

# **How Love Rewires the Brain (and Other Romantic Secrets of Brain Chemistry)**

A Free Report with  
Norman Doidge, MD, PhD  
Joan Borysenko, PhD  
Bill O'Hanlon, MS, LMFT

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National Institute for  
the Clinical Application  
of Behavioral Medicine

## How Love Rewires the Brain (and Other Romantic Secrets of Brain Chemistry)

Norman Doidge, MD PhD

There are several neurotransmitters that seem to be involved in novelty. Dopamine is often spoken of and aspects of norepinephrine are involved in novelty, too.

But basically, what happens in life is that if you keep doing the same thing of any kind, your dopamine chemistry is not being triggered.

Sometimes, when you hear people complaining about monogamy as being boring, it's not that their mate is boring, it's just that there's a certain amount of routine involved in monogamous relationships or long-term, steady relationships.

It's good to know about that and learn how to manipulate your dopamine to some degree. You should pay some attention to the fact that if you want to maintain a long-term relationship, you're going to have to do certain things to inject some novelty into it.

People – and I am not inventing this – who are very good at love know how to do this. Part of the reason you might want to go on vacation is to be with your beloved in a totally new situation – a new place where you're both doing a lot of learning. It's turning on that dopamine chemistry that's allowing you to discover new things in the beloved. Probably that is what a new suit and a new dress is about, too.

So, again, this is just part of knowing about the “Users' Guide to the Brain” – just knowing about the art of life and that your brain evolved to learn.

It is not just for learning – it is for self-regulation, too. The brain has to be learning to feel fit. So you always have to be learning new things, and even within the context of a relationship, I think you have to be learning together to keep that relationship feeling really vital.

### Putting Ideas into Action

Joan Borysenko, PhD  
Bill O'Hanlon, MS, LMFT

**Bill O'Hanlon:** One of the challenges with long-term relationships is that they do get into ruts – and they say the difference between a rut and the grave is just the dimensions. Some relationships can get so boring that people want to leave or have an affair...just to get that dopamine hit again.

I think Dr. Doidge is talking about the dark and light side of plasticity. The good news is that you don't have to work on your relationship every day like you do when it's new. It's like driving to work every day – you don't really have to think about it. That's the good news about brain plasticity; you get really efficient at doing the day-to-day things you need to do.

But we know relationships can be a challenge, so anything you can do to change it up is a good idea.

There are two ways you can do this. One is to change the usual problems that you have. I remember years ago in a relationship of mine, my partner always complained that she felt responsible for doing everything about the house – noticing the repairs and doing them, calling the plumber, and calling the dentist for the kids... I was okay with that because, “I just don’t attend to that stuff.”

But one day I thought to myself, “I’m so tired of hearing that complaint. I’m going to go around the house and list everything I can see. I’m really going to pay attention – because I usually don’t notice these things – and I’m going to get about five things done.” I’ll tell you, we didn’t have that argument for a year after that because I’d blown my stereotype!

So, here’s the question: What does your partner usually complain about that bothers him/her about what you do again and again? This is just one way of changing up the relationship.

There are three ways, or areas, which you can change. Change the viewing (and that, I think, connects to mindfulness). If you notice something new about your partner, it increases the satisfaction – your satisfaction and your partner’s satisfaction. “Wow, I never noticed that your hair goes like this...”

Change how you’re used to seeing someone. “That’s a different blouse you’re wearing today.” Or, “That’s interesting.” Or, “You got up at a different time.” Just view any change that they have made – really notice it rather than thinking, “Oh, that’s my partner, I know what they do, I know how they are.”

It’s all about changing the viewing, changing the doing, and changing the context. Dr. Doidge talks about going on vacation – but there are many ways of changing the context. You could rearrange the furniture in your house and that might change your interactions because you’ve been used to sitting in certain places – now, all of a sudden, this changes things.

Small changes just increase the interest and make a difference in the relationship so you don’t fall into those ruts.

**Joan Borysenko:** Dr. Doidge makes such an interesting point here about the need to continue to trigger high levels of dopamine because that gives us pleasure, keeps the relationship alive.

I’ll give you a personal example: I am not a cowboy boot kind of girl, but my husband loves cowboy boots and country dancing. So now, I have three pairs of cowboy boots. I know how to do the two-step and we go out from time to time for country dancing. That means I have an interest in something he has, but it’s still a novel thing we do together.

The question I would ask, first of all, is this: What are your partner’s hobbies? Is there something that, if you just give yourself over to it and try, that you could love and join him/her in doing?

The second suggestion would be this: Is there a hobby that, in fact, the two of you can take up together? That can add a tremendous amount of novelty and excitement to life. Also, it just takes you outside the bounds of your normal context.

## About The Speakers:



Norman Doidge, M.D., FRCPC, MACPsa, is a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, researcher, and New York Times and international bestselling author, on the subject of neuroplasticity. He is on the Research Faculty at the Columbia University Department of Psychiatry, Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research, in New York, and the University of Toronto's Department of Psychiatry.

Dr. Doidge is author of *The Brain that Changes Itself*. The book has been a #1 bestseller in Canada and in Australia, and is a New York Times Bestseller, on the extended list for over 12 months. It is available in over 90 countries, and is also a documentary film by the same name. He recently hosted the 25-hour TVO television series, *Mysteries of The Mind*.



Joan Z. Borysenko, PhD, has been described as a respected scientist, gifted therapist, and unabashed mystic. Trained at Harvard Medical School, she was an instructor in medicine until 1988.

Currently the President of Mind/Body Health Sciences, Inc., she is an internationally known speaker and consultant in women's health and spirituality, integrative medicine, and the mind/body connection. Joan also has a regular 2 to 3 page column she writes in *Prevention* every month. She is the author of nine books, including *New York Times* bestsellers.



Bill O'Hanlon, MS, LMFT, is a dynamic, inspirational speaker and prolific author (35 books so far) who helps motivate people and organizations to determine what they are meant to be doing and to remove the barriers to succeeding at those goals.

Originally trained as a psychotherapist, Bill has become known for his collaborative and respectful approach, irreverent humor, storytelling, clear and accessible presentation style, and his infectious enthusiasm for whatever he is doing. He teaches seminars, leads trainings, writes books, coaches people, and offers websites, podcasts, blogs, web-based courses, teleclasses, and audio and video programs.