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The Nature of Intimacy:
A qualitative study of five couples

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
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Abstract

This study takes a qualitative approach to facilitate five couples describing their experiences of intimacy. Transcribed interviews were analysed for recurring themes and processes. The Waring Intimacy scale was also administered to participants. Although intimacy is an important goal in contemporary society much is still to be understood about how it is achieved and maintained.

Reis and Shaver (1988) have developed a process model of intimacy that describes a single interaction between two individuals and incorporates the properties of a relationship, thus recognising that intimacy is more than the sum of repeated interactions.

The general validity of the model was confirmed by the experiences of the couples in this study. Differences were found between those with intimate relationships, who often behaved according to the model and those who reported their relationship as lacking in intimacy, who frequently omitted one or more steps of the model.

The model was revised in the light of the data to incorporate such metacognitive factors as the effects of an individuals' expectations and beliefs on his or her motives, fears, needs and goals. Self disclosure was differentiated into direct or indirect, verbal or non-verbal; all of which may play a role in intimacy.

The results show that intimacy is both a complex process and a subjective relational experience necessitating a relatively well defined sense of identity and high level communication skills. Analysis of themes and experiences from the interview data reflected the complexity of this construct more adequately than data from the Waring Intimacy Questionnaire.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

"Intimacy ... is a matter of tuning into someone else's reality and risking being changed by that."

(Dowrick, 1991, p.183)

Intimacy is a widely sought after goal in contemporary Western society. However, Wynne and Wynne (1986) suggest that rather than pursuing intimacy, it can best be achieved by attending to the basic relational processes such as caregiving and joint problem solving. They offer a definition of intimacy somewhat different to Dowrick's intriguing one quoted above: a subjective relational experience characterised by trusting self-disclosure and empathic responding. Intimacy is not seen as a process but rather as the resulting subjective experience of basic relational processes.

Reis (1990) asks "Is intimacy the sine qua non of satisfying interpersonal bonds and personal growth, as some would claim, or is our concern with intimacy a byproduct of the spiritually deprived 1980's?" (p. 16) After a review of selected theories and related empirical evidence, Reis concludes in agreement with Wynne and Wynne that intimacy is a popular and very important human goal.

Sternberg (1987) suggests that, above all, it is love that people seek. He describes three components in the triangle of love; intimacy, passion and commitment. The intimacy component in this model involves those feelings that promote closeness and connectedness.

A considerable amount has been written in the psychological literature on the subject of intimacy: attempts at identifying the components of the subjective experience of intimacy, describing intimacy as a process, developing operational definitions and establishing the roles intimacy plays.

This chapter will:

1/ Explore suggestions of the roles intimacy may play in human interaction in order to establish why the study of this concept is so important.

2/ Examine theoretical positions and related empirical contributions to the study of intimacy in the psychological literature. These will be augmented by some of the insights offered by self-help literature in order to develop a comprehensive picture of current understandings of the nature of intimacy.

1/ The Role of Intimacy in Human Development and Wellbeing

Waring, Patton, Neron and Linker (1986) operationally define four types of marital quality based on a total intimacy score, subscale profile and social desirability score from the Waring Intimacy Questionnaire. (Waring, 1984) These authors found that for couples with a low level of marital intimacy, a significantly higher proportion of spouses showed symptoms of non-psychotic emotional illness than couples with an average or higher level of intimacy. This finding suggests the possibility that relationships with a high level of intimacy may have a positive effect on the psychological well-being of spouses, and those with a low level of intimacy may have the opposite effect.

For example, patients with psychosomatic illness have been found to have relationships in which they do not share personal thoughts and feelings, are seldom mutually affectionate and have minimal sexual activity. (Waring, 1986). Waring and Patton (1984) found a significant association between severity of depression and deficiencies of marital intimacy in both men and women. Although no causal relationship or direction can be determined from these studies, they do offer some indication of the role intimacy may play in preventing non-psychotic emotional illness.

Much has been written about the contribution of intimacy to sexual relations. Talmadge and Talmadge (1986) see low sexual desire as the result of the interaction of intrapsychic issues with interpersonal issues. In particular they conceptualise low sexual desire as a way of acting out the lack of intimacy in a relationship.

In his theory of sexual offending Marshall (1989) suggests that the emotional loneliness that results from failure to achieve intimacy in adult relationships can lead to an aggressive disposition and the tendency to seek sex with less threatening partners in the hope of finding intimacy.

In his book *Male Sexual Awareness*, McCarthy (1988) contends that sex is one sure means of creating and reinforcing feelings of intimacy between a couple and conversely that intimacy is a major contributor to couples wanting to have sex together.

Zilbergeld (1978) also discusses male sexuality but imposes somewhat more restrictive guidelines. He suggests that men have been conditioned into translating their need for closeness and comfort into a need for sex, citing as evidence for this the fact that most massage parlours are also places of prostitution. He contends that this conditioning is a major contributing factor to many erectile problems in men. Zilbergeld offers as a solution to these problems the importance of both partners getting their intimacy needs met before attempting sex. He considers that the discussion of feelings and wishes and the treatment of non-sexual touching as an important activity in its own right, are two important aspects of the intimacy process.

A significant factor in a woman's ability to experience orgasm has been found to be her capacity to relate intimately to her partner (Leiblum and Rosen, 1989). These authors found that in sexually troubled relationships there are often problems with the regulation of distance and closeness.

As a result of interviews with 50 easily orgasmic women Ogden (1988) proposed an holistic concept of sexual ecstasy that incorporates involvement of the body, mind, heart and soul. She suggests that women require more than orgasm for sexual satisfaction; they also need emotional, intellectual and spiritual satisfaction some of which comes from caring and sensitive non-sexual interactions with partners.

2/ Towards a Definition of Intimacy

Intimacy as a single interpersonal process

In their extensive review of research on interpersonal processes in close relationships, Clark and Reis (1988) criticise on several grounds the limitations of research in the area of intimacy prior to the 1980's, particularly:

- 1/ The lack of construct validity. Intimacy studies focused narrowly on either willingness to self disclose or physical proximity and other non-verbal contact during first encounters. (eg. Altman and Taylor, 1973)
- 2/ The lack of ecological validity. Many studies reviewed were laboratory studies. (eg. Archer and Berg, 1978)

Included in this review are reports of more recent studies that use much broader operational definitions of intimacy. These will be described in detail later in this chapter. (eg. Waring, Tillmann, Frelick & Weisz, 1980; Reis and Shaver, 1988). The authors also acknowledge that an intimate relationship is more than the sum of repeated interactions. However Clark and Reis have limited their own definition of intimacy by nominating three processes which they suggest comprise close interpersonal relationships; these are interdependence, emotion and intimacy. They offer no rationale for their selection of these three processes and examine them separately thus disregarding both the possibility of interactions between these processes and of an holistic view.

The authors state that how one sees intimacy depends on the perspective used to examine it. They review research of the intimacy process (eg. Berscheid, 1985), the components of intimacy (eg. Pennebaker and Beall, 1986) and individual differences in preferences and capacities for intimacy (eg. McAdams, 1984 in Clark and Reis, 1988). From each of these perspectives the emphasis is largely on self-disclosure rather than on a broader definition of intimacy as a multicomponent process, although Clark and Reis had previously mentioned the recognition of the importance of other processes such as affection, validation and support. These authors attribute this emphasis to the legacy of early research and overlook the effect of their own apparently arbitrary separation of intimacy from interdependence and emotion. A study of some of the research reviewed by these authors and of research subsequent to their article reveals the inadequacies of the account produced by Clark and Reis.

Intimacy as the sum of eight major components

Waring, Tillman, Frelick, Russell and Weisz (1980) moved away from the limitations of earlier definitions by seeking spontaneous understandings of the concept of intimacy. They conducted open ended interviews with a random sample of 50 adults in the general population and standardised interviews with a further sample of 24 couples randomly selected from the general population matched to 24 clinical couples. From this, a subsequent study (Waring, McElrath, Lefcoe and Weisz, 1981) and an extensive review of the literature, Waring and colleagues developed an operational definition of intimacy that includes eight facets. These are:

- 1/ Conflict resolution: resolving differences of opinion.
- 2/ Affection: expressing feelings of emotional closeness.
- 3/ Cohesion: feeling committed to the relationship.
- 4/ Sexuality: communicating and fulfilling sexual needs.
- 5/ Identity: level of self confidence and self esteem.
- 6/ Compatibility: ability to work and play together.
- 7/ Expressiveness: disclosing thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and feelings.
- 8/ Autonomy: being independent from families of origin and from offspring.

Waring (1981) proposed that a measure of the quantity and quality of marital intimacy can be obtained from the responses to forty items based on the above eight constructs. Thus he developed the Waring Intimacy Questionnaire (1984). A detailed discussion of the development of this questionnaire can be seen in Appendix B.

Waring adopted Berman and Lief's (1975) theory that dyadic relationships can be defined by three dimensions; power, boundary and intimacy. From previous research (Waring, McElrath, Mitchell & Derry, 1981) intimacy was found to be the dimension that most determines marital adjustment. However since the development of intimacy was seen as a process, Waring did not attempt to isolate boundary and power from the definition of intimacy. The Waring Intimacy Questionnaire can therefore be seen as a measure of the quality and quantity of overall marital functioning taken from the perspective of closeness rather than of power or of boundaries.

Intimacy as a dimension of a dyadic system

Roughan and Jenkins (1990) recognize, like Waring, that the three interpersonal dimensions of power, boundary and intimacy identified by Berman and Lief (1975) are not mutually exclusive. Accordingly they do not attempt to explore any one dimension in isolation. Their model is based on White's (1984) cybernetic premise that couples mature through a series of predictable developmental phases and that problems can be viewed in terms of " the reciprocal fit between partners and the social context in which they develop." p130, (Roughan and Jenkins, 1990) This model offers a framework for understanding data, that shows how parts of a structure (in this case a couple's relationship) are interrelated and how structures themselves interact with other structures; each structure is a system itself, may contain other systems and is a member of other systems.

Roughan and Jenkins propose that the nature of imbalances in each of the three dimensions of a relationship affects a couple's functioning in all dimensions. In order to facilitate identification of imbalances Roughan and Jenkins' model includes a description of the stages of a relationship, the components of an individual's style of loving and sexual style, and three main categories of relationship imbalance as summarised below:

1/ Relationship Stages

The authors outline three main phases of the continuing process of relationship development that are worked through, not neatly and sequentially but in different areas of the relationship at different times and in different orders:

- a) Honeymoon - the stage of novelty, romance and ideals where the emphasis is on agreement and differences are overlooked either by accommodation and compromise or by adherence to relationship roles (often traditional).

- b) Dispute - individual differences emerge, partners struggle to balance individual and relationship needs. Tasks are to achieve independence and autonomy and to cope with disillusionment and dissatisfaction. If both partners have established themselves as independent individuals before entering the relationship they are seen as being much more likely to cope at this stage of the relationship.

c) Balance - Both partners are able to take responsibility for their own needs and wants, accept their partners' differences, limitations and strengths and share responsibilities in the relationship. The aim is to achieve a balance between sharing and independence.

2/ Style of Loving and Sexual Style

Roughan and Jenkins refer to the beliefs, values and expectations each individual has about what constitutes a fulfilling and loving relationship as a person's "style of loving". This style has an effect on the choice of partner, the ways in which each partner contributes to the relationship, and which aspects of the relationship each takes responsibility for. Discrepancies between styles can be a cause of problems. The authors refer to "sexual style" as a subset of the style of loving which relates specifically to sexual behaviour.

3/ Categories of Relationship Imbalance

Roughan and Jenkins have outlined three overlapping patterns of relationship difficulties that can arise due to the combining of two individuals with particular styles of loving:

- a) Power: Relationships with a predominant imbalance in the areas of status and hierarchy. Couples have either a predominantly dominant/submissive relationship or a symmetrical, predominantly competitive relationship.
- b) Boundary: Relationships can have boundary and territorial imbalances in the way each partner balances his/her loyalties to self, partner and wider systems outside the partnership. Three common patterns of imbalance are:
 - i) Ownership-obligation: where the dominant partner believes it is their right/duty to define the partners' boundaries and restrict behaviour.
 - ii) Hypervigilance and reassurance: one constantly monitors the other's behaviour, the other constantly seeks to reassure.
 - iii) Loyalty to partner vs. loyalty to the wider system: one partner wants more commitment to the relationship and less to eg. work or the family of origin, the other wants the reverse.

c) Intimacy: Imbalances in this dimension concern closeness and distance, attachment and affiliation. Three common patterns of imbalances are:

- i) Belongingness-separateness: where one partner takes most of the responsibility for emotional and physical sharing and closeness and the other takes most of the responsibility for helping partners to establish clear individual boundaries and a sense of independence.
- ii) Sexual intimacy-non sexual: one partner sees sex as the most appropriate way to express love and affection and expects sex to lead to loving feelings and a fulfilling relationship. The other partner contributes to intimacy in non sexual ways; touch, talking etc. and sees these as appropriate ways to express love and affection believing sex may follow.
- iii) Verbal-non verbal: different communication styles; one partner relies on verbal communication to express needs and solve problems, the other non verbal behaviour.

The Roughton and Jenkins' model described above incorporates:

- * Individual cognitive aspects showing that behaviour is affected by the meanings attributed to events as well as the events themselves.
- * The changing forces affecting behaviour in an ongoing dyadic system.
- * The imbalances created by the interactions of two individuals with each other and with other systems.

Consistent with most family therapy models which focus on observable relationships, the model does not focus on individual personalities. Alternative theories and models of intimacy which do place an emphasis on individual psychology are discussed below.

Intimacy as a Prototype of Major Relational Principles

Influential relational theories rate frequent mention in some discussions of intimacy (Reis, 1990; Paul and White, 1990; Birchnell, 1986.) although the authors offer various interpretations of their contribution to the study of intimacy. These include:

1/ Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory of personality stages which proposes that the capacity for intimacy emerges from the sixth stage of development during young adulthood. Of particular importance for a healthy adult is the resolution of the fifth stage identity crisis. A secure sense of personal identity is seen as a necessary prerequisite for intimacy, which itself is a prerequisite for the development of a productive adult of good character.

Erikson described intimacy as the fusion of identities of two people who know and care deeply about each other; this task cannot be achieved healthily without a clear sense of identity. Though acknowledging that same-sex friends are better suited than opposite-sex friends to provide understanding and validation due to their common experiences, Erikson maintains that the most satisfying form of relationship involves a combination of sexuality with trust and commitment. Thus he argues that intimacy occurs best in committed adult heterosexual relationships, apparently overlooking the possibility of these conditions being met by a committed adult homosexual relationship.

Reis and Shaver (1988) found that empirical research supports Erikson's claim that identity precedes intimacy (eg. Tesch and Whitbourne, 1982) though as the focus of the studies reviewed is on intimacy as a state to be attained, little understanding is gained of the process by which this state is achieved.

In contrast, Paul and White (1990), whose model is described later in this chapter, argue that intimate relationships develop in a spiral pattern; the relationship offers a context for the development of identity which in turn prepares individuals for progress to higher levels of intimacy.

2/ Bowlby's attachment theory. This has provided a basis for studies of intimacy. In this theory a sense of security gained from having a reliable and responsive caregiver is seen as a prerequisite for normal interaction with others. Bowlby (1969) contends that individuals develop cognitive schemata of their expectations and beliefs from their early attachment experiences. Though there are no

longitudinal studies providing direct evidence of the continuation of attachment style from infancy through to adult relationships, Reis and Shaver (1988) review studies suggesting that concepts of Bowlby's attachment theory do apply to adult intimate relationships (eg Hazan and Shaver, 1987). Reis (1990) suggests that attachment is largely established, maintained and expressed non-verbally and involves many of the same channels used by adults to regulate intimacy: proximity, gaze, facial expressions, touch and so forth.

3/ Harry Stack Sullivan's interpersonal theory, which also has relevance to the study of intimacy. Sullivan (1953) observed that the need for intimacy arises between childhood and adolescence in same sex friendships in which partners reveal themselves and gain validation of their ideas and attributes. With puberty and its accompanying lustful needs comes the urge to enter relationships involving sex. However Sullivan suggests that the different socialisation experiences of males and females fail to prepare adolescents for establishing mutually validating relationships with a member of the opposite sex.

Buhrmester and Furman (1987) support Sullivan's claim that intimacy becomes important during preadolescence with their finding that childrens' descriptions of friendship begin to emphasize the sharing of intimate thoughts and feelings before they reach adolescence. Gottman (1979) demonstrates the importance of validation as a response to self-disclosure with his finding that non-distressed married couples demonstrate mutual validation much more than distressed married couples in their problem-focused communication.

4/ Carl Rogers (1980) argued that empathic, nonjudgemental, supportive listening fosters self acceptance which in turn facilitates openness and trust in a marital relationship. Like Sullivan, Rogers sees validation as the major component of intimacy.

Intimacy From a Developmental Perspective

Paul and White (1990) propose relationship maturity as a conceptual framework for understanding the formation of intimate relationships as part of a major developmental process. The authors provide a description of the progression of such skills and characteristics essential to intimacy as perspective taking, communication, commitment, empathy and sexuality, through three levels of maturity. They have named these levels: the self focused, role focused and individuated connected levels of maturity.

This model offers a useful picture of intimacy as comprising cognitive, behavioural and affective components each of which changes according to the level of maturity. Though Paul and White suggest that it is relationship maturity that defines the level of intimacy it could be argued that any relationship is made up of two individuals who can only relate together at the level of the less mature partner. Thus one can see this as another model focusing on the individual personality.

As mentioned earlier these authors acknowledge the importance to intimacy of both the attachment and individuation processes but differ from Erikson (1950) in seeing the two processes as interwoven. They argue that experimentation with close interpersonal relationships during adolescence facilitates identity development which then prepares the adult for the formation of intimate relationships in Erikson's sense.

Intimacy as an Interaction Between Two Individuals

Reis and Shaver (1988) suggest that although intimacy is ultimately an individual experience and perception it occurs in a socially interactive situation and consequently the focus needs to be placed on the interaction.

The intimacy process begins when one person expresses, through verbal or non-verbal means, personally revealing feelings or information to another person. It continues when the listener responds supportively or empathically. For an interaction to become intimate, the discloser must feel understood, validated and cared for by the listener. Both participants' behaviour depends on the other's behaviour and response, as well as on their own pre-existing or situationally determined motives, needs and goals. (p. 16)

Reis and Shaver offer the most precise and detailed explanation of the intimacy process of all the models reviewed, incorporating individual, contextual and interactional factors as will be described following the diagram of this model presented in Figure 1. Although the model illustrates a single episode with A as discloser and B as responder the authors recognise that intimacy occurs between two people who influence each other's feelings and behaviours on an ongoing basis.

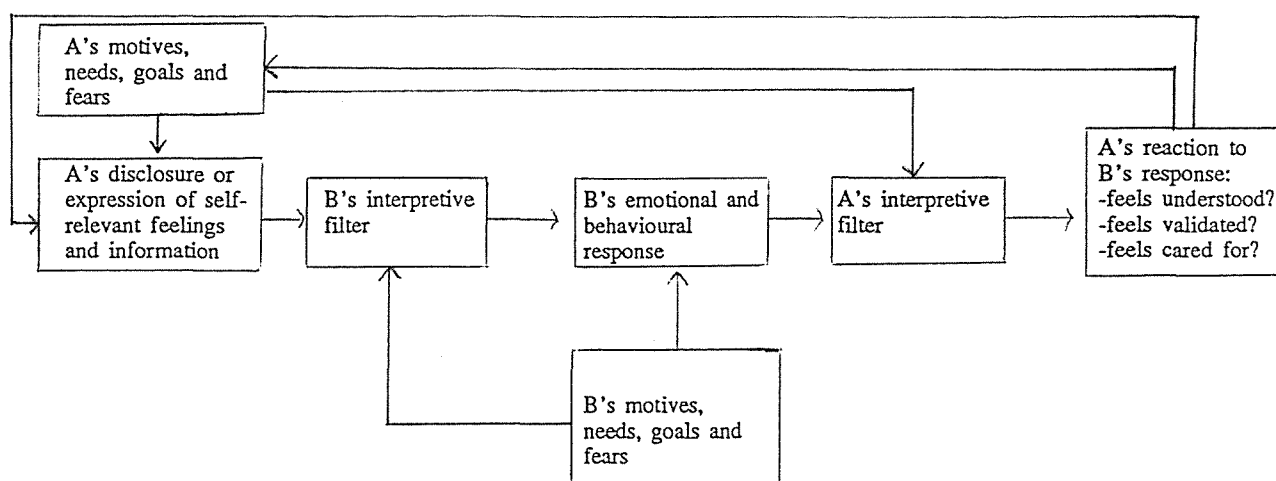


Figure 1 A model of the intimacy process (Reis and Shaver, 1988)

1/ Individual factors

Reis and Shaver do not assume that an individual has constant tendencies towards intimacy independent of fluctuating motives, fears and goals. They suggest that desires and fears influenced by past interpersonal experiences may create or act in conflict with an individual's motives in any intimate interaction.

Incorporated in this model is the concept of metacognition; a process of appraising one's partners' attempts at intimacy and the information revealed. Reis and Shaver incorporated the concept of an interpretive filter based on social psychology research which shows that interpretations of a partner's behaviour are greatly influenced by expectations and schemata which themselves are based on past experiences (Markus and Zajonc, 1985). An individual may not perceive a partner's expression as it was intended; what influences the response is the interpretation, accurate or not.

In their reference to individual fears Reis and Shaver note but do not enlarge upon the issue of distance regulation. Israelstam (1989) suggests that any definition of intimacy must include both the separateness and the closeness aspects of intimacy:

Intimacy between two individuals can be said to exist when each is able to sustain sufficient closeness to satisfy mutual proximity seeking and caregiving needs and sufficient separateness to satisfy each other's needs for personal growth and development. (p. 7)

Weiss (1987) agrees with this view and stresses that intimacy does not equal indiscriminate self-disclosure; in order to create interactional thoughts and feelings an individual must have privacy and a sense of boundaries. Weiss suggests that unwanted invasion of boundaries destroys intimacy because the individual does not have privacy.

2/ Interactional factors

Disclosure of feelings and desires has been found to have a potentially greater impact on the development of intimacy than disclosure of facts (Fitzpatrick, 1987). Reis and Shaver propose that in providing an opportunity to understand the speaker as a unique and vulnerable human being, emotional self-disclosure also offers the possibility for the listener to demonstrate caring, understanding and validation by responding appropriately. Rogers (1972) suggests an attitude of unconditional positive regard will fulfill the criterion of appropriate responding.

When this process is mutual partners can develop the shared, reciprocal and deep understandings that Reis and Shaver describe as characterising intimacy.

Perlmutter and Hatfield (1980) take the issue of emotional self-disclosure one step further than Reis and Shaver. Writing from a systemic perspective they suggest that for an intimate relationship to remain intimate, couples must intentionally metacommunicate over serious issues; that is, deliberately talk about the relational context of their message as well as communicating at a literal level. Using the principles of Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974), Perlmutter and Hatfield describe how intentional metacomments can bring about second order change. In contrast to first order change transactions where partners in an interaction use strategies to maintain the status quo, second order change transactions involve a spontaneous move into the unknown, thus risking change. Here Perlmutter and Hatfield appear to be in accord with Dowrick's (1991) proposal quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that intimacy occurs when one individual tunes into another's reality and risks being changed by that process.

A further interactional factor is identified by Hatfield and Rapson (1987). Few people select partners who desire the same level of intimacy as they do. This can lead to an ongoing deterioration in intimacy when one partner seeks more closeness and the other more distance.

3/ Contextual factors

Reis and Shaver recognize that intimacy is more than the sum of repeated interactions; special properties such as trust and stable expectations derive from, but extend beyond, the content of the individual episodes. Memories of past encounters and anticipations of future ones influence goals, motives and fears which in turn affect the ability of both partners to be open and honest. Commitment, arising from the emotions engendered in intimate interactions, from love, from fear of being alone and from feelings of obligation, can carry partners through the fluctuations in their feelings for each other and perhaps influence responses in individual interactions. Similarly experiencing validation, understanding and caring can help a partner to reciprocate at a future time.

Gender Issues

In a study of sex and marital intimacy Patton and Waring (1985) found gender differences in understandings of intimacy. Husbands were more likely to see their sexual relationship as a component separate from intimacy, whereas for wives sexual fulfillment was more closely associated with their perception of marital intimacy.

Hatfield and Rapson (1987) quote the results from a survey of peoples' expectations of typical men and women. These showed that women are seen to have the characteristics necessary for intimacy (warm, expressive, aware of the feelings of others) and that men are not. They also quote research from the 1970's and 80's indicating that women are more comfortable with intimate talk than men and know more about intimate relations than men. (eg. Dion and Dion, 1979. Millet, 1975, in Hatfield and Rapson, 1987). With the current move away from traditional stereotypical gender conditioning towards the androgynous man and woman able to develop all aspects of his or her character, research in the 1990's may show different results. It seems likely that these will reflect individual differences in the capacity for intimacy, rather than gender differences.

Wynne and Wynne (1986) suggest that rather than reflecting biological differences, gender differences in intimacy are indications of differing life experiences, different goals and different priorities. For example, women's experiences of intense involvement in an attachment/caregiving relationship with their children may have allowed them to develop greater skills and expectations in intimate relating than men. Women's inability to satisfy their needs and wants by the use of force may have led to them developing their communication skills to a higher degree than men, particularly in the area of responsiveness to subtle connotations of verbal and non-verbal language. Traditionally women have been concerned with seeking community and intimacy while men in Western culture seek autonomy and individuation.

Methodological Issues

Much of the interpersonal relations literature of the last few decades reveals increasingly sophisticated attempts to classify and measure various dimensions of marital relationships such as happiness, success, stability, adjustment, intimacy, satisfaction, cohesion, inclusion, control and affection. The study of human interaction gives rise to a variety of methodological questions. The present review of intimacy studies reveals many methodological issues yet to be resolved:

1/ Any instrument or research method may in part be measuring social desirability and conventionality as much as the construct of interest. The Waring Intimacy Questionnaire (Waring, 1984) includes a social desirability scale in part answer to this criticism. Waring (1985) found that husbands have a different perception of their marital intimacy than their wives and suggests that the question of whose perception is more accurate awaits objective assessment. This may not be a useful question to ask in the study of intimacy; if one defines intimacy as a subjective experience, perhaps it is entirely in the eye of the beholder and objectivity is not at issue.

2/ The analysis of outcome is inevitably affected by the initial selection of data, as illustrated in the Clark and Reis (1988) review.

3/ Any assessment of intimacy has to take into account both recipients' needs and satisfaction with the ingredients provided by the other; intimacy is a bidirectional concept. (Wilhelm and Parker, 1988)

4/ In proposing to study intimacy, researchers need to be clear on several issues:

- *Is the study of individual or relational intimacy?

- *Is it possible to differentiate between individual characteristics and relationship characteristics?

- *If studying individual intimacy, is the focus on capacity for intimacy, perception of intimacy or an observer's assessment of intimacy achieved?

- *If studying relational intimacy, is the focus on each individual's perception of the level of intimacy in their relationship or on each individual's level of satisfaction with intimacy; a question of quantity or quality? Furthermore the researcher needs to decide whether the focus will be on discrepancies between individual accounts, an observer's account or a joint account of intimacy by the couple.

5/ If intimacy is seen as a process occurring over time and individuals have differing needs for intimacy which may never be fully met on a continual basis then an individual's expectations and beliefs will influence their experience of intimacy. Those who focus on their unmet needs, perhaps because of dissatisfactions in other areas of their life or depression (Waring and Patton, 1984), may describe their relationship differently than those who have a more positive focus on what they are getting.

6/ Opinions seem to differ over whether it is better to use a narrow operational definition or a broader definition of intimacy. Particular issues of concern are the avoidance of confounding variables on the one hand and recognition of the nature of intimacy as a multifaceted concept on the other.

7/ Henderson, Byrne & Duncan-Jones (1981) have developed a measure of both the availability and the adequacy of attachment. Findings indicate that measures of availability of attachment are stable over time, like a personality trait, whereas measures of the adequacy of attachment show greater fluctuation. Waring (1985) suggests that if a study analyses perception of the quality of intimacy it may be tapping a stable quality of relationships which may reflect a personality trait or attitude rather than the actual quality of the relationship.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed suggests quite clearly that intimacy is a widely sought after goal that plays an important role in adult happiness and wellbeing. The meaning of the term intimacy is a lot less clear. Intimacy is seen by some authors as a process occurring in a socially interactive situation and by others as the resulting subjective experience of basic relational processes such as caregiving, communicating and problem solving. Although Wynne and Wynne (1986) have argued that the use of the word intimacy to describe both the subjective experience and the process is confusing and blurs a crucial distinction, the preceding review has shown that regardless of the perspective from which one views intimacy there appear to be several common important factors.

In order to create and maintain an intimate relationship with a balance between closeness and separateness each individual needs to have a certain degree of maturity and a clear sense of their own identity. Both of these factors can be enhanced by an intimate relationship but to a certain degree are also necessary prerequisites.

Metacognitions; the way attempts at intimacy are appraised by one's partner, are also important. The crucial factors of this process that facilitate intimacy appear to be emotional self-disclosure and unconditional positive regard. When these conditions are met a transaction allows individuals to feel cared for, understood and validated. These are all important components of an intimate transaction.

There are many processes operating in any relationship, all of which interact to some extent. Any attempt to narrowly define intimacy oversimplifies a complex process and experience.

The aim of the present study is to utilise a largely qualitative approach to explore the nature of intimacy in a committed dyadic relationship. There is still much contention in the field of interpersonal relations over what is meant by the term intimacy. Clearly an important goal in contemporary society, a great deal is also still to be understood about how to achieve this objective and why some fail and others succeed. A more precise understanding of how the process works and what the components are would be a valuable contribution to the interpersonal relations field.

Rather than deriving an understanding of this concept through complex statistical procedures this study will involve recording and transcribing indepth interviews in order to be able to offer an illustration of the experiences of some couples. The current theories and model of intimacy outlined in the previous chapter will be re-examined in the light of the data collected.

The focus of interest in this study will be the intimacy process and experience; the unit of analysis, the couple. In accord with Rosenwald's (1988) requirement for a useful synthesis every attempt will be made to procure couples from a range of vantage points. Although articulate couples may provide a greater depth of information the stories of less articulate and less educated couples are seen as accounts of equal importance.

Non-sexual touching will be used as a window into intimacy. As one component of an intimate relationship it illustrates the struggle to achieve a balance between distance and closeness, and the necessity of communicating well.