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The Philosopher's Stone

Armstrong College of Liberal Arts

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### Is intimacy sex, or is sex intimacy?

Philosophical Discussion Group, Armstrong State University

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# THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

Join us for an intimate discussion on sex and intimacy!

## Is intimacy sex, or is sex intimacy?

By Megan Netherland (mn7644@armstrong.edu) and  
Tracy Le (tl2797@armstrong.edu)

**Sappho:** It seems in this day and age people have this notion of intimacy being sex. What is intimacy to you?

**Marquis de Sade:** Banging hotties. What else is there?

**S:** Intimacy must be something more than simply consensual sex. If intimacy was only sex, how could we have intimate moments with friends or family?

**M:** Fair point. What else must be included in the concept of intimacy then?

**S:** If we wish to expand it to include friends and family, there must be something about intimacy that implies treating people as ends in themselves.

**M:** What does treating people as ends in themselves entail?

**S:** It means treating a person as a human being rather than as a means to achieve some end.

**M:** In sex we do not always treat the other person as an end but rather as a means to achieve orgasm. Do we not?

**S:** Yes, but I would not call that an “intimate sexual relationship”. To call a sexual relationship “intimate” there must be something more.

**M:** Well let us try to distinguish different types of intimacy. I think we would agree that there is an intimacy in friendship; we can refer to that as “platonic intimacy”. There is also the intimacy that comes in a romantic relationship, and we will call this the “unnamed intimacy” so as to avoid the connotations associated with the word “romantic” such as lust and passion. What do these two types have in common?

**S:** Perhaps in order to have an intimacy there must be some sort of knowledge of the other person.

**M:** Knowledge of them that you could get from asking other people or searching them on the internet?

**S:** No. The knowledge needs to be obtained from that person. How can you have a friendship with a person until you have at least some personal knowledge of them?

### PHILOSOPHY NEWS YOU MAY USE

The PDG invites you to discuss  
**SEX and INTIMACY**  
on Friday, March 27 in  
**GAMBLE HALL 106 @ 1PM**

### CALL FOR PAPERS!

Armstrong's First Ever  
Philosophy Conference  
For Undergraduates  
Co-Sponsored with GSU  
on April 25<sup>th</sup>

Submit a paper to  
[gsuphisigmata@gmail.com](mailto:gsuphisigmata@gmail.com)  
by midnight on March 30 for  
consideration!

### Attend

Armstrong's First Ever Philosophy  
Conference for Undergraduates  
Co-Sponsored with GSU on April 25<sup>th</sup>  
Mark your calendars!

This Issue's Faculty Advisor: Dr. Julie Swanstrom

**M:** I will grant you this. What about the physical aspect to intimacy? I would argue that any voluntary physical touch is an expression of intimacy, such as hugs and a touch of the hand to provide comfort and understanding.

**S:** Just because we share some physical touch does not mean that it's intimate. I could shake your hand or pat your back, and that would not be intimate. I am not trying to divorce the physical component from intimacy. I think intimacy can manifest as a physical, sexual relationship or be completely platonic, but physical touch can be intimate but isn't necessarily intimate—shaking hands upon greeting isn't intimacy.

**M:** So we can have a physical aspect to all intimate relationships, but we need not have any physicality in an intimate relationship?

**S:** Yes. Let's get down to what exactly platonic intimacy might look like. We have agreed that there must be a knowledge of the other person and that these people must treat each other as ends and not means. I would also assert that there is an openness between the two people.

**M:** Openness? Does this tie back to having knowledge of a person?

**S:** I mean openness in the sense that two people would have a free communication with one another. I suppose this would also mean being comfortable enough with each other to share certain things without the fear of much, or any, judgment.

**M:** Okay, so this knowledge we must have comes about not simply by observation or third party testimonials but from the sharing with the other person one-on-one. Is reciprocation something that is necessary in platonic intimacy then?

**S:** Ideally, I believe it should be. However, realistically this isn't so much the case. Realistically, I think, it doesn't need to be. Friends do not always mean the same thing to each other. One friend might consider that other person to be their closest friend, and the other could see the friendship as a mere acquaintance.

**M:** I think I have a good grasp on your idea of platonic intimacy, so now the question is what distinguishes unnamed intimacy from platonic intimacy?

**S:** Unnamed intimacy has the same basic characteristics of platonic intimacy but it can be considered a higher level of intimacy.

**M:** How so?

**S:** Well it has a performative aspect to it. In platonic intimacy you share ideas and thoughts together, yet there need not be the demonstration or performance of the ideas that are expressed.

**M:** Ergo I can tell my friend about the sexual preferences I have, but I will not do those with my friend or they will never actually experience them with me.

**S:** Yes, but I do not want to relegate unnamed intimacy just to sex. Unnamed intimacy is not just sex or knowledge but an intertwining of the two. It would need both aspects to be considered something beyond platonic intimacy.

**M:** If this is a step beyond platonic intimacy, well, I believe that it doesn't necessarily need to be reciprocated. Think of the example of BDSM with a dominant and a submissive class. One is only performing an act on the other.

**S:** I would have to disagree. Sex is ideally a process of give and take. I could also argue for the same for BDSM.

Although it's true that one is acting on the other, they both gained pleasure from acting and being acted upon. Would you not say that is a sense of reciprocity?

**M:** Yes, I would agree. I am beginning to see your distinction. In platonic intimacy we said there was openness, and in this unnamed intimacy we can call this greater degree of sharing transparency—transparency because it is not simply telling another person things, but the other person sees it, experiences it, and participates in it with you.

**S:** Exactly! Ideally unnamed intimacy should begin as platonic so that there is a solid groundwork to your relationship.

**M:** One last question: in this age of technological dominance, it is common for people to post their innermost thoughts and emotions online for anyone to see. Since platonic intimacy does not need to be reciprocated, and it is a sharing of ideas, is this not an intimate action?

**S:** It expresses a need for intimacy more than anything else or can be considered an act of egoism. Intimacy comes about between one person and another, not one person and the entire internet.

**M:** Okay, okay, but I still am curious about this whole sex thing. What is it? Why does society equate it with intimacy? How can it be both an expression of an intimate relationship and also not?

**S:** There are many different ideas about it. Some philosophers assert that love is merely an outgrowth of the desire to procreate, which seems like unnamed intimacy is supposed to focus on making babies. Others think that sex should not be regulated and should be enjoyed as the physical experience that it is with no other ties.

**M:** That's me. Free love all around baby!

**S:** As for me, I agree with Nietzsche when he says that love, and this unnamed intimacy as well, is the spiritualization of sensuality. Sex can be relegated to the realm of basic instinct yet we cannot deny that there can be more there, that it can be the expression of a higher connection between two people.

**M:** I can still maintain my libertine ways though, right?

**S:** Since morality isn't the topic under discussion here I will not tell you one way or the other, but consider how much more there is to be had. Don't we always want more?