

## Episode 7: Love in Any Language

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[ANNOUNCER, MUSIC UNDER]

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[MUSIC UP FULL]

[OPEN MONTAGE OF SOTS FROM TV SHOW, MUSIC UNDER]

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[MUSIC UP FULL]

[HOST JAYNE CHACKO, MUSIC UNDER]

*"This is... Rutgers Around the World— a finger on the pulse of all things global at Rutgers."*

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**HOST:** Hi I'm Jayne Chacko, Rutgers junior and host of the podcast, Rutgers Around the World.

Valentine's Day is known internationally as the "day of love" – a day when people of many countries around the world celebrate romantic love and express affection for those closest to them. In Germany, couples exchange pig-themed gifts. And in South Africa, women literally wear their hearts on their sleeves, pinning the names of their love interest on their shirt sleeves. All this love talk had me thinking – while Valentine's Day might be celebrated with different traditions in other countries, is the way we fall in love around the world really that different?

We delve into this question and others with our next guest, Dr. Helen Fisher. Dr. Helen Fisher is biological anthropologist and member of the Center for Human Evolutionary Studies in the Department of Anthropology at Rutgers. She is also a senior research fellow at The Kinsey Institute and chief scientific advisor to the Internet dating site Match.com. Dr. Fisher has conducted extensive research across the globe and written six books on the evolution and future of human sex, love, marriage, and gender differences in the brain. She joins us now via phone.

Dr. Fisher, welcome on Rutgers Around the World. Thank you for joining us!

**HELEN FISHER:** I am delighted to be with you!

**HOST:** How do we fall in love? And, is it the same across the world?

**HELEN FISHER:** Yes, it is the same. We express it differently in different parts of the world. I mean different people have different customs for romance and for marriage. But it's basically the same brain system. You know I and my colleagues have now put over a hundred people into a brain scanner using functional magnetic resonance imaging, FMRI to find the brain circuitry of romantic love. And, we put people in the machine who had just fallen happily in love and others who had just been rejected in love and then some who were in love long-term. And, as it turns out, this is a basic brain system. It lies in the

very base of the brain linked with drive. In fact, it lies right near brain regions that orchestrate thirst and hunger. It's a drive. It's a drive to find life's greatest prize really, a mating partner. So it's a basic brain system like the fear system or the anger system, it's human, evolved millions of years ago.

**HOST:** You were part of a study that looked at the brain activity of Chinese students in love a few years ago and controlled the experiment by looking at the brain activity of American students in love. What did you find?

**HELEN FISHER:** Among those people who were madly in love, the basic brain system, the dopamine system that becomes triggered was the same among the Chinese as it was among the Americans which didn't surprise me. But you know, they are going to do it a little bit differently. We really actively and openly date. They are just slowly getting rid of all their beliefs in arranged marriage and more and more doing what they call "free love" which is picking the partner for yourself. We also looked at what happens to the brain when you are in a long-term happy marriage. This is what we found in our Chinese people who we went back actually almost four years later to see who was still in a relationship. And this is what we found: three brain regions become active when you are happily in love – a brain region linked with empathy, a brain region linked with controlling your own stress and your own emotions, and a brain region linked with what I call positive illusions, the ability to overlook what you don't like about somebody and focus on what you do. So we're beginning to understand not only what romantic love is, but what makes romantic love be sustained in a long-term partnership.

**HOST:** What about other countries around the world? How does culture impact the way we love?

**HELEN FISHER:** In India, for example, they still have quite a few arranged marriages. And, they often feel first we marry and then we fall in love. And, they've got these very fancy wedding ceremonies that go on for four or five days and very often they say somebody will fall in love actually during the wedding ceremony and I'm not surprised at that because the wedding ceremony is so exciting and that can drive the dopamine system in the brain and actually push you over the threshold into falling in love.

**HOST:** Are there differences between countries in our attitudes to love and the way we express our love?

**HELEN FISHER:** Definitely. You know, I'm an anthropologist and so you know, I study people who live up the Amazon River and in the deserts of Botswana. In fact, I asked one little boy, a Hadza, hunter-gatherer Hadza, did he have a girlfriend. And he replied, "I saw a girl and when I grow up I'm going to kill a Zebra and give her the tail." So that's a very different present than what we give today, but the sentiment is the same. It shows that the person can actually provide. You know in America you can bring chocolate and flowers and that's not a good signal that you're necessarily going to be the head of the bank and be very supportive of your children and your future. In many respects, the zebra's tail says a great deal more about the talents of the boy than we do with some of our expressions of romance.

**HOST:** Would you say that technology has changed the way we fall in love?

**HELEN FISHER:** That's very good that you said it just that way. It is changing the way we fall in love. It's not changing love. You can't kill romantic love, it's a basic brain system. In my day, they called you up on the telephone. These days they are texting, emailing, and looking for somebody on the internet. And, that is different, there is no question about it. But these internet dating sites, they're not dating sites, they are introducing sites. We can give you a host of what you are looking for. But you've got to get out there and

look at that person. The only real algorithm is your own brain and when you meet somebody in person, you smile the way you always did, you laugh the way you always did, you parade the way you always did, you listen the way you always did, you try to impress the way you always did. So all they are is the newest device to do the same old thing.

**HOST:** Are millennials doing anything differently?

**HELEN FISHER:** I am really impressed with millennials. I think millennials are introducing something really smart. I don't know if they know that, but I call it "slow love." What they're doing is they're being very cautious. They are trying to figure out who somebody is, whether they want to go any further. They're living together before they wed. We're seeing a real extension of that period of time of getting to know somebody before they walk down the aisle. So I did a study of 1100 married people and asked a lot of questions. But one of the questions was, "would you remarry the person you're currently married to?" And, 81 percent said "yes." So marriage rates actually are going up right now, divorce is stable, going down maybe a little. And, we're marrying later. And, the later you marry, the more experience that you've got, the more likely you are to remain married. And, that's what the millennials are doing.

**HOST:** Are there any major trends that affect the way we love?

**HELEN FISHER:** The biggest trend of all is women piling into the job market in cultures around the world and with that, they're marrying later, having fewer children, expressing their sexuality more. They can walk out of bad relationships in order to make better ones. All of that and much more is changing the dating landscape. They're still falling in love, but it's changing how we court.

**HOST:** Dr. Fisher, from everything we've discussed today it sounds like there is a lot to be hopeful about and that love is truly a universal language! Thank you for your insight!

**HELEN FISHER:** Thank you very much.

**HOST:** That was Dr. Helen Fisher, biological anthropologist and member of the Center for Human Evolutionary Studies in the Department of Anthropology at Rutgers. Dr. Fisher is also a senior research fellow at The Kinsey Institute and chief scientific advisor to the Internet dating website Match.com.

Special thanks to WRSU, 88.7 FM, Rutgers radio for making this interview possible.

That's all for this episode of Rutgers Around the World. Join us next time as we discuss all things global with members of the Rutgers community. Thanks for listening!

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