

Simple things the secret to success in love

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Credit: Lynn Greyling/Public Domain

Sharing the simple things in life – like having a cup of coffee, gardening or renovating – are most important to couples in a long-term relationship, a Flinders University study shows.

Researcher and senior lecturer in social work Dr Priscilla Dunk-West said the survey of almost 500 Australians in long-term relationships showed "surprising" results, with most saying it was day-to-day gestures of love which were symbolic of a broader commitment from their

partner and helped to sustain their relationship.

"It's not the grand gestures like 'date nights' or lavish gifts that people in happy relationships said were important, but rather the mundane and everyday interactions which matter," Dr Dunk-West says.

"Data suggest that the division of household tasks help [couples](#) reinforce their partnership. For example, people reported that their partner making them a daily cup of coffee meant that they continue to feel appreciated and loved."

Dr Dunk-West said the Long-term Relationships study of both heterosexual and [gay couples](#) aged between 25 and 54, which follows a similar study by researchers in the UK, was different to previous Australian studies on relationships.

She said it focused on the reasons behind the success of relationships, rather than why things go wrong for couples, by asking people to reflect on personal happiness and satisfaction with their lives and partners.

Dr Dunk-West said the findings also revealed shared values, expressions of intimacy and being aware of one another's needs were all important to relationship satisfaction. It was also important for people in relationships to understand one another.

"Couples who live together have to share space. Though this is what we might expect, it seems that the ways that people share space is important. These days, people have busy lives and home can be a sanctuary, a private space in which it is important to 'code' particular activities as constituting coupledness," she said.

"What we found was that making time together didn't have to involve elaborate plans. Rather, thinking of the other person sharing the space,

along with associated household chores, is important to feelings of happiness and equality."

Dr Dunk-West said interestingly most respondents had experienced adversity or a major life change, such as redundancy, starting a new job, bereavement or illness, but still reported happiness with their lives and relationships.

She said the findings had implications for what kinds of support were offered for [people](#) who were having difficulties in relating to their partner. It also would help social workers understand the ways in which couples build resilience in the face of changing social and economic conditions.

Dr Dunk-West is a sociologist and social worker whose research interests include the self and identity, sexuality and late modern life.

Provided by Flinders University

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