

hard wired

Sex might be about chemistry, as our cover story so aptly illustrates, but love, well, as the cliché goes: Before you can love someone else, you have to love yourself (get your mind out of the gutter, we didn't mean it that way). Don't we all want to love and be loved? To quote *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*: "Nothing spoils the taste of peanut butter like unrequited love."

Everyone needs something a little different when it comes to self love. Some of us love our bodies the way they are, and for others, "loving your body" means sculpting it, making it perfect. Did the cleavage on the cover of a recent issue of *Wired Magazine* shock people more because it was boobs on a tech magazine, or because the boobs looked a bit too perfect and airbrushed? Some of us have a little more to love; some of us sag in places where movie stars are perky. Whether it's picking up a sledgehammer or signing up for some hot yoga, do what it takes. Eat some chocolate, put on some jewelry, and love your body, whatever it looks like. — *Camilla Mortensen*



by shannon finnell

they say love is all about chemistry ... turns out, screwing is all about chemistry, too (and biology and psychology and even math). Modern technology is making it possible to understand more about the science of sex, which is hard to flesh out, even in many well-studied areas. EW talked to some scientists and surveyed the studies to find out more about what's going on while you're getting it on.

hot, wet and ready

Conventional wisdom (i.e., sexism) holds that men become aroused visually while women are only excited by romantic notions. That's why chicks hate porn, right? That particular cultural myth has been proven false.

Women get wet for mating bonobos. Actually, pretty much watching anyone having sex instigates women's genital arousal, which is calculated by sticking a light-up device in a woman's vagina and detecting the alternating current from the pressure changes in her vessels. Men are slightly more picky: Their genitals only rouse when they see sexual activity involving their preferred gender.

Meredith Chivers, a researcher who conducted these experiments, wrote in 2005 that for women, being able to get slippery without love or even attraction "may be an evolved protective mechanism." This automatic lubrication can protect women from friction-induced injury even when sex isn't the most fantastic experience.

While genital arousal makes the world go round, sex doesn't start to get exciting without the brain. Psychological arousal is vital for sex that's actually ... good, and the women who watched the bonobos in Chivers' study didn't report feeling at all turned on.

The hormone oxytocin starts mediating emotions during foreplay, and that's one of the things that can make people feel good, according to Sarina Rodrigues, an OSU psychology professor who studies neuroendocrinology. An almond-sized region of the brain, the hypothalamus, creates oxytocin (along with other hormones), then sends it to the pituitary gland. When things get sexy, oxytocin starts emerging. "It's released with skin to skin contact, like spooning, massage, kissing," Rodrigues says.

Oxytocin also plays roles in different processes like birth and bonding related to that feeling of wellbeing. "It seems that oxytocin decreases how much your emotional centers activate, especially your fear centers," Rodrigues says. "It also calms your heart and decreases cardio responses to stress."

So why is it so important to tamp down on stress and distraction during sex? Can't we still get the evolutionary job done while updating a mental to-do list?

Nope. Two Dutch sexologists (best job title ever) found that for both men and women, distractions are a total downer (and softener). Jacques van Lankveld directed