

Stephen J. Betchen D.S.W.
Magnetic Partners

Why We Marry People We Aren't Physically Attracted To

The importance of laying a good relational foundation

Posted Sep 13, 2015



One of the first things I do after evaluating a couple is to separate the partners and ask each the following questions: Are you physically attracted to your spouse? Were you ever physically attracted to your spouse? How's your sex life? How was your sex life in the beginning of your courtship? Why did you marry your spouse? Here's some of the responses:

"I never found him very physically attractive."

"He was 'good-enough' looking. But I usually like taller guys with more hair."

"She was okay for a brunette, but I always liked blondes better."

"I didn't really find him attractive, but I thought I could with time."

"He really seemed to love me, and I fall easily for guys who pursue me."

"I didn't date much, and she was the first girl who showed interest in me."

"I used to be attracted to her, but she stopped taking care of herself."

"I was attracted to him, but his drinking eventually turned me off."

"I was attracted to him, but since cheating on me I get nauseous when he's near."

"Our sex life is nonexistent."

"Our sex life is sporadic at best."

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"I never thought a good sex life was that important."

"I knew he'd be a good provider, and I thought that was enough."

"I never liked the way she kissed."

"He never initiated sex. I always wondered whether he was really attracted to me."

"She never initiated sex. And I prefer more sexually aggressive women."

"I married him because my parents liked him."

"I married him because my biological clock was ticking."

"I married him because I thought he'd make a good father."

"I married him because religion was just as important to him as it was to me."

"I got married because I really liked his family."

"I married her because I just can't say no."

"I married her because we went out for a long time and I just couldn't break her heart."

"I married him because I thought the reasons why I didn't find him attractive were shallow and not enough to take seriously (e.g., crooked teeth, smoker, dressed weird)."

As a marital therapist, most of the responses make saving a relationship rather daunting to say the least. But what I find ironic is that most of these people were conscious of the fact that something was amiss before they even tied the knot, and yet they carried on. This simply won't do. You will need to more carefully consider who you are going to marry and why you are marrying them. It must be understood: if there is something that is bothering you—even if it is your gut alone—you should take some time and contemplate what you are about to do.

Marriage is not a game. It is a serious commitment with potential serious consequences. And while there will always be some risk involved in such a complex commitment, many take it for granted. Like the wife who complained to me that her husband stared at other women when they first met. She thought after marriage he would focus on her alone. Well she was wrong...and things got worse.

More often than not, when a problem exists before marriage it usually gets worse. Hence, I cannot underestimate the value of laying a good relational foundation. Without such a base to launch from, too often the relationship turns out to be a veritable "house of cards," easily blown over when a strong enough crisis occurs. Dylan's lyrics in *Forever Young* are prophetic:

"May your hands always be busy.

May your feet always be swift.

May you have a strong foundation.

When the winds of change shift."



38 Comments

To be fair, some of these

Submitted by Anonymous on September 14, 2015 - 12:30am

To be fair, some of these reasons can not be easily foreseen before marriage. You can't always see the warning signs that someone will let themselves go or that they will cheat on you.

Reply to Anonymous

Quote Anonymous

If one is willing to marry

Submitted by H.W. on September 14, 2015 - 4:52am

If one is willing to marry someone they don't find attractive, the real question is why they did it, not if they'll find a mate they do find attractive.

Reply to H.W.

Quote H.W.

So why do people marry

Submitted by Anonymous on September 14, 2015 - 6:23am

So why do people marry despite a lack of initial physical attraction?

Reply to Anonymous

Quote Anonymous

Unanswered

Submitted by Crystal on September 16, 2015 - 10:29am

I know! I asked myself the same thing after reading the post. The author didn't even answer why people marry.

Reply to Crystal

Quote Crystal

Attraction

Submitted by Stephen J Betchen D.S.W. on September 16, 2015 - 10:43am

Thank you for responding Crystal. The question of why we marry people we aren't physically attracted to was answered by many of the client responses (because of my biological clock; pressure from parents; religion; good provider, etc.). But in the next blog I will address some of the deeper, more complex reasons we do so. Dr. Betchen

[Reply to Stephen J Betchen D.S.W.](#)

[Quote Stephen J Betchen D.S.W.](#)

I've heard it said that women

Submitted by Maria on September 14, 2015 - 6:47am

I've heard it said that women marry men, hoping the man will change. And men marry women, hoping the woman will not change. Based on some of the responses you shared, sounds like there's some truth to that.

[Reply to Maria](#)

[Quote Maria](#)

People marry people they don't like all the time

Submitted by Anonymous on September 14, 2015 - 7:36am

Marriage has lots of privileges. Marriage can be used to claw one's way to the top. Marriage can get one a job, a better social position or lots of money. Almost every marriage I see these days has piece of this. If one isn't getting something from a marriage then why bother?

Once one gets the money, the job or whatever element they want from a marriage there is really no reason to continue to pretend they like their spouse. Marital counseling isn't going to fix it. The situation is what it is.

[Reply to Anonymous](#)

[Quote Anonymous](#)

Spot on Anonymous

Submitted by Mary on September 14, 2015 - 7:45am

What has love go to do with marriage?

Nothing. And marriage provides a boatload of legal, social, financial and other benefits, to include a stable (hopefully) structure to bear and rear children. That is a powerful reason enough to marry.

What has probably ruined marriage is the concept of it being about love. Now, the expectation is that one is supposed to get so many needs met from their spouse, and if that doesn't happen, everyone says they "married the wrong person".

There is no more efficient a machine to kill romance than marriage. But marriage can provide a stability, buttressed by legal perks that is helpful over the long term.

Perhaps people need to lower their expectations on how much happiness and satisfaction they are actually going to get from the state of marriage. It probably won't be as much as they fantasize about.

Reply to Mary

Quote Mary

Don't agree that marriage is a waste of time

Submitted by Frybread on September 15, 2015 - 1:54pm

Marriage carries with it more than 1,000 federal and states rights that non-married couples do not get, such as hospital visitation, estate inheritance, adoption, protection from having to testify against your spouse, etc. This is why gay men and women have been fighting for the right to marry for some time.

Reply to Frybread

Quote Frybread

RIGHT!

Submitted by tj on September 16, 2015 - 9:31am

The more I think about it, the more I am convinced all gays should have the right to marry. After all, why should they be happy!

(Just kidding---but just couldn't help myself.)

Those same "rights, you quote carry a lot of obligations which you are minimizing. It's not all a one-way street.

Reality---marriage is what you make it; heaven or hell. You damn well better marry for more than physical attraction or money. or nice hair--they come and go--and quickly.

Reply to tj

Quote tj

I would only add to this

Submitted by Gary g on September 14, 2015 - 9:20am

I would only add to this article that sometimes people who are not physically attracted at first, or not so much attracted, become more attracted as they adjust to their spouse over the years.

And, likewise, some people who are very attracted at first lose their sexual desire or motivation entirely due to hormonal and body changes due to childbirth, menopause, low testosterone, erectile dysfunction, or a myriad of other medical conditions.

And some people who were very attracted at first find that their sexual interests change a lot over the years, and their once-attractive spouses are not interesting anymore. Some even realize that their real attraction was to the same sex, etc.

Of course it always helps to have a strong physical attraction at first, but that alone turns out to be only a small advantage in the long run, not a near-guarantee by any means.

Reply to Gary g

Quote Gary g

Physical attraction is not enough

Submitted by Lynn on September 14, 2015 - 10:50am

I agree fully that physical attraction isn't everything. People grow fond of another through many ways. Love progresses to familiarity, like how comfortable one is almost like a good friend, how one is able to handle situations well, able to communicate, convey love, care and concern. Physical attraction thus may develop further for one is attracted to a more whole person at a deeper level. Passion and lust only lasts for that moment. When one grows old, is it time for a change to a new young one that is irresistibly attractive and one you're physically extremely attracted to? But can't even understand a single word you're saying.

Reply to Lynn

Quote Lynn

Speak for yourself

Submitted by Gary g on September 14, 2015 - 10:31pm

You're not speaking for everyone with your comments. Perhaps you're telling us more about you than anything else.

For some people the passion lasts into growing old. If nobody liked someone old, then just how is it supposed to work for an older person to find a "new young one"? That "young one" has to already like someone old, long before they're old themselves. Didn't think of that logical flaw in your comment, did you?

And you're not right about "can't understand a single word". Sometimes an age-gap relationship works because the communication is actually quite good, between an intelligent young person and an older person with the same interests who is a mentor in the same passion. A young person and an old person can sometimes have far more to teach and learn from each other than two people with the same experience -- who have too much in common sometimes.

Reply to Gary g

Quote Gary g

Add new comment | Psychology Today

Submitted by K3vin Envoy on September 18, 2015 - 2:19am

What i do not understood is in fact how you're now not really a lot more smartly-preferred than you may be right now. You're very intelligent. You realize thus considerably in the case of this subject, made me individually believe it from so many numerous angles. Its like women and men aren't interested unless it's something to accomplish with Girl gaga! Your personal stuffs nice. At all times care for it up!

Reply to K3vin Envoy

Quote K3vin Envoy

It's seen as shallow

Submitted by anon on September 14, 2015 - 1:06pm

I have been with people I have not found physically attractive for years before, and yes I agree I probably shouldn't have. It really doesn't work. My problem is partly that whatever it is in me that decides someone is sexually appealing, it has a very narrow range of interest, so I do not find the vast, vast majority of men attractive. For this reason, as well as a lot of social pressure 'not to be shallow', I started to tell myself that I was wrong to hold out for someone attractive and that I had to be more reasonable, lower my standards, and give other people a try.

I agree, it's a mistake (though I've never been married, fortunately); but I think it's kind of understandable given that you're not "supposed" to put looks first (according to our culture).

Reply to anon

Quote anon

Don't beat yourself up

Submitted by Kelly on September 15, 2015 - 12:36pm

I feel the same way as you do, I have a very narrow definition of what I find attractive in men and hence have gone prolonged periods (single 10 yrs now) without dating. Who cares about what we're "supposed" to do? Do what works for you.

Reply to Kelly

Quote Kelly

Good

Submitted by Frybread on September 15, 2015 - 1:58pm

No offense, but it sounds like you and anon are doing men a favor by effectively removing yourselves from the dating market.

Reply to Frybread

Quote Frybread

What I will never understand

Submitted by a wife on September 15, 2015 - 12:45pm

What I will never understand is why people think it's just fine to seriously let themselves go. And then many of them complain their spouse doesn't want to have sex with them. Maybe they do it intentionally so that they won't have to have sex...I don't know. All I do know is that it sure would be nice to look at your spouse from across the room and still feel like he or she looks sexy and handsome.

Reply to a wife

Quote a wife

Are you sure they are letting

Submitted by G.R. on September 16, 2015 - 12:54pm

Are you sure they are letting themselves go? Hormones dictate that a woman's body will fluctuate. Some women can't lose the baby weight after they have children. Breasts change size from pregnancy. Stomachs change size for both men and women during the mid-age spread. Just wait for menopause if you're a woman; it doesn't get better.

People grow old, they get wrinkles (some say women age faster than men so they get wrinkled faster and look older quicker.)

You think people can wave a magic wand and have no wrinkles or no fat, no hormones ever, never lose their hair, never have thinning hair? Never change? Sure, you might think makeup can cover flaws but that will never hold them back permanently.

Come to understand that people of both genders change as they grow older; there's nothing turning back age. We cannot remain a slender, sexy, handsome teenager or young adult forever. Maybe if you're a celebrity, but not all of us are.

Reply to G.R.

Quote G.R.

There's a lot one can do to

Submitted by Gary g on September 17, 2015 - 10:36pm

There's a lot one can do to stay in shape, primarily with lots of exercise. And even without exercise, not everyone experiences all of the inevitable things at all with age. For example, some people never gain weight. Good genes help. And smoking and drinking will accelerate cellular aging, which is closely related to how old you look, and independent of actual age in years. That's an eye-opener. There are people who look older at 40 than some do at 60.

So, I call wrong on your assumptions. You can indeed turn back age, especially if you're out of shape, smoke, and don't exercise. By making changes, you will add years to your life and look younger too.

Reply to Gary g

Quote Gary g

Staying healthy regardless of marital status

Submitted by Mary on September 18, 2015 - 7:10am

Gary g is correct - there is a lot one can do to keep themselves in the best shape that is right for them.

When we all were younger most people looked pretty good. As we age the habits we engage in have a dramatic impact on our health. Not excessively drinking, not smoking, eating well, exercising, maintain appropriate weight and wearing our seat belts are the five things people can do on a daily basis that, over the long haul, can improve our overall quality of life.

At age 57 I am startled by the physical differences- peer wise - starting to emerge in people my age in a way that never was when I was younger. You can look at a group of people in these advanced age groups and see who engages in regular physical conditioning and who does not. And the older we get the more pronounced they physical differences are. Some certainly cannot be helped, but a lot of aging is due to long term life style choices and habits.

Reply to Mary

Quote Mary

From a scientific and

Submitted by Anonymous on September 15, 2015 - 2:06pm

From a scientific and anthropological point of view, the idea of two people remaining physically attracted to each other for their whole lives is ridiculous. Mating for life is not a biological feature of the human species, because if it was then there would be no need for the legal and religious inventions of marriage or divorce. From a sociological point of view marriage is a method of control which safeguards children for long enough for them to become the next generation of workers, and it doesn't matter if their parents haven't loved each other for years.

As regards gaining from marriage, it is fairly obvious that it is women who gain the security and legal protection, while men gain very little, except perhaps the respect of other married women.

Reply to Anonymous

Quote Anonymous

What century are you from?

Submitted by Gary g on September 15, 2015 - 10:53pm

Those who feel credit scores have no place in the hiring process will, however, be disheartened by some of the other findings. Bernerth says researchers found correlations between credit scores and what he terms "task performance" and "citizenship behavior."

Huh? What century are you from? For some years now, more women have been getting college degrees than men.

Reply to Gary g

Quote Gary g

What do men get from marriage?

Submitted by Ashara Dayne on September 16, 2015 - 4:57am

Men get the legal right to be involved with the raising of their children, as well as a promise from their mother that the children are his. Quite important for men who actually care about those things. Arguably there may be other benefits, such as a housekeeper/cook/cleaner/whore/nanny/nurse, as well as some guarantee of companionship.

Of course, unrealistic expectations on both sides often leads to marital breakdown. If both are unduly selfish it's highly unlikely to work. If both are kind, sensitive and caring it's more certain to succeed.

And of course, circumstances change. Workaholic husbands who eventually become wealthy will want someone who will be appreciative, grateful, respectful and who'll admire them, etc. rather than the equal they married. And so many women are gold diggers they'll have no shortage of women lining up ready to be the perfect partner who knows exactly what he wants. Unless the long-suffering wife is on her best behavior and competing she'll be unceremoniously dumped.

Reply to Ashara Dayne

Quote Ashara Dayne

incorrect paste!

Submitted by Gary g on September 18, 2015 - 12:10pm

As regards gaining from marriage, it is fairly obvious that it is women who gain the security and legal protection, while men gain very little, except perhaps the respect of other married women.

Women have been getting more bachelor degrees than men for some years now. Your thinking was more true in the 20th century. We're in the 21st century now.

Reply to Gary g

Quote Gary g

Long-term passionate love does exist

Submitted by Hank on September 15, 2015 - 4:31pm

I am not trying to say that life-long monogamy is for everyone, but anonymous is wrong when he says that "the idea of two people remaining physically attracted to each other for their whole lives is ridiculous (sic)." The research of Arthur Aron and others shows that for a minority of couples (

Reply to Hank

Quote Hank

Testimony

Submitted by Dr Dumis on September 16, 2015 - 5:51am

I am sharing my testimony to everyone that has tried everything possible and had lost hope on how they can get their ex back, I am from New York, USA, i want you all to know that Dr Dumis did a spell work for me and after 2days of his spell cast, my ex came back to me without any delay, i am really happy now that we are together again and we are living happily with so much love and respect for each other, so i will advise everyone to ask for this same help of Dr Dumis so that you can be happy again and make your dreams and wishes you have with your ex come true and he also specialized in other speritual cases. Thanks so much If you need his help you can contact him through this email (drdumispellcaster@gmail.com ✉), or you can 'contact him through his phone number +27717441865

Reply to Dr Dumis

Quote Dr Dumis

spam spam spam spam

Submitted by spam hound on September 17, 2015 - 1:37am

Go boil your head

Reply to spam hound

Quote spam hound

Testiony

Submitted by Dr Dumis on September 16, 2015 - 5:54am

I am sharing my testimony to everyone that has tried everything possible and had lost hope on how they can get their ex back, I am from New York, USA, i want you all to know that Dr Dumis did a spell work for me and after 2days of his spell cast, my ex came back to me without any delay, i am really happy now that we are together again and we are living happily with so much love and respect for each other, so i will advise everyone to ask for this same help of Dr Dumis so that you can be happy again and make your dreams and wishes you have with your ex come true and he also specialized in other speritual cases. Thanks so much If you need his help you can contact him through this email (drdumispellcaster@gmail.com ✉), or you can 'contact him through his phone number +27717441865

Reply to Dr Dumis

Quote Dr Dumis

I married a guy who beat me.

Submitted by Hari on September 16, 2015 - 4:36pm

I married a guy who beat me. I thought that I couldn't do any better. I am glad that I dumped him after he strangled me. I have a good guy now.

Reply to Hari

Quote Hari

"In Praise of Love"

Submitted by SDR on September 16, 2015 - 9:57pm

Yes there is something called "love," it is real, and it deepens.

If you want to trust your life with someone who does not love you, you are making a grievous mistake. The person you marry at that moment becomes your next of kin, and if anything happens to you where you can't decide what should be done, guess who has the right to decide for you? You've got it.

So do you really think that should be the person who repulses you, or who you are repulsed by? Or the one you're with for money? (When does your workday end, then?)

The romantic and the pragmatic give you the same answer.

BTW, "In Praise of Love" is the title of a book that I strongly recommend.

Reply to SDR

Quote SDR

the next of kin test

Submitted by Gary B on September 17, 2015 - 1:45am

Thank you for your comments.... as dumb as it seems, I hadn't thought of it that way.... but what a wonderful test to apply to the partner you're with right now!

Would you're partner, as next of kin, do the right thing by you in the event of your untimely demise?

If in doubt, bale out.....

Made me think for sure!

Reply to Gary B

Quote Gary B

Why people marry someone they don't find attractive.

Submitted by Kim L. Short on September 17, 2015 - 8:26am

In American culture the last guy in the neighborhood to have a sex life is not a man. And women are still pressured to have babies whether they want them or not.

.

People get married because they think they're supposed to.

Reply to Kim L. Short

Quote Kim L. Short

Marrying someone You have Little Attraction To

Submitted by Anne on September 18, 2015 - 8:18am

Its all about societal pressures. Women are convinced they "must" bear children, and do it by a certain age, and men get tired of pursuing sex partners that don't pan out. The woman gives out sex to get the man's commitment and the man gives his commitment (hoping) to get limitless sex-on-demand. Its all a "bait and switch" maneuver!

Reply to Anne

Quote Anne

Unfortunately, too true

Submitted by Gary g on September 18, 2015 - 12:15pm

Unfortunately, Anne, what you write is true too often, even for couples who are physically attracted to each other, and even if they think they will have love and sex forever.

Reply to Gary g

Quote Gary g

Poorly titled article

Submitted by Ross on September 18, 2015 - 9:14am

Let's look at the statements listed at the beginning of this article.

Many of these statements have nothing to do with being physically attracted to someone. Other statements show a change in the initial attraction, not a lack of attraction at the time of marriage.

"I used to be attracted to her, but she stopped taking care of herself." This is a change in attraction. It clearly show initial attraction.

"I was attracted to him, but his drinking eventually turned me off." This is a change in attraction also. It clearly states that she was initially attracted to him.

"I was attracted to him, but since cheating on me I get nauseous when he's near." This is a change in attraction also. It clearly states that she was initially attracted to him.

"He never initiated sex. I always wondered whether he was really attracted to me." & "She never initiated sex. And I prefer more sexually

aggressive women." These statements are about behavior and show no evidence of a lack of attraction at the time of marriage.

Let's continue on and look at the paragraph directly after the statements. This paragraph has nothing to do with physical attraction. This paragraph is about intuition and as the author states " these people were conscious of the fact that something was amiss before they even tied the knot". This in no way shows any connection to physical attraction.

The next two paragraphs continue on with a preachy lecture about behaviors, not physical attraction. This article provides no answer to the initial question of "Why We Marry People We Aren't Physically Attracted To". The article doesn't relate to its title. I suggest a new title.

Reply to Ross

Quote Ross

Other attractions

Submitted by Cianna on September 18, 2015 - 3:30pm

People could also marry based on emotional attraction, like I married them because of their heart.

Reply to Cianna

Quote Cianna

Women and a narrower definition of what we find attractive

Submitted by Anna on September 19, 2015 - 5:30am

I would just like to reply in relation to Kelly and anon's comments regarding their narrow definition of what they find attractive in men. The male species should not be offended that this is the case. Studies have concluded that in general men are far more likely to be attracted to the majority of women they arrange to date while the opposite is true for women on meeting. This appears to be a product of the way humans have evolved. For women if we are attracted to fewer men overall that we come into contact with then we will be more likely to protect our sexual health and the health of any embryo or child that we are carrying. For men, obviously if you are attracted to a wide variety of women then the chances of your seed being sown far and wide are far greater and the survival of the species is thus promoted. It seems to me there is an evolutionary angle that has not been considered.

Personally I married a man that I was not particularly attracted to because he pursued me. It lasted five quite unhappy years but we have two children that I am very happy about. You can't ever regret any union that provided you with children.

Reply to Anna

Quote Anna

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What pulled you together may be pulling you apart.



Stephen J. Betchen, D.S.W., is the author of the book *Magnetic Partners*.



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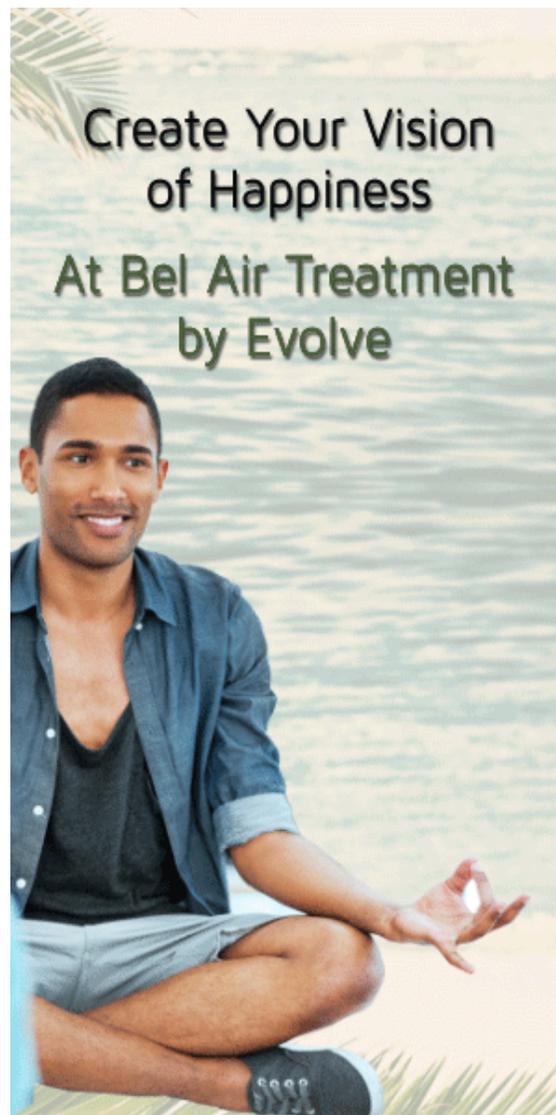
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