

## PROSTAGLANDIN EXCHANGE DURING MARITAL RELATIONS: A THEORETICAL BASIS FOR MARITAL BONDING

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**Abstract:** None available.

**Full Text:** Although marital bonding does not fall strictly within the realms of study to which PPPANA is dedicated, it cannot fail to be of interest because of its close relationship to the work of this group. Because of the advanced insights of the members of PPPANA, there is no organized group today better qualified and suited to investigate this vital area. This letter is being submitted in hopes that it will stimulate study in this area. At the present time there is a strong trend in the United States towards increasing disintegration of the family institution. (We in America can only hope that Canada has been somewhat spared from this sad trend.) Although vast numbers of sociological and psychological studies have been directed at this problem, there has been little if any interest in the possible effects of various methods of contraception on marital bonding. Could the normal consummation of marital sexual relations without barriers favor marital bonding? Conversely, could insulation with condoms, now in prevalent use, tend to prevent this bonding? Largely due to the work of Dr. Ashley Montague, former chairman of the Department of Anthropology, Rutgers University, the importance of the human touch, skin to skin, is increasingly recognized. This concept is dealt with in his classic work, "Touching-the Human Significance of the Skin."<sup>1</sup> As one practical example of this principle, researchers at the University of Miami Medical School's Touch Research Institute began giving premature babies massages 45 minutes each day which involved firm massage strokes and limb movements. Within ten days the massaged babies showed a 47-percent greater weight gain than their wardmates, as well as improved sleep, alertness and activity. Up to eight months later they displayed greater mental and physical skills.<sup>2</sup> If these principles apply to the care of the newborn, may they not also be applicable to one of the most potentially important and profound experiences a human can know-conjugal relations between husband and wife? This premise is at present theoretical, as yet being unstudied, but there is a basis for this hypothesis in physiologic science, as will be reviewed in the following. Prostaglandins are hormone-like substances derived primarily from cell membranes. They regulate many cellular, hormonal, and neurotransmission functions. They are present in most if not all body secretions. All smooth muscles and all endocrine glands are affected by them. Their extreme potency is reflected in the fact that most biological effects are brought about by extremely minute quantities, usually in the nanogram range (parts per billion). The male seminal fluid, which serves as a carrier for sperm, is an extremely complicated substance, richly endowed with prostaglandins as well as proteins, enzymes, and hormones. The prostaglandins are derived primarily from the seminal vesicles, with lesser amounts coming from the prostate gland and the glands of Cowper. The prostaglandins are known to contribute to male fertility.<sup>3</sup><sup>5</sup> However, their potential effects on the female partner, aside from reproduction, have had little attention until now. When deposited in the female vagina, these substances are absorbed into the female system over a period of hours,<sup>6</sup> the process being somewhat analogous to that of a blood transfusion. In this manner there are reasons for believing that the substances imprint themselves on the female system. A corresponding secretion occurs in the female vagina during sexual arousal. It is known that secretions of the uterine cervix are rich in prostaglandins.<sup>7</sup> They are also probably produced by the Bartholin glands and present in the vaginal transudate. As with the male, this fluid contains a complicated array of substances which may be absorbed into the male system through the highly vascular head of the penis and inner foreskin. In this manner the marital partners may "imprint" themselves on each other during normal marital relations, thus establishing a physiologic bonding that cannot be accomplished in any other way. There are two methods of birth control in common use which

effectively prevent this mutual fluidic exchange: the use of condoms and the practice of premature withdrawal. If this theory of mutual exchange holds true as an essential component of marital bonding, proof of which must remain for the future, then the common practice of aberrant methods of sexual intercourse may be one of the major causes, both subtle and unsuspected, for the current trend in family disintegration. This subject cannot be dismissed without addressing legitimate concerns for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, especially the deadly AIDS virus, and the need for measures of birth control. In regard to the former, authorities are increasingly recognizing that there is only one certain way to avoid contracting AIDS, and that is the monogamous relation with a mutually uninfected partner. In regard to birth control, probably there has never been a time in human history with greater need for safe, effective, and inexpensive methods of birth control, methods which are also in harmony with natural physiologic processes. As a result of careful research sponsored by Oxford University in England, there does appear to be such a method, which consists of a combination of three "natural" methods of birth control that focus on: -the temperature chart -changes in cervical mucus (the Billings method), and -the softening of the female cervix approaching the period of fertility, as determined by self-examination. Although no one of these methods is entirely successful, the combination of the three methods, according to the Oxford study, compares favorably in effectiveness with other methods of birth control now in common use. The one essential is the training of couples in these methods. Such training is now available in the form of a video cassette entitled "Fertility-a Guide to Natural Family Planning."<sup>8</sup> In conclusion, almost universally today the sexual act is looked upon as purely physical. In stark contrast to this, virtually all of the major religions, at least in their beginnings, have taught that the sexual act has a profound effect on human welfare for good or for ill, according to its use. Surely the time is ripe for study of this area by those not only with scientific integrity but also with a sense of moral values.

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8. The video cassette, *Tertility-A guide to natural family planning*, produced by Oxford University, is available at a cost of \$250.00. It may be ordered from the Natural Planning Service, Clitherow House, 1 Blythe News, Blythe Road, London W14 ONW, England.

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