



WHAT MAKES GOLDFISH FEEL SEXY?

\$3.9 Million

Maine

National Science Foundation and National Institutes of Health



What makes goldfish feel sexy?

“What makes goldfish feel sexy?,” ponder researchers at Bowdoin College of Maine.³⁸²

The National Science Foundation provided a \$340,400 grant to find out by studying the courtship behavior of goldfish.³⁸³ The National Institutes of Health also supported the study with backing from two grants totaling more than \$3.6 million³⁸⁴

Goldfish “are a highly social species that congregate in mixed-sex groups.” The researchers “demonstrated that goldfish can make sexual discriminations using only visual cues, although males and females do not obviously differ in appearance to the

human eye.”³⁸⁵ In other words, a male goldfish knows if another goldfish is male or female even if you don’t.

The male goldfish in the study serving as test subjects were fitted with a white, pointed cap. “Not a fashion statement, the cap is essential to Richmond Thompson’s research into brain chemicals and social behavior. With a nod to a Clint Eastwood western, Thompson, assistant professor of psychology and neuroscience, began his tale of ‘The Good the Bad and the Sexy: How Brain Chemistry Affects Social Judgments.’”³⁸⁶

Lab technician James Walton “developed a method of surgically attaching the cap to the fish. The cap is attached to a tube that goes directly into its brain, so that Thompson and Walton can apply different peptides to the brain and observe the results.”³⁸⁷

The male goldfish was then injected with two sex steroids, testosterone and estradiol, and then put into the middle of a tank separated into three divisions—one holding another male the other with a female in the other.³⁸⁸

“Clear Plexiglas partitions between the chambers allowed animals to see each other but prevented chemical exchange between chambers.”³⁸⁹ The fish could, however, still “interact socially across a Plexiglas barrier.”³⁹⁰

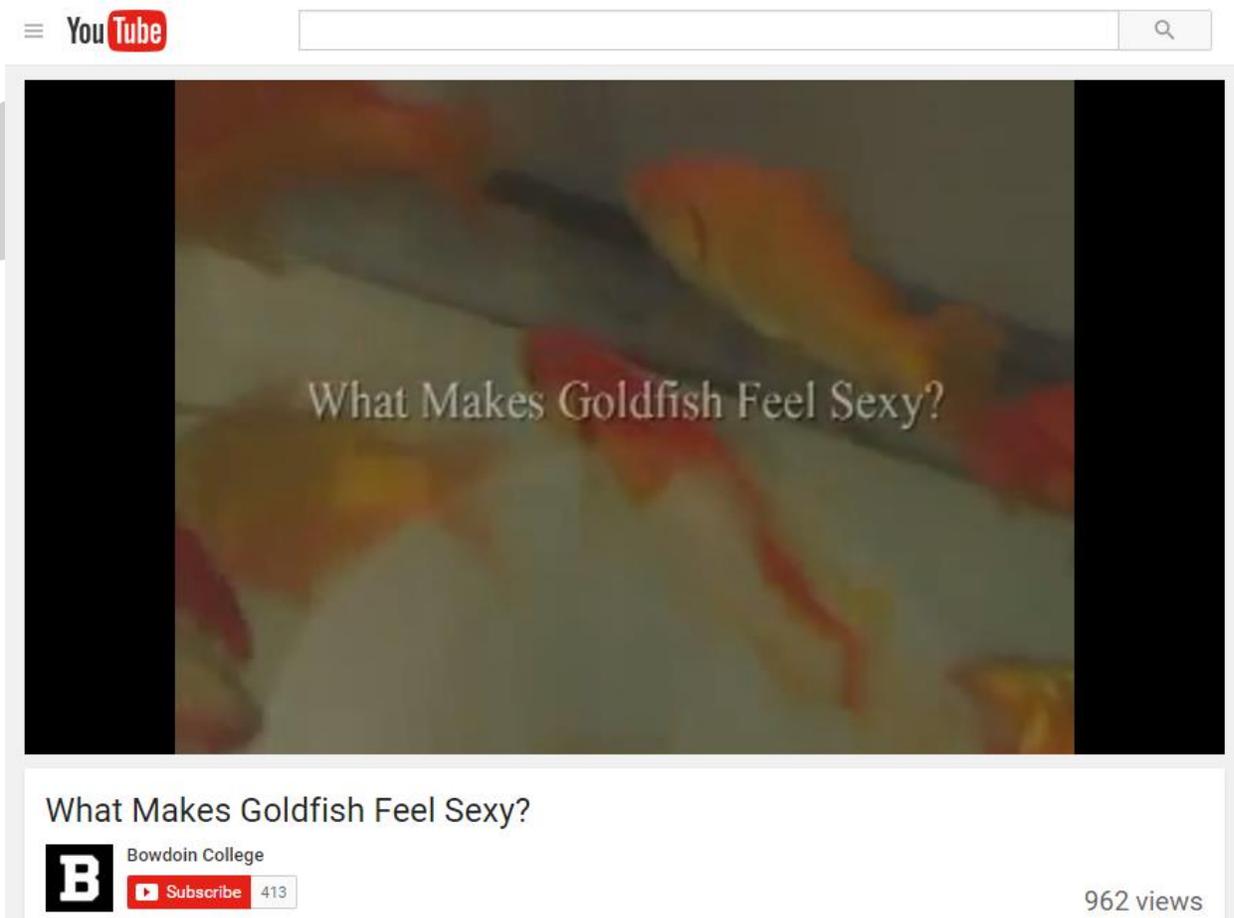
Black and white video cameras recorded the “social approach” of the subject fish to the other fish.³⁹¹

The findings: When infused with steroids, the male goldfish spent more time swimming close to the female. He spent less time by the female when no steroids were administered.³⁹²

“We see changes in sexual behavior within 10 to 20 minutes,” notes Thompson. “We’re trying to figure out how that happens in the brain so quickly. They use visual cues to make sexual decisions and steroids seems [sic] to be affecting this process.”³⁹³

There is another factor to consider with injecting chemicals into a fish’s brain, Thompson points out. “Are we just whacking the fish out?” he asks.³⁹⁴

Spending taxpayer money to study the impact of hormones on the courtship of goldfish smells a little fishy.



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Bowdoin College

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Well hello hello there beautiful...

After being injected with two sex steroids, male goldfish spent more time swimming close to the female water tank