

Crazy Love



While not the most poetic notion, Reproduction for Perpetuation of the Species is among the most basic of human instincts. Since romantic love is not essential to the project of breeding, why does love exist at all? What is love? Where does it come from and what is it made of?

From Darwin to Cole Porter, from Shakespeare to Nicolas Sarkozy, from Adam and Eve to Britney and K-Fed, love is and has always been a consuming preoccupation of us mere mortals, and so Valentine's Day seems a fitting occasion upon which to explore beneath that first blush of attraction to examine a most impractical phenomenon under the harsh light of pragmatic erudition.

"When love is not madness, it is not love." -Pedro Calderon de la Barca

Love Is A Drug

When first one falls for one's beloved, the reward centers of the brain are deluged with dopamine, a hormone that affects the nervous system of the lover in much the same way as cocaine, nicotine and amphetamines, and which, at abnormally high levels, is linked to psychosis and schizophrenia. In the flood, those regions of the brain that control negative emotions and critical social judgment are incapacitated, while the paramour's serotonin levels drop, a chemical function observed in those undergoing an intense religious experience and in the case studies of serial killers.

Lust has its own set of hormones gone wild, including testosterone, which is linked with mood disorders and aggressive behavior, and the narcotic-like chemical phenethylamine, which is a major ingredient in chocolate. Endorphins released can be compared to opiates and the feeling known as "runner's high." Love is not blind, but it *does* cause the ardent organism in question to view the world through the decidedly unconventional psychedelic, pin-prick irises of a hop-headed lunatic. In essence then, even your garden-variety Lothario is a deranged junkie careening about with a lampshade on his head, a Snickers bar in his hand and a song in his heart, willing to do anything to secure his next fix. He is, literally, addicted.

The same dopamine high that convinced our inamorata

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Love is Good For You

So says an article written by the staff of the venerable Mayo Clinic (2/6/2006, www.mayoclinic.com), and here's why:

Stress kills. Your cardiovascular, hormonal and immune systems are negatively impacted by stress, making you vulnerable to disease. A happy partnership is an extremely effective stress management tool because you have more hands on deck, more solutions, more money, and a sense of responsibility to your partner that affects your behavior for the better.

A decades-long study still underway at Ohio State University examines how our personal relationships bring to bear on our health. Positive interaction between partners caused lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which in turn allowed the compounds and cells responsible for repairing injured tissues to expedite their healing process.

Professor Linda Waite of the University of Chicago, in an address to the Population Association of America, explained that the health benefits of marriage are so strong that a married man with heart disease can be expected to live, on average, 1400 days longer (nearly four years!) than an unmarried man with a healthy heart. This longer life expectancy is even greater for a married man who has cancer or is 20 pounds overweight compared to his healthy, but unmarried, counterpart. (Linda J. Waite, "Does Marriage Matter?" *Presidential Address to the American Population Association of America, April 8, 1995*; Linda Waite, "Does Marriage Matter?" *Demography* 32 (1995): 483-507).

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he same dopamine high that convinced our inamorata that all she needed was love leaves her in the proverbial gutter of despair when the dose is withheld, leading some to sadness and an irresistible urge to write bad poetry, and others to hacking into their ex's email or murder. The tabloids are filled with the tragic stories of those who cannot cope with withdrawal from the euphoria of that first attraction, but happily, most of us are hardwired to move on to the next stage.

Since we would all burn out in short order if such an extreme intoxication were sustained, cooler heads eventually prevail, as the hormones oxytocin (aka "The Cuddling Hormone") and vasopressin are activated later in a relationship and lead to bonding and trust, as well as the hormone prolactin, which specifically tones down the affects of dopamine, testosterone and estrogen. These are the same hormones at play in our relationships with our children, our grandmothers, our dogs and our chiropractors.



If falling in love feels so good, why don't we all just scamper about falling in love anew once a day with anyone who happens to be convenient? This, too, is a scientific event, because selecting a mate is another aspect of the Darwinian Imperative of reproduction, which requires not only the production of the most high quality babies, but the ability to nurture those babies until they are adults with the stamina and smarts to make their own exceptional offspring. So, in order to broadcast high quality seeds in the most fertile of fields, men and women are designed to seek out outward signs of good genes in a potential partner: symmetrical features, intelligence and the ability to 'feather a nest.'

Consider the cave woman with a 10 pound infant. Can she leave him unattended to gather firewood? Hunt for bison? Drink Cosmopolitans with her girlfriends? No, she cannot. And so, the issue of community (if not monogamy) is born.



Less than 5% of mammals are monogamous in a relationship, among them Prairie Voles, Marmosets, Otters, Beavers and Klipspringers. Monogamy gone wrong forms the basis of most of western literature and some of our history as well; think of famous triangles such as those involv-

ing Cleopatra, Julius Caesar and Marc Antony; Guinevere, King Arthur and Lancelot; Henry VIII and his six wives (!), and Helen, the wife of Greek King Menelaus, who dallied with Trojan Prince Paris and provoked the Trojan War. Perhaps it was not the fabled "face that launched a thousand ships," but the dopamine coursing through their veins.

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato gave some thought to the idea of the *Soul Mate*, denizens of a now mythological world who were both male and female at the same time, each with two sets of arms, legs, and one head with two faces. Perfectly content and self-sufficient, this tribe essentially turned away from the Gods, who punished them by splitting them in half, condemning all people to spend their lives searching for their *Other Half*.

Sonnets and sunsets aside, the last twenty years have seen an unprecedented interest from the world of science on the topic of Love. As they monitor and measure their way into the twenty-first century, perhaps a day will come when a perfect mate can be ordered like a complicated coffee from Starbucks ("Tall, dark and Handsome. Likes pina coladas and walks in the rain..."). Until such time, we like Joni Mitchell's take on her 1969 album *Clouds*:

"Moons and Junes and Ferris Wheels,
The dizzy, dancing way you feel
As every fairy tale comes real -
I've looked at love that way...

I've looked at love from both sides now -
From give and take, and still somehow
Its love's illusions I recall -
I really don't know love at all." ♥

Love is Good (continued)

Although new studies prove that good relationships are critical to our health, the current medical model, one that requires doctors to process patients as though they were Model Ts on Henry Ford's assembly line, does not address the isolation and loneliness of an immense part of the national population. LifeSpan advocates for our clients like they were family, and we are pleased to report that the effect of our counsel has garnered some remarkable results. ♥

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www.lifespancm.com/news.aspx

**"I don't think my wife likes me very much. When I had a heart attack she wrote for an ambulance."
Irish Comedian Frank Carson**

Doctor to Doctor

By Sebastian Dovi, M.D. - LifeSpan Medical Director

Achy Breaky Heart?

Here it is ~ February ~ *and no snow!* Perhaps this is a good thing, because heart attacks seem to increase in the winter when people shovel snow. Other peculiar statistics for risk include Mondays, living in the South and hair loss; while own-



ing a pet, conservative consumption of alcohol and a diet rich in fiber seem to provide some defense against heart attack and high blood pressure.

Two years in advance of their 2010 goal, The American Heart Association has achieved their mission of reducing coronary heart disease and stroke by 25%, but heart disease is still the number one cause of death in the United States. Your heart deserves better. Think of all it does for you: two thousand gallons of blood are pumped through your system every day, and if you live to be 70 years old, your heart will beat more than 2.5 billion times, pumping a total of roughly 51 million gallons of blood.

People with chest pain that gets worse when they walk and that goes away when they rest most likely have angina. Angina is caused when you don't get enough blood to your heart muscle. Lots of people take nitroglycerine under their tongue and the pain goes away in minutes, some need a stent, others bypass surgery. Part of the evaluation for chest pain is an EKG, A Stress Test, and/or a Stress Thallium test, an ECHO cardiogram and a cardiac catheterization. These all help to determine if you have a heart that needs surgery or can be treated with medication. They also help you to know how much work or exercise you can safely do. Other tests that are important are blood tests to check your sugar for diabetes and your fats for cholesterol, and triglycerides. It is also important to know if your blood pressure is elevated, if your kidneys are working properly and if anyone in your family had cardiovascular disease.

If you get sick and need to go to the hospital, this is a lot of information to remember. If you get sick locally and your

A Final Note:

You deserve to be healthy, and the power to be healthy rests in your own hands. Small, reasonable steps toward your resolution of good health will eventually get you to your destination. ♥

doctor will be taking care of you that's not so bad. But if you're on vacation, visiting your family out of town, or in a different country, what will you do? Lifespan has the solution. Their GuardianKey™ stores all your medical records on a password protected flash drive that you carry on your key chain, your wrist or on a lanyard around your neck. It contains not only your medical records but a copy of your Living Will, insurance information which speeds admission time, and an authorization that allows treatment in an emergency situation. The doctors will have a copy of your baseline information, EKG's, Stress Test, Blood work, and X-rays so they can treat you quickly and you won't have to remember a lot of complicated data. ♥

Websites We Love

www.AmericanHeart.org

The American Heart Association was founded in 1915, at a time when a diagnosis of heart disease was a death sentence. In their mission to build healthier lives, they are a dynamic organization of volunteers and a powerhouse of information on cardiovascular disease.

We're Growing!



Meet **Frank Alkin**, LifeSpan's *Director of Business Development*

Frank Alkin has spent his entire career in the health care industry providing management leadership to employers, providers, consumers and health care insurers. He has lectured on health care economics, and has served in a variety of capacities as sales manager, clinic and hospital administrator, marketing vice president, and national accounts consultant.

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