



**kort's korner**

# The Love Drug

WHEN YOU LOOK ACROSS A CROWDED ROOM and spot that hot guy, you may think you've found the man of your dreams. Usually, it is lust that you are feeling—a purely sexual sensation, until you start to talk to him and get to

know him. And suddenly you fall into romantic love.

Our society focuses primarily on romantic love and calls it real love. Movies, books, songs, and television programs all make us feel that if we cannot sustain this feeling, then we've "fallen out of love." Many believe that this rapturous emotion should never end and that keeping the "high" of the connection should require little to no work at all. That's just not so. If you two are lucky, this physiological state of infatuation lasts from six to 18 months, tops.

For most people, romantic love is the best part of their relationship. With the selection process in the hunt for love seemingly over, it's easy to just lie back and enjoy the ecstatic feelings and the bonding experience. But as an emotional experience, romantic love is simply the doorway to any relationship. Its main purpose is to bring two people together in an emotional "time out" when both partners can feel their sameness, overlook their dif-

ferences and experience a feeling of euphoria.

Romantic love is nature's anesthesia. During this stage, people often say they feel drugged. If depressed, they report being less so. If suffering from an addiction, they will experience a diminished craving or feel entirely "cured." Love's a stimulant too: Someone who needs a lot of sleep finds he can suddenly operate on less; and a sluggish sex drive will ratchet up to match a partner's higher libido.

The sense of elation, exhilaration and euphoria that new lovers feel is largely due to their bodies producing a natural amphetamine called phenylethylamine (PEA). So if you feel drugged, it's because you are! Most people don't know that as we fall in romantic love, nature floods us with chemical cousins of amphetamines like PEA, dopamine, norepinephrine—all natural stimulants and painkillers. When PEA is first released, it is actually at its most potent state, which is why people never forget their first

love. This also promotes addictions to sex and love in people who are constantly seeking to access this natural high. The problem, just as with most other addictions, is that each time it's released, it becomes less and less powerful and lasts for a shorter period of time. It's not meant to last. Its only purpose is to connect two people to begin the bonding process.

Gay men cherish this time even more than our heterosexual counterparts do, since we're so often warned that we'll never find love, and that the gay culture is based on promiscuity and short-term hook-ups. So when romantic love hits, it's like a long-forgotten uncle remembered you in his will.

Alas, it's only a temporary state that's supposed to end. But people who don't know this, do all they can to keep it from ending. Some people break it off just to make up again and reactivate those early feelings, plus the dose of PEA. Others use drugs and alcohol to try and make the feeling permanent—or at least, replace it. Still others decide that relationships "shouldn't be so much work," so they dissolve it in disillusionment—or else have sex with others to bring back that of PEA high. Too many gay men see the inevitable twilight of romantic love as a confirmation that we can-

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# The Love Drug, continued

not enjoy sustained love, and that the heterosexists and homophobes were right. But this is another misconception: they are not right, and we CAN enjoy sustained love.

Some cultures (India's, for example, where arranged marriages are still the norm) don't aspire to limerence, because they're aware that it's not based on reality. If you find a guy that you think is the man of your dreams, just understand that real love involves three stages, and that your first two years together are not necessarily a positive indicator that he's the right one for you. It's good to enjoy the PEA high, as long as you understand that it's not what real love is all about. This is important because if you base your feelings on the PEA high, when the stage of romantic love ends, you could walk away from the relationship of your dreams.