Have you ever noticed that intimate relationships seem to be jinxed? You marry someone genuinely wonderful, whom you’re certain you can love forever. Yet after a while a strange tension and distance has set in, and one or both of you are sure that you’ve chosen the wrong person or need ‘space’ in the relationship. You may stay married, and tolerate the status quo or you may divorce and begin the dance anew; the unwelcome pattern, however, remains.

The media assures us that we could correct the problem with better communication skills, regular counselling, or altered motivations. In fact, we need to learn to make love differently.

Byron had noticed that our recurring malaise is an unconscious script lurking in the limbic system—a primitive part of every mammalian brain. Here we are neurochemically programmed to fall in love with intense passion, form temporary attachments, reproduce—and then fall out of love.

Why has evolution shaped us to make ourselves miserable? It hasn’t—at least not directly. It has, however, molded us to increase the genetic variety of our offspring...by changing partners. Over the millennia of climactic changes and new strains of illness; this subtle program significantly increases the chances that genes survive their journey through countless generations. So successful is it (in evolution’s eyes), that virtually no animals are monogamous. DNA tests reveal that even socially monogamous prairie voles and swans occasionally fool around when no one’s looking.

The pattern of intense romantic attraction, brief affairs, and heartache from relationship turnover has also been observed in hunter-gatherer societies believed to be the best representatives of our ancestors, such as the Kung of the Kalahari and the Mehikau of South America. Now that divorce is easier and carries less social stigma, our innate evolutionary program is rapidly reasserting itself worldwide.

Beyond biology

Yet biology need not rule us, and it would be better for our individual wellbeing if it did not. Studies show that married people live longer with fewer addictions and lower rates of illness than their single counterparts. They tend to be better off financially: Stable families are also more beneficial for kids. (The pattern of churning relationships probably worked little hardship on children for the millions of years that we lived in tribes, but kids in today’s insular families are quite vulnerable when parental bonds disintegrate.)

Material welfare isn’t the only issue. Many of us have a yen to go beyond the script of our selfish genes and realise our full potential. It’s an intrinsic desire for more in our lives than just propagation of the species—or even greater prosperity, health, and children’s welfare. Call it a spiritual yearning...a yen to go beyond the script of our selfish genes and realise our full potential. It’s an intrinsic desire for more in our lives than just propagation of the species—or even greater prosperity, health, and children’s welfare. Call it a spiritual yearning...

The key concept of the sexual sages is this: the many benefits of sex come from regular, affectionate intercourse, while the hidden risks stem from orgasm. Observing post orgasmic fatigue and increased cravings following sex, the Taoists and Hindu/Tibetan tantra practitioners, logically concluded that semen loss was the culprit behind feelings of depletion/deprivation. Some therefore concluded that orgasm posed no problem for women, but that men had much to gain from controlled intercourse. Yet both traditions also retain whispers of the spiritual benefits to women from avoiding orgasm. And some Taoist lore (not taught by Lao Tzu) advises that a woman deliberately loses energy through orgasm—which a dearer lover can learn to ‘steal’ to strengthen himself at her expense.

But back to the semen-loss theory. However logical it seems, modern neuroscience reveals that it is flawed. Feelings of depletion, deprivation, irritability, and disharmony during the days after a passionate encounter are not due to semen loss. They stem from perfectly natural neurochemical changes in the brain, which accompany fertilisation-driven sex. The fallout is not confined to the ‘roll over and snore’ phenomenon. It can appear off and on for days, or even two weeks—and it can make women over-reactive, needy, and just plain hard to live with, too. Because the link between cause and effect is subtle and delayed, we don’t make the connection.

Not, strictly speaking, is orgasm the trigger. The trigger is a surge (or surges) of dopamine. This powerful neurochemical, which drives the reward centre of the brain, is the ‘foot on the gas’ of our sex drive. It also impels us to engage in fertilisation behaviour whatever the risks. This is not to say that dopamine is bad. At moderate levels it gives us a healthy appetite for food and water and a zest for all aspects of life. Too much of it, however, is not a good thing.

Mission accomplished at orgasm, dopamine levels plummet. This is our body’s way of bringing us back into balance after over-stimulation. If dopamine stayed too high all the time, it could make us crazy: high levels of dopamine are associated with schizophrenia, fetishes, aggression and anxiety. However, when dopamine drops too low—which it tends to do after it has been too high—it can cause obsessive-compulsive symptoms, thought disorders, and anxiety and depressive symptoms. At the very least it can radically alter our moods and perception of each other. This is why the sexual sages of the past recommended the goal of balance rather than our familiar, addictive cycle of intense thrills...and hangovers. They learned that if you don’t push your dopamine too high, then it doesn’t drop too low. It fluctuates at comfortable levels that help you meet your goals and keep you cheerful and enthusiastic about life.

After orgasm, a second neurochemical, called prolactin, suppresses dopamine, acting as a sexual saturation mechanism in both men and women. Interestingly, our bodies produce 400 times more prolactin after orgasm with intercourse than with masturbation. In other words, masturbation leaves us feeling less sated than intercourse does, perhaps because we haven’t accomplished our fertilisation mission.

Prolactin is not the only ‘foot on the brake’ of our sex drive—steering us to turn our attention to hunting/gathering and child rearing. After sexual satisfaction, hormones (and their receptors) in the brain change the brain. The brain may be more geared for a week, adversely affecting libido. Testosterone, our lusty hormone (for both men and women) has a dual role. High prolactin and less (effect from) testosterone can alter moods, too. For both, high prolactin is known to be high and far from weight gain, anxiety...
impotence, and depression...the very things couples typically complain about as their relationships settle into the heartache of emotional separation.

Now do you see why you care what your neurochemistry is doing during and after sex? Neurochemicals govern how you feel—how you feel determines what you see. When you're nursing with dopamine in a state of high arousal, your lover looks like ‘Mr or Ms Right’. When your hangover neurochemistry kicks in, however, you tend to see ‘Mr Hyde’ or ‘Medusa’. Of course, you don't necessarily project your post-passion distress onto your lover. You may instead find

Transforming your relationship

How to apply the principles of healing sexuality in every day life

Intrigued by this wisdom from the past, my husband and I decided to experiment. The benefits have been subtle, but powerful. No more yeast or urinary tract infections for me; an end to a myriad of emotional separations. We slept together every night, and even danced together. This routine, we noticed that

■ When we did add intercourse—
the third week—we made love on a schedule, skipping at least one or two days in between encounters. Every night we also continued some form of generous, non-foreplay exchange. The non-intercourse nights turned out to be vital to sticking with this way of making love. They serve to remind us (and our primitive brains) what a non-goal-oriented exchange of affection feels like, and how satisfying that, too, can be.

■ Now that we are 'with the program', we continue to make love on a schedule. We also make it a point to exchange lots of affection on non-intercourse nights.

■ When we moved away from this routine, we noticed that

your boss impossible or snap at your kids. Usually, however, our romances follow an addictive cycle, which leads to a phenomenon observed in various mammals and both sexes. Scientists call it ‘the Coolidge Effect’. It is the tendency of mates to find a novel partner more sexually interesting than one with which they have experienced sexual satiety.

Two-week period allowed us both to return to equilibrium before moving on to intercourse.

This evolutionary program, of course, increases the genetic variety of our offspring.

Humans, the Coolidge Effect often looks like this: for example, Lao Tzu taught in the Taoist texts that ordinary sexual intercourse is ‘a great backward leap’ because lovers place all their emphasis upon the sexual organs. Whatever physical energy they accumulate backward leap’ because lovers place all their emphasis upon

- the sexual organs. Whatever physical energy they accumulate (instead of benefiting them). He also observed that regular sex ‘dissipates and disorders the subtle energies’—foreshadowing by 2300 years the neurochemical findings outlined above.

The solution? Make leisurely love without striving for the

"relationship" byron

and even danced together. This

massages, meditated together,
took turns giving each other foot

REET: When we moved away from

biochemistry tended to wax over,

heating us up and leaving us

frustrated. In short, we were
once again producing too much

dopamine—and too little oxytocin

to soothe the attendant cravings.

Dopamine is the ‘gambling’

neurochemical, so spontaneous

tends to increase levels of
dopamine. By contrast, knowing

when you'll make love is like

knowing when you'll have a

good meal; it makes it easier to

wait with delicious anticipation,

but without frustration—or the

sense that you must grab at

every opportunity.

Perhaps the most important

contribution to our consistency

was a strong motivation to

change. We were thoroughly tired

of the carousel of relationship

highs and lows and longed for

harmonious intimacy.

Sexologists of the past

Earlier observers grasped the weak point in our design as well as the potential gains from overcoming it with gentle, affectionate sex. For example, Lao Tzu taught in the Hua Hu Ching that ordinary sexual intercourse is ‘a great backward leap’ because lovers place all their emphasis upon the sexual organs. Whatever physical energy they accumulate (instead of benefiting them). He also noted that regular sex ‘dissipates and disorders the subtle energies’—foreshadowing by 2300 years the neurochemical findings outlined above.

The solution? Make leisurely love without striving for orgasm. The result of this practice, he states, is ‘improved health, harmonised emotions, the cessation of cravings and impulsiveness, and, at the highest level, the transcendent integration of the entire energy body’. While my husband and I can't yet claim transcendence, we have experienced all of the other benefits he lists.

John Humphrey Noyes, an American social pioneer of the mid-19th century, reached the same conclusions independently of Lao Tzu. In Male Continence he wrote that if ordinary sexual intercourse ‘begins in spirit it soon ends in flesh and feelings of exhaustion’. This accounts for the process of “cooling off” which sometimes happens after marriage and often ends in indifference and disgust.

In contrast with all this, lovers who use their sexual

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Healing with sexual relationships

Peace Between the Sheets

exploring the striking parallels between current neurosciences and ancient sacred sex texts

Author: Marnia Robinson
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byronchild 54
We have been looking at common childhood illnesses over the last three issues, covering chicken pox, measles and whooping cough. These illnesses we see frequently in the clinic at Mullumbimby Herbs and have had a lot of experience guiding parents through them. Two weeks ago I had been thinking that I had not seen any mumps for a long time and then, hey presto, in walks a mother asking for advice on mumps! So let’s refresh on mumps.

Mumps is a paramyxovirus, related to the flu virus. It helps us to know it is viral so we can pull out all our great antiviral herbs and immune stimulants. The upside of contracting mumps is that it usually gives immunity for life. This illness is spread by droplet infection, coughing and sneezing. The onset of the illness is usually a fever of up to 39°C, headache, loss of appetite, and swelling and pain of the parotid glands which are at the back of the cheeks. These glands produce saliva for the mouth, therefore it can be quite painful for the patient to eat or talk. Mumps can also affect other glands. In adolescent and adult men one or both of the testicles may become inflamed and swollen. Abdominal pain, nausea and vomiting may be experienced. Sterility is a rare complication of this inflammation of the testes. The ovaries (in rare cases) can be affected in women and the pancreas may also be involved.

Mumps is contagious from about two days before symptoms begin to around six days after symptoms. Sometimes people can have no symptoms yet still pass on the disease.

Neurochemistry determines your desire for monogamy, and by choosing balance and lots of affection you can strengthen and maintain your attraction for each other.

Mumps is an evolutionary program of the primitive brain. Its loud signals mislead us. Our wellbeing does not lie in more thrills and partners. This is because the sexual cycle is not simply foreplay and orgasm. The underlying program actually drives us towards foreplay; reckless procreation, neurochemical hangover, emotional separation—and frequently a determination to seek ‘happiness’ in the form of a new neurochemical joyride (novel partner).

Weaning the brain evolved many millions of years ago. It was designed to drive our ancestors to grab high calorie foods, procreation opportunities, additional mates, and short-term sexual partners. In environments where such options were often scarce. This primitive centre of the brain is not well equipped for the constant enticement of dopamine-exciting temptations of modern life: abundant fast food, pornography, calorie foods, procreation opportunities, additional mates, and short-term sexual partners. This primitive centre of the brain is not well equipped for the constant enticement of dopamine-exciting temptations of modern life: abundant fast food, pornography, calorie foods, procreation opportunities, additional mates, and short-term sexual partners.

Fortunately, as others have discovered through the ages, we can learn to sustain monogamy from within. In the words of J. William Lloyd, tender lovelmaking without orgasm, ‘makes marriage more delicious than courtship, more romantic than wooing, and maintains an endless, satisfying honeymoon.’

A former corporate lawyer, Marnia Robinson wrote Peace Between the Sexes, with sexual relationships, with the collaboration of her husband Gary, a human sciences teacher. Sign up for their free monthly newsletter at www.reuniting.info

So what can we do for the mumps?

To start with, we now know it is viral so forget antibiotics. We have a number of great antiviral herbs; echinacea, garlic, clove, hypericum, elderflower, reishi mushroom and the powerful antioxiandrogaphis all work as anti viruses and to stimulate immune function. Using lymphatic herbs for mumps is helpful to bring down swelling; poke root, cloves, red clover blue flag and baptisia are all good for this.

If there is high fever try our YEP tea, which is a combination of yarrow, elderflower and peppermint and can reduce fever while tasting yummy (add a little honey or a squeeze of lemon).

Externally you can apply a potato poultice to the swollen areas (simply grate raw potato into a mash and apply for an hour or so), or poke root cream is easy to rub on and is also quite effective.

Diet should be kept light and nourishing. Keep meals small and well cut up, as chewing may mislead us. Our wellbeing does not lie in more thrills and partners.

Phytolacca can be used when pains shoot into the ear and when swallowing is painful, also for the swelling of any of the glands.

Mumps is easy to rub on and is also quite effective.

Pulsatilla is always a handy remedy to have in all the childhood illnesses. If the child is teary, clingy and changeable, this is the remedy. It is also good for swollen glands and red, flushed appearance; there may also be great thirst and sensitivity to light.

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