



Conflict Unifies

If we avoid conflict, we miss out on the immense benefits born of productive disagreement. Disagreement makes us more intelligent, as teams and as individuals, and helps us reach better decisions. It makes us more creative, innovative, and, perhaps most surprisingly, it brings us closer. Why is conflict beneficial for relationships? We can start to answer that by looking at the science of romantic relationships.

In the lab, psychologists closely observe couples discussing points of contention in their relationship. Then they monitor the progress of those couples over the months and years to come. It turns out that the couples who are always amicable tend to be less happy and less satisfied in their relationship than more confrontational couples. Couples who are relatively quick to argue are more likely to stay together and make headway in solving their differences.

Why is that? A psychologist who specializes in marital conflict told me that “Conflict is information.” It is often only when your partner loses their temper that you understand what is deeply important to them. Sometimes it’s only in an emotional disagreement that you find out how much the other cares about you. In an argument, you learn about what the other *really* thinks and *really* feels. Conflict offers an insight into the other’s heart, revealing truths—and truthful relationships tend to be stronger.

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