

Are Age Differences a Barrier to Romance?



Ageless love is a popular topic for [Loveawake online dating site](#) forum. Our culture has raised us to believe that love is a mysterious, superior force that will automatically conquer any obstacles. While it is true that a deep and lasting love gives couples a solid foundation from which to meet the challenges of daily life, the idea that “love conquers all” may be a bit unrealistic. Ageless love can certainly work, but couples should remain aware of the special issues that a large age difference may raise.

One of the biggest challenges to ageless love is the issue of psychological and emotional development. According to popular psychological thought, humans develop through a series of stages. The exact ages at which one passes through a particular stage will vary according to many factors, but

expect that those in a given age range will likely be in approximately the same stage of development.

According to Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, humans reach the Identity vs. Role Confusion stage during adolescence, while young adulthood marks the Intimacy vs. Isolation stage. However, Erikson developed his theory during the 1950s when marrying just after high school was the norm. Many contemporary psychologists feel that in the modern Western world, where delaying marriage and family is the new norm, we reach these stages at more advanced ages. Many experts feel that the Identity vs. Role Confusion stage is now achieved in young adulthood.

This means that in a May-December relationship (a popular term for ageless love), the younger partner may still struggle with figuring out his or her own identity. Until the identity crisis is resolved, it is difficult for anyone to create and maintain a long-lived marriage type relationship. Many couples do come together during

this phase and create lifelong relationships. In a typical relationship between people of this age, both partners will be in this stage or have recently completed it. This can lead to a sense of shared struggle that can bring the partners closer. In an ageless love relationship, however, the younger partner may feel alone in working through the identity crisis. He or she may feel that the partner simply does not understand.

The older partner in an ageless love relationship may struggle with developmental stage issues of his or her own. The stage after Identity vs. Role Confusion is Intimacy vs. Isolation. It is during the latter phase of development that people typically marry for the first time. [The older partner](#) may have successfully resolved his or her own identity crisis and be ready for a deeper, more lasting relationship. He or she may feel that the younger partner is self-centered or unloving, because the younger partner is still heavily focused on resolving his or her own stage of development.

For couples with an even larger age difference, things may be yet more complicated. In middle adulthood, individuals struggle with generativity, wondering if they have truly left a lasting mark on the world. A partner who has reached this stage may see the younger partner's identity crisis or fear of intimacy as minor and silly in comparison to the new issues with which he struggles.

Maturity level may also be a concern in ageless love. In general, as we age and mature, we learn better control over our emotions. While this is certainly not true in every case, the norm is that younger partners are more prone to unhealthy coping mechanisms from repression to explosive outbursts. Older partners, with more experience in relationship issues, are generally more able to discuss rationally issues without panic or inappropriate anger. Again, this is a general trend and may not be true within a specific relationship.

Another challenge that ageless love may face is in the area of shared experience. Generations are defined primarily by major world events. Someone who was a child when the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded, for example, sees that particular event far differently than does someone who was an adult at the time. The Vietnam War resonates far differently for those who either served or protested than for someone who learned about the conflict only through history books.

Dating outside one's generational group means dating someone with a completely different world view. The way we approach our lives, from relationships to finances, is impacted largely by the circumstances in which we have been previously involved. In this sense, inter-generational dating is no different from interracial dating or dating someone from a much different financial and social class. While this disparity in life experience should in no way deter anyone from following his or her heart, it does create another level of possible conflict of which both partners should be aware.

Patience with each other is also necessary in achieving a successful ageless love. Both partners must remember that the other is working through his or her required psychological and emotional development. A younger partner may feel resentful of an older partner's seeming selflessness, while the older partner may feel uncomfortable with the younger partner's ever-changing roster of seemingly selfish friends.

Both partners [must be mature enough](#) to handle possible negative reactions from friends and family as well as society as a whole. Ageless love is not yet accepted in many segments of society, so the couple should expect that not everyone will approve of their relationship. Healthy communication between the couple and the presentation of a united front can help the couple to deal with these reactions.

Those who are involved in ageless love must remember to approach the relationship from a position of logic and reason as well as emotion and feelings. All relationships are complicated and those that vary from societal norms are especially so. Nonetheless, if your feelings are strong and your lines of communication open, then there is no reason that your relationship cannot be successful. Awareness of the possible challenges that your relationship might face will help you to recognize and face any problems as they arise.