

SCRIPT for the videopodcast

How did the concept of 'romantic love' begin?

{Opening title is on screen and background music plays}

{Fades to shot of Alena}

ALENA: The ancient Greeks called romantic love a "madness of the Gods". The concept of romantic love is familiar to all humans and although the attitudes towards romance vary across cultures, the intense feeling of being "madly in love" is universal to all humans. People have always been fascinated by romantic love and romantic love continues to be a gratifying theme in literature, music and all other aspects of artistic expression. Well, let's investigate how romantic love originated.

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ALENA: While romantic love is often experienced in union with passionate love, both can exist independently and both have distinct underlying neurobiological substrates. The distinctive feelings of romantic love and subsequent attachment are mediated by dopaminergic "reward" circuitry of mammalian brain and monogamous avian species. Romantic love shares many traits with basic drives; it is characterized by strong motivation and goal-oriented behaviour. Brains of people "deeply in love" show the same pathways as brains of people associated with addictions.

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ALENA: There are two major evolutionary hypotheses to explain adaptive features of being in love. Helen Fisher (2006) believes that romantic love with its goal-oriented behaviour and focused attention on a specific individual evolved to save a great deal of time and energy. Attraction to a favored mating partner considerably simplifies selecting a mate and the subsequent courtship. Fisher suggests that the neural mechanism for mate preference evolved as early as 3.5 million years ago with the evolution of hominid pair bonding.

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ALENA: However, the most prominent theory is that of Lisa Diamond (2006) who argues that romantic love originally evolved for an altogether different purpose. She proposes that romance originated as an infant-caregiver attachment. This suggests that romantic love might be an exaptation - originally evolved for one purpose, but later co-opted for another. The emotional bond that originally served to increase the infant's

survival, subsequently developed into romantic attachment between adults to keep reproductive partners together to rear their offspring. Interestingly, both types of attachments are mediated by the same opioid- and oxytocin-based neural circuitry. Other researchers also agree that attachment and bonding are evolved processes based on neural circuitry rooted deep in mammalian evolution.

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ALENA: Indeed, the adaptive value of romantic love might not be very romantic. David Buss (1994) sees the love, particularly expressing the acts of love, as a sign of commitment. According to Parenting investment theory, women invest significantly more into offspring than men and therefore should be more selective. How can they be sure that the male will stick around? Acts of love might be good indicators of commitment demonstrating that the men will invest their resources into their offspring.

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ALENA: Clearly, humans long to experience romance and all the positive emotions that go together with reciprocated love. Although we might not be able to precisely identify the evolutionary origins of romantic love, there is strong evidence that romantic love is a powerful motivational system that facilitates courtship, mating, reproduction and parenting.

{Shot fades as background music plays and then credits roll in}

References:

Fisher, E. H., Aron, A., Mashek, D., Li, H., Brown, L. L. (2002). Defining the brain system of lust, romantic attraction and attachment. *Archives of Sexual Behaviour*, 31, 413-419.

Diamond, L. M. (2004). Emerging perspectives on distinctions between romantic love and sexual desire. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13, 116-119.

Buss, D. M. (1994). The evolution of desire. New York: Basic Books.