

Emotional Maturity & Romantic Attraction

The Two Key Attributes of Successful Relationships

By Lorraine Banfield

About fifteen years ago I read this really cool book called *The Love Test* by Harold Bessell, PH.D. I found it to be a kind of rule book on what makes for a successful romantic relationship. Bessell identifies two basic attributes romantic attraction and emotional maturity as key factors in successful relationships.

If both partners have romantic attraction and emotional maturity then there is a high likelihood of success – both are attracted and both are emotionally mature – think Jane Austin’s Elizabeth Bennett and Mr. Darcy. This is what we all want but is it what we get?

There are five other combinations from two very immature but romantically attracted to two very mature but not very attracted to each other – you can probably guess the outcome of these combinations.

The combination I see most often as a therapist and life coach is a couple where both are attracted to each other but one is emotionally immature in important ways. This is often hard to see right away – most people, especially those intelligent and aware enough to come to a therapist have developed ways to look and act mature. It’s an outside job – they look together from the outside. But emotional maturity is an inside job – you have to be mature inside yourself, where it counts, not simply look and act mature to the outside world.

Of course, a romantic relationship is where your emotional maturity or lack of it shows up in its most natural form. Most of us can keep a lid on our emotional immature responses at work and with friends but once we get home or relax with our significant other, the real us comes out. This is why you often hear people say, “After we were together for awhile he/she changed.” The person didn’t change, what they did was relax and become more who they really were all along. This is why companies usually have a 90 day probation period – it takes that long for someone to feel secure enough to stop faking it, if they are and show their true character.

The same is true in a relationship – you might not see that immature response for several weeks or months but if the person is immature it will come out sooner or later. If the real you is what you present to the world; an emotionally mature, psychologically whole person, then great – you will be able to deal with issues and conflicts that are a normal part of a close relationship with ease and confidence but if you have been faking it all day, then your spouse or significant other better watch out – they will get the brunt of your immaturity somewhere along the line.

So what is emotional maturity? Daniel Goldman wrote a book called *Emotional Intelligence* – EQ for short, and in it he talks about the various ways people can react to the world. He says certain traits demonstrate emotional intelligence. Emotional maturity is much like emotional intelligence. People with high EQ or EM are likely to:

- ❖ Know what they want and have the capacity to make it happen
- ❖ They have high self-control and think before they act
- ❖ They are self-reliant and have the ability to take responsibility for their actions
- ❖ They have patience and are willing to delay gratification or wait for someone else to do something
- ❖ They have the ability to sustain intimate relationships and establish positive connections with others
- ❖ They are personally generous and have the desire to give and be there for others
- ❖ They have personal integrity as well as law and order integrity
- ❖ They have a sense of balance and equanimity in dealing with stress

- ❖ They have strong personal boundaries and are not boundary invaders – they know where they end and other people begin
- ❖ They can, and do persevere
- ❖ They are decisive and can make decisions – they are not wishy-washy
- ❖ They have humility and the ability to admit when they wrong
- ❖ They are self-reflective and examine their life and make changes where needed – they own up to their mistakes but don't brood about them
- ❖ They are both self aware and aware of others
- ❖ They are generally optimistic and positive about life
- ❖ They are not whiners or blamers

So if you are having trouble in your romantic relationships you might want to check to see how many of the above attributes you have. Print this out and put a check mark by the ones that you feel you have and then on the back give an example from your current relationship or one you have had in the past. If you think you have this attribute but can't think of an example, ask your significant other or a close friend to give you an example, if they can't think of one either then my guess you are an EQ wannabe but are not there yet. For those that you feel you don't currently express well at all, these are the attributes that need attention. Beginning a program to address these will go along way in helping you become successful in romantic relationships.

If you find you are tempted to do this exercise by looking at your current or a past partner rather than yourself, resist this temptation. Here's why – like attracts like – this is the law of attraction. What it means is that you will attract people to you at the same level of development that you are, so if you are attracting people who are not emotionally mature or your current partner falls into this category, then I suggest you first take a long hard look at yourself. The only person you can change is you. What is really great about this, however, is that once you begin to change the people around you do too, or they move away from you. So begin today to be more aware of yourself in terms of emotional maturity and see what happens...I think you'll be pleasantly surprised.

By the way, if you are not romantically attracted to your partner or a potential one, the other aspect of a solid romantic relationship, my advice is move on – life is too short to be with someone who doesn't turn you on – romance is one of the spices of life, so hold out for that, you deserve it.

Blessings, Lorraine