

# Intimacy, Sensuality & Sexuality.

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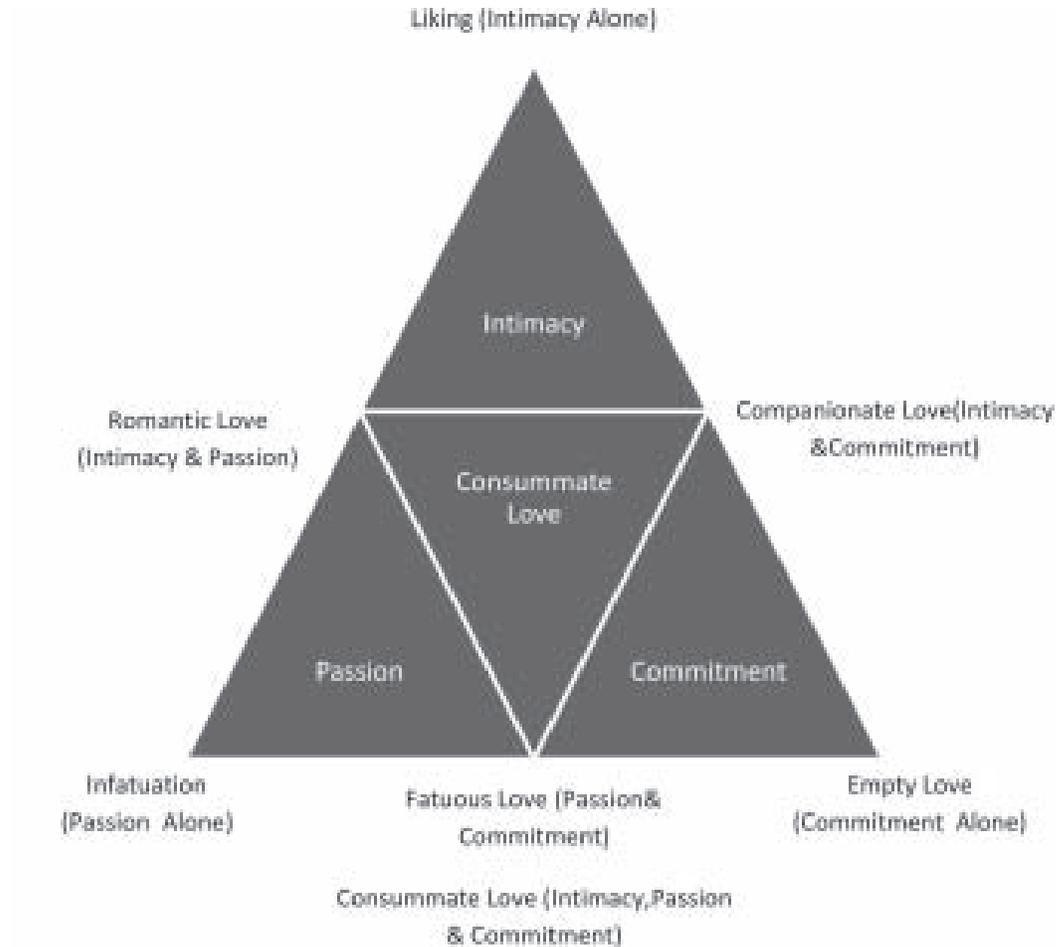
*“People are just people, and if you had basic human needs when you were 20, you are going to experience the same basic human needs when you are 70”<sup>[1]</sup>*

Human sexuality is a complex topic, and no single theory or perspective can capture all its nuances.<sup>[2]</sup> Many people in our culture see sexual activity as appropriate only for the young.<sup>[3]</sup> With age we evolve sexually, the sexual maturation process makes lovemaking far more enjoyable ,intimate and sensual: sensual implies to devotedness to the gratification of the bodily appetites especially sexual, free indulgence in carnal pleasures, luxuriousness, voluptuousness and lewdness. Typically, men and women cross sexual and psychological paths at midlife, in a process called *contrasexual transition*, by Carl Jung.<sup>[4]</sup> Women become more independent and assertive and men become more nurturing and comfortable with intimacy. The Turkish proverb “Young love is from the earth, and late love is from heaven” describes it all. <sup>[5]</sup>

What is Intimacy?Although the systematic study of intimate relationships is fairly recent, social thought and analysis of intimate

relationships dates back to early Greek philosophers.<sup>[6]</sup> Most people confuse love, closeness and intimacy and end up experiencing one at the cost of the other two. In broad terms every human interaction offers the possibility of love, “a strong feeling of deep affection”.<sup>[7]</sup> But it is being loving that brings the benefits, not being loved. Love is a total submission of will, the absolute dedication of the entire being to the beloved, like an ecstatic saint insanely in love with God, without fear or vulnerability, pain or the madness of its intensity with trust to take responsibility for the soul and body.<sup>[8]</sup> Sternberg<sup>[9]</sup> has described three components of love: intimacy, commitment and passion. Further he has described various types of love in a relationship the most important being *passionate love* and *companionate love*. Companionate love involves diminished potent feelings of attachment, an authentic and enduring bond, a sense of mutual commitment, the profound feeling of mutual caring, feeling proud of a mate’s accomplishment, and the satisfaction that comes from sharing goals and perspective. In contrast, passionate love is marked by infatuation, intense preoccupation with the partner, strong sexual longing, throes of ecstasy, and feelings of exhilaration that come from being reunited with the partner<sup>[10]</sup> Other types of love according to Sternberg’s triangular model are nonlove, liking, infatuation, empty love, fatuous love and consummate love.<sup>[2]</sup>

Sternberg<sup>[9,11]</sup> theorizes that the passion component of love peaks early in a relationship then declines whereas the other two components intimacy and commitment continue to build gradually over time. Though many people believe that being close would bring them intimacy, closeness or more correctly over-closeness is an enemy of intimacy. Healthy closeness involves being aware of each other’s realities and capacity to experience them as unique, being prepared to give up our personal space and be



Sternberg's triangular model[9,11]

selflessly loving , caring and interested. So by being close we get to know our partner and intimacy helps to know ourselves.<sup>[12]</sup>

The word intimacy has its origin in the Latin word *intima*, meaning inner or innermost. *Webster's Dictionary* defines intimate as 'belonging to or characterizing one's deepest nature; suggesting informal warmth or privacy; of a very personal or private nature'. The characteristics of an intimate relationship include an enduring behavioral interdependence, repeated interactions, emotional attachment and need fulfillment. Intimate relationships include friendships, dating relationships, spiritual relationships,

and marital relationships and there are individual differences in both the quality and quantity of these relationships. As a result now many people hold the view that the most important sort of intimacy is that which we experience in the company of another person<sup>[12]</sup>, that is the intimacy of being aware of ourselves in the same space as someone else who is similarly open. Intimacy requires an ability to be both separate and together as participants in an intimate relationship. Murray Bowen<sup>[13]</sup> called this *self-differentiation*. It results in a connection in which there is an emotional range involving both robust conflict, and intense loyalty. Intimacy is a subjective experience<sup>[6]</sup>; for some it may mean sex, for some being close and yet for others a soul-to-soul connection. Being intimate is one of the most cherishing, of human experiences and also one of the most courageous. Opening ourselves up in the presence of another person is never easy. Intimacy does not necessarily mean sex. However very often, an individual with whom we have a soul-to-soul connection is the same with whom we have a sexual agreement. As a result intimacy and sex go hand in hand, though it is very much possible for good friends to be truly intimate with no sexual connection.<sup>[12]</sup> Many people who complain of sexual problems are in fact not able to get intimate with their partners.

No matter how many people surround ourselves there always remains an emptiness for that special intimate bond which only another significant human being can bring. Sharing life with someone with whom we can just be ourselves, a person who can provide a safe haven from the demands of modern life are all proponents to intimacy; to feel loved and wanted is a basic human necessity. Talking to your partner as well as listening including the nonverbal communications are at the core of an intimate relationship. Comfortable intimates may even use silence in a

surprisingly healthy manner; laughing and crying together while sharing deep joys and pains, trusting your partner ,being tender and gracious, honesty and being open can do wonders. Experiencing physical touch, other than during sexual activity <sup>[6]</sup>,as in holding hands and kissing for no reason can be very rewarding. A casual touch of the limbs under a false pretext can be sensuous and erotic. A friendly embrace that you wish could last forever, a careless whisper that urges you to pull the face closer ; seduction must proceed slowly and deliciously. <sup>[8]</sup> At some time or the other even unintentionally we tend to hurt our partner, where forgiveness plays its part. Liking each other, self discipline and commitment are important issues. Liking means that we value our relationship more than we do our personal differences. Having fun and a shared life outside the bedroom is based on liking each other. Simply doing everyday things together, like small household chores, can reinforce true intimacy in a relationship. <sup>[6,12]</sup>

In practical terms commitment to a relationship would include sexual fidelity, giving time to each other, behavior which helps in keeping a healthy relationship, agreeing that the relationship is not just for days but for years and possibly for ever. <sup>[12]</sup> Couples now-a days give so much time to their work, children or grandchildren that they rarely experience pleasure, delight and joy in each others company; and look upon sex as the only source of pleasure. We are so absorbed in extraordinary demands of life that we tend to forget the ordinary; intimacy enables most couples to discover delight and joy in situations that would have previously appeared boring, dull or ordinary. <sup>[12]</sup> For many men, intimacy is linked to negative notions of dependency with fear of returning to uncomfortable feelings of childhood dependency; however truly intimate couples, are able to separate the two with ease and enjoy both.

Sex involves merging emotional, spiritual and physical intimacies.<sup>[8]</sup> Once we introduce sexual intimacy in a relationship, it becomes more complex; fear of hurt, rejection and losing individuality creeps in. A sexual experience may be just a prolonged foreplay, a coupling which is self-centred and solely a genital activity or a sexual intercourse in the context of an intimate relationship which gives the transcendental joys and promises an ecstatic union<sup>[8]</sup>; a couple which is creative, experimental and amenable to change are most likely to get the sensual pleasures. An erotic massage, mutual masturbation, individual masturbation to know your bodies better, sharing and acting out on each others fantasies can create magic.<sup>[8,12]</sup>

Quality, in a sense, is more important than quantity when it comes to sex and it comes only with time as the couple get to know each other better. Any performance concerns makes the act only more difficult; the very act of experimenting can lead to failure at times which can be overcome easily in an intimate relationship.<sup>[8]</sup> As our life expectancy is increasing it is heartening to know that those in their sixties and beyond can expect a sensual, sexually active and intimate relationship with their partners.

*“The best and most beautiful things in this world cannot be seen or even heard, but must be felt with the heart.”*

~ Helen Keller

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