



## PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY

### LESSON 8

### GENDER AND SEXUALITY AS A PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUE

#### Lesson Objectives:

When you finish reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. define the term "psychosocial";
2. discuss the psychosocial dimension of gender and sexuality; and
3. reflect upon one's responsibility in ensuring psychosocial wellness in the aspect of gender and development.

#### Definition of Terms:

- Psychosocial – a term pertaining to psychological and social factors and the interaction of these factors.
- Psychosocial issues – needs and concerns relating to one or all of the psychosocial dimensions.
- Reproductive role – the social script ascribed to individuals pertaining to their role in child-bearing or child-rearing and related tasks such as maintaining the household.
- Productive role – the social script ascribed to individuals pertaining to their role in economic production and related tasks such as engaging in public affairs and living in the world of work.

## Introduction

In previous sessions, we discussed about the biological dimension of sexuality. We learned that the human person has biological mechanisms for sexual growth and reproduction, and that depending on sex, these mechanisms differ.

At the beginning of this text book, we also emphasized that these reproductive mechanisms are interpreted by societies, thereby, creating differentiated social standards for behavior and expectations. For instance, since the human female is capable of bearing a child, the society interprets this capacity as associated to womanhood, and thus, sets fulfillment of reproductive role as an expectation among women. On the other hand, since the human male does not have the capability to bear the child but has a relatively larger muscular-skeletal frame, the society expects the human male to perform productive role and associates this role to men.

CONTEMPLATE. How does your being a female or male influence your family's and peers' expectations from you?

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However, while there are distinct physiological differences, much of the capabilities, except those involved in reproduction, can actually be performed by either sexes. Both women and men can perform child-rearing roles. Both can also engage and succeed in the world of work. In many cases, the limits are only set by social expectations.

These scenarios only exemplify that much about gender and sexuality is not only biological and physiological but also psychological and social. This perspective of exploring and understanding human sexuality in the lens of psychological social processes is referred to as psychosocial perspective.

### What Does Psychosocial Mean?

The term "psychosocial" is an encompassing term. It is comprised by two primary aspects: psychological and social. There are myriad of ways in defining these two terms but in essence, psychological pertains to anything associated with mental process and behavior, while social pertains to anything associated with human relationships, connection, and interaction.

The psychological aspect of gender and sexuality anchors itself on the field of psychology. Psychology is a field of science which concerns itself with how people think and feel and how thoughts and feelings interact and lead to behavior. There are three primary psychological domains: affect, behavior, and cognition. Affect or the affective domain pertains to people's emotions and feelings. Behavior or the behavioral domain pertains to people's actions—both observable (overt) or not readily observable (covert). Cognition or cognitive domain pertains to people's thought processes such as memory, perception, and information-processing. Hence, to say that gender and sexuality have a psychological dimension is to note that our sexual behaviors, as well as gender-related behaviors, originate from what we sense, think, and feel.

On the other hand, the social aspect of gender and sexuality primarily anchors itself on the field of sociology and allied fields such as social psychology. In essence, Sociology is a field of science which concerns itself with the human person's realities and experiences as part of groups and institutions, including the structures and functions of these institutions, and the dynamics of human relationships within them.

### Understanding the Psychosocial Dimension

There are many ways through which the psychosocial dimension of gender and sexuality can be understood and explained. Our experience of gender and sexuality is generally a relational experience. It is relational because while as individuals, we have our own affect, cognition and behavior to be aware of, we are also viewing ourselves in relation to others who also have their own personal preoccupations. There are some elements of our gendered self which are best viewed in an ecological context—that is, in the circumstances in our physical and social environment.



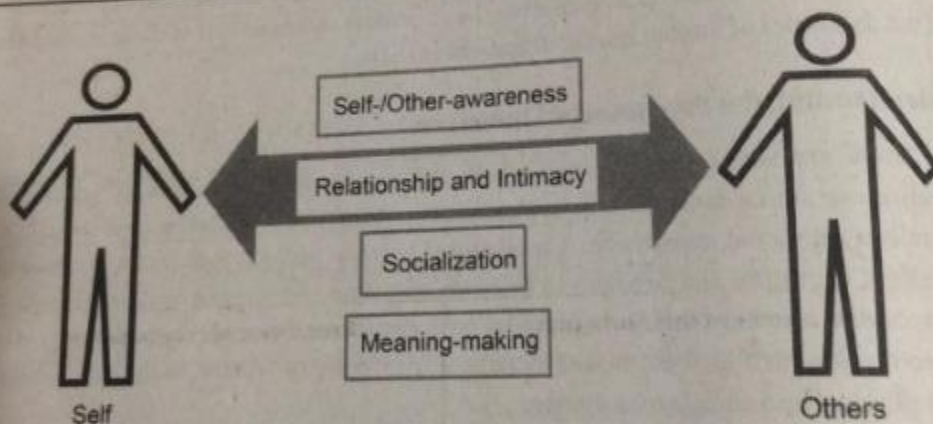
COMMUNICATE. Think about the following and share with your classmate whom you are comfortable to talk to.

My strengths

Areas where I can improve

My aspirations in life

How I see myself



### Awareness

At the front of our experience as gendered beings is awareness. In simpler terms, awareness is our conscious understanding of something. As individuals, we are in constant process towards self-awareness: Who and what am I? What do I like/dislike? What are my strengths and weakness? What motivates me? What are my aspirations? We are in an endless process of asking and trying to understand. In the context of gender and sexuality, we ask: What am I physiologically? Am I happy with what I am? How do I genuinely see myself? How do I feel about myself as a sexual being? Is there anything good I should do?

But then again, we are not isolated in a vacuum. We are social beings. We live our lives in relation to others. Hence, as we try to understand ourselves more, we are also in a constant process towards *other-awareness*, that is, understanding others: What is the other's motivations, preferences, and aspirations? Where am I positioned in her or his life, vis-à-vis where is s/he positioned in my life? How different and or similar am I and other?

### ***Intimacy and relationship***

In certain situations, when two people recognize and become aware of each other, they decide to keep close distance in each other's lives, share their personal bubbles, so to speak, and allow frequency of interaction between them. This forges some form of **human relationship**—a bond formed between two or more people, manifested through communication and interaction. These relationships may be in the form of family, friendships, romantic relationship, or others. While in these relationships, we share resources and emotions, we, as individuals, constantly aim to further understand our own selves as we also try to understand others and be understood by them. This process of knowing others and allowing others to know us is **intimacy**.

As social beings, we also learn from our own experiences and from the lessons taught to us by those who have come before us. How we behave in relation to other people, with due consideration to social expectations related to our gender, and how we make choices to balance out personal goals and social goals, might be passed on to us through education and other cultural preoccupations. The process by which we learn cultural norms and traditions is referred to as **socialization**.

At the end of it all, as rational beings, we are also capable of making sense of our experiences vis-à-vis the influences of our environments and integrate these interpretations into our own choice.

**CONTEMPLATE.** How am I in the following psychosocial aspects of my life?

Awareness of self and others	Intimacy and relationships
Learning and socialization	Purpose and meaning

### *Well-being as a Psychosocial Goal*

The ultimate goal of understanding the psychosocial aspects of our experiences is well-being—a state of satisfaction, meaning, and purpose. There are two sides to well-being. One is that kind of well-being which is observed, outward, and can be evaluated through the presence or absence of particular elements in our environment. This is referred to as objective well-being. In the aspect of gender and sexuality here are some of the questions to ask:

- Does the physical environment allow expression of diversity? Does the physical infrastructure mitigate any possibility of abuse and violence related to gender?
- Are material resources (money, properties) equitably available to men, women, and other people with different genders? Are these resources sufficient for them?
- Are there health systems which cater to gender-related needs? Are there wellness programs that support women, men and people of different genders?

Another side of well-being is our personal experience of satisfaction, meaning, and purpose. This is referred to as **subjective well-being**. It is subjective because it pertains to our own appreciation of how well we are. Sometimes, even when the environment fully provides for all our needs, we remain unsatisfied, and thus, having low sense of subjective well-being. There are also moments where the environment has shortcomings, but we are at peace and satisfied within. In a common term, the closes word to also mean subjective well-being is **happiness**. Some of the question to ask are as follows:

- How far is your sense of satisfaction about the various areas of your life as a sexual being?
- Is your purpose as a person clear to you and if not yet, what are you doing to clarify this purpose?

### *Dimensions of Well-being*

Based on what well-being means, we can see that there are various dimensions into it. The following are just the primary dimensions of well-being which we must look into when trying to understand the psychosocial condition of a person:

- **physical** – physical/biological health;
- **emotional** – positive feelings; mood stability;
- **mental** – clarity of mind; healthy thought process;
- **material** – available and adequate financial and other resources; and
- **social** – healthy and positive interaction and relationship with others.





## LESSON 9 | LOVE, INTIMACY, AND RELATIONSHIP

### Lesson Objectives:

When you finish reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. define terms such as "love," "attraction," "intimacy," "relationship," and other related terms;
2. discuss different theories of love;
3. identify needs, issues, and concerns experienced by people who are in a romantic relationship; and
4. reflect upon one's attitudes towards love, intimacy, and relationship.

### Definition of Terms:

- Love - a complex phenomenon characterized by an affective and cognitive inclination to someone and a set of social behaviors geared towards cohesion.
- Intimacy - the psychosocial component of love; knowing and being known by someone in a deeply personal level; emotional closeness and connection.
- Passion - the emotive and physical component of love; drive towards sexual and romantic attraction.
- Commitment - decision to engage and maintain a loving relationship.
- Relationship - social bond between and among individuals manifested through communication and other forms of interaction. This bond may be biological or determined by social contracts such as social consensus or laws.

### Introduction

In February 15, 2015, an article featuring a study by McCann World Group, among 30,000 respondents from 29 countries, came out of a national newspaper, bannered the title "Filipinos most expressive about love among Asia Pacific countries—study" (Hegina 2015). The article presented an interesting result: The Filipinos say "I love you" approximately 17 times in a week, making us sixth among the countries in the survey, which are most articulate and expressive.

Robert Sternberg, a psychologist renowned for his theory of love asked, in his 1986 paper: "What does it mean "to love" someone? Does it always mean the same thing, and if not, in what ways do loves differ from each other?" In this chapter, we will tackle, perhaps, one of the most complex and celebrated human emotion and experience: love.



## LOVE AS A HUMAN EXPERIENCE

Love is a human experience differently defined and conceptualized.

### *Love as a culture universal*

Love is construed as a culture universal. A culture universal is a phenomenon experienced similarly by people across time and cultures. This means that humans, whether those who lived in the past or who are living now and regardless of their geographic location and socio-cultural identities, have experienced love, in one way or another. Said differently, love is an experience that transcends time and culture. People before us, such as our grandparents, parents, and other adolescents like us who live in other countries, are believed to know and encounter love as we do. The way we appreciate and experience this phenomenon may be unique, but it is a similar phenomenon altogether.

### *Love as a social phenomenon*

Likewise, love is viewed as a social phenomenon. Social phenomena are events or experiences which ensue within our interaction and relationship with other people. Loving entails communication—the process of giving and receiving information between and

among people. It also entails the use of a language—symbols that are culturally agreed upon as possessing certain meanings and that are used by people to express certain realities and worldviews.

#### *Love as an emotion*

Love is also construed as an emotion. Emotions are physiological responses that we evaluate psychologically as we experience particular life events. There are **basic emotions** such as joy, sadness, fear, disgust, and anger among others. There are also **complex emotions**, which are a combination of basic emotions in varying magnitudes and are made intricate by circumstances surrounding the experience (e.g., the people involved, the place and time where the emotion is experienced, etc.). Love, as we know it, is a complex emotion.

#### *Love as a neurobiological event*

With recent advancements in science, love, now, can be studied as a **neurobiological event**. Every split of a second, information is being passed on within our **nervous system**—a conglomerate of organs (including our brain, our spinal cord, and our nerves, among others) responsible for our ability to process and transmit essential information among the many organs in our body. The information comes in the form of electrical signal running along our **neurons** (nerve cell), which movement is facilitated by our **neurotransmitters**—a variety of chemicals found in our nervous system.

Neurobiologically, the experience of love is associated with various parts of our brain. For instance, the loving experience is commonly associated with the activation of the **ventral tegmental area (VTA)** of our brain which is just right behind our left eyes. It is also associated with the increased amount in **endorphins**—hormones believed to provide humans a good mood.

### **Theorizing Love**

Since love is a rather complex idea, which can be described, defined and experienced in myriad of ways, several theories and frameworks offer diverse perspectives on how it can be understood and explained.

#### *Psychodynamic view on love*

Psychodynamic theory is a collective term, which pertains to the **psychoanalytic tradition** forwarded by Sigmund Freud (a Viennese neurologist), as well as the succeeding theories that support, redefine, or refute his propositions.

In a nutshell, the psychodynamic theory posits that we have desires and motives fueled by our life (eros) and death (thanatos) instincts. For instance, desirable behaviors that promote positive relationship with others might be viewed as influenced by our life instincts, while aggressive behaviors that hurt, manipulate, or harm ourselves and others might be viewed as influenced by our death instincts. Both the life and death instincts are

thought to stream from our unconscious—the province of our mind, which we are highly unaware of. Likewise, the psychodynamic view puts prime on the influence of our early life experiences (from conception to around six years old)—referred to as formative years—in our personality development. Crucial to this life stage is our relationship with our primary caregiver—typically the mother. It suggests that the kind of attachment (psychic bond) we have with our primary caregiver/s, influence our relationships in later life, including our choice of romantic partners and the way we relate and operate within this partnership.

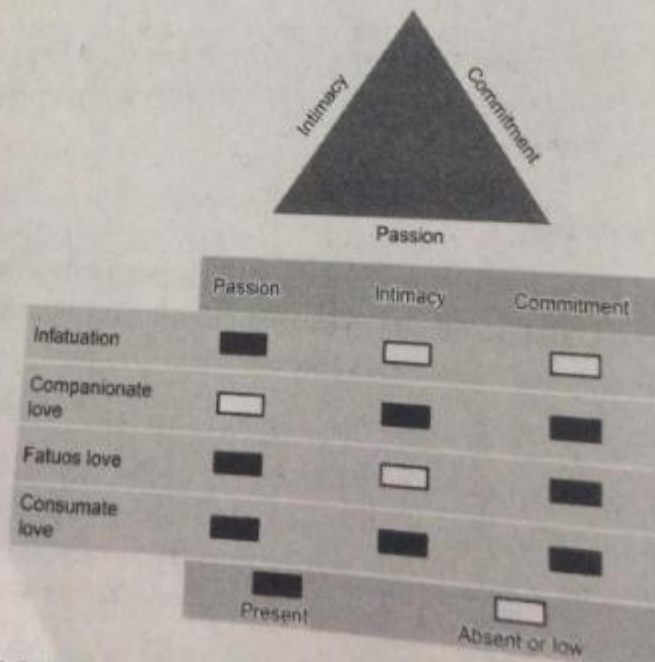
Hence, from a psychodynamic view, love can be seen as a manifestation of our eros and the placement of our libido (life energy) unto an object (a thing or a person towards who we transfer our psychic energies to ease pain or achieve pleasure).

### Color wheel of love

John Alan Lee (1973), a Canadian psychologist, suggested that there are different types of love. The primary types are: eros (sexual and romantic), philia (friendly), and storge (parental/filial love). The secondary types are: pragma (practical love), agape (universal love), and philautia (self love). It is possible for us to experience not just one, but two or more of these types of love in our lifetime. A child who loves her parents (storge) might eventually find new friends whom to like once they go to school (philia) and then experience romantic love (eros) especially during her youth.

### Triangular model of love

One of the most popular theories of love is the triangular model by Sternberg (1986), a psychologist. This theory looks at love from a psychometric stance, which means that it is generally concerned about trying to measure love as a psychological variable and in determining the various dimensions and facets that love has as experienced by people.





According to Sternberg (1986), love has three interlocking dimensions—passion, intimacy, and commitment. **Passion** refers to the physical/emotional aspect. **Intimacy** pertains to the psychological/relational aspect. **Commitment** pertains to the agency component, that is the choice we make with regards to engaging and maintaining the loving relationship. The combination of these dimensions yields a particular love type. For instance, when there is only passion but no other components, **infatuation** is formed. When there is only intimacy but no other components, there is **liking**. When there is only commitment, there is **empty love**. However, when there is passion and intimacy, there is **romantic love**. When there is passion and commitment, there is **ludic love**. When there is intimacy and commitment, there is **friendly love**. When all three components are presents, then we can say that **consummate love** exists.

#### *Romantic and companionate love*

Hatfield and Rapson (1978, 1993), on the other hand, suggests that there are two general types of love: romantic love and companionate love. **Romantic love** is characterized by intense passion—“a state of intense longing for union with your partner” (Hatfield and Rapson 1987, 1993). **Companionate love**, on the other hand, is characterized by intense intimacy—emotional closeness—which is also characteristic of liking.

#### *Love Languages*

Gary Chapman, a world-renown author, suggested that people have various ways through which we give and receive love. He referred to these unique ways as **love languages**. Chapman (1995) posited that there are generally five love languages; namely, words of affirmation, touch, time, gifts, and acts of service.

People whose love language is **words of affirmation** tend to verbally express their thoughts and feelings of love towards the people they love. They may be comfortable saying “I love you’s” and articulating other words of endearment. They also seem to be generous in expressing through words their appreciation of others’ presence in their lives, as well as the positive impact their loved ones have in them. Those whose love language is **touch**, on the other hand, express love non-verbally through hugs, kisses, or, simply, a tap on the back. They value **proximity** (nearness) and yearns for physical contact (not necessarily sexual in nature) with their partners. Those whose love language is **time** tend to value quality moments with their loved ones. They are much willing to create memories with the people they love. Those whose love language is **gifts**, want to show and receive affection through material objects, especially during special occasions. Finally, those whose love language is **act of service**, are much willing to serve the other person by helping her or him in things that they do.

### Love and Intimate Relationships

Love, although well-studied and variedly-theorized, remains abstract and obscure unless viewed in the context of human relationship. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle, has been widely quoted as referring to humans as social animals. This means that we survive, thrive, and flourish when we are together such that relating to other humans is not only a sentimental, but also an evolutionary and a practical process.

**CONTEMPLATE.** Having initially explored your understanding of love, intimacy, and relationship, we will reflect further about these phenomena by looking at *your own* experiences or attitudes. Below is a table with two columns. In Column A, list down traits of a person which might potentially make you attracted towards her or him. In Column B, list down traits of a person which might potentially make you commit to her or him at a more long-term and stable basis. Remember that traits can be **physical** (i.e., physical features) or **not physical** (i.e., values, mental or emotional qualities).

A: Traits that might attract you towards someone	B: Traits that might convince you to commit into a long-term, stable relationship

Social connection is necessary for our growth as individuals. In certain cases, it also serves as a foundation for family life, which then provides us humans a venue for nurturance and care and as a platform where we can develop to our greatest potentials. In other cases, it enables us to secure our social position and provides us human resources to implement our goals for ourselves and for the greater community.

In his analysis of close human relationships, George Levinger (1982) postulated that there are stages that intimate relationships go through: (1) acquaintance, (2) buildup, (3) continuation or consolidation, (4) deterioration or decline, and (5) ending or termination. Simply, the ABCDE of intimate relationships.

#### *Acquaintance*

Intimate human relationships start in acquaintanceship. We meet up through circumstances and first learn about basic information about one another. Crucial at this stage is attraction. What does it take for a person to actually decide to be acquainted with another? Attraction can take place in an enabling environment. It can happen when there is propinquity or proximity—when we are physically closer to one another. It can happen when there is exposure—when due to proximity, there are repeated possibilities of interaction. It can also happen when there is similarity—common preferences, interests, and probably, beliefs and values.

#### *Buildup*

Some acquaintanceships build up into deeper relationships. Frequency of interaction increases. Kinds of activities shared become diverse. The involved parties begin to introduce one another to each other's friends and families, thus, making the social network larger and interconnected. This is the stage when two persons test their boundaries. They test the waters before engaging fully and so committedly in the relationship.

#### *Consolidation and Continuation*

The third stage of intimate relationship is consolidation. This stage is when people commits to a long-term relationship with one another, either through a personal agreement (i.e., exclusivity of partnership, domestic partnership) or a social-legal agreement (i.e., marriage). What makes people commit to a relationship, to the point of legitimizing it through marriage? Often, people set standards that are sustainable (e.g., ability of each other to maintain a family or a household, readiness of each other to raise children, career, and financial capacities).

#### *Decline or Deterioration*

Unfortunately, some intimate partnerships are unable to sustain and maintain their commitments or attraction. For one, there may be a change in priorities between the individual couple, such that the conjoint value of the partnership is not anymore sufficient. There may be infidelity—the breach of loyalty and promises as agreed upon by both individuals (e.g., presence of a third-party, extra-marital affairs). Or, in other, there may be irreconcilable differences—which are already harming each individual and the partnership as a whole.



interviews. Present your output in the class.

### *Ending*

Finally, for those intimate partnerships who are unable to address the causes and circumstances leading to the deterioration of their relationship, the stages culminate into ending or termination of the agreements made (either personal or socio-legal) through informal (e.g., collective decision to end the relationship) or formal (e.g., marriage dissolution) means.

### **Summary**

Humans are social beings and at the core of this nature, is relating and connecting with others. Central to understanding human relationship is the concept of love, an experience so abstract, yet so meaningful to many people. But then again, love is diversely defined inasmuch as it manifests and is experienced in diverse ways. This chapter tackles the various theories which explain love and its types. It also tackles the stages which people who are in love and in an intimate relationship undertake as they progress from acquaintanceship to a deeper form of consensual relationship. Conversely, reasons for deterioration of intimate relationship, as well as its eventual demise, are also highlighted. By and large, we are all encouraged to reflect about our human relationships with the goal of forging healthy, successful, and nurturing connections with others.