

Unhooked and Set Free (Part 2)

by Linda Bartlett

Maura, my young friend, has bonded with her boyfriend. She doesn't seem to want to be with anyone else. In fact, she moved in with him with the hope that he will ask her to marry him.

It's really quite remarkable, don't you think? Despite the cultural acceptance of multiple partners most young women want to be married to one man and make a nest for their children. Unfortunately, a woman's consent to play house outside the commitment of marriage actually encourages young men to postpone marriage.

So what is going on with Maura? Why has she bonded with her boyfriend? I believe it's because faith and science are at work in Maura's life. The Creator of life has not only written Himself on Maura but also wired her for monogamous attachment.

Right now, Maura's faith is relegated to Sunday morning or an occasional religious discussion with her dad or me. But, I'd like to help Maura see that faith intersects with daily life in all areas including the physical, emotional, and relational. Together, Maura and I are learning that God has designed a woman's body and mind to connect through the biological wonder of neurochemicals.

Oxytocin, or the "cuddle" hormone," is a neurochemical. It is present in both male and female, but is primarily active in females. The female body releases oxytocin at four different times. Take note! Each has to do with procreation and the care of children. Oxytocin is released:

- During meaningful or intimate touching with another person (Action: bonding and trust)
- During sexual intercourse (Action: bonding and trust)
- During the onset of labor in a pregnant woman (Action: causes uterine contractions, results in birth)
- After baby's delivery (Action: stimulates nipples and produces flow of milk from mom for nursing)

Oxytocin, which floods a woman's brain during labor, childbirth and breast-feeding, creates a bond between mother and child. But first, it creates a bond between the parents of that child. When a man and a woman touch in familiar and intimate ways, oxytocin is released into the woman's brain. Without being able to explain why, she desires more of that same kind of intimacy. Can you see how oxytocin plays a vital role in the "one flesh" union of one man and one woman in marriage? Oxytocin helps assure the continuation of the human race!

Oxytocin bonding helps produce long-term connectedness. It might be for this reason that an American woman in an intact marriage rarely has sexual intercourse with anyone but her husband. Such stability is affected by oxytocin. Think of the significance. The bonding of father and mother greatly increases the chance for a child to be raised in a healthy, two-parent

home. Such a child is blessed not necessarily with perfect parents but with a mom and dad who mentor faithfulness.

The world speaks about the emotions of love. The emotions of connectedness. In reality, the desire to connect is more than an emotional feeling. Bonding is like glue. And it can't be undone or ripped apart without great emotional pain.

The flow of oxytocin serves to promote trust. Oxytocin triggered the bonding process between Maura and her boyfriend even before they went "all the way" but only kissed and hugged. Do parents know this? Do moms who think it's "cute" that their 12-year-old daughter has a "boyfriend" and dads who allow 14-year-old daughters to spend long periods of time alone with a boy realize that they are placing vulnerable girls at risk? A girl's protective boundary of modesty and inhibition gradually breaks down with each kiss, each touch, each pledge of love... even though the boy she's with has no intention of marrying her or having children with her.

Maura confessed, "It's so very strange. The more time I spend with my boyfriend, the more I need to be with him." Maura's neurochemicals are doing what they were designed to do.

Here, then, is one of the failures of sex education. Children are imagined as "sexual from birth." The wonders of sex and sexuality are dangled like carrots in front of them from early age through high school and beyond. Then hands are washed when the educators say, "We told them to wait." But can anyone turn off the oxytocin?

Maura and I are talking about the glue of oxytocin. I hope she is telling her friend Nichole. Nichole has been in several intimate relationships. She has "hooked up." She has "friends with benefits." It all seems so casual and harmless. But, oxytocin is at work. Every time that Nichole and her "friend" break up and she moves on to a new sexual partner, a bond is broken. This is emotional. Painful. Sometimes paralyzing.

Being sexually intimate with one person, breaking up, and being sexually intimate with another is like a divorce. Repeating this cycle again and again places a girl in danger of negative emotional consequences. Sexual activity creates emotional bonds between partners. Breaking these bonds can damage the brain's natural connecting or bonding mechanism, cause depression, and even make it more difficult to bond in marriage. Nichole doesn't realize it, but her choices are in conflict with her own body and the way she was designed to function.

Sexual intimacy, as Maura has discovered, is addictive. But through the honesty of a friend, she is learning why her body, mind and soul are so interconnected. It is by Divine Design. As her friend, I can't force a change in her behavior but I can be a reminder of why God's design for marriage matters.

If Nichole is your friend, too, will you speak up? Will you tell her about the "glue" of oxytocin? Will you help her unhook... and be set free to better navigate away from depression

and hardness of heart? Will you tell her how well her body has been woven together and why and by Whom?

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