

IS IT LOVE OR IS IT OXYTOCIN?

Welcome to the course! You'll discover a lot about falling in love and building a relationship that lasts. Let's jump in to this first lesson...

You read about it in books, you sing about it songs. Romantic movies are based upon it. You've probably felt it yourself. The "it" is love's first bite, that feeling of being heads over heels in love with someone.

THE BIOLOGY OF INFATUATION

You may call those first powerful feelings of attraction love. They're not.

INFATUATION, THE FIRST STAGE OF A LOVE RELATIONSHIP, IS YOUR BODY PLAYING TRICKS ON YOU. SEE HOW:

- Your body produces chemicals which affect your emotions and convinces you that your soulmate has arrived.
- Your physical body is primed to have you find someone to mate with, to form a relationship so that reproduction and continuation of humanity will occur.
- **The biology of love doesn't care whether the person will be an excellent life-long partner.** That's your job. Your biology simply brings you together.
- Infatuation is an initial aspect in most, if not all, romantic relationships no matter the sexual orientation.
- Infatuation occurs for most at the beginning of a relationship. For others, it may occur in the midst of a deep friendship which moves to romance.

THE CHEMICAL NATURE OF INFATUATION

Falling in love is exciting! Remember the last crush you had? Remember how powerful those feelings were? You might be surprised to learn that those feelings were due to chemical reactions in your body.

The chemicals your body creates when strongly attracted to another activates portions of the limbic brain, the part of the brain which creates emotions.

SEE HOW IT WORKS:

1. **In the case of infatuation, phenylethylamines are produced by the brain.** These lead to the euphoric feeling often experienced by “falling in love.”
 - Phenylethylamine stimulates the production of other chemicals such as endorphins, dopamine, and norepinephrine.
 - These result in feelings of euphoria and increased feelings of energy and joy.

These are all feelings associated with being in love.

2. **Once dopamine enters the picture, oxytocin follows.**
 - Oxytocin increases the desire for cuddling and touch. It's also known as the bonding hormone, increasing the feelings of connection to others. The more you cuddle the more oxytocin is produced.
 - Oxytocin is a crucial chemical in long-term bonding with partners, spouses, and children. It's not just for the early stages of a relationship.

3. **Chemicals act on certain parts of the brain.** These "love" chemicals act upon the pleasure centers of the brain as well as those which control sexual response and aggression.
 - This is why infatuation leads to the strong desire to have sex as well as the negative aggressive effects of jealousy.

- Physically, the person feeling “in love” experiences increased heart rate and blood pressure, a loss in appetite, and an increased sense of well-being.
- **Emotionally, this state of euphoria blocks seeing the faults everyone else can see.** Oh, the arguments and family conflict this can produce!

ROMANCE ADDICTION

The chemical high produced during infatuation can lead to a form of addiction known as Romance Addiction.

Although not an officially recognized addiction according to the American Psychiatric Association, many therapists treat it as a debilitating problem leading to failed relationships and deeply unhappy people.

When a relationship moves from the infatuation stage, the “love” chemicals decrease markedly or disappear. However, a Romance Addict has to have that chemical high in a relationship. They equate love with this high.

As a result, the Romance Addict attempts to recreate the chemical high of infatuation by moving from relationship to relationship.

The passion of infatuation is not the deep, abiding love of a long-term relationship. If individuals continue to look for the high of infatuation, they will never discover the true heart connection found in a love commitment.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

You may ask, “But what about all the stories of love at first sight?” Yes, there are those wonderful stories where love begins at first sight and develops into long-term relationships that last decades.

However, you usually only hear the success stories. Unless the individuals involved are celebrities, you won’t hear the failure stories. And, unfortunately, the world abounds with “exes” who mistakenly thought they had found love at first sight.

RECENT RESEARCH SHOWS:

- The intensity of infatuation feelings do *not* appear to be predictors of long-term love.
- In fact, some studies show that the more

intense the initial feelings, the less likely the relationship is to continue long-term.

UN-CRUSHING THE CRUSH

Because the chemical nature of infatuation can be as strong as an amphetamine high, **the pain of a relationship ending is similar to withdrawal from a drug.**

Not only is there emotional pain, but there can also be physical pain. Some experts liken the withdrawal feelings at the ending of a “crush” to those of withdrawal from heroin.

DESPITE THE CHEMICAL REACTIONS GOING ON IN YOUR BODY, THESE STRATEGIES WILL HELP YOU TO MOVE THROUGH A LOSS OF A RELATIONSHIP:

1. Be with others.
2. Exercise to produce natural endorphins.
3. Avoid dwelling on the person you lost.
4. Time

We will discuss these strategies in detail in a later lesson, so hang in there.

SUMMARY

YOU'VE DISCOVERED:

- Those powerful and amazing experiences of the initial stage of falling in love are chemical reactions in your brain.
- Some people actually become addicted to the brain chemicals and form what is called Relationship Addiction.
- Research shows the more intense those initial “falling in love” feelings, the less likely the relationship will last.
- The brain chemicals are what makes breaking up so painful.

NEXT TIME:

In the next lesson you'll learn how your early family life leads you to be attracted to certain types of people.

But first, before you start the next lesson, please take a few moments for reflection.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions on a scale of 1-5. What do your answers tell you about you or your relationships?

1 (not at all)

2 (somewhat)

3 (in the middle)

4 (Pretty much)

5 (Completely)

1. How much do I need the "high" of infatuation?
2. Do I believe in the chemical nature of infatuation?
3. For me, is the relationship over if the intensity of feelings are gone?