

## What is the Right Couple Sexual Style for You? - 2018

Most people begin as a romantic love/passionate sex/idealized couple. This very special phase (limerance) lasts between 6 months and if you're lucky 2 years. The challenge is to create a couple sexual style which will enhance desire/pleasure/eroticism/satisfaction. The challenge for couples, married or cohabitating, straight or gay, is how to integrate intimacy and eroticism into your relationship, and how to balance your "sexual voice" with being an "intimate sexual team". You develop a mutually comfortable level of intimacy, share non-demand pleasuring, value erotic scenarios and techniques, and maintain positive, realistic sexual expectations.

### **The four most common couple sexual styles (by order of frequency) are:**

- Complementary—mine and ours
- Traditional—conflict-minimizing
- Best Friend—soul-mate
- Emotionally Expressive—fun and erotic

Contrary to "pop psych" there is not a "right" style which is best for all couples. Be aware that usually your couple sexual style is different than your relational style. Each partner needs to be aware of her/his preferences, feelings, and values and choose the balance of intimacy/eroticism and autonomy/coupleness which enhance sexual desire and satisfaction. Be aware of strengths and vulnerabilities of each couple sexual style so you choose which is right for you.

**Complementary Couple Sexual Style** Complementary is the most common couple style because it balances each person's sexual voice with being a securely bonded intimate sexual team. Each partner has the freedom to initiate a sexual encounter, say no or offer an alternative way to connect, value both intimacy and eroticism, and play out your preferred erotic and intercourse scenarios. What are the vulnerabilities (traps) for this sexual style? The two major traps are treating sex with "benign neglect"—sex falls into a routine but not energizing, pattern. The second trap is that when life changes, for example, having a baby, rather than valuing couple time, you fall into traditional parenting roles and lose erotic playfulness.

**Traditional Couple Sexual Style** These couples follow traditional gender roles where sexual initiation and intercourse is the man's domain while intimacy and affection is the woman's domain. This is the most stable couple style, high on clarity and security, and low on drama and the need to negotiate sexual issues. The vulnerabilities are role rigidity and with aging the man finds it difficult to function sexually without her stimulation. Other traps are not dealing with sexual problems until they are chronic and the woman feeling her need for intimate connection and validation are ignored.

**Best Friend Couple Sexual Style** Best Friend is the cultural ideal—the most intimate relationship. Sharing intimacy and eroticism with the same person, feeling accepted and loved for who you really are (warts and all), maintaining a secure bond, are powerfully validating emotionally and sexually. However, this is a very risky sexual choice. You feel so close that you



de-eroticize your partner. The woman feels disappointed in the man and relationship because he fails to meet unrealistically high expectations. There is so much emphasis on mutuality that you don't take sexual risks and thus have low sexual frequency. The Best Friend sexual style is unable to be resilient when dealing with hard issues, such as an EMA.

**Emotionally Expressive Couple Sexual Style** Emotionally Expressive is the stuff of movies and love songs—vibrant, playful, erotic, high-energy sex. These couples use sex to heal emotional conflicts, take sexual risks, are experimental, and enjoy sexual fun and intensity. The traps are too much emotional and sexual drama drain your bond and threaten relationship stability, overemphasize sexual experimentation and eroticism at the expense of intimacy and security, use sex to avoid dealing with problems, and this level of intensity wears the partners out.

**Choosing the Right Style for You** A “wise” choice of a couple sexual style challenges you to weigh both emotional and practical factors, choosing not just for the short term but what brings sexual satisfaction over the long term. Choose a mutually acceptable sexual style which facilitates sexual desire/pleasure/eroticism/satisfaction. You want sexuality to play a 15-20% role in enhancing relationship vitality and satisfaction. Emphasize the strengths of your chosen couple sexual style and be mindful of traps/vulnerabilities so these don't subvert sexuality. You want to celebrate yourself as a sexual person and experience bonding as a sexual couple. Usually the relational and sexual styles are different. For most couples, the Best Friend relational style and the Complementary sexual style is the best decision.

***Resource: McCarthy, B. & McCarthy, E. (2009). Developing Your Couple Sexual Style.***

