

Decoding the Science Behind Makeup Sex

All about the emotional and hormonal components

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Makeup sex is a common thing. It happens after an intense fight when a couple ends up falling passionately into bed together. The resulting lovemaking after a fight is often described as more exciting and intense than normal.

“In the aftermath of an argument or a fight, connecting sexually reaffirms your desire, passion, and connection with each other. Depending on the argument, it can help soothe the hurt feelings and extinguish the anger,” said **Dr. Jane Greer**, marriage and family therapist and Shrink Wrap media commentator.

Find out more about the science behind makeup sex and what it means if it happens in your relationship.



Transfer of arousal

There's a simple reason behind the excitement in makeup sex. The arousal state is transferred from one situation to another. When a person is excited by one stimulus, they can be more easily excited by another.

A **classic bridge experiment** was conducted in 1974 by Donald Dutton and Arthur Aron that had men contacted by an attractive woman either on a scary suspension bridge, or a non-fear arousing bridge. The woman asked them to fill out questionnaires. The men on the fear-arousing bridge felt more sexual arousal for the woman.

Makeup sex can be explained in a similar way, because the high arousal state during makeup sex is the direct result of the angry fight that created a problem in the first place. There is a sense of relief after the fight is over and makeup sex can reestablish the couple's bond.

“When one is angry epinephrine and norepinephrine, as well as glucocorticoids are released into the body. The hormones that are released during lovemaking - prolactin, oxytocin and dopamine - can counteract these stressors. While this is the mechanism at work, we do not think it actually drives the desire for makeup sex. The real motivator would be relational in nature,” said **Patricia Johnson and Mark Michaels**, co-authors of *Designer Relationships, Partners in Passion, Great Sex Made Simple, Tantra for Erotic Empowerment*, and *The Essence of Tantric Sexuality*.



Deepening your bond

“Makeup sex can deepen your bond. But this is not really due to the passionate romp; it's because of your disagreement. It may be counterintuitive, but studies suggest that conflict-free relationships do not fare as well as ones in which people are able to work through their disagreements. Absence of conflict can be a sign of indifference or suppression of emotions. When managed well, small tiffs can actually lead to deeper bonding. Thus, contrary to popular belief, couples who fight well together, stay together. Stressors that don't break the relationship can actually make it stronger,” Johnson and Michaels said.

“Makeup sex is more than an unconscious method for regaining equilibrium and harmony, but it shows that you both have weathered the storm and are now in much calmer waters. The argument makes mending the split more urgent, and the mending can create a sense of appreciation for your partner. That's why makeup sex can be so hot,” they said.

With this in mind, couples often wonder if they should have makeup sex. Johnson and Michaels said, “you should have sex when both of you are enthusiastically interested. If there is any sense that intimacy might distract from the issue at hand, it is probably not a good idea, as the underlying issue will only surface again at a later time.”



Don't avoid the issues

“If there are unresolved issues and you keep relying on makeup sex to get through it, instead of working on the problems, you risk your relationship becoming sexualized - that becomes the way to solve problems, and eventually you won't have a solid foundation for handling difficulties and getting through them,” Dr. Greer said.

Lisa Bahar, a marriage and family therapist, said that she thinks that makeup sex can be beneficial if it's not happening over and over.

“If it's a pattern of behavior, it is setting up a positive reinforcement for arguments that will lead to great sex and due to the chemical nature of it (adrenaline, etc.), the potential for addictive patterns to start to occur with behaviors can potentially lead or create a “love” or “sex’ addiction due to the “rush.” As with a substance, the intensity will require more and more which will lead potentially to more and more arguments and lead to like what the article indicated domestic violence and dominance/rage,” Bahar said.

“However, sex can be very healing and be a bonding experience after an argument and be a process of reconnection and loving one another after separation, it really depends on the situation and the mental and emotional health of the individuals,” Bahar said.

But don't worry. If you do fight on occasion, that's not a bad thing, according to Sherri Murphy, CEO of **Elite Connections**.

“Whether couples want to admit it or not, everyone fights. A healthy relationship includes fighting, arguments and breakups. Fighting while living separately can be a bit easier because it gives the two of you time to think about things alone on your own time. When couples live together it can be a little messier during fights, sometimes they play the “silent treatment” game or even go as far as heading to a friends or family members for the night or even a few. Eventually though, if the couple is truly in love with one another they find a way to make amends,” Murphy said.