

# Romance between Democrats and Republicans: is it possible?

**By: Katherine Foo (WG'09) Managing Editor**

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*Disclaimer: I don't have any personal stories about dating any cute men in the other political camp that will form the basis of this article. Sorry to disappoint!*

Dating and marriage relationships are complex enough, as we'd all agree! But this year especially, different political viewpoints over McCain or Obama can be the source of many heated disagreements. It has been incredible to see the sharp divide between people who are passionately loyal to Obama and those who staunchly support McCain. The election has shown many of our true colors. I, for one, never knew that I was a diehard Democrat until Obama emerged in the political arena- frankly, I've voted Republican in all prior elections. He represents to me integrity, hope, steadfastness, and leadership, and the Democratic platform resonates with my values. No doubt, it'd be fabulous to meet someone who shares similar belief systems!

If you think back to elementary school, your first crush was probably someone who gave you the extra cupcake in his/ her lunchbox. You were instantly smitten. (For me, it was a boy in my third grade class - I liked him partly because he was good at drawing.) But as we all got older, those reasons for attraction became replaced by a desire for compatibility. Instead of bonding over the fact that you both thought Garbage Pail Kids were the coolest things ever (yes, I used to collect the cards), romance blossomed because you were avid readers or travelers, relished outdoor adventure, or shared the same religious faith.

Most couples are drawn to each other for similar reasons, confirms Professor Deborah Small, Wroe Alderson Term Assistant Professor of Marketing who has done research on attraction. "People tend to be attracted to similar others across a wide range of personality traits and attitudes, including political attitudes." While it is unlikely that political attitudes draw us to potential mates in the first place, political compatibility probably exists for most couples, theorizes Professor Scott Rick, Visiting Professor of OPIM. "Romantic partners tend to agree on whether abortion should be legal, whether same-sex marriage should be legalized, whether we should withdraw from Iraq, and on a host of other issues."

## **When the conflict heats up**

Historically, prior research has never found political views to be a primary source of marital conflict, according to Professor Rick. "Usually, arguments over money and inlaws are far more common." He also speculates: "Politics can be a source of conflict even for romantic partners who share similar views, if those partners differ in the intensity of their views. If both husband and wife are Democrats, but one is relatively uninterested in the election and the other is reading Huffington Post all day long, you're likely to hear shouts of 'I'm tired of watching Keith Olbermann!' or 'I don't want to hear another word about Joe the Plumber!' quite frequently."

How do red and blue couples deal with politically different viewpoints? To maintain harmony, couples

may emphasize similarities and conceal or avoid areas of disagreement. Professor Small posits, "For cases where one is a Republican and the other is a Democrat, there is likely to be some cognitive dissonance." (Who would have thought we'd hear of cognitive dissonance again after *Managing People at Work*??)

"For example, if she likes Obama but also loves her husband who likes McCain, she'll need to do something to resolve this imbalance. They may avoid discussing politics or create rationales. He may tell himself that they don't really differ on fundamental issues, but that she votes based on social issues whereas he is focused more on economic or foreign policy." Several studies have also found that husbands and wives assume their viewpoints are much more similar than their viewpoints actually are. And you yourself may be a pro at dissonance resolution! "Hmm, it's okay that he texts me 59 times a day... he's just being super thoughtful," etc.

Whether a politically polarized couple can last depends on the issues too. More personal ones such as abortion cut to the heart of moral standards, and tie into religion and family background. Some view politics as a proxy for your belief systems and worldview, so relationships with radically different paradigms may not bode well in the long-term. (Prime example: Barbra Streisand and Robert Redford's characters in *The Way We Were*.) Still, most couples find a way to manage the conflict: they do not personalize the disagreements and do treat each other respectfully.

### **Crossing party lines**

What about singles, however? Are divergent political viewpoints a dealbreaker? Most Americans say no. According to a study by iMatchup.com, over 80% would date someone with a different political outlook. A Gallup poll conducted for Match.com found that 57% would marry someone with considerably different political beliefs. So they view political disagreements as just another factor to take into consideration. Besides, isn't it far more stimulating to talk with someone with diverse perspectives than to hear your opinions mirrored back?

Interestingly, single Republicans are more willing to cross party lines to find romance. As explained by the VP of Engage.com, "A Republican can believe in less government control yet want to kiss someone who feels the opposite." Pundit James Carville provides a humorous explanation for this discrepancy: "Democrats are hotter!" Carville, formerly under the Clinton administration, is married to Mary Matalin, former counselor to Cheney - they're one of Washington's most famous bipartisan couples.

For some people, however, crossing party lines would be akin to death. One eHarmony blogger wrote: "I would rather relocate to a Tibetan monastery for life than date a Republican." And, in a recent interview with *Elle* magazine, Alec Baldwin responded that he would rather bed the more matronly left-wing Senator Dianne Feinstein than the slim and blonde right-wing pundit Anne Coulter. "With Coulter, we'd have sex and I'd have to jump right out the window. I wouldn't even get dressed." Harsh! But maybe for him, politics is more important than beauty.

### **Looking for Mr. Right (or Ms. Left)?**

If you're single and if sharing political ideologies is a must-have, numerous websites have sprung up to help you meet that special someone, believe it or not. For example, ActForLove.org seeks to help liberals find love. It also links members to websites of groups and causes such as the American Civil Liberties Union. Liberalhearts.com boasts "Over 10 million 2ofakind matches served in 10 years!" If that weren't enough, mosey on over to Republicansingles.com and Democratsingles.com, which include links for almost every city imaginable including Biloxi and Oakland.

Sure, there are many things we look for in someone. Someone who shares your penchant for cheesy movies, someone who loves salsa dancing, someone who also envisions living abroad someday, and maybe someone who roots for Obama or McCain. But when it comes down to it, compatibility is a mystery. Maybe the heavens have to align, maybe you have to be wearing your lucky shoes for it to happen- either way, you'll know it when you have it. And in this intense election year, whether you're in a relationship or single, may love ultimately trump politics!

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