

Definitions of Levels of Sexual and Romantic Attachment

Ruth Whistler

21st June 2005

1 Attraction: (Purely Physical)

Attraction is solely admiring someone's looks, either because you don't like their personality, or because you haven't learned anything about them yet. It is based purely on physical appearance. Examples might include liking the look of someone as you walk past them in the street, or seeing a model looking good in an advert. This is usually not a very permanent thing, as a person's looks change and they age. Based on something as fleeting as physical appearance, it cannot be expected to continue if the person's appearance alters. This usually involves little or no emotional or romantic attachment to the subject, and cannot be expected to evolve into a relationship unless deeper knowledge of the person you are attracted to is gained and accepted.

Often people may be attracted to someone visually, as an aesthetically appealing object, rather than sexually, the same way they might be to a work of art. Feeling attraction does not necessarily indicate the desire to begin a relationship with the subject, and removal of the subject from your life will often pass unremarked and rarely mourned. Spotting and admiring attractive people can be a form of entertainment or amusement in some social groups, and most often little thought is given as to the emotional needs of the attractive specimen, such as whether or not they would be dismayed by blatant staring. Attraction is a basic starting point that may lead to lust, and then a crush, but as often as not it is simply a manner of passing the time, a brief flare of interest when seeing someone visually appealing.

2 Lust: (Sexual attraction, fixation, desire.)

Lust focuses mainly on the sexual aspects of admiration for another person, and is nearly as shallow as attraction in terms of its emphasis on appearance. It involves being aroused by the sight of, and thoughts of, the person. Daydreams about sexual activity with them are combined with involuntary sexual response especially if in physical contact with them. This is usually the stage where some small knowledge of their personality and lifestyle has been procured, and accepted as meeting a decent standard. Lust can also be a facet of your feelings towards someone, an aspect of them, attaching to a deeper respect, but as a separate component it is limited to mostly selfish, fleeting

emotion. Overall is it a “deeper” thing than physical attraction because you can also be aroused by aspects of their personality, voice, skills, job, body language, and interests, rather than just their looks. Lust tends to occupy a lot of time and thought.

3 A Crush: (Fancying someone, “Liking” them.)

Often mistaken for lust, a crush does contain the same levels of sexual arousal often, but also features aspects of romance. The person with a crush will not only wish to have sexual activity with the object of their affections but also to have a loving relationship with them. They may already think themselves in love with the person. This stage can act as a preliminary to love, and/or a relationship, or simply as a brief fantasy with someone unobtainable, complete with day dreams but never deepening into something more real. The person with a crush may have tender, protective feelings towards their crush, wanting to keep them from harm. At this stage reciprocation becomes very important, more so than it was in the lust and attraction stages. A mutual declaration of feelings and intent is desirable, and possibly a willingness to fall in love together. A greater emotional investment is made here, and the risk of getting hurt is greater, so embarrassment and nervousness are amplified. Dreams, fantasies, wishes and hopes are heavily involved.

4 Love:

Love is essentially a crush that has been deemed acceptable and taken root, and allowed to become real. A deep respect, understanding, knowledge, and acceptance of the person is gained. Time passes, and the strength of the relationship may be tested, and if it decreases love may cease or diminish, but if it increases, the devotion to each other may grow. The subject has become an important centre of their lover’s life. Sexual attraction, while desirable, is no longer essential to create the bond between the partners.

Sacrifices and compromises are reached or love may break down. Thoughtful, careful, considerate, and selfless action is promoted and encouraged. This stage may appear somewhat permanent, and the damage if the person is removed from your life is phenomenal, devastating and unforgettable. The love does not have to be requited, but some level of acquaintance, closeness, and friendship is required for you to have enough knowledge about them to form a connection this deep — to “test” your feelings against every day life; its mundane aspects and its stressful aspects, is one of the ways of discovering if they are real or if they are based on a fantasy.

Love is not static but is often changing, but you adapt with it or lose it. Trust eradicates some unfounded jealousy you may have encountered at the crush stage, but real reason for jealousy such as infidelity becomes an even deeper betrayal of trust. People in love often value the life of the person they love above their own, and may wish to create bonds viewed by society as acceptable, such as marrying, owning joint property, or having children.

5 True Love: (Mr/Mrs Right, The One, Soul mates.)

It is usually expected of people who are in love that they claim their lover is “The One”. Ultimately it’s very hard to tell, because by definition your soul mate is the one person you will meet in your life than you will love above all others. Thus until your life is over you cannot tell who you loved best. You may meet someone tomorrow that you love more. On your death bed you could look back over your life and see who you loved the most, and they would be the one. Often a soul mate is someone we love so much, perhaps under particularly strenuous or difficult circumstances, that we cannot imagine loving anyone else more for the rest of our lives.

Usually your true love is someone you feel a deeper connection with than people you have loved before. You may get the sense that they are special, unique, and a perfect fit with your personality — the real you, who is not changed by day to day events. If we fall in love because we love someone’s personality, and then they change, we may fall out of love, but with soul mates the assumption is that they can somehow see through the transitory aspects of our personality and observe the “essence” of us, that which will never truly change. Thus it is impossible to fall out of true love because of circumstances which change us, because the real, central “You” that your soul mate sees does not change.

Generally and sadly (especially in plays, books, and films) it is expected that a lot of people who find their Mr/Mrs Right will lose them again in some tragic separation. There are two main views of this:

5.1 View 1:

They seem like Mr/Mrs Right *because* you lost them. They are the one you can’t forget because you never entered reality, and every day life with them. They are a fantasy. Thus Romeo and Juliet and all the other similar couples wouldn’t have found each other exceptional, had they lived together for years and lost all the romance in their relationships. A soul mate is purely a lost chance, someone who *might* have been someone special, but you never got to find out. It’s purely human nature to be curious about the one who got away. The soul mate embodies all our escapism, and impossible dreams, unrealistic ideals, and impossible fantasies. They exist in a space outside real life, such as holiday romances. If introduced to real life they would lose their magic. We project specialness upon them because we want to believe in fairy tales. They come to embody all our “what if’s” and need for closure.

5.2 View 2:

A: Not everyone loses their Mr/Mrs Right. Some people live in happiness with them for many years, even till death, and are happy to have found their soul mates. We hear about the ones that got lost because it makes a more dramatic story. Romeo and Juliet wouldn’t be as moving if the two lovers merely slightly fancied each other, would it? Or if they lived happily ever after? Yes, finding Mr/Mrs Right and keeping him/her is less dramatic and might seem less romantic, so is less heard of, but anyone who is in love for the wild passionate, hysterical romance of it is living a fantasy, not real love.

Real love can include romance, but it is still love even without death scenes and wild speeches and fast paced action. True love that never encounters huge difficulties does not a good play make, but it isn't any less true.

B: What if you *did* lose your soul mate? Or get into danger with them? Well, times of difficulty and pain bond us to people or break us from them. Such high stress and emotion and such trials make a good test to see if the person really is our soul mate. If you face death together, you will only stay together if you really are meant to be, and that experience will firm your bonds. Sadly the thing about facing trial and terror and loss and death is that often this means we do lose our soul mate, straight after having bonded with them so fiercely under such extreme circumstances, because the chance of death is high when there is danger to us.

C: Thirdly, loss allows us to see what we have lacking from our life. If something is missing, we really do notice its absence more than we would notice its presence. Contentment and happiness are less direct, blunt, strong emotions than despair, pain and unhappiness. It is quite possible we hear about people losing their Mr/Mrs Right after finding them, because the loss helped them realise exactly what they had been in possession of: a soul mate. So many of us may already have our true love, but not realise till we lose them.

D: Love isn't some beautifully balanced equation. Someone can be your soul mate without you being theirs. Sometimes we lose our soul mates because they just don't feel the same. If the chance of finding the one for you is pretty low, how low must the chance be of them feeling the same as well? Admittedly, I think soul mates are usually soul mates because they recognise and reflect back and forth between them the love they feel, amplifying it. But I'm not going to rule out the possibility that someone could be right for you, but you might not be right for them. It's even more tragic to find your soul mate and find they don't like you, than to not find them at all. Thus we hear about tales of being dumped by your one true love.

E: True love is based on deep knowledge of each other, and time spent with each other, just like regular love. I argue that what Romeo and Juliet had was no true love at all, but some form of crush or obsession, which I shall mention in the next item. True love is based on much more enduring and lasting bonds than the idea of "love at first sight". We may recognise something special in our soul mate right away, but time and endurance is the proof and confirmation that they are someone special to us. I believe in "recognising potential to love someone, when you first see them".

6 Obsession:

Obsession is an "add-on" If you like, to all other states of emotional being. It is the unhealthy, damaging, and harmful fixation with someone you are attracted to in a way which disrupts your life and the lives of those around you for worse, not better. The level of emotion that you add obsession to determines its potency. Add obsession to

merely physical attraction, and you might get someone who stalks celebrities because of how they look. Add obsession to love, and you may get an ex who will kill themselves if you won't go back to them.

Obsession doesn't always have to be harmful to others, but it is usually harmful to the person with the obsession, no matter how much they keep it to themselves, because the unfulfilled yearning and pain is all consuming and becomes their priority in life so that they may neglect family and friends and work, commit crimes in order to fulfil their obsession (like stealing enough money to buy their loved one gifts) and losing their self esteem.

Obsession is often unrequited, because the lack of satisfaction fuels the obsession, in a desperate attempt to regain the damage done to their ego, and gain romantic or sexual fulfilment, but when it is requited and two people are obsessed with each other, they also tend to exclude the rest of the world and become utterly dependent on each other, which can be unhealthy.

Many relationships contain mild amounts of obsession, but in small doses and kept carefully checked, it can be safe and non harmful. If you are obsessed with someone you believe to be your soul mate, you may simply spend the rest of your life thinking about them, and missing them. This is a sad, quiet, tragedy, and a very personal one. It would be a shame to spend a whole life time heart broken.

7 Acknowledgements

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA.

This document was typeset using L^AT_EX by Jamie Cheetham.