

The Chemistry of Love

By Bob Evancho

*Oh, oh, catch that buzz, love is the drug I'm thinking of.
Oh, oh, can't you see, love is the drug for me.*

— Bryan Ferry

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ctually, the “drug” that British rock star Ferry craves in his song is an amphetaminelike, mildly hallucinogenic substance called phenylethylamine (PEA) — a naturally occurring chemical we release

in response to stimuli associated with romantic love.

The natural high we derive from PEA is certainly one of the most sublime and enjoyable qualities of being human. But beneath the passion, romance and all that mushy stuff is a carnal licentiousness — albeit unconscious — that is anchored in the most basic of instincts: the propagation of the species.

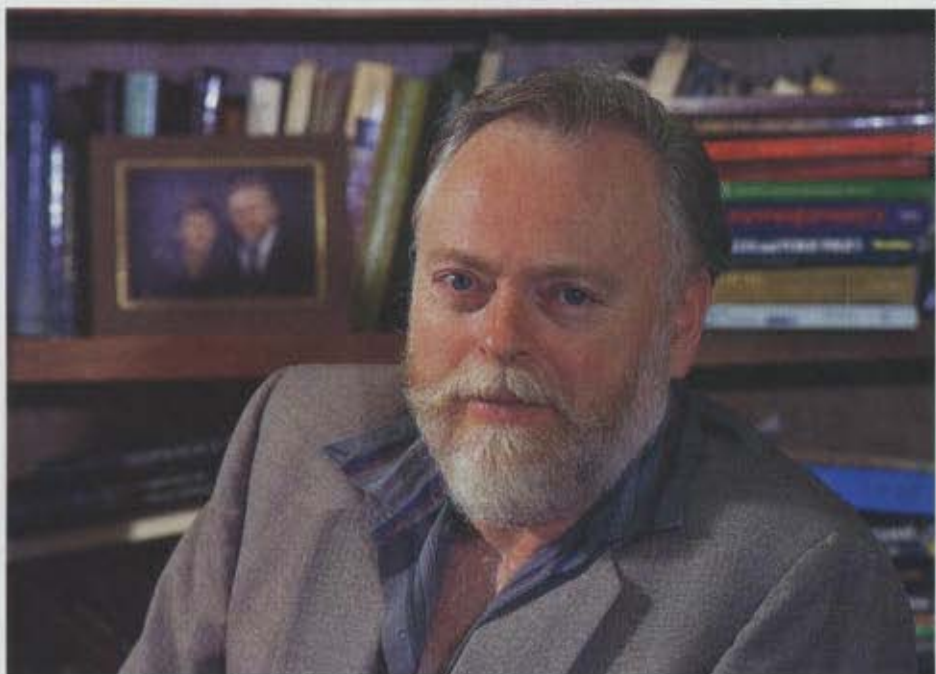
“Nature,” writes BSU criminologist Tony Walsh in his 1995 book *Biosociology: An Emerging Paradigm*, “has chemically wired us to feel good when we do things that encourage reproductive success.”

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محمد عبد الحليم

“Love will never last if you define it as that major, helter-skelter, heavy-metal feeling when you first fall in love. If that’s all you think love is, you’re in deep trouble. The phenylethylamine lasts two years, tops. It’s a drug that wears off like any other drug.”



Walsh: “Humans are what they are because our distant ancestors learned to love.”

In other words, this “chemistry of love,” as Walsh calls it, is all part of the evolution of mating and marriage patterns among human beings that began in the Stone Age. In a chapter from *Biosociology* titled “Love, Marriage and the Family,” Walsh notes that mating among animals “is little more than a mechanistic reproductive dance, shorn of emotional intensity.

“Nature has emotionally enriched the human reproductive impulse with love; and in doing so, it has immensely increased our enjoyment of both,” he continues. “Human social organization may have taken a very different turn were it not for the evolution of what scientists call pair-bonding and which the more romantic among us call love.”

But mankind’s inherent ability to kindle romance and intimacy wasn’t always a trait that set us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. Mating among early *Homo sapiens*, Walsh notes, was predicated on animal attraction and the biological urge to reproduce. As our species evolved, however, males tended to remain with the females they impregnated.

This initial pair-bonding, says Walsh, was an important chapter in the natural selection of the human species. “Our ancient ancestors faced some terrible challenges to survival, and one of the biggest problems was a tremendous infant

mortality rate. Eventually men and women began to stick together, or pair-bond, to aid one another in raising the infant, at least until that infant reached the age of reproductive success itself. Those offspring then passed on that propensity to pair-bond.”

And throughout the formation of society and the development of human intellect, what was called pair-bonding evolved into marriage. “What we’re doing is responding to the whispers of our evolutionary history,” says Walsh. “Marriage is simply a cultural formalization of what Mother Nature wants us to do anyway.”

According to Walsh, “humans are what they are because our distant ancestors learned to love.” Assuming the majority of marriages in our culture are based on romantic attachment, why, then, is contemporary American society rife with divorce and marital strife?

Needless to say, societal ills — the erosion of moral values, harsh economic conditions, etc. — are the most obvious factors. But chemistry plays a role, too. Just as addicts develop a tolerance to the drugs they ingest, spouses eventually develop a tolerance to PEA. “Love will never last if you define it as that major, helter-skelter, heavy-metal feeling when you first fall in love,” warns Walsh. “If

Viva Las Vegas!

By LaVelle Gardner

that's all you think love is, you're in deep trouble. The phenylethylamine lasts two years, tops. It's a drug that wears off like any other drug."

In other words, connubial bliss eventually gives way to the pressures of everyday life. Inevitably, over the years the foundation of the marriage changes, and the emotions that seemed so urgent and intense in the beginning scarcely apply as children arrive, careers take shape, and bills pile up.

It's ludicrous, asserts Walsh, to expect the honeymoon (the PEA) to last forever, and those who harbor such illusions threaten the viability of marriage. "Perhaps if those contemplating marriage were divested of unrealistic expectations of enduring bliss and of the narcissism implicit in the ethos of self-fulfillment, there might be less adultery and fewer divorces and hurt children," he writes in *Biosociology*, his eighth book.

A native of Great Britain with an extensive law-enforcement background, Walsh's reputation as an expert in the chemistry of love is gaining international prominence. He has been quoted in *TIME* and other magazines and interviewed on TV. In the fall of 1995 he flew to New York to appear on *Donahue* as part of a panel discussion on the evolution of love.

Walsh's interest in the "psychobiological perspective" of love began before he entered academia. A bobby in his homeland in the mid-'60s, he worked as a probation and parole officer when he moved to the United States. His master's degree is in medical sociology and his Ph.D. dissertation is on sex crimes.

Drawing from his scholarly background in biology, sociology, criminology and psychology and his professional experience in law enforcement, Walsh conducted extensive research in the late 1980s that examined the link between love deprivation and criminal activity. That interest branched out into the chemistry of love.

Speaking of which, how, then, do old married folks satiate their need for PEA? Or are they doomed to marriages bereft of fire and passion?

"Herein lies the importance of choosing our lovers wisely so that we like them and continue to do so after the sheer euphoria wears off," says Walsh in his book. "PEA tolerance does not spell the end of love; for most of us, it spells only a diminution of intense passion." □

Picture your basic movie, with your basic big-time movie stars. The two beautiful people meet, make beautiful love, overcome dramatic obstacles to be together and live happily ever after once they've had their glamorous tear-stained wedding.

Now picture panhandling Elvises, blue-haired gamblers and Wayne Newton. With no more than a couple of hundred bucks and reservations for Bob Stupak's Vegasworld in our pockets, my boyfriend Jac Webb and I went to

Las Vegas two summers ago looking for Elvis to marry us.

Jac and I became best of friends after meeting in an acting class at Boise State in 1990. We didn't start dating until the summer we got married, but by then we knew each other so well it wasn't long before we decided to elope.

My parents moaned when they heard what we had planned, but we knew we didn't want anything traditional about our wedding.

It was Aug. 10, 1994, and it was at least 110 degrees outside. We hailed a cab outside our hotel at 3:30 p.m. and headed for City Hall.

Ten minutes later we were filling out our marriage license (they didn't even ask for identification). Names, address, birth dates and Social Security numbers were all they needed.

By 4 p.m. we were on our way to the only drive-thru wedding chapel in Las Vegas, the Little White Chapel, which we chose not only because we didn't want to get out of the cab, but most notably because Joan Collins and Ricki Lake had been married there. Our cab driver was almost as excited as we were. As we pulled into the drive-thru, he told us he also was married there two years ago.

After filling out more paperwork, our preacher came up to the window. He gave us the choice of having either a secular or religious ceremony. We opted for the former, and five minutes later we were married!

Although we never found Elvis, our wedding in Las Vegas was exactly what we hoped it would be — cheesy. And it all took about an hour. □

Council, Idaho, native LaVelle Gardner is a 1993 theatre arts graduate. She and her husband, also a BSU grad, are living and working in Chicago.



Two crazy kids on their wedding day.

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