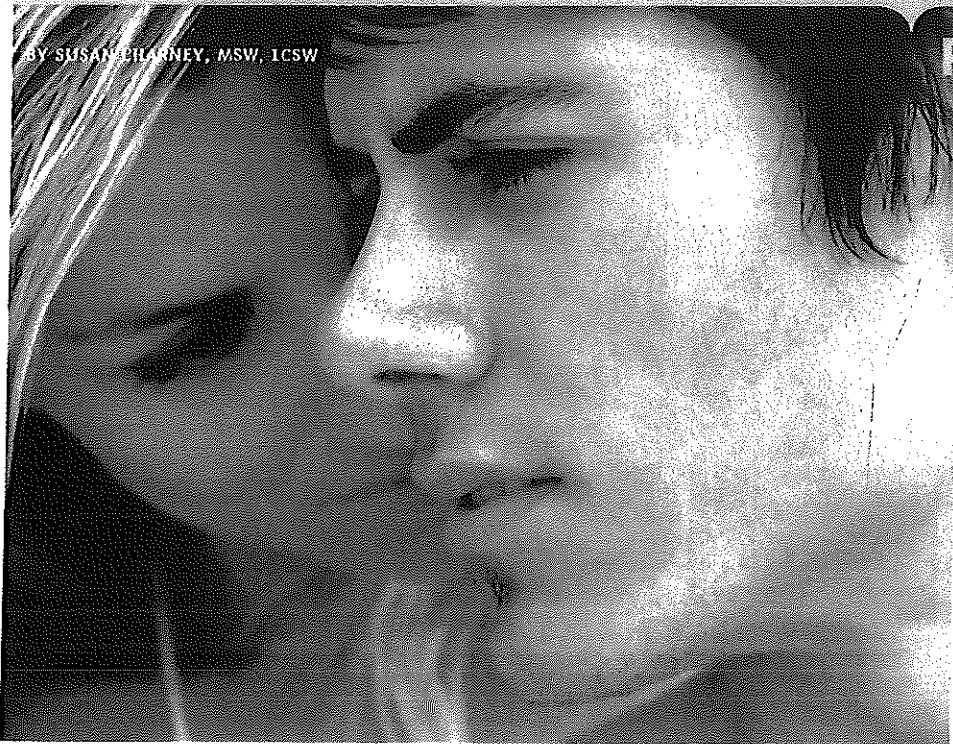


BY SUSAN CHARNEY, MSW, LCSW



Intimacy—Defined

"I can walk around in front of my husband naked and he would view my body with all its imperfections and still love me unconditionally." This was a comment made by a friend, when she was asked to define intimacy. Many people start their first session with me with the statement, "We have no intimacy." I then ask them to define what they think intimacy means.

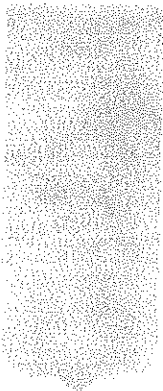
THE DEFINITION

When I chose to write about intimacy, I randomly asked people for their personal definitions.

Everyone replied that they viewed intimacy in a relationship as a safe place to share anything without the threat of being attacked or ridiculed. It is about connecting safely with comfort and openness. Everyone also described intimacy as a way to feel close to someone.

THE INTERNET

"The internet killed intimacy." That was the response I heard from many people in their late 20s and early 30s—an



interesting comment, don't you think? I asked them to explain what they meant. Many developed their social lives through the anonymity of the internet. It is not a very connected meeting and one that usually starts out with mistrust. There are some cyberspace connections that turn out long-lasting, but initially it presents with uncertainty. How do you develop an intimate relationship when you start off with mistrust?

in•ti•ma•cy

A safe place to share anything without the threat of being attacked or ridiculed.

People write a story that they want others to read. After a cyberspace chat they may choose to meet, looking for the real person they met online. Look around at a local Starbucks and you can usually easily spot those having the "meet and greet" conversations. In many ways it is similar to the bar scene, missing the initial attraction.

On a personal note, I met my friend Sonia in a most unusual way. I had just

given a eulogy for my dad and she was a friend of his. She approached me afterwards. We now email each other a few times weekly. We met 1 time and shared some personal stories. It may sound strange, but I hesitate to see her again. I don't want our present relationship spoiled by the remote chance of meeting in person again and being disappointed!

TRUE INTIMACY

My grandparents were married over 60 years. During 1 of my last visits with them, my grandmother said, "Look at Papa, he had difficulty this morning with his friends." I looked at him but his expression hadn't changed—it was hard for people to see the difference between his "happy face" and his "unhappy face." My grandfather was almost deaf at the time.

That evening, my grandmother thought I was asleep and I could hear her say, "Nat, what happened today, you look upset?" Sure enough my grandfather ended up sharing the difficulties he experienced that morning.

This was the 1 element of intimacy that was never brought up. There is a part of intimacy that does not involve conversation or touching. It involves the respect of silence and distance. The most intimate moments can be the ability to read the needs of another person with acceptance. Two people can be in the same room doing 2 different activities and still feel close and connected. The complicated foundation of intimacy is individuation within a relationship with respect and patience. Time is the best teacher for the intimacy of silence!

Susan Charney, MSW, LCSW, psychotherapist, has a private practice in Scottsdale. She provides counseling services for individuals, families and couples. Additionally, she handles Employee Assistance programs associated with any trauma or changes in the workplace. Charney also works with people with chronic illness and their families to help them find balance in their lives. 480.467.0223.

EN
B
R
I
G
H
T
U
?
B
Y
D
S
'S
Y
D
R,
'S
!