

The book explore how love shapes human behavior as well as the motivation for love. Being in love floods the brain with chemicals that can induce feeling of everything from pleasure to intense desire and attachment.

The Risks and Rewards of Love: Is It Worth It?

By Gisele Haralson

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*The
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GISELE HARALSON

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Print ISBN: 978-1-64719-802-2

Ebook ISBN: 978-1-64719-803-9

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.

2021

First Edition

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Chapter One:

This Thing Called Love

As a sociologist, I have built a career around studying love, finances, and other things that mark our complex relationships. Through the science of behaviors, I am learning more in the area of the human makeup than I could have ever imagined. Writing a book about love and intimacy has been a wonderful but challenging experience. It caused me to truly examine myself. I have found this journey to understand love a struggle, but at the same time it is so very enlightening. The knowledge and process has been fun and exciting. Love and relationships will always be intriguing and mesmerizing on every level.

Love gives us hope for a better feeling. The thought of the next best love has a way of consuming us and hopefully allows us to love a little harder and a little more passionately. My research has found that the hardest thing is finding yourself falling in love with someone while you seem to be at war with your own emotions from a past relationship, not knowing whether you have the courage to completely open up your heart and let love flow in freely again. The very essence of love is courage; this act of allowing that special person to enter into your heart can be very risky. It has been said that the more you love, the more you suffer.

The overarching idea of love has captured the curiosity and interest of the human species for centuries. There is always a flurry of questions that surrounds love. Will I ever find that special one? Is there something wrong with me? Is this too good to be true? Can I trust him? Can I trust her? Can I trust myself to do the right thing? We know that social media displays the illusions of love in such a

grand way. Love has many appearances, and true love seems to be the desire of the world.

But What Is Love?

To me, love is everything. When love is right and in order, it makes everything in your circle seem to shine brighter and prospects for the future much clearer. When order is present, conversations flow effortlessly and the connection with the one we are loving appears incredibly solid and soothing. Love can be the most beautiful part of our existence if shared with the right partner. The journey of love is a two-way street. It takes giving and receiving, and that should always be the case.

You learn from love what it can do only if you are open to learning. There is no better feeling than to love and be loved. When someone says, “I love you,” what are they loving? Are they falling in love with the idea of being in love? Love requires understanding what the other person needs.

Love is not easy; it can be tough at times, but when it is good, it is the most magnificent experience one can engage in- so beautiful and enticing in every way.

Love is not unconditional; there are terms and expectations that come along with love. Love goes through phases. It does not stay stagnant; it does not stay the same. Feelings change and transform; they grow often to a deeper, more grounded place. But on the other side, love can diminish, it can fade and it can truly die.

With all this being said, one thing that we have to always keep in mind is that we are human and not free of errors, because at the core of every relationship is the fact that none of us are without

flaws. We all fall short and mistakes are made, but then we rise up again to embrace that magnetic power that keeps pulling us back into the arms of the one we love.

Love really is supreme; it truly rules. The one thing that you cannot deny is the ecstasy that can fill the air when two lovers are together. It becomes pretty apparent to the individuals involved in a relationship that there is nothing in the world that compares to the feeling you get when you look into the eyes of the person that you have discovered to be your soulmate. There is no better feeling than the extraordinary joy at that time and moment.

I have spent the past few years studying love in its many forms in an attempt to explore the emotional and health benefits for those who give and receive love. I really focused on how love shapes human behavior as well as the motivation for love. I was fortunate to have a group of individuals that I worked with on this project. Their feedback and responses on surveys and discussion was invaluable and are listed under “What Are They Saying About Love?” in each chapter.

What Are They Saying About Love?

I think a lot of people believe love to be the secret of life and, in many ways, it can be and is. Love is the only thing that continues for generations upon generations.

That feeling of being held, caressed, kissed- that leaves a warm feeling all over your body. It just makes you feel happy. I believe that love is so desirable because it is the ultimate gift that God gave mankind. God has designed us to need each other. Most of

us grow up as children believing that at some point we will fall in love and get married. I believe that physical attraction, readiness, and desirable characteristics are factors we are seeking.

Everyone wants to feel loved. Just knowing someone cares that much is a wonderful feeling.

Love often equates to happiness.

Love is a perennial topic of fascination for scholars and laypersons alike. Whereas psychological science was slow to develop an active interest in love, the past few decades have seen considerable growth in research on the subject, to the point where a uniquely psychological perspective on love can be identified. Most people I know have descriptions of love that are some of the more central and well-established findings from psychologically informed research on love and its influence in adult human relationships. Love, like money, is often what people live for. Love is defined, the significance of love for human activity and well-being, and evidence about the mechanisms by which love is believed to operate. I conclude by stating the institution of love for me represent marriage, and whether you are LGBT or regular, the fascination stems from what it represents as a whole for us as human beings.

Love is desirable simply because of the security that it provides for participants.

The Risks and Rewards of Love - Is It Worth It?

I do agree that most are looking for love, but until you love yourself more than anyone else, it will never work.

I would say love can be a motivator in life. I believe that when you are in love with the right person and in the right relationship, it motivates you to become the best version of yourself. I believe that both individuals fight for their love and growth in all areas of life.

Many people desire love because it is the foundation of unity and hope.

Just like most, we all want to feel special and needed. God didn't create us to be alone. He created us to have companionship. That's why when Adam was created God gave him Eve. It's beyond our control to desire love, as far as I am concerned, every man, woman, and child desires to be loved.

Chapter Two: The Science of Love

I finally understand why my mother would say “This girl done lost her mind,” when I fell in love for the very first time. I developed tunnel vision for my high school sweetheart.

Love is so unpredictable. There seems to be a fire in your heart that at times can be dangerous, because love can make people feel out of control. Many people are confused with the difference between love and lust. Lust is a very strong craving for sexual gratification. Love is defined as an intense feeling of deep affection, a great interest and pleasure in something or someone. Love changes your brain chemistry.

Being in love floods our brains with chemicals that can induce feelings of everything from pleasure to intense desire and attachment. Oxytocin and dopamine are two specific chemicals and hormones that we attribute to love and the way we behave when we are in love.

Oxytocin

The body chemical oxytocin has long been known as the warm, fuzzy hormone that promotes feelings of love, bonding, and intimacy between two people. But new research reported in the journal *Nature Neuroscience* shows oxytocin also can cause emotional pain. This chemical plays different roles in men and women. For men, oxytocin’s function is that of moving the sperm. It also appears to affect the production of testosterone in the testes. Studies of oxytocin also have found that it is an important chemical messenger that controls some human behaviors and

social interaction. This is why it has been shown to have been tested as an anti-anxiety drug.

It plays a role in the female reproductive functions, from sexual activity to childbirth and breast feeding. Stimulation of the nipples prompts its release. During labor, oxytocin increases uterine motility, causing contractions in the muscles of the uterus or womb. As you can see, this chemical has a number of functions.

Dopamine

Dopamine is a brain chemical that releases when you see or feel something pleasurable. It makes you want more of the good feeling you are receiving. Dopamine is what can make love and your love interest seem addicting. Research has shown a link between strong feelings of love and increased levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine in the brain, which tells us rewards are ahead and we can become very much drawn to these rewards. MRI scans indicate that love lights up the pleasure center of the brain.

I can certainly attest to initially meeting a new love interest and feeling like I am on a natural high. It has taken all these years to realize that it was the releasing of dopamine that was making me want more and more of that person. Feelings of euphoria begin setting in and, before you know it, you begin to feel like you are all over the place. Out-of-body experience seems to occur.

Why Do We Love Who We Love?

I know many may wonder what makes a person fall in love with one particular person versus another person. There is a science to love and a chemical in the brain or circuitry. Men and women fall in love for different reasons and in different ways.

But there is a special feeling you experience when the ideal person comes along and there is no doubt; you know when it is the chosen one. There may have been a time when you found yourself dating others, but when the attraction of love begins creeping in, you find yourself only wanting to give your attention to that chosen one.

Addiction to Love

According to a new study, you really can be addicted to love. From looking at the brain scans of the broken-hearted, researchers found that recovering from a break-up is like kicking an addiction to a drug. “Love addiction is just as real as any other addiction in terms of its behavior patterns and brain mechanisms.” According to Dr. Helen Fisher, “Besotted lovers express all four of the basic traits of addiction: craving, tolerance, withdrawal, and relapse.”

Love really is like a drug. Intense spells of passion are as effective at blocking pain as cocaine and other illicit drugs. Brain scans reveal that these feelings cause more activity in parts of the brain that are also triggered by morphine and cocaine.

Withdrawal

We know that love is such an exciting feeling, but it is also known that there is an element of pain with love. Humans are social beings, and it is within us to connect with others, be it sexual partners, children, friends, or family.

There are so many ways love can go wrong in a relationship. Beta-endorphin, the hormone released when you are in love, is part of your body’s natural painkilling system, and it works amazingly. This is why you can feel physical pain at the end of a relationship.

Breaking up with someone is physically painful because you no longer get that dose of endorphin. You've got used to having it, and suddenly it is not there anymore. It all comes down to chemistry. When people have sex, kiss, touch each other, laugh, there is a release of beta-endorphin. It can be addictive, which means that you can become addicted to that person. When people fall in love, they can go into a state of infatuation or obsession. This happens because our brain and hormones go wild when faced with a sincere love interest, and withdrawal can happen when he or she is gone.

What Does It Really Mean to Fall in Love?

The brain of someone in love looks very similar to the brain of someone on cocaine. Cocaine acts on the pleasure sense of the brain by lowering the threshold at which it fires. This means you feel really good a lot easier, but it is not just the love or the cocaine that makes you feel good, but anything that you experience feels extremely good as well. This feeling will more easily set off pleasure sense centers, making anything you experience really feel good.

The craving and desire to be with the person you have fallen in love with gives you an oozing feeling or high each passing minute that you are away from your love. It makes your appetite for this person more and more intense.

Although we have always associated love with the heart, the true feeling and magic actually comes from the brain. We have already stated that love also turns on the neurotransmitter dopamine, which is known to stimulate the brain's pleasure centers. Add that to a drop in levels of serotonin, which can cause impulsive behavior

and you have a recipe for wild madness like crazy, obsession and infatuation.

Romantic love is not simple; it is a drive from the motor of the mind. We begin to imagine a fairy tale world around us that is flowing with pleasure. Often times these changes in the brain chemistry and hormones are only temporary. After the newness of the relationship wears off, we adjust back to our normal brain chemistry.

What Are They Saying About Love?

The neurochemicals related to love are 100 times more powerful than any illicit street drug or any pain reliever. Love is the only legally accepted and encouraged addiction.

As a Christian, your “brand” is love. Addiction happens often when a person begins to think that he or she has to be in some type of love relationship instead of enjoying quality time with self. Usually, this will involve a series of bad relationships for which the addictive lifestyle involves love.

I think love is very highly addictive because there is a chemical released in the body when one is in love.

Like many things, the potential for addiction exists. Love is not excluded from that.

I say no, that it is not possible to be addicted to love, but I know a lot of fools who are addicted to love. Can we really be addicted to love? Absolutely, although it's our ideas of love that we are addicted to over real, sustainable love itself. I see and talk with people every day until their addiction to love becomes unhealthy thoughts and behaviors, and romance starts to control them.

There are four types of addiction: general love addiction, romance addiction, people addiction, and sex addiction.

If you are just generally a "love addict" you will prioritize relationships and other's attentions above all else. The addiction here is to the feeling of being engulfed with another. You will have a hidden belief that you are not whole as is, but need someone else to complete you and make you feel happy.

If you are a "romance addict" you are consumed by ideas of epic and fairytale love. It's the sensation of being in love that you are hooked on. At the root there can be victimhood and a desire to be saved. People addiction goes far beyond love and romance. We think we need a person in our life, no matter what, and are willing to suffer to have it be so. The addiction in that case can actually be to the pain itself. At its worst, people addiction can lead to stalking someone, being arrested for harassment, or actually harming or assaulting the object of your affection.

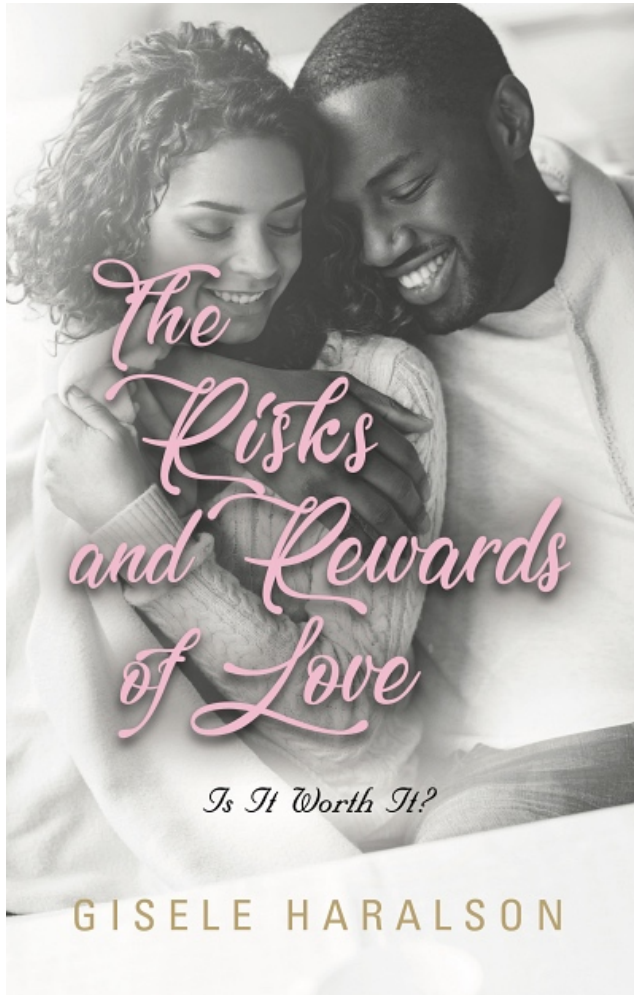
Sex addiction involves obsessively thinking about sex and seeking sexual gratification in ways that have negative consequences for you and those you love. At the root is a need to escape whether that is escaping a life you hate, deep-rooted shame for past events, low self-esteem, loneliness, or repressed anger. The idea that a sex addict is only someone out there

having many wild affairs is just a cliché. Many sex addicts have little if any real sex, but are hooked into a cycle of self-pleasuring, using porn sites, etc. For me, I would be a love addict, just realizing that you need someone in your life when you get sick or go through financial hardship. The reality is that you need a soulmate, a true help mate. I feel love is a feeling between two people that grows, gains, and gives as the two individuals do in their maturation.

Based on a May 28, 2011, article in *Psychology Today*, one can become addicted to the feeling of being in love. It is believed that it can start from abandonment in early childhood. Other factors that may influence this behavior include lack of nurturing and the need for positive regards.

Surely, I can definitely understand being addicted to love. Whatever that chemical that's released, whatever the part of the brain that's been turned on to, whatever temperature the blood increases because of love- it can certainly be something that causes people to want to feel it again. Also, taking away the science behind it, some people associate love with acceptance, with belonging, with defining who they are, and without it they would be lost. I can see someone becoming addicted to the need to be accepted and to defining who they are.

I find love to be a high that you continuously chase, especially as men or the male that I am dating at the time either falls out of love or infatuation with me. I think, as humans, we unreasonably chase the high instead of the balanced and steady.



The book explore how love shapes human behavior as well as the motivation for love. Being in love floods the brain with chemicals that can induce feeling of everything from pleasure to intense desire and attachment.

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