

A man and a woman are shown in a close embrace, smiling and looking at each other. The man is on the left, wearing a white shirt and a patterned tie. The woman is on the right, wearing a black top and a striped skirt. At the top of the page, the word "LOVE" is written in large, bold, red letters. The background is a blurred indoor setting.

LOVE

The Surprising Keys to Compatibility

HE IS CUTE AND FUNNY AND SHARES YOUR OBSESSION WITH TRUE-CRIME SHOWS—HOW COULD YOU TWO *NOT* BE MEANT TO BE? HERE'S HOW: THE FACTORS THAT MAKE COUPLES REALLY CLICK AREN'T THE ONES YOU'D EXPECT. ALLOW US TO EXPLAIN.

BY PAULA DERROW

Admit it:

You have some kind of list in mind when deciding whether or not a guy has potential to be The One. It probably goes something like: must be tall, confident but not cocky, have his sh*t together, share your love for alpacas... *whatever*. It's easy to think that if he checks off on enough items, you'll be #SoulMates, right? Actually, not so fast.

Even if someone seems like your perfect match—on an app or after several dates—new studies suggest the crucial factors for compatibility are way less obvious than, say, a shared taste in music or bonding over being outdoorsy. Here's what you need to look for to determine that a mate is really right for you and some less important details you can let slide.

THE SURPRISING THINGS THAT REALLY MATTER

Your Fighting MO

The way you and he argue is one of the most crucial predictors of whether you'll make it as a couple, says John Gottman, PhD, author of *What Makes Love Last?* and cofounder of the Gottman Institute in Seattle. People usually fall into three basic categories: Vol-

atiles get fired up in heated debates, Engagers dive in and process why each person feels the way they do, and Avoiders maintain a *Let's agree to disagree* attitude. "An Engager and an Avoider...that's a potential recipe for a lot of pain," warns Carrie Cole, director of research at the Gottman Institute. On the other hand, two Volatiles can be unexpectedly copacetic (think of that couple you know who scream at each other, then kiss and make up minutes later). Two Engagers will also do

well together, and even two Avoiders can endure, although they have to be careful not to let unspoken resentment fester.

Speaking of which, also take note of how your BF responds when something's bothering him: Does he attack or blame you? And in turn, do you respond by hitting him where it hurts or shutting down completely? These are all clues that your relationship may get rockier over time.

How You Share

As in, feelings. Take a hard look at how each of you approaches expressing—and reacting to—emotions. "If one person thinks negative feelings should be buried at all costs and the other thinks it's important to explore every last sentiment, you'll have a lot of trouble," says Gottman. In fact, his research on married couples has found that such a mismatch can predict divorce with 80 percent accuracy. Bottom line: It's better to be with someone who weighs feelings just as heavily (or lightly) as you do.

Your Attachment Styles

Surprise! There are again three types of people, says Amir Levine, MD, coauthor of *Attached: The New Science of Adult Attachment and How It Can Help You Find and Keep Love*. Anxious attachers tend to need a lot of reassurance from their partners (e.g., they won't stop wondering what's wrong until they hear "I'm not mad at you, babe.

I'm just in a bad mood"). Avoiders may *say* they want to get close—but then react like you're a Stage Five Clinger when you ask for a good-night Snap. And then there's the secure type—those who aren't afraid to load up on couple's selfies but are also totally okay with giving their S.O. some space. Not surprisingly, *everyone* does well with a secure partner. But other combinations don't fare so well. The worst? Avoiders dating anxious types. "They set each other off, constantly pushing and pulling, and are the least satisfied," says Dr. Levine.

Getting and Giving Attention

A *bid* (a couples-therapy term coined by Gottman) is a moment when you're looking for attention from your partner—it can be small, like starting an innocent convo about the weather, or something deeper, like telling him about that ongoing drama with your sister. No shocker here: Duos who routinely respond to each other's bids and make each other feel heard are much likelier to stay together long term than those who dismiss them. "Couples often say, 'We don't have stuff in common anymore.' But often, the real problem is that they've been ignoring each other's bids and failed to stay connected," explains Cole. (Sometimes, this can be easy to suss out early on. If, on your first date, he actually yawns when you share your favorite childhood memory, odds are, he's not right for you.)



A CLUE YOU TWO AREN'T JIVING: HE CARES ABOUT IT. YOU OBVI DON'T.

Overcome Uncommon Interests

Don't share many hobbies with your guy? No prob! Just ask yourself: *Will you let your different passions enhance or hurt your relationship?* If you'd rather read while he bikes, you can still make a great pair—both of you just have to be curious about what the other is doing when you're apart.



"HEY, IS THAT YOUR HIP OR MINE? I CAN NEVER TELL ANYMORE!"

Yes, You Can Get More in Sync

"The biggest misconception about compatibility is that it's easy," says sociologist Pepper Schwartz, PhD, a relationship expert on FYI's *Married at First Sight*. How you can work on building it with bae over time?

Investigate Your Differences

Instead of getting louder about your own opinion, ask him to explain his so you can better understand him.

Be Open to Change

"If you yell and it upsets your partner, find it within yourself to say, 'I'm sorry,'" says Schwartz, then try a different tactic next time.

Learn the Magic Phrase

Ahem, repeat: "I was wrong. I share some of the blame here." Trust us, it works wonders.

Your Supporting Roles

This is a biggie! You want a partner to be your cheerleader—someone who hears your 10-year plan to girl-boss status and keeps asking, "How can we make this happen for you?"—even if your ambitions aren't something that excites him personally. "Your dreams can be different, but if you don't see any merit in each other's big life goals, you're not going to do well together," warns Cole. After all, who wants to date a guy who goes on and on about the website he's been working on but tunes out as soon as you start talking about the cross-country trip you've been saving for? Correct answer: No one.

THESE MATTER—BUT MAYBE NOT AS MUCH AS YOU THINK...

Chemistry

Sure, attraction is crucial at the beginning of any relationship. You have to be turned on by the way he looks, smells, tastes, and kisses. But even if sparks aren't blazing between you two, he can still end up being someone who is reliable, contributes his fair share, and makes you laugh for years to come. So it's worth trying to bounce back from an initial so-so vibe by giving him a fair chance and seeing where things go.

Sex

"Having the best sex ever with someone doesn't necessarily mean they're definitely the one for you," says Jenny Taitz, PsyD, a psychologist in Los Angeles. Tons of other elements, like communication, for instance, can become even more powerful than sex—especially over time, says Helen Fisher, PhD, a biological anthropologist and author of *Why Him? Why Her? How to Find and Keep Lasting Love*. A great example: Remember that one guy who hit all the right buttons for you in bed but stopped returning your texts? Well, your perfect match will keep the orgasms *and* daily check-ins coming. ■