

## *Just What The Doctor Ordered*

Good For Your Health  
Dedicated to Bonnie Ross-Parker

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Similar to the way an architect views the world in structures and physicists view the world in vectors, I view the world scientifically. More specifically, as a doctor, epidemiologist, and endocrine researcher, I view human interactions from a biological perspective. There has been a lot written about the biology of animal interaction, but more recently investigators are looking into things like hormones, (specifically pheromones) and their role in human behavior. Pheromones are chemicals found in urine and sweat that are detected by smell and trigger very ancient responses in the human brain. Pheromones in male perspiration are detected by the female brain and translated into feelings of attraction and arousal.

In my practice, I deal with women and many hormonal issues impacting their health. Consequently, most women will also reveal that their significant other is also, to some degree suffering from some sort of stress or age related hormonal imbalance. Most women do not know the truth about their hormones and spend years suffering needlessly chasing down empty promises. Some of these hormonal imbalances ruin their marriages, careers, and numerous relationships along the way. One of the most fascinating things I have discovered is that every woman truly has her own chemistry. Most physicians have a one-size-fits-all approach to hormones and that is why women simply are not being treated. This chemical complexity became a reality for me when I started to attend the Joy of Connecting through Bonnie Ross-Parker. Bonnie runs a business called the Joy of Connecting, which brings women together for the purpose of creating business connections and expanding their relationships. As compared to other connecting organizations, I believe Bonnie's system has what the other groups don't, and that's chemistry. Let me prove it to you with a little background in science.

If we look at animals, science has proven that the reason animals interact a lot do so because they get small releases of endorphins—opiates in their brain. It makes them feel good, and may explain why we are social beings. Hugging, kissing and touch all make us feel good because this translates in the brain to feelings of acceptance and love. When that area of the brain 'fires', chemicals and neurotransmitters are released into the bloodstream which have a variety of consequences throughout the body. One researcher took mother and infant monkeys and gave them opiates, put them back together and found they interacted a lot less. When they were given receptor-blockers that prevented the opiates from having any effect, the researchers found the monkeys engaged in a lot more social interaction like hugging and clinging. The researchers think because they were not getting the opiate release to the receptor, they weren't getting that "feel-good" relief and are driven to interact more.

We can try to speculate if the same is true in humans, however. ethical problems arise. Researchers would have to give drugs to a human mother and her infant and that's not going to happen. One thing women do know is that something in chocolate certainly is chemical. When we need to feel good or it is around our menstrual cycle, we hit the chocolate hard. Science has already proven its chemical effects.

Another interesting hypothesis being explored by researchers is whether or not women have built-in hormonal advantages when it comes to dealing with chronic stress.

The flight or fight response to stress has been studied for decades. When a human perceives danger, whether real or imagined, cortisol, ACTH, CRH, vasopressin and others chemicals cascade throughout the body. These hormones increase heart beat, blood pressure, increase sugar in the bloodstream to name a few. If the threat is real, our body is prepared to fight, physically. If the threat is imagined like most stress from work, the body revs up, but the sugar in your bloodstream goes directly to stored fat. If the stress is repeated, it's like crying wolf. Chronic stress leads to hormonal failure. This is why the most successful people tend to have many health problems.

Women, however have a powerful system for fighting stress based on a hormone called Oxytocin. Oxytocin is considered the social attachment hormone. It is best exemplified during childbirth, lactation and during orgasm. It is also secreted during other forms of pleasant touch such as massage or chiropractic treatments. I have a 19- year old patient who is from Russia. It is the first time he was ever away from his mother. He came to me because of a car accident. After the first visit, despite his spinal symptoms he greatly responded to therapeutic massage. He didn't even want me to use the massage machine; he specifically wanted my hands on his back. He responded pretty much like my children do when they are hurt and need me. After a few visits I felt comfortable enough to talk about this and he told me how he was sick in part due to the lack of affection he was missing from his mother. He told me that coming to the office made him feel better. Could there be a hormonal connection in my profession that may not exist when you visit your medical doctor? More specifically, could it be that because I am a woman, his body responded to nurturing similar to a child to a mother? I know that this is true, but the public seems to require scientific verification.

Some researchers believe that women may be programmed by evolution to deal with stress, not just in the 'male' way by fighting, but also by "befriending and tending" and turning to each other for moral support and nurturing the young. Do you sometimes notice most women will make friendships by 'needing' each other? It is rare to meet a woman who is friends with another woman and they don't tell each other their problems. Women are nurturers. There appears to be a counter-regulatory system that may operate more strongly in females leading to the engagement of Oxytocin and social contact.

One researcher explains that there really is a lot of merit to the Oxytocin theory. Oxytocin is a tiny molecule of only nine amino acids that is made in the brain called the hypothalamus. It works closely with vasopressin, which is carried on the same chromosome as Oxytocin and is so similar that the two chemicals fit into each other's receptors in the brain. Oxytocin acts in tandem with estrogen, and often has calming effects; vasopressin acts in tandem with testosterone, which can act as a stress response enhancer, creating things like high blood pressure. For the most part, male brains contain more vasopressin than female brains, especially in the amygdala of the brain, a fear-processing center. Vasopressin also increases aggression and male territoriality. Oxytocin is associated with typically female behaviors, such as childbirth and nurturing the young, whereas vasopressin is associated with male behaviors such as defensive and territorial aggression. It's the dual role of Oxytocin as a bonding and stress-reducing chemical that may explain why females outlive males. Women seek to talk things out and as a result, Oxytocin is released and acts on the body as a health booster.

Some studies have found that women with anxiety and panic disorders are relieved of their symptoms when they are pregnant and lactating. It is interesting for me to note that women suffer from these disorders when they get a divorce, a pet dies, or a child leaves for college. The lack of Oxytocin may be the problem. Women who work in isolation such as busy executives, women who work out of their home or in a car have less social interaction may get less Oxytocin induction and may suffer from anxiety easier than women who have more social interaction.

Another important point to note is on the link between hormonal and immunological responses to stress. In one experiment, 90 young, happy, newly wed couples were required to spend 24 hours, including a night's sleep, in the hospital lab. "They were in absolutely pristine mental and physical health. The researchers drew blood and measured hormone levels and various aspects of immune function every hour throughout the stay.

Early on, each couple asked to spend 30 minutes discussing an area of disagreement. This conflict was recorded on videotapes that were viewed for negative behavior such as hostility, sarcasm put downs, etc. The results showed that marital strife was much tougher on women than men. Women showed a faster and more enduring response to hostility, noting that women's' stress hormones (epinephrine, norepinephrine and ACTH) rose sharply and stayed up longer. Women also showed a lowering of certain aspects of immune function. A follow up study found women whose stress hormones had risen the highest during the earlier phase of the study were most likely to get divorced. The researchers concluded that if you are stressed out, call a friend. They also found that women often relieve their own stress by turning to each other.

An interesting point to note is that men worry about three things - their immediate family, their job and money. Women worry on a daily basis about as many as 12 things - their immediate family, their job, money, extended family, friends, their kids' friends, the way the house looks, their weight, the dog, etc. This is probably why nature has the built in Oxytocin system.!

With the above biology lesson in mind, it is easy to see a deeper reason for the success of the Joy of Connecting.

When you go to one of the "connecting" gatherings, all of the women have nametags and socialize around dinner. Each participant is given time to share about her business. The women count off, dividing into smaller groups. Each then takes her turn to speak for 3 minutes about herself and the business or service she provides. They ask each other for support in what they need. They also distribute business cards and printed materials. After that, the women socialize and get to share connections made and their personal impressions of the evening.

It all sounds very simple but there is more to it than that. After the evening, I could not sleep. I was so excited and motivated about my business that any fear or doubt about my abilities and talents simply disappeared. This is where the biology comes in. Could the connection with these women have induced secretion of Oxytocin in my body and in turn created a positive health experience? Similarly, if you are out in the world promoting your business in the more traditional fashion, you tend to be stressed and feel fear and self-doubt. Making contacts on your own does not promote Oxytocin effects. It promotes vasopressin effects, which take up Oxytocin receptors, therefore, promoting aggressive and fighting behavior. Perhaps that is why when we are alone after a busy day we may overeat or crave sweets because we are searching for Oxytocin! Maybe we are more likely to crave attention or have an affair with someone outside because we need Oxytocin.

Another important and very monumental aspect about Bennie's program is that more than one person from the same profession is allowed to attend. There is no "exclusivity". Normally in other groups this is not allowed. This specific point may be the "defining" or "light bulb" difference making Bonnie and her Joy of Connecting gatherings superior. I can better explain this by defining my own *light bulb* moment. When I first arrived, I learned that there was another chiropractor attending, which immediately put me on the defensive. I suddenly felt the need to be 'male and territorial' because, after all, the meeting was about business. This may attribute to the rise in vasopressin and feelings of aggression although a little aggression is healthy. As the meeting began to unfold, I was getting the stimulation of Oxytocin. It really poured on when I stood up to speak. It was the *safety* of the women and *not* the dog-eat-dog world the room fostered that promoted this feeling. This safety balanced out the fight or flight and now my behavior became assertive. When the time came to hear the other Chiropractor, I *really* listened. I found out she had a child with special needs, and was really making it on her own as a single parent. She was also very active in the school system about children with special needs. I felt so proud of her, recognizing her unique talents and niche. My immediate reaction was to appreciate her and to want to help her in any way possible. This was the "joy of connecting" and for me a moment of personal growth. I made a point to call her first thing in the morning to offer help. I also appreciated *my special niche*. I became more empowered and more confident in my knowledge and expertise. I looked around the room and felt that this was my classroom! I deal with women's hormones and now experiencing first hand how unique women and their chemistry really can be. Until this realization, I was missing this "light bulb" in my treatment protocol. I was also missing it in myself. Bonnie's gathering created the chemistry similar to when you fall in love. It is bonding and nurturing. Just like love, it matures. So does the relationship with each of the women every time we connect.

The next day, I was invited to a women's networking luncheon. This group had some of the same participants as the previous night but the structure was *very* different. It had membership dues, structured paperwork and most of all, only *one* from each profession was allowed to participate and be a member. Accidentally, I was invited as there is already another woman of the same profession. Recalling the lesson I learned the night before, I was ready to connect, find out about her specialty and seek ways we could support one another. Sadly, I was met with hostility, anger and jealousy. All she could see was I was a threat and she did not hear a word I had to say. I kept my cool I realizing the problem was hers as she perceived me as a threat. She displayed all of the male vasopressive tendencies. I immediately chose to introduce myself and focus on something other than my profession. The other ladies who recognized her hostility smiled and winked at me because I chose to steer around it. Of course, I realize that hostility and competitiveness exist and some people may never change. I was looking for the same feeling I had experienced the night before - Oxytocin release and bonding. I could not experience the feelings of well being and nurturing at this particular meeting.

When I got home, I felt it was necessary to reflect on the women from the previous night. As I reviewed each of the women and their individual cards, I imagined how I might help each one in their quest for success. I also imagined if any were to call for my unique service, how I could be supportive. Immediately, I felt empowered. I was able to create my own Oxytocin rush.!

A recent article in Time magazine called "Midlife Crisis? Bring it ON!" Really defined my place in the Joy of Connecting. The article explores how women of this generation are seizing that stressful, pivotal moment in their lives to reinvent themselves.

Nancy Gibbs explained, "It is both a stable truth and an unsettling one that our lives loop and twist from age to age. With that endearing sense of discovery that baby boomers bring to the most enduring experiences-like growing up or finding God or burning out-women are confronting the obstacles of middle age and figuring out how to turn them into opportunities. Women may actually discover that there has never been a better time to have a midlife crisis than now."

She explains, "Women get to wrestle their hormones through a change of life; but however *disruptive menopause may be for some women, the changes that matter most are often more psychic and spiritual than physical*. Talk to women about what happens when they hit midlife hurdles—whether divorce or disease, an empty nest, the loss of a parent—and very often the response is a surprise even to them. They may first turn inward, ask the cosmic questions or retrieve some passion they put aside to make room for a career and family and adult responsibilities. Among the growing ranks of female entrepreneurs are many who have sensed a massive Midlife Marketing Opportunity. Women are natural marketers, even of their worst fears. Their instinct when they get in trouble is to talk about it with other women. So, once they have weathered the crisis, they are ready to become *crisis managers*."

These are the women in Bonnie's group. There is a whole world of sharing that is going on drastically different from male groups of similar age. Men are still in the aggressive mode. Perhaps this is why you hear of the stressed out-over weight executive that has a heart attack too young.

I noticed each woman in the group might have had marital strife, financial difficulty, have been divorced, or have had children who have grown and a pet that may have died. Some women are just coming out of a life altering health scare such as cancer. I realized why I was participating and why I am driven to do what I do. My role is to help women avoid the debilitating Change of Life, prevent these

illnesses through education and allow them to finally realize themselves. I was here to open the door for them. I wanted to nurture and care for each woman. I wanted to share my knowledge. I realized I need to nurture each person because I feel empty with my mother's absence. In return, each woman had something to teach me about raising children, keeping my marriage going and learning from their mistakes.

Older women are constantly reminded that they are aging. Younger women are constantly reminded that they better hang on to it. All of this vanity really takes the true meaning out of life. Older women are fantastic and have the most to teach. I feel blessed my job is to help older women. It offers me a chance to learn and take advice. It is like having access to the largest library right at my fingertips! I get a high on any day when I get a call from woman who tells me as a result of our work together they are feeling more energy. Every time I feel proud knowing I had a small part to play in their success. MY largest challenge is recognizing I can't help everyone. I want to cry. I realize the success I see in other women helps me to understand it is impossible to help *all* women.

This is perhaps why shows like *Sex in the City* or *Desperate Housewives* are so successful. These episodes allow us to vicariously bond, get the Oxytocin we need and still flip the wash. *If you have a business idea, turn the TV off and click on to Bonnie's website. ([www.bonnierossparker.com](http://www.bonnierossparker.com)) Get connected. The rush is much better.*

Bonnie Ross-Parker truly has the "Joy of Connecting" art mastered. As with anything, many factors may be present to ensure success of any project, however, it is usually good chemistry that makes a project truly great.

My prescription to *any* woman in business is to contact Bonnie and connect with her. Connecting with her is not only being good for your business, it is good for your health!

References available upon request.

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