

Researcher explores what makes love last

March 21 2014, by Libby Roerig

How couples in the Wabash Valley maintain the passion in their relationships will be the topic of an upcoming podcast.

In 2009, Indiana State University student researchers polled people living in the Terre Haute area and asked them to measure three types of love in their relationships: eros, a passionate or romantic love; storge, a sense of friendship or companionship; and mania, an obsessive love. About 65 percent of the 800 people surveyed reported being in a romance. Of that percentage, respondents characterized their relationships as 97 percent at eros, 92 percent at storge and 33 percent at mania.

Virgil Sheets, [psychology professor](#) and department chair, wanted to know more about those [experiences](#) of love and conducted a more extensive analysis.

"Scientifically, what I've been looking at is the factors needed to maintain love," Sheets said.

Mania or obsessive love, which is the distracting state of love where you constantly think about your partner, is often experienced at the start of a relationship and typically fades with time, Sheets said. "That's probably good, because you have to live your life, too."

While it's long been believed the passion a person feels for his or her partner declines over time in relationships, Sheets has learned that the romance doesn't have to fade.

"While the obsession drops, many couples still report a strong, even sensual, attraction to their partners even many years in," Sheets said. He theorizes the reason humans are drawn to [romantic relationships](#) is to expand our sense of self.

"Because they're different from us, we gain new abilities and experiences. When that happens, we develop a sense of passion for what the person teaches us about ourselves and how they help us cope with life," he said.

The degree to which a couple reported feeling a sense of romantic love depended on their amount of continued self-expansion, Sheets said. After about 20 years in a relationship - a time when children leave the home and couples have more time for growth experiences - the occurrence of romantic love picks up again. Even people who say they don't want self-expansion reported a benefit from these experiences.

More research is needed to define some unknowns, including how many self-expansion experiences are beneficial to a [relationship](#), what kinds might be harmful, how cyclical [romantic love](#) is, etc.

"Relationships are important, they affect our physical health," Sheets said. "We've evolved to need that. That's why [relationships are] especially interesting."

More information: Direct link to podcast:
[www.scienceofrelationships.com ... ters-podcast-30.html](http://www.scienceofrelationships.com...ters-podcast-30.html)

"Passion for life: Self-expansion and passionate love across the life span." *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 0265407513515618, first published on December 18, 2013 [DOI: 10.1177/0265407513515618](#)

Provided by Indiana State University

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