**TACKLING PROBLEMS**

Tackling marital problems properly can lead to stronger, happier relationships. McNulty and O’Mara (2008) discovered that in the long run, couples in healthy relationships experienced higher levels of marital satisfaction if they thought positively about their problems. The researchers found that couples who initially experienced severe and frequent problems faced larger declines in marital satisfaction over time if they employed benevolent cognitions. These findings suggest that less severe, infrequent problems can be minimized to help maintain relationship satisfaction, but that larger, more severe problems should be addressed so that they do not worsen over time. Additional research by Adler et al. (1988) also provides insight into relationship conflict. These researchers found that relationship satisfaction was negatively correlated with the Ludus love style (game-playing, uncommitted love), but positively correlated with the Eros love style (intense, passionate love). Therefore, couples experiencing conflict could potentially increase marital satisfaction by working to display aspects of a Ludus love style such as passion. Adler et al. (1988) also found that the Agape love style (altruistic, gift love) was a predictor of partner-satisfaction. If your partner is having problems with the relationship, you might try to be more giving and altruistic in order to increase your partner’s feelings of satisfaction. **TIP:** Practice positivity in the face of small problems, and engage in passionate, altruistic styles of love in order to boost relationship satisfaction during times of conflict.

**ROLE OF COMMITMENT**

Commitment plays a role in determining the likely success rate of a relationship. The relationships examined in the Gonzaga et al. (2007) studies show that couples who stayed together longer had higher levels of commitment and higher ratings of relationship satisfaction. A study by Adler et al. (1988) also examined the role of commitment in relationships. Researchers found that couples with similar levels of commitment not only stayed together over time but they also reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction. These studies reveal that matters in terms of relationship satisfaction is not the level of commitment, but that you and your partner display the same level of commitment. Another study by McNulty and O’Mara (2008) found that for healthy couples, minimizing the significance of negative events on global evaluations of the relationship helped maintain stable levels of marital satisfaction. This suggests that couples in healthy relationships characterized by infrequent problems could benefit by committing to viewing their partner positively, even in the face of negative occurrences. This commitment to positivity could help healthy couples achieve and maintain higher levels of relationship satisfaction. **TIP:** Strive to match your partner’s level of commitment, and also commit to reducing the significance of small relationship problems.

**DATING GUIDE**

**HOW TO ACHIEVE HIGH LEVELS OF RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION**


**INTRODUCTION**

Developing and maintaining healthy, satisfying romantic relationships can be a challenging task. Fortunately, relationship experts have conducted extensive research that provides insight regarding intimate relationships. In this Dating Guide, we summarize the main points of three stellar articles in order to help you achieve highly satisfying romantic connections. Through the presence of similarity in a relationship, the use of healthy approaches to problems, and a dedication to commitment, you can be on the road to a happy, long-term relationship.

**SIMILARITY**

Similarity is key to a successful relationship. A study by Adler et al. (1988) explored the role of six different Love Attitudes, or love styles, and their effects on relationships. The six styles were Eros (intense, passionate love), Ludus (game-playing, uncommitted love), Storge (friendship-based love), Pragma (practical, “shopping-list” love), Mania (obsessive, dependent love), and Agape (altruistic, gift love). Researchers found that couples tended to have either the same or similar love styles and thus, more satisfaction in relationships. In addition to similar love styles, studies by Gonzaga et al. (2007) found that couples who are similar to one another are more likely to have a successful relationship. Similarity in the studies was based on the Big Five Personality Inventory and participant’s self-reports on emotion levels. The more similar the results were for the couples on these tests, the more satisfied they were in their relationship. However, emotion similarity only predicted female relationship satisfaction and did not predict male satisfaction.

**TIP:** When looking to start a relationship, find out what you have in common with the other person to determine if the relationship is likely to work out! Remember, opposites don’t always attract.

**THE RESEARCH**

Two studies conducted by Gonzaga, Campos, and Bradbury (2007) examined the relationship between similarity, convergence, and relationship satisfaction in dating couples and newlyweds. Researchers asked the couples to provide measures of personality and relationship quality, complete a series of videotaped interactions, and then rate the emotions felt during those interactions. In addition, researchers examined personality and emotions in the newlywed couples overtime, and assessed them a year after the initial study. To assess the couples, researchers used the Big Five Personality Inventory and emotion self-report scales.

McNulty and O’Mara (2008) examined intimate relationships and explored the effects of partners’ responses to negativity on relationship satisfaction. The researchers examined couples’ use of benevolent cognitions that minimized the importance of negative events on the quality of the relationship as a whole. McNulty and O’Mara (2008) predicted that in the long run, the effectiveness of positive thinking depends on the relationship’s initial level of negativity. They utilized a longitudinal study that followed couples throughout the first four years of their marriages in order to collect information about relationship attributions, marital satisfaction, and problem severity over time.

Adler, Hendrick, and Hendrick (1988) studied the effects of love styles, commitment, disclosure, investment, and satisfaction on romantic relationships. Participants were all measured twice on the Love Attitudes Scale, the Dyadic Adjustment Scale and Relationship Assessment Scale, and on reports of self-esteem. A smaller group of participants within this sample were tested on these additional variables: self-disclosure, willingness to disclose personal information, and ability to obtain self-disclosing information from another. They also asked for self-reports of commitment and investment levels. Adler et al.(1988) then explored correlations between differing variables and examined the differences in variable scores for couples that stayed together and for couples that did not.