

**HOW READY ARE
YOU FOR LOVE?**

The School of Life

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HOW READY ARE YOU FOR LOVE?

A path to more fulfilling
and joyful relationships

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I.

INTRODUCTION

The blame for most of what goes wrong in our love lives can be traced back to an almost innocent-sounding problem: a lack of self-knowledge. It is because we don't understand ourselves very well that we pick incompatible candidates, fail to assess our needs correctly, can't spot what we are doing to generate resentment and have trouble deciding whether to stay with or leave partners with whom we have run into difficulties.

Life normally ends up, at huge cost, eventually teaching us the necessary lessons. With the years, we tend to learn who we are, what makes us happy, what we do to frighten away those we like and how we sabotage our chances of contentment. By the time we reach retirement age, we may have correctly pieced together some good thoughts about how our early childhoods shaped our attachments; we may be getting better at apologising and saying important things directly. We may even accept that it is not – always and invariably – the other person's fault.

But the promise of this questionnaire is that, through a series of carefully structured enquiries, we may learn faster. Our deep minds will disclose themselves to us with greater ease and insight. We could – with luck – spare ourselves a few decades, and many crises too. The essays that accompany these questions are intended as conduits to self-reflection and prompts for emotional exploration; we might spend as much time reflecting as we do on reading. We are invited to

recognise ourselves in certain doubtful or counterproductive patterns – and wince and vow to do things differently.

It may be best to answer the questions quickly. ‘Not thinking too much’ can help our true natures to manifest themselves more cleanly. Speed can help us to catch our defences unaware. The back flap of the book has space to record our answers. Once we have worked through the series, we can retrace our steps and – using the grading system at the back – add up our score, which is designed to give us a sense of our overall levels of emotional progress. We might then ask a prospective or actual partner to do the same, which could make for a valuable game on an early date.

As ever, we should not expect to be entirely mature in many areas: imperfection is the general rule; we are never done with ‘growing up’. Love is a skill, not an emotion – and one we seldom receive systematic instruction in. However urgent our longing for love might be, a satisfying relationship only seems possible after we make considerable conscious effort to master the quirks of our obtuse minds. This book hopes to introduce us to some central unknown bits of ourselves – in the name of the love we long for.