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WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?
BY HELEN FISHER, PHD

Intimacy: His & Hers

WHAT IS INTIMACY TO you?" Recently, I asked this of a man I've been seeing. He replied, "Doing things together." I knew what he meant.

Most of us have a primal craving to be truly known by someone before we die, to build a deeply committed relationship based on honesty, trust, self-disclosure, respect, appreciation, interdependence, and togetherness. But the sexes often define intimacy differently. When women want to draw closer, we face each other, lock eyes in what has been called the "anchoring gaze," and proceed to reveal our hopes, our worries, our lives. To women, intimacy is talking face-to-face—a behavior that probably evolved millions of years ago when ancestral females spent their days holding their infants up in front of them, soothing them with words.

Men, however, often regard intimacy as working or playing side-by-side. Sure, they might discuss a bad week at work, even troubles in their love lives. But rarely do they share their secret dreams and darkest fears. (When they do, they often use "joke speak," camouflaging their feelings with humor.) And men almost never look deeply into each other's eyes. Their approach to intimacy probably also harks back to prehistory: Picture ancestral males gathering behind a bush, quietly staring across the grass in hopes of felling a passing buffalo. They faced their enemies but sat

next to their friends.

This is why, to build intimacy with a man, I do things with him—side-by-side. That way, when I talk, he isn't threatened by my gaze.

Curious to find out more about such gender differences, I asked 4,876 members of the Internet dating site chemistry.com, "What would you do as an intimate



activity with a partner?" and offered various choices. I found that men were far more likely to regard "debating" as intimate. I wasn't surprised: Intimacy requires being in your comfort zone, and men's testosterone is associated with competitiveness. On the other hand, women were more likely to consider "organizing a neighborhood or community

party together" and "taking a vacation together with a crowd of your closest friends" as ways to be close. Because estrogen is associated with social skills and nurturing, I wasn't surprised by this either.

What I didn't expect was that 95 percent of all respondents rated "talking heart-to-heart with your partner about your relationship" as something they'd do to be intimate, while 94 percent felt that "doing something adventurous together" spelled togetherness—with hardly any difference between the sexes. If these results are any indication that men are learning to appreciate women's need to talk, while women are understanding the male way of showing love ("actions speak louder than words"), then bravo!

There are, of course, many other things you can do to cultivate togetherness. Help your partner achieve his goals. Face your problems as a team. Develop a private spiritual or religious world. Choose a new interest to pursue jointly. Do chores together. Play.

And get the oxytocin flowing. Oxytocin is a brain chemical that produces feelings of trust and attachment. Men get a blast of it when they kiss, women feel a rush when they hold a lover's hand, and during orgasm, both partners are flooded with the powerful substance. So last but not least, enjoy each other physically. Good sex really does build intimacy. **Q**

BRAIN CANDY

Sorry, Ben Franklin: Only *some* of us should heed your "early to rise" credo. Neuroscientists found that self-described morning people are actually wired differently than midnight oil types. Larks' motor pathways are most excitable at 9 A.M.; night owls', at 9 P.M. SOURCE: *Journal of Biological Rhythms*, June 2009