

## Learning to Stress Well.<sup>1</sup>

Intimacy – Its Role in Wellbeing

by Mary Elaine Kiener

Decades ago, on a sun-filled, sandy beach along the Caribbean, we were enjoying a welcome respite from a Michigan winter. I mostly recall a confused frustration and an uncomfortable, lingering silence following his abrupt withdrawal from an intense discussion about our own intimacy-related challenges. Years later, the memory returns, with the desire for a gift of freshly-available understanding.

Some understand intimacy rather simply--as sexual intimacy or lovemaking. Others expand its meaning to include the easy sense of warmth, closeness and/or familiarity between individuals (with or without sexual activity). Another definition precludes people entirely, referring instead to a private, cozy setting with a peaceful sense of intimacy, while a newly popular explanation equates intimacy with the phrase "In-To-Me-See". For example, as intimacy deepens, each individual allows more of themselves to be open and available to the other person--sort of like gradually peeling the layers of an onion, until nothing is left to hide.

Without negating any of the above, I find myself exploring a deeper, more "intimate" look, beginning with the role of trust--as an essential fuel for nurturing intimacy. Some level of trust-worthy-ness in the other person allows each one a confident expectation of safety within the confines of their relationship. Otherwise, an individual would be foolhardy to risk the vulnerability of baring their innermost secrets with another. Likewise, even that cozy intimate space presupposes a certain assurance of trust in the safety of its surroundings.

And, *what if*--as Rainer Marie Rilke suggested over a century ago—there might be an intimacy within which "each partner appoints the other to be the guardian of his solitude and thus they show each other the greatest possible trust"? And, if so, how might intimate partners help hold the other safe so each might courageously be alone with the still-yet-unknown secrets within themselves?

In a recent blog post, Heather Plett points the way to such a possibility in her description of "holding space for someone else." She writes, "It means that we are willing to walk alongside another person in whatever journey they're on without judging them, making them feel inadequate, trying to fix them, or trying to impact the outcome. When we hold space for other people, we open our hearts, offer unconditional support, and let go of judgment and control."

Wow, that feels deeply intimate to me, with welcome wisdom to bring to *any* relationship! Paraphrasing Rilke, perhaps the most intimate gift we offer another is holding space for them "to have patience with everything that is unsolved" in their hearts, so they might "cherish the questions themselves."

I'm curious about what comes inside as you consider the concept of intimacy in your own life. I'd love to hear about your own "sensings", thoughts and feelings--especially since we'll next explore the wellbeing dimension of "finding meaning".

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<sup>1</sup> Kiener, M.E. (2015, October). Learning to stress well. Intimacy – Its Role in Wellbeing. *Sibyl Magazine. For the Spirit and Soul of Woman*. Retrieved from [www.sibylmagazine.com](http://www.sibylmagazine.com).