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## Habits of crazy-in-love couples

Carrie Sloan

We've uncovered the secrets to being that couple— you know, the been-together-forever pair who are so connected, they make the Obamas' relationship look tentative. Granted, you have to have the same values when it comes to things like kids and marriage, but there are other, more surprising factors at play. "Many couples think staying tight requires magical soul-mate status, but in reality, the trick is to establish habits that strengthen your bond," says Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D., a psychologist in Los Angeles, US.

We interviewed a team of relationship experts, including Thomas, and pinpointed exactly what those habits are. From the right way to make up after a fight to how often you talk about the future, using these strategies on a regular basis will keep your love going strong forever...or for as long as you want it to. Find it hard to believe? Read on to discover the secrets that your so-in-love neighbour/best friend/sister/co-worker has internalised. The best part—your love life will be completely shock-proof after this.

### Other women see Ben stiller, you see Ben affleck

One of the biggest secrets to long-lasting lust is also the easiest: tweaking the way you think so that you always try to see the best in your guy...and helping him to do the same.

We're not suggesting that you ignore his mistakes or pretend he's being sweet when he's acting like an ass. It's more about reframing your view so you appreciate all the great things he has going for him. For example, if he's so devoted to his job that you feel like you two barely talk some nights, resist the urge to gripe. Instead, think about how much you respect his passion and ambition. If you're the one working overtime, remind him of how much he loves to brag about his ultra-accomplished girlfriend or wife.

Besides squashing resentment, focussing on what draws you to each other will revive that gotta-have-you now lust you had in the beginning. "When starting to date, all couples have an idealised take on each other, which leads to intense attraction," says Thomas. "But after six months to a year, that often fades and we tend to zero in on what exactly is wrong with the other person."

Fixating on faults can make you dissatisfied in the relationship. Make your union strong by always being aware of how lucky you both are.

### You keep your fights clean

Conventional wisdom has it that partners who always (or rarely) duke it out are on thin relationship ice. But it's how you fight that matters, not how often. "Conflict is inevitable, but nasty behaviour, like finger-pointing and name-calling, shows contempt for each other, and that's sulphuric acid for love," says relationship researcher John Gottman, Ph.D., co-founder of the Gottman Institute in Seattle, US. On the flip side, if you confront problems head-on and in a way that conveys respect, you can actually get closer during a fight. "Research shows that the most successful couples use something called the soft start-up when they argue," says Gottman. Say your guy suddenly bailed on meeting you and your friends for dinner one night. Instead of blurting out "You're a total douche bag for not showing up!" go with "Hey, what happened? I was upset that you cancelled like that." Or if you're the one who screwed up big, defuse his fury by saying "I can understand why you'd be mad." That cooperative, rather than combative, approach will help transform a fight into a conversation.

And if one of you does fly off the handle (which is bound to happen every once in a while), do damage control as

soon as possible. Make genuine repair attempts: Apologise, then laugh or touch him to cut the tension, says Gottman. These actions tell the other person that, no matter what you disagree about, you're still on the same team.

### **You share the same badass habits**

Sneaking into posh hotel pools after hours, e-mailing your friends-and-family discount to everyone and their mother, calling in sick and downloading Xbox game demos all day—hey, everyone has one or two ways that they break the rules or behave badly. But the surprising news is that whether you and your guy agree on which infractions are okay—and which ones aren't—has a direct impact on the longevity of your relationship.

This is especially true when it comes to seriously bad-for-you behaviours. A State University of New York at Buffalo study found that couples who mirrored each other's levels of drinking and smoking stayed close as time went by, while abstainers paired with smokers and/or drinkers eventually split.

Booze and cigarettes aside, having harmless guilty pleasures in common also helps your love go the long haul. "If you can both be a little reckless in certain areas of your life—but within boundaries you each find appropriate—it can feel exciting, like you have a partner in crime," says Thomas. So go ahead and be bad together—just make sure you don't end up cuddling in the back of a police cruiser.

### **You satisfy each other's naughty needs**

As you know, lots of superhot, burn-ahole-in-the-bed booty does wonders when it comes to deepening your connection. That's no problem during the first months of your relationship; your bodies are brand-new to each other, and you're always looking for reasons to be naked and horizontal. But after a while, your true bedroom personalities begin to reveal themselves...and it becomes even more crucial that you stay aware of what the other person craves.

"There are two basic sexual types: thrill seekers and comfort seekers," says sex therapist Ian Kerner, PhD, author of *She Comes First*. Thrill seekers crave novelty; they get bored easily and are always looking for ways to amp up things. Comfort seekers, on the other hand, may like getting busy a lot and could be turned on by some out-there things, "but the routine is key," explains Kerner. "Whatever they like, they want to stick with; they don't have that drive thrill seekers have to constantly test out new scenarios."

If you both happen to be the same type, keeping each other satisfied will come more naturally. But if you and your guy are opposites, it can still work—as long as you make communicating about sex a habit, says Kerner.

### **You both pack endless surprises**

Uncovering new details about each other, like finding out that he starred in his seventh-grade musical or letting it slip that you can count to 20 in Japanese, triggers the release of the neurotransmitter dopamine, which leads to that isn't he/she so awesome feeling.

"Partners who last aren't static," says Thomas. "They continually reveal different facets of themselves."

It can be as simple as doing novel activities together, like trying Korean food or the opera just for the hell of it—even if you both hate it, you'll still learn something new about each other. You also can ask questions about your pasts or what you'd like to do in the future. "Doing so will keep that exciting first stage of a relationship—when you're slowly peeling away layers of who you both are—alive and ongoing," says Gottman. That perpetual newness is the drug that will keep you high on each other forever... and ever. So what are you waiting for? Master these moves and be a rock-steady twosome till eternity.

### **The love ritual that keeps us tight**

We asked readers how they reinforce their connection (in ways that don't involve getting naked).

When we first moved into our new apartment, we didn't have a table for a couple of weeks. So my boyfriend and I would put a blanket on the floor and have nightly 'picnics.' We have a table now, but we still like to set up picnics in

the living room, complete with takeout sandwiches and a bottle of our favourite wine. It's sort of a reminder of how far we've come."

—*Felicia, 28*

We live in different cities, so we've developed this thing where we will book a hotel room and have a staycation in either Baltimore, where he lives, or New York, where I live. No roommates, no family members...just me, him, and some serious quality time."

—*Jessica, 23*

My husband and I play Iron Chef once a month. We pick a new theme each time, then create meals centred around it. The competition heats us both up and the sex rocks."

—*Holly, 31*

Every Friday night, we get cosy in our sweats and watch all the TV shows we DVR'd from that past week. It's our downtime when we really get to enjoy each other one-on-one and relax after the stresses from the week."

—*Michelle, 25*

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