

Romance Research Roundup

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By the time Valentine's Day rolls around each year, researchers have gleaned a new batch of findings on the psychological secrets of the human heart. Below are some of the most recent findings on the science of love.

[Oxytocin May Put 'Rose-Colored Glasses' On Relationships](#)

Ever wondered what a friend or colleague sees in a new love interest? A study of how romantic partners express and receive gratitude found that people with higher levels of the “cuddle hormone” oxytocin may focus on the bigger picture of their relationship, while those with less of the feel-good hormone remain more tethered to the here and now of what their partner is actually saying. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill researchers Sara Algoe, Karen Grewen, and colleagues say this positive spin may help couples bond.

[Viewing Cute Animals Can Help Rekindle Marital Spark](#)

A team of scientists led by APS Fellow James McNulty of Florida State University has found that looking at images of baby animals can have an “acute” impact on a couple's relationship. When presented with a stream of such positive stimuli paired with images of their partner's face, people's implicit attitudes toward their significant other became more positive as well. The real surprise? This research was funded by the US Department of Defense to help couples separated by deployment fend off broken hearts.

[A 48-Hour Sexual 'Afterglow' Helps to Bond Partners Across Time](#)

Sex may be about more than reproduction and pleasure: Research suggests that the short-term boost of sexual satisfaction may play a crucial role in partner bonding. In a study of more than 200 newlywed

couples, APS Fellows Thomas Bradbury of University of California, Los Angeles, and James McNulty of Florida State University (FSU), as well as FSU researcher Andrea Meltzer and colleagues, found that partners who reported the strongest sexual afterglow had higher marital satisfaction during the first 6 months of marriage.

Lasting Love Relies on Equal Commitment, Not More Commitment

Learning to love requires us to balance our own needs with those of the people we care about. A longitudinal study suggests, however, that a resilient relationship may not be based on how people manage conflict, but on how closely their relational skills, such as conflict resolution and communication, match those of their partner. According to findings from APS Fellow Jeffry A. Simpson (University of Minnesota), M. Minda Oriña (Texas A&M University), and others, it's often a mismatch in relationship styles that lead to hostility.

How to Write Your Way to Marital Success

Putting aside just 7 minutes to take an objective look at intermarital conflicts may help defend a relationship against the ravages of time. APS Fellows Eli Finkel (Northwestern University) and James Gross (Stanford University) and colleagues found that while journaling about disagreements doesn't stop couples from fighting, it can prevent those same arguments from hindering their long-term marital stability.