

The dance of love and lust  
by Lloyd Robertson

You are at the Zoo and it's 2:00 A.M. You find yourself incredibly attracted to the person you just met. Chances are it's more lust than love.

My last column dealt with the chemistry of love. All feelings have a chemical and hormonal basis. The ability to love and to lust evolved over untold eons. To understand ourselves we have to understand some of the reasons how we came to have these feelings.

Our genes are potentially immortal. They divide and we pass half of them on to any given offspring. If we have lots of offspring then, chances are, we will have passed on all of our genes. The only way genes die (or more correctly, stop) is if we fail to have any surviving children.

It is in the interest of our genes that we have many children. Men can, potentially, have more children with multiple partners than with one partner. Women increase the chances that their children will have an ideal or compatible genetic mix by having several partners. Hence those genes that passed on the capacity for sexual lust replicated to a greater degree than those that did not.

Lust is not the whole genetic story. We pay a big price for our intelligence. Compared to other species, all human babies are born premature. Even so, their large head size makes childbirth difficult and sometimes dangerous. Successful birth results in a very long period of child rearing before the child can survive on his own. Both mother and child may be vulnerable, especially in prehistoric times. Those parents that stayed together passed on more of their genes to future generations than those who did not. Those families that stuck together passed on more of their genes than those that did not stick together. Those communities of people that helped each other out prospered more than those that did not. Love is an effective glue binding parents, families and communities together. Those genes that passed on the ability to love helped us, and themselves, to survive.

Genetics is not the whole story. We are thinking beings. We have the ability to control our emotions thru our thoughts. Also, we have a need to find meaning in all that we do. These two facts have meant the development of culture and the development of a sense of self.

Culture, often thru the vehicle of religion, defines how the dance between love and lust may be played. Our sense of self then determines what roles we play in that dance.

Pre-marital sex was sanctioned by the father of Christianity, Judaism. Ancient Jewish couples entered a betrothal period before marriage. If the woman became pregnant they were married. If she did not become pregnant both were free to find new partners. Without knowing anything about genetics the Jews recognized that some partnerings were more compatible than others for producing children.

The child of Christianity, Islam, made a different compromise with our genetic heritage. It allows men four wives. Christianity itself has been fairly rigid. Early missionaries were

scandalized that aboriginal people enjoyed sex and enjoyed it in many different ways. The image of these celibate priests attempting to teach native people the one "proper" way to have sex never ceases to bring a smile to my lips. Ever since, the way favored by the priests has been known as "the missionary position".

The responsibility is placed on us, in modern society, to define for ourselves our own sexuality. That definition must take into account our genetic emotions of love and lust along with our own particular belief system and a healthy sense of self. Emotional difficulties arise where we fail to include all four elements in our sexuality.

Some belief systems fail to recognize that both love and lust are built into all of us. People who believe that lust is evil while love is angelic have a problem. The feeling of lust may be repressed but as the experience of numerous priests has shown that repression is not always successful. Other people believe that they have good and evil inside themselves. They may build two selves or personas, one that is loving and "good" and one that is lustful and "evil". Such a person may be unpredictable in their behaviors and may even appear to have two personalities.

Healthy sexuality integrates both our feelings of love and lust into one consistent sense of self and finds positive ways of giving expression to both.