

Intimacy begins with “I” by Janelle Fletcher

I overheard a woman the other day saying “Hey thank God I am pregnant finally. Now I won’t have to have sex with my husband for awhile.” Many women clients of mine also say “Sex is the last thing they feel like at the end of the day after juggling this, that and the next thing.” Understandable, yes – having raised 6 kids and juggled the wife, mother, business owner and lover roles myself! Others of us love to curl up with a good girlie “flick” with some good old fashioned romance – but when it comes to actually allowing such romance to occur in our own lives, we withdraw, make excuses or find reasons not to enjoy intimacy to the degree we actually desire.

So what are some common factors that impact the degree and quality of intimacy and relationships we could enjoy?

Our **thoughts and perceptions** are powerful. Some of us women berate ourselves daily for the way our body looks, hangs, sags and wobbles and we are often set on doing everything in our willpower to focus on the negatives or that focus has simply become a habit. Such thoughts, words and subsequent worry or anxiety about getting “up close and personal” deny us of some potentially awesome intimate moments. Instead of “I hate my body and the way I look” or “I couldn’t possibly do such and such because.....”, how about replacing those powerful, but negative, statements with the strong belief that “I can enjoy intimacy no matter what weight or shape I am.” How many of us, for example, have enjoyed awesome sexual moments with an 8-month pregnant belly or enjoyed some tender cuddles and attention when we have been looking worse for wear when we are sick?

Our thoughts and our **words** around who we think we are, what we think we deserve and what “our lot is in life” are powerful magnets – we attract exactly what we are saying, thinking and doing to ourselves. Positive affirmations and thoughts are useful here, but we also need to consistently monitor our actions and behaviours so that they align with our more positive thoughts. “Pray but start walking”, someone once said to me. Think the right thoughts, believe that you can experience what you desire in your relationships and align yourself with that belief by “walking the talk”.

Highly-fuelled emotions – guilt, fear, anxiety, powerlessness and overwhelm...impact intimacy. Emotions occur as a result of what we are thinking. Change our thinking and our emotional state will change. Change our emotional state, and our body, our desire and our self esteem will manifest different things for us – including our relationships – with ourselves first and foremost and then with others.

Seeing the issue or problem outside of ourselves – that is, blaming others for our woes affects intimacy. How often do you hear women saying, “He doesn’t do this!” and “He doesn’t do that?” In fact, “He just doesn’t get me at all!” What follows is typically a holding back of something, a tit-for-tat “well stuff him” attitude or a withdrawal, to some degree, of intimacy - whether it be a withheld cuddle, a closed-off ear, a definite “no” to sex or a headache from the sheer frustration of it all. So often we blame the other person and we don’t see ourselves in the equation at all. Next time when you hear yourself blaming or criticizing someone, try rephrasing it with “I.....” or “My part to play in this is.....” Getting into the other person’s shoes or getting someone else’s point of view can be incredibly helpful as we, all too often, get wrapped up in our own version of events!

Our **attitudes** play a huge part in the way we relate to intimacy. What the attitudes and teaching of our parents or other role-models were around bodily functions, puberty, losing our virginity, sex, relationships, homosexuality and commitment, for example, can determine the experience of intimacy. Taking a good honest look at these attitudes and deciding now as an adult, what attitudes we choose for ourselves, and reflecting on the costs and payoffs of holding onto old, and possibly outdated, attitudes, can be incredibly liberating. I remember the very moment that I swallowed my

first contraceptive pill – knowing full well that I had been taught, in no uncertain terms, that I was not to have sex before marriage. Did that have an influence on my experience of sex and intimacy? By crikey it did – guilt and shame –brought about by my inherited attitudes - can be huge dampeners!

When ***underlying traumas, dramas and events*** are healed, this makes way for more intimate space. Not only does our heart need to be loving and open for greater intimacy, but we need to feel at ease with our more “intimate” parts. Abuse, early or unhappy sexual experiences, shame around our body parts and bodily functions, being different during growth spurts, loved ones leaving us – through death, separation, abandonment and relationship break-ups, experiencing grief over infertility, miscarriage, abortion and other losses that are so closely linked to our sexuality - these can leave scars that also scar our perspective on how intimacy can be. Many people do not want to put themselves in the position of possibly experiencing “pain” again. Many subconsciously go around saying they are “not worth being around” or “they deserve second best” with the ongoing recurring outcome of unfulfilled relationships. How can you heal? Forgiveness is incredibly powerful. Find a supportive friend or coach. Healing at an energetic, cell level – without having to rehash or relive the whole “trauma” again – can work wonders as I have seen in my work again and again with clients. Rituals and ceremonies are great symbolic ways of letting go of what has been and opening up afresh to new possibilities.

The juggling act – yes, we women need to learn that multi-tasking is a great skill, but we have to give it up now and then! Many women use busy-ness as a means of avoiding intimacy. Some women have found their “identity” in being everything to everyone. We need, however to learn that we are valuable, no matter what we are doing and how much we give out, and that in fact, we are often appreciated more when we are more “present” to our families and to our partners. Rather than having a “superwoman or supermother” identity, try on a “superlover” identity.

What about all the other factors that affect intimacy? Health issues, pain, communication difficulties, stress, fear, tiredness, emotional issues, transition, betrayal of trust or having no partner amongst other factors, all can play a part.

Intimacy begins with “I” and here’s a starting point.

- “I am vigilant with my thoughts, words and actions so they reflect possibilities and opportunities to develop more intimate relationships.”
- “I put myself in the “spotlight” by addressing any issues in my relationships by starting with myself first and foremost.”
- “I let go of outdated attitudes and adopt attitudes that support me living and loving more intimately.
- “I heal from the core by addressing any underlying factors.”
- “I am “present” with people, not “absent” through distractions and busy-ness.”

“I am a beautiful, fabulous woman deserved of mutually happy, wholesome and loving relationships and extraordinary intimacy.”

Janelle Fletcher

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