the bold decision-makers are often quite happy alongside those with much less conviction; in fact, often it's these very different behaviours which attract us to each other. These differences can of course cause frustrations, but people who are very different in certain ways are often highly compatible. When studying the results with all five of the personality traits taken into account, there was a more marked difference between the spousal couples than between the randomly selected pairs.

However...

However, the data points to one important exception. There is one aspect of our characters that needs to be pretty well aligned for us to be happy together long term – and that's our Affection. Perhaps it's unsurprising that it's the way we view our relationships with others, and the value we place on those relationships, that matters the most. Someone trusting, caring and helpful may find it hard to relate to someone who takes a tougher, harsher view of others; someone who doesn't jump to help a stranger or who is quite cynical in their outlook of other people. Conversely those with a more pragmatic outlook may get frustrated by perceived softness and an excessively forgiving nature. Affection is very much about our sense of fairness, of what constitutes social justice; while two people with a low Affection score may be perfectly well suited, or two people with a high score, a couple with significantly different scores will place different values on their relationships with others.

It is quite possible that Affection would have a less marked impact on relationships in the workplace, as the personal bond is less crucial, but it may well play a part in how quickly we establish rapport, relationships and trust between colleagues. People with different Affection scores, according to this data, would have less harmonious relationships than people exhibiting differences in any of the other factors. In using Facet5 to identify these differences, greater understanding of one another's inherent differences may well help to ease friction and resolve conflict. While workplace relationships are not necessarily expected to be the same as those in our personal lives, there are many aspects which are similar, and understanding how different personality types interact can only be a positive for teams and individuals alike.

While much of our personality make-up can be very different to those of our partners, or our colleagues, it's our values and our shared views of the world around us and how we perceive others that can make or break a relationship; our sense of fairness, and our underlying social value system. So while many differences can turn up the heat on a relationship and even help it last, not all opposites attract.

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