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Making Marriage Simple: Ten Truths for Changing the Relationship You Have into the One You Want

By Harville Hendrix, Helen LaKelly Hunt



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Welcome to the Relationship Revolution! *Making Marriage Simple* is the accessible, essential road map to building a strong marriage in the modern world. Bestselling authors Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt distill into ten essential truths what they've learned about how to create a successful and satisfying relationship—both from their decades of “R&D” in the marriage lab of their workshops, and from their own relationship journey. In each chapter, Harville and Helen introduce a simple truth—such as “a frustration is a wish in disguise,” “incompatibility is grounds for marriage,” or “conflict is growth trying to happen”—and then walk couples through easy yet effective exercises to help them apply each truth in real life, every day.

Harville and Helen have spent their careers helping couples transform their marriages through research, workshops, and counseling. But marriage—even for marriage experts—is never easy, and a number of years ago they found themselves on the brink of divorce. Harville and Helen put themselves back through the exercises they'd coached so many other couples through, saving their marriage and helping them achieve a true partnership.

This book is for **all** couples. It offers the practical tools needed to transform one's relationship into a rewarding and joyous marriage. Written with humor, compassion, and honesty, and illustrated throughout with engaging line drawings, *Making Marriage Simple* is a strategic blueprint for creating a stronger, more satisfying partnership in today's world.



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Editorial Review

Review

"[An] easy-to-understand handbook for creating and maintaining a "Partnership Marriage." Lightened by a cartoon couple's relationship conversations and whimsical descriptions of personality types (e.g., the Turtle and the Hailstorm), the book advocates a relationship in which each member helps the other recapitulate and recover from the emotional wounds of childhood...Hendrix and Hunt's focus on gentleness, reflective listening, and removing negativity forms a decidedly common-sense approach to marriage. Base this in a clear and methodical approach, and you've got a workable manual for couples committed to doing a better job living a modern married life—for their own sake and their partner's."

—**Publishers Weekly**

"This book ought to be in every bride and groom's gift basket. Not only have Hendrix and Hunt created a delightful and easy-to-read guide to what every marriage needs, but they have done it by also revealing their own personal struggles (with their very happy ending) to the reader. We absolutely loved the cartoons. The book is the ideal combination of useful advice and very specific tips, and a real understanding of the huge benefits a new couple will gain from a lasting, intimate relationship. Here's how to make that happen!"

—John & Julie Gottman, authors of *And Baby Makes Three*

"I am thrilled that the greatest hits of what Harville and Helen have taught for decades are being distilled into one book. They are true masterful teachers and have offered clear, humorous, revelatory knowledge. Beyond supporting an intimate marriage, the application of these tools yields benefits throughout every relationship in your life."

—**Alanis Morissette**

"This is an enormously useful, helpful, and effective book (and workbook) for married couples, but really for relationships in general. With enormous clarity and insight, Harville and Helen walk us through the major traps of relationships, and specific techniques and exercises to overcome them, making your relationships deeper, stronger, more loving, and more rewarding—all around! Highly recommended for any relationship."

—**Ken Wilber, author of *The Integral Vision***

About the Author

HARVILLE HENDRIX, Ph.D, author of *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*, has more than forty years of experience as a clinical pastoral counselor, therapist, educator, clinical trainer, and public speaker. He has appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show 19 times. HELEN LAKELLY HUNT, Ph.D, was elected to the Women's Hall of Fame for her work in women's philanthropy. Harville and Helen co-created Imago Relationship Therapy and are founders of Imago Relationships International, Inc. They have six children and five grandchildren.

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TRUTH #1

Romantic Love Is a Trick

Helen

Although Harville and I come from very different worlds, when we fell in love, we had so much in common. Both of us were divorced. In addition, we each had two children, were passionate about psychology, and loved BBQ. We even had the exact same idea of our ideal vacation: driving around the United States in a rented RV with our newly blended family. Imagine how compatible we (thought we) were!

I can't remember a single thing we disagreed on.

Ahhh, the splendor of a newly budding relationship!

One minute you're involved in your life as you know it, when suddenly you see the one. Your eyes meet (perhaps across a crowded room). Heart palpitations start. And the fairy tale of romance begins. Flowers, batting eyelashes, shared meals, laughter. Sunset walks and little love gifts to each other. You spend hours looking forward to your next time together. Maybe you'll see a movie or simply hang out--talking about everything and nothing.

Each of you finds yourself saying: "It feels like I've known you forever.???" And in some ways you have. This new person has some very strong similarities to your childhood caregivers.

Now this "falling in love" business might not be so intense for everyone. For some, it's more gradual. But either way, you begin to think about each other a lot. Being apart feels unbearable. So you text and call each other frequently. When together, you seem to know each other's thoughts. You complete each other's sentences. You know exactly what the other one wants because, well, it's exactly what you want too!

The early stage of a romance brings out the best in people. Both homes are always tidy. Personal grooming is done with special care. Neither one of you burps around the other person. Before you even know what's happening, you've fallen head over heels in LOVE.

Romantic Love that is???.

It is a mysterious attraction: you feel moments of absolute ecstasy!

Unfortunately this bliss doesn't last.

FROM ECSTASY TO AGONY

Romantic Love sticks around long enough to bind two people together. Then it rides off into the sunset. And seemingly overnight, your dream marriage can turn into your biggest nightmare.

Now, once in the throes of full-blown Romantic Love, you can do no wrong. When Romantic Love fades however, it feels like you can do no right. The person who was once your greatest fan can become your

worst critic. Adoration is replaced by nagging. You notice yourself thinking, “Who IS this person I married? We used to be so compatible. We agreed on everything.” The pit of your stomach churns. And you ask yourself, “How can my partner think that way, act that way, say those things? They fooled me into believing they were someone else!”

When rudely awakened from the dazzling dream of compatibility, people can get very grumpy. Desperate to end the pain and disappointment Romantic Love leaves behind, many couples get divorced. Others who decide not to do the mind--numbing work of dividing up the stuff may stay together. But they wind up living parallel lives, without any true connection. They assume this is as good as it gets. But secretly they think something must be terribly wrong.

Let us reassure you, nothing has gone wrong.

Romantic Love is just the first stage of couplehood. It’s supposed to fade.

Romantic Love is the powerful force that draws you to someone who has the positive and negative qualities of your parents or caregiver (this includes anyone responsible for your care as a child, for example: a parent, older sibling, grandparent, or babysitters.). You felt like you knew your partner forever when you first met because they have the positive qualities of your parents. And because they also have your parents’ negative qualities, you wind up feeling irritated and disappointed by your partner. This is why agony can replace the initial ecstasy. Why relationships can get so painful and hard.

Whoa! The idea that your partner is really a composite of your parents can be a bit upsetting at first. Though we love our parents, most of us got over (consciously) wanting to marry them when we turned five or six. Then, when we hit our teenage years, all we wanted was our freedom. But the fact is, we’re unconsciously drawn to that special someone with the best and worst character traits of all of our caregivers combined. We call this our “Imago”---the template of positive and negative qualities of your primary caregivers.

If you’re reading this and thinking, “But wait, there is no resemblance between my partner and my parents,” let us clarify: Your partner may not look like your parents, and on the surface they may not act like your parents. But you will end up feeling the same feelings you had as a child when you were with your parents. This includes the sense of belonging and the love you felt. But it also includes the experience and upset of not getting all your needs met.

RELIVING CHILDHOOD

We call the result of not getting all of your needs met your “childhood wounding.” You become sensitive in the present to what was missing in the past. Our unconscious mind is set up so that the only way to heal these wounds is to have someone with traits like our caregivers learn how to give us what we needed--and missed out on--in childhood. Though frustrating to endure, this design of relationship has a wondrous plan: to heal each other’s childhood wounds.

Rest assured that when we talk about childhood wounding, we’re not blaming anyone’s parents (ours or yours). The reality is that nobody’s parents were perfect. Ask any one of our six kids if we were perfect, and they will assure you we’re certainly not! But even when parents are great, there are ways their parenting misses the mark. In other words, it’s impossible to parent “perfectly.”

So whether your parents were lousy, or if their wounding was more subtle, the results generally fall into two categories. Your parents were either overinvolved, which left you feeling controlled and smothered.

Or your parents were underinvolved, which left you feeling abandoned.

As a young girl, I felt smothered by the expectations of others. My parents required me to be sweet and thoughtful to everyone, no matter how I really felt. Born and raised in the South, my whole culture expected me to be a gracious Southern Belle who pleased others. I was even taught how to execute a perfect curtsy--seriously, I was expected to bow to others. Busy volunteering at the hospital, my mother was rarely around when I got home from school. And, like her, I was expected to volunteer the majority of my free time.

Now fast-forward to my marriage.

You'd think I'd be the perfect wife, caring for Harville in every way.???.

Well, the truth is yes???.and no.

When we got married, I vowed to be the best wife I could be to Harville. Utterly devoted, I prided myself on paying attention to all the details of his life--every single one of them. Pretty soon, I felt like I knew him better than he knew himself. (Oh dear, watch out!)

When friends asked Harville a question, I'd often proudly jump in and answer. I'd set out his breakfast and pridefully cook dinner for him without asking what he wanted. I didn't have to ask. Because I already knew. Given his love of Star Trek, I just knew he'd be delighted with the Star Trek mugs and bath towels I surprised him with from time to time. I was so attentive to Harville that if you wanted to know how he was doing, all you had to do was ask me.

Given all I was doing for him, I assumed he felt so lucky to be married to me. Then one day, Harville did something SO completely out of character. He SNAPPED! I'd never seen him so angry. I was shocked. Hurt. And so confused. How could he not appreciate all that I was doing? After he calmed down, he explained that in all my efforts, I'd never actually asked him what he wanted. This was stunning feedback. I'd assumed I already knew, but instead Harville felt utterly eradicated.

In spite of my many efforts, I was failing to meet any of Harville's real needs. I was doing things for him, but I wasn't connecting with him.

The patterns from my childhood wounding fit perfectly with Harville's. Both of Harville's parents died when he was young and he was sent to live with his older sister, Rosa Lee, when he was six. She tried to do everything she could for him. And she was great in many ways. But she had other children to care for. And she was his older sister. So she wasn't as attuned to Harville as his mother had been. How could she be? As a result, Harville felt very lonely. His primary childhood wounding was abandonment.

My doing things for Harville without really being connected with him brought up these same childhood feelings. Once again he was being abandoned, but this time by his wife.

It wasn't a mistake that our childhood wounding fit together so well. Remember, when Romantic Love strikes, you will be drawn to a person whose behaviors make you re-experience the feelings you had with your caregivers.

So remember, your unconscious mind chose your partner. It knew that in order to heal your childhood wounds, you had to feel these emotions again as an adult. Marriage gives you this chance to relive memories and feelings from your childhood, but with a different, happier outcome. As a child you were helpless. As an adult, you have power. You can work with your partner so that each of you gets your needs met.

BUT HERE'S SOME GOOD NEWS

All this may seem like a terrible tangle. But since partnership is designed to resurface feelings from childhood, it means that most of the upset that gets triggered in us during our relationship is from our past. Yes! About 90 percent of the frustrations your partner has with you are really about their issues from childhood. That means only 10 percent or so is about each of you right now. Doesn't that make you feel better?

MYSTERY DECODED!

Romantic Love delivers us into the passionate arms of someone who will ultimately trigger the same frustrations we had with our parents, but for the best possible reason! Doing so brings our childhood wounds to the surface so they can be healed.

You'd think that with this potential for healing, your relationship would get a whole lot better in a hurry. And eventually it will get a whole lot better.

But there's some challenging work to be done first.

Truth #1: Romantic Love Is a Trick

EXERCISE: THEN AND NOW

First:

1. Write down the frustrations you remember that you had with your childhood caregivers and how you felt (you can use "Frustrations Then and Now" on page 157, which is part of the exercise program at the back of the book). The frustrations can be a specific event or a general experience.

Reminder: Caregivers include whoever was responsible for your care when you were a child, for example, a parent, older sibling, relative, or babysitter.

2. List the ongoing frustrations you have with your partner and how these make you feel. List as many as you can--including both petty annoyances and those things that really irritate you.

3. Look over the two lists, noting any similarities.

Then:

Talk over the similarities between the two lists with your partner. As you share, you'll notice the curiosity growing between you. It's hard to feel curious and frustrated at the same time. In the exercise for Truth #7 (Negativity Is a Wish in Disguise) you will practice how to turn the more challenging frustrations you have with your partner into specific requests for growth and healing.

And Remember:

Ninety percent of our frustrations with our partner come from experiences from our past.

That means only 10 percent of the frustrations you currently have are about each other.

TRUTH #2

Incompatibility Is Grounds for Marriage

Harville

Why will the work on your marriage be challenging? Not only is the person you're married to like your parents, but the two of you are also incompatible. It's as if there is a universal design and, mysteriously, our incompatibility seems to be a key piece of this plan. As you'll see, incompatibility plays a crucial role in preparing you and your partner to meet each other's needs.

This is why we say that incompatibility is grounds for marriage.

And, honestly, compatibility is grounds for boredom.

We've seen it time and again. People want to believe they've fallen in love with someone who is a lot like them. But the fact is we're drawn to people who are, in certain ways, our polar opposite. This is why Romantic Love needs to be such a powerful force. Without it, we'd see the truth of our incompatibility right away--and run screaming in the other direction!

Helen and I were really incompatible. I grew up on a sharecropper's farm in rural Georgia. She grew up in a mansion overlooking a lake in Dallas. I was dirt poor. She was Texas-oil rich. My father died just after I was born, leaving my mother alone with nine children on a mortgaged one-hundred-acre farm. Mom died when I was six years old. One of the few things Helen and I had in common was this: I grew up an orphan in the care of my older sisters; she grew up "orphaned" in a house with busy household staff and even busier parents.

Helen is a nester. I am a wanderer. She is internal, and I'm oriented to the outer world. On a car trip, I'd say, "Isn't this scenery great?" Only then would she look up from her needlepoint. Helen has a minimal relationship to time, and I am obsessively punctual. If she knocks and a door doesn't open, she keeps knocking. I go to another door. She likes her vegetables soft. I like mine barely cooked or raw.

Helen is intuitive and understands complexity immediately. I'm logical. By the time I get to the solution, she's at the finish line waiting for me to arrive. Helen is a great multi-tasker. That used to drive me nuts! I'm still better when I focus on one thing at a time.

There's an old song from the movie My Fair Lady, "Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Man?" I can't tell you how many times I've lamented, "Why Can't Helen Be More Like Me?" Unfortunately, this kind of lament can only lead to one thing.???.

ENTER THE POWER STRUGGLE

"You never???"

"You ALWAYS???"

"You're such a???"

Welcome to the dark valley of the Power Struggle. Each of you is deeply entrenched in believing you're right. If only your partner would see how truly wonderful you are. Oh, and also agree to do everything you've asked for (or hinted at, or privately wished for but haven't said), exactly the way you want them to do it. Then everything would be FINE. The Power Struggle is absolutely miserable. But, guess what? Yes, you're catching on.???.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Terry Hayes:

Nowadays reading books are more than want or need but also work as a life style. This reading practice give you lot of advantages. The huge benefits you got of course the knowledge the actual information inside the book that will improve your knowledge and information. The information you get based on what kind of reserve you read, if you want send more knowledge just go with training books but if you want feel happy read one with theme for entertaining for example comic or novel. The particular Making Marriage Simple: Ten Truths for Changing the Relationship You Have into the One You Want is kind of reserve which is giving the reader unpredictable experience.

Jorge Hinkley:

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Kristin Todd:

The book with title Making Marriage Simple: Ten Truths for Changing the Relationship You Have into the One You Want has a lot of information that you can understand it. You can get a lot of advantage after read

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Lloyd Gilbert:

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