

# Love makes you strong: Psychologists explain how neurotic people may benefit from a romantic relationship

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Psychologists from Jena and Kassel (Germany) found, that a romantic relationship helps neurotic people to stabilize their personality. Credit: Jan-Peter Kasper/FSU Jena

It is springtime and they are everywhere: Newly enamored couples walking through the city hand in hand, floating on cloud nine. Yet a few weeks later the initial rush of romance will have dissolved and the world

will not appear as rosy anymore. Nevertheless, love and romance have long lasting effects.

Psychologists of the German Universities of Jena and Kassel discovered that a romantic [relationship](#) can have a positive effect on [personality development](#) in young adults. Researchers report on this finding in the online edition of the renowned science magazine *Journal of Personality*. The scientists focused on neuroticism – one of the five characteristics considered to be the basic dimensions of human personality which can be used to characterize every human being. "Neurotic people are rather anxious, insecure, and easily annoyed. They have a tendency towards depression, often show low self-esteem and tend to be generally dissatisfied with their lives," Dr. Christine Finn explains, who wrote her doctoral dissertation within the framework of the current study. "However, we were able to show that they become more stable in a love relationship, and that their personality stabilizes," the Jena psychologist says.

The scientists have accompanied 245 couples in the age group 18 to 30 years for nine months and interviewed them individually every three months. Using a questionnaire the scientists analyzed the degrees of neuroticism as well as relationship satisfaction. Moreover, the study participants had to evaluate fictitious everyday life situations and their possible significance for their own partnership. "This part was crucial, because neurotic people process influences from the outside world differently," Finn explains. For instance, they react more strongly to negative stimuli and have a tendency to interpret ambiguous situations negatively instead of positively or neutrally.

The scientists found that this tendency gradually decreases over time when being in a [romantic relationship](#). On the one hand, the partners support each other, according to Christine Finn. On the other hand, the cognitive level, i.e. the world of inner thought of an individual, plays a

crucial role: "The positive experiences and emotions gained by having a partner change the personality – not directly but indirectly – as at the same time the thought structures and the perception of presumably negative situations change," Finn emphasizes. To put it more simply: Love helps us to tackle life with more confidence instead of seeing things pessimistically straight away.

The scientists were able to observe this effect in men as well as women. "Of course everyone reacts differently and a long, happy relationship has a stronger effect than a short one," Prof. Dr. Franz J. Neyer says. He is the co-author of the new publication and chair of Differential Psychology of the Jena University. "But generally we can say: [young adults](#) entering a relationship can only win!"

For Christine Finn the results contain yet another positive message – not only for people with neurotic tendencies but also for those who suffer from depression or anxiety disorders: "It is difficult to reform a whole [personality](#) but our study confirms: Negative thinking can be unlearned!"

**More information:** Finn, C., Mitte, K. & Neyer, F.J.: Recent Decreases in Specific Interpretation Biases Predict Decreases in Neuroticism. Evidence from a Longitudinal Study with Young Adult Couples. *Journal of Personality* (2014), [onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jopy.12102/abstract](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jopy.12102/abstract) . [DOI: 10.1111/jopy.12102](https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12102)

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