

*A new concept for dating and insightful advice*

—Harville Hendrix, Ph.D. and Helen LaKelly Hunt, Ph.D.

# CONSCIOUS DATING

Finding  
the Love  
of Your  
Life &  
the Life  
That You  
Love



David Steele

Revised Second Edition

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*a division of Relationship Coaching Network*

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All personal vignettes, anecdotes, and stories are from my life, the lives of my clients, or people I interviewed. However, names and identifying details have been altered to preserve their privacy.

Conscious Dating: *Finding the Love of Your Life and the Life that You Love*

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*This second edition is dedicated  
to my soul mate, Darlene.  
Finding each other is a fitting and miraculous  
completion of my Conscious Dating journey.  
Our marriage joyfully proves  
that it's never too late to find  
the love of your life and the life that you love.*

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# Introduction

**I**N TODAY'S SOCIETY, we all want the same thing, whether we are single or married, young or old, gay or straight: to love and to be loved. The great majority of us desire a fulfilling life partnership. As social beings, we need intimacy and connection with a community of friends and family, and a committed relationship that meets our emotional, physical, and spiritual needs. As our world grows increasingly complex, personal relationships—the building blocks of our society—seem to suffer. We want to be happy and fulfilled in our most important relationships, but don't seem to know how.

The rules for dating and mating have changed, and up until now you may have been discovering the new rules by trial and error. The good news is that in today's world you are able to live the life that you choose. I hope this book helps you make conscious, wise, and effective relationship choices. Moreover, I sincerely hope you will “find the love of your life and the life that you love.”

Regrettably, one holdover from the past is a misperception that singles are selfish, failures, inadequate, immature, unwanted, and/or unlovable. When that misperception merges with our impatience and desire for immediate gratification—an unfortunate characteristic of today's culture—many singles believe that the path to happiness lies in getting into a relationship as quickly as possible. Typically, after heartbreak and failure, many singles feel confused about how to make relationships work. Thus, you may hesitate to trust yourself and others. Consciously or unconsciously, you may fear commitment. Unsatisfying and painful relationship experiences breed discouragement and defensiveness. This intensifies a fear of intimacy and creates barriers to having the relationship you really want.

You are not alone. Today, there are more single people than ever before: 101 million singles in the United States, which means 46 percent of the adult population. Since 85 percent of adults marry, it

is clear that the great majority of people prefer to be in a committed relationship.<sup>1</sup>

Most singles today want to find their life partner, but are scared and confused, afraid of failure and perplexed about how to succeed. There is a whole growth industry providing solutions for singles, much of which is shallow, exploitive, and worthless. Our high divorce rate suggests that this process is ineffective. As a result, people are increasingly aware of the importance of making good relationship choices, of realizing that infatuation, hope, promises, and good intentions will not help them find and keep the love of their life. Singles like you seem ready and eager to learn how to have conscious, intentional, and successful committed relationships.

In *Conscious Dating*, I hope to help you find your Life Partner efficiently and effectively. However, the quickest route to happiness is not necessarily the best route. I will give you a road map to avoid mirages, dead ends, potholes, and swamps so that you are able to go where you genuinely want and need to be.

Finding the love of your life in today's world means being the pioneer of your destiny. When it comes to relationship choices, there are no guarantees or predictable outcomes, despite romantic promises and fantasies. *Conscious Dating* can help you have the life and relationship that you want by showing you how to make intentional, conscious choices. In these chapters you will learn more about who you really are and how to get what you want in your life. You have many choices. You are not bound by the traditions of the past. You are free to choose the life and relationships that you *really* want.

## WHAT IS "CONSCIOUS DATING?"

Conscious Dating simply means to date with conscious intention. A simple statement that requires definition:

**Dating:** A broad term referring to singles seeking a partner. It is commonly understood that when singles become couples they

graduate from “dating” to being in a “relationship.” What is not commonly understood is that there is more than one kind of dating, as we will discover in Chapter 9.

**Conscious:** Best illustrated by contrasting the following:

### Three Levels of Consciousness

1. **Unconscious:** You’re awake and functioning, but not paying attention. This happens when distracted, multi-tasking, tired, or unaware of the need to pay attention. For example, you’re talking on your cell phone and park your car at a busy mall. When done shopping you can’t find your car because you weren’t paying attention to where you parked.

Some of life’s most tragic events happen when we’re unconscious, such as car accidents, tripping and falling around the house, fires, as well as more benign mishaps like forgetting where you put your keys, leaving the headlights on and being surprised by a dead battery, driving past your freeway exit, etc.

If life is like an iceberg, when we’re unconscious we crash and sink before we see it.

2. **Semi-Conscious:** You believe your own stories. Anything that is not a “fact” is a “story” that you create in your mind. Facts are typically measurable events. Stories are opinions, judgments, and interpretations. For example, you’re talking on your cell phone and park your car at a busy mall, have a vague awareness you should make note of where you parked, then tell yourself “I always remember where I park.” When done shopping you can’t find your car because you convinced yourself you didn’t need to note where you parked.

We make some of our biggest mistakes in life when we’re operating on partial or false information and convince ourselves we know what we’re doing, such as one-night stands, having

unprotected sex, riding a bike without a helmet, jumping into a relationship, etc.

If life is like an iceberg, when we're semi-conscious we're aware of the iceberg and truly believe we know how to avoid it, then crash and sink because it's larger than we thought.

3. **Conscious:** Aware of the big picture; self, others, life, past, present, future. This is when we bring everything we know, have experienced, and have learned to a situation, humbly aware that "you don't know what you don't know." We realize that there may be more to a situation than we can see or understand at the time. We are aware of our goal and do our best to learn more about the situation and examine our options to make the best possible choice.

If life is like an iceberg, when we're conscious we realize that we need to know more about what's under the surface before making our choices about how to proceed.

**Intention:** Making a choice mindful of long-term consequences. Being clear about what you want for your future and acting in alignment with your desired outcomes. This should be a no-brainer, but too often we make choices unconsciously or semi-consciously that sabotage our long-term goals.

Conscious Dating means:

1. Being clear about who you are and what you want
2. Realizing that "you don't know what you don't know" and learning the information, skills and attitudes necessary to be successful
3. Making your life and relationship choices in alignment with what you want, mindful of the long-term consequence of your choices

## **MY STORY**

Like you, I've learned about life and relationships from personal experience. Growing up in a single-parent family, there was no one to show me how to get what I wanted and needed in my life and relationships. I had to learn by trial and error.

One of my first serious relationships led to marriage. My wife and I had married young and unconsciously. There was a lot of tension in our relationship, but I believed that love could conquer all, and if we just worked hard enough we could "make" the relationship work. Not so. It was a hard and devastating lesson, learning the reality of relationships. In 1990, after ten years of marriage, the birth of our daughter, and years of unsuccessful marriage counseling, we divorced. It was the same year I started my private practice as a marriage and family therapist. How ironic.

In 1997, I had been a helping professional for almost two decades, including seven years of full-time private practice. When I decided to become a therapist, I fantasized about being a superhero that, on his own, could lower our country's divorce rate. But through all those years, my work did not seem to be making couples happier or more stable. And, at age forty, my personal life was not looking very positive either.

I'd been running a yellow pages ad offering professional help for "couples in crisis." Couples were continually coming to me seeking support. But rather than saving their marriages, half or more of my clients were still ending up in divorce court. I was burning out.

Today, I look back and wonder, half-jokingly, why I didn't advertise to help "happy couples" or "easy couples." Instead, I was seeing angry and bitter couples on the verge of breaking up. Often, I was the second call they made after first consulting a divorce lawyer. For a long time I felt responsible for saving their marriages, and if I couldn't, it was just a matter of my needing more training and experience. Over time, I discovered that the average success rate for other marriage and family therapists was no better than

mine. I was somewhat comforted by these statistics, but dissatisfied at the same time.

I was in no hurry to remarry. A few years after my divorce, I had started dating a woman who had worked with me at a local counseling clinic. She was fun and attractive and pursued me persistently. We decided to live together. It turned out to be a passionate push-and-pull relationship with lots of chaos and broken promises. In May 1995, I had moved out, determined to regain my sanity and never see her again. Four months later, after some lengthy and intense discussions, I moved back in. That October, we married. She was very eager to have children, but we ran into fertility problems due to her age (she was forty-three) and started costly in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatments.

Under tremendous financial pressure, my entrepreneurial side got creative. I was looking around for ways to expand my practice. One morning in 1997 at the monthly meeting of my men's organization, Robert, an acquaintance who was a vitamin salesman, announced that he was training to become a life coach and was seeking practice clients.

A "life coach"? I thought, "Hey, he's going to charge people for helping them with their lives—that's what I do! Is this a gimmick for practicing without a license?" When I asked him what coaching was about, he smiled and told me that a life or personal coach is someone who helps people achieve their goals and live fulfilling lives. At first, I felt threatened that someone without a graduate degree or a license was seeking to help people be happy and charging them hundreds of dollars to do so!

However, intrigued with the idea of personal or life coaching, I researched the profession of coaching on the Internet and discovered a whole new helping profession had been growing right under my nose. Robert offered to coach me for practice at no charge, so I decided to give it a try.

We started with weekly phone conversations. His approach was awkward at first, obviously reading from a list of prepared "coach-

ing” questions. He was trying really hard and I went along. I worked with him on my dilemma about my career, my passion for helping people have successful relationships, and my burnout as a couples therapist. Within a few weeks, I had a breakthrough idea for a new direction for my practice and a whole new vision for my career. Moreover, this experience piqued my curiosity, and I decided to check out exactly what coaching was all about.

I signed up for training with a large, established professional coaching organization. Its paradigm for helping people sounded familiar to me, given my counseling background, yet seemed very new at the same time. For example, in one exercise I was partnered with another participant and was told to listen and ask questions for five minutes without giving advice or feedback. I could ask questions, but not respond as an expert by telling him what to do or sharing my perspective. This approach to supporting someone was a challenge for the therapist in me! But it was a great exercise in learning how to be present with my client and frame powerful questions that empowered the client to be the expert on his/her life.

I thought: “What if I applied a coaching approach to help my clients in their relationships?” I researched models for relationship coaching, but could find no standard; everyone seemed to be doing his/her own thing. Still, I was impressed by what I had learned and experienced, and I thought seriously about transitioning my practice to relationship coaching.

As part of my introduction to the coaching approach to creating successful relationships, I decided to review and reread a number of the current self-help books on relationships. What I discovered was an oversimplified approach: “Do this” or “Don’t do this.” Yes, relationship self-help books could help couples improve their relationship and singles find a partner in the short term, but not necessarily help find a life partner or create a sustainable lifelong relationship. It was then I decided I wanted to create a comprehensive model for relationship coaching.

At the same time, I was dreading going to my office every day. I

knew I was burning out because I was at the point that I couldn't stand working with my clients anymore. While I had made the decision to work with couples experiencing difficult challenges and was dedicated to keeping them together, I was frustrated with getting so few positive results.

But my discovery of coaching opened up new possibilities and gave me a new direction. One day, I was thinking about the different stages we go through to create a successful life partnership, and I had an epiphany: singles become couples! THAT WAS IT! As a therapist, it had never occurred to me to work with singles. Moreover, I thought that if I started coaching singles and they became couples, I could continue to support them through coaching.

I decided to launch a weekly group in my area to help singles: a "Friday Night Social" in which singles could meet, socialize, and learn about relationships. We talked about how singles could prepare for a committed relationship and set themselves up for success. We outgrew our first space in just three weeks!

In working with singles, I saw a lot of well-educated middle-aged men who worked in the technology industry and who had little clue about how to have a good relationship. I helped them learn basic dating skills, like asking a woman out, and supported them to be more assertive. I met many women who felt they were past their prime, too old, or too overweight. I helped them become more positive and less desperate. It seemed that most singles needed to overcome fears, become more authentic with others, and focus on the big picture of their life and not be in such a desperate hurry to find a relationship.

In January 1998, my wife and I had twin boys. Shortly thereafter, I discovered that she had been addicted to prescription medication for quite some time. I knew there were a lot more medications in the house, but I had assumed they were related to her IVF treatments. She reluctantly went into rehab, relapsed, and went to rehab again multiple times. Finally, the welfare of two beautiful baby boys was at stake. We divorced after two years of denial, conflict, and broken promises.

Certainly in my own life I had made enough relationship choices that didn't work out and learned about unsolvable problems the hard way. As a new relationship coach, my hope was to make the path for others less arduous.

As I expanded my relationship coaching practice, the Friday night singles socials grew more popular. Around this time, I also discovered that many other coaches were holding seminars by telephone to reach wider audiences, so I put together a variety of teleclasses for singles on dating, communication, and other topics. While conducting classes over the telephone was new and awkward at first, I was thrilled at how many people called in from all over the world, and found this new way of teaching to be a lot of fun.

My excitement at the success of my relationship coaching ventures led me to dream big. What if relationship coaching grew so expansively that it resembled McDonald's? Just as easy as it is to find a hamburger anywhere in the world, you could step out your door or pick up your phone and receive solid support with your relationships. How different our world would be! I envisioned how our society would be different if helping professionals from every facet—whether they were therapists, social workers, psychologists, or personal coaches—got together as a unified force to help singles and couples to have successful relationships. This vision inspired the birth of Relationship Coaching Institute.

As I entered into this new millennium, I branched further into the world of professional coaching and developed the niche of relationship coaching. At the same time, I had another huge responsibility: caring for my two-year-old twin boys. As their mother continued to battle her addiction to prescription drugs, I needed to adjust my schedule to work more from home and less in the office. (Today she is doing very well, and though we didn't work as a couple, we're good friends and coparents.) Meanwhile, our divorce was finalized and I had legal custody of my sons. With the breakup of my second marriage, having painfully learned about unsolvable relationship problems the hard way, I felt further inspired to help

singles prepare for relationships in which they could set themselves up for success.

As I write this for the second edition of *Conscious Dating*, Relationship Coaching Institute is in its tenth year, I've learned much about relationships, trained hundreds of relationship coaches. Each relationship has been my teacher and the lessons I've learned helped me find my soul mate, Darlene. It took me awhile, but I finally learned that the journey is as important as the destination, that being single is truly an opportunity to create the life that you really want. My hope is that this book will help you seize your own opportunity to prepare for and find the love of your life and the life that you love.

## **ABOUT THIS BOOK**

In this book you will discover how to avoid the many pitfalls and traps that can hold you back in your journey to find your life partner. You will learn effective principles, tools, and information you can use to find the life and relationship that you really want.

*Conscious Dating* will introduce you to many innovative concepts and tools to help you make conscious, sustainable relationship choices. The first four chapters address “The Mystery of Relationships,” “What Do We Really Want” in relationships, “Why ‘Dating’ Doesn’t Work,” and “The Opportunity of Being Single.”

The remainder of the book is organized around the Ten Principles of Conscious Dating. Following an explanation of each principle, you will find tools, exercises, encouragement, and concrete tips for applying each principle to life and relationships.

The final two chapters cover how to develop a “Conscious Dating Plan” to find a life partner, and how to use a relationship’s “pre-commitment” stage to determine if the relationship is a good long-term choice. Within each chapter, you will find the stories of real singles who

have implemented these dating practices in their own lives. As you follow their relationship journeys and learn the principles and tools for conscious dating, I hope you too will gain clarity about who you are and how you can get what you really want in your life and relationships.

Being single is truly an opportunity. Today, a whole new world begins. You are the pioneer of your own life. Let's begin our journey together. ✨

# The Mystery of Relationships

1

**T**he media today pay very close attention to singles, offering plenty of advice about how to find the perfect partner. This is no accident: there are more single adults today than ever before in history. While today's singles are more aware than ever about how important it is to make careful relationship choices, it can be confusing and frustrating to be flooded with "guidance" that's often shallow or exploitative. In this chapter, we'll discuss some common questions you might have about why so many relationships fail and why dating seems so challenging.

## THE RULES HAVE CHANGED

Every media outlet today seems to be rushing to offer singles the latest solutions to finding and keeping that perfect partner. *Glamour* features "How to Come Back from the Brink," about couples on the verge of divorce who turned their relationship around. eHarmony.com has patented a matchmaking formula to bring singles together in successful relationships. Nerve.com, an online magazine exploring sexuality and culture, is promoting "The Future of Marriage" issue with experts answering all your relationship questions.

We have a powerful need and desire for a successful life partnership. But we grope around in the dark, using trial and error to try to make them work, often learning our lessons the hard way. We have all made relationship choices that led to feelings of confusion and hopelessness. When we are single, we want to be in a relationship. When we are in an unfulfilling relationship, it is often very difficult to accept the status quo and we want to move on. I believe that we all want to be happy. We're just not sure how.

I initially entered the psychology field to understand and help people in relationships. I wanted couples to be happy together. Yet, during most of my years as a therapist, relationships remained a mystery to me. I wondered, for instance, why so many couples allowed their marriages to become so severely troubled before doing something about it. I also questioned why some couples called a divorce lawyer before calling a therapist. I shook my head at the divorce rate, considering the fact that there are over 350,000 licensed mental health professionals in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

---

***We have a powerful need and desire  
for a successful life partnership, which drives us into  
and out of relationships.***

---

**Angela  
Raleigh, North Carolina**

*Angela, a forty-year-old single mother, was more than mystified with her recent relationship. She was feeling just plain lost. Angela's boyfriend of two years had just split town believing, like Moses, that God was calling him to the desert, literally!*

*Last Friday, Matt, her boyfriend, had called and said he urgently needed to talk with her. He was never the urgent type,*

*so her heart pounded when she opened the door at 10 p.m. in her cotton nightgown. She'd asked him to whisper, not sure if her son was still up.*

*"I've been packing all day," Matt said. "My time in Raleigh is through."*

*"Packing?" Angela said, dumbfounded. "I don't understand—" "I wanted to tell you before," Matt said, "but I didn't think you'd understand."*

*"Understand? No, I don't understand!"*

*"Please, Angela," Matt said. "Let me explain."*

*He went on to tell her that a few days earlier, when he had gone camping alone in the mountains, he woke up under the stars and had a vision. "God commanded me to go to Arizona. He says I'll receive further communication when I get there."*

## **Mark** **San Francisco, California**

*The ink was barely dry on Mark's divorce papers when he started to date again. Thirty-five-year-old Mark felt that he'd already spent the last two years of his unhappy marriage grieving and bickering, and was ready to move on. The divorce papers were signed and he had his daughters—ages ten and twelve—every other weekend. This gave the successful market-ing manager lots of free time for his new life as a bachelor.*

*Word seemed to travel quickly that he was single. Socializing with friends for drinks every night also sped up the process of getting out there as a new single. In a short time, his bureau at home was decorated with a number of women's phone numbers written on cocktail napkins.*

*Women were drawn to his financial wealth, as he was to their good looks. But recently, he had a wake-up call when his twelve-year-old daughter told him point-blank: “Dad, women are like Kleenex to you. You use them and throw them away.” That one comment has sent Mark into a period of deep self-reflection.*

## **Cathy** **Denver, Colorado**

*Cathy, age thirty-eight, was grieving the end of her ten-year codependent marriage. Cathy was devastated that she and her husband were splitting up. In a bold move to regain her self-confidence, Cathy signed up for my Conscious Dating Relationship Success Training for Singles (RESTS) class. She’d been battling depression for years and was now reaching out to connect with a more supportive community.*

*I recommended a book to her—Rebuilding: When Your Relationship Ends. The author, Bruce Fisher, compared the healing process after a divorce to climbing a mountain composed of nineteen different “rebuilding blocks.” Fisher says it takes time and effort to get past the emotional pain; finishing the climb is what counts, not how long it takes.*

*Over time, Cathy would let the words sink in. She realized she couldn’t expect herself to wake up happy and different tomorrow; this was going to take time, maybe a long time. But she was committed to her journey to rediscover herself and find her life partner.*

## **Seth** **New York City**

*Seth hopped onto the train to downtown Manhattan for his midday lunch date. At 2 p.m., he would take the train back to*

*work. At 6 p.m., he would meet his dinner date in midtown. To an outsider, this thirty-year-old gay man's dating life might seem hectic and frenzied. But he was on a mission to find the love of his life. After five years of living in Manhattan, Seth had had enough of the Greenwich Village gay bar circuit.*

*When he first moved to the city from suburban New Jersey, he was only looking for sex. He had a long string of one-night stands, mostly with muscular white men who were attracted to his "exotic" appearance. (Seth was a clean-cut, five-foot-six first-generation American of Korean descent.) Seth did not want to be anyone's "boy toy" again. He knew that hooking up with guys was easy; the challenging part was staying together.*

*After his last breakup a few months earlier—the first time he'd lived with another man—Seth came up with a plan for finding his next and, hopefully, last relationship. He placed numerous ads online in search for "a monogamous, honest, intelligent, spiritual, financially responsible partner." Now he was going out on two or three dates a day (lunch, dinner, drinks)—yes, it was a feat! Dating was his assignment, and his life partner was his "degree."*

## **Dorothy Houston, Texas**

*It seemed like one of the craziest things Dorothy had ever done in her life. The weekend after she had dropped by the video dating office, Dorothy, age fifty-five, sat down to call her potential matches. Each time she reached a man's voice mail, she took a deep breath, trying her best to listen to his greeting, and then said in her friendliest, most outgoing voice, "Hi! This is Dorothy! I got your number from—"*

*Dorothy had been divorced for two decades. She'd been in and out of short-term relationships, but longed to get married again.*

*Joining a video dating service for the first time in her life was a very bold move! But when the service sent her ten possible matches, her fear turned to excitement.*

## ANYTHING GOES

As I stated in the Introduction, there are 101 million singles in the United States, which is 46 percent of the adult population. Twenty five percent of all households are single occupants, compared with 17 percent in 1970. And the marriage rate is at its lowest in thirty years.<sup>2</sup> I see many singles traveling to a vague destination without a map or compass. They seem unsure of where they are going and feel off-track without knowing why. I like to refer to our society as the Anything Goes Culture. Today, we have an infinite number of choices and, as a relationship coach, I love this! Change brings about personal growth and evolution. But it can also be overwhelming. Without the security of tradition to lean on, singles are often left groping around in the dark.

---

- **101 million singles in the United States, 46 percent of the adult population**
  - **25 percent of all households are single occupants**
  - **Marriage rate is at its lowest in thirty years**
  - **For every marriage, there is about one divorce**
  - **More than 85 percent of all adults marry at least once**
  - **The majority of first-born children are now conceived by, or born to, unmarried parents**
- 

With our new freedom of choice come growing pains. As a father, I've seen my children learn about behavior and consequences. A lamp breaks, for example, and a child naively thinks he or she can

lie and get away with it. Children often think magically, and are in denial of reality. However, many adults also are still learning about consequences. We have unprotected sex and get pregnant. Or we jump into a relationship after dating for two weeks and then wonder why it doesn't work out.

Recently, I was discussing these issues with another relationship coach and he said to me, "We've been raised on movies and TV shows to believe that it's all about the romance and climactic moments. Despite popular 'reality' shows, because of the cameras, we never really see the reality of everyday life. It's not about going out into the world and finding that perfect partner. We need to see that we, as individuals, are a part of the big puzzle. This fairy-tale image ignores our responsibility for our choices and adds to our confusion about our relationships."

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***It's our responsibility to be conscious***

***about where we are in life***

***if we are to find our own happiness.***

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In our culture we are goal-oriented and consumer-driven. We want what we want, when we want it. Many of us are concerned with looking good and obtaining certain material things, and we believe that's what will make us happy. But even when we get all those things, we are not happy and we don't understand why. Similarly, in relationships, we pair up and expect to be happy. Once again, we need to understand that it's our responsibility to be conscious about where we are in life if we are to find our own happiness.

Moreover, for many of us, our role models—our parents—are divorced, and there is divorce all around us. For every marriage today, there is about one divorce. More than 85 percent of all adults

marry at least once. The majority of first-born children are now conceived by or born to unmarried parents. And there are more single people today than ever in history.<sup>3</sup> When I study these statistics, I find it amazing that so many people are doing this committed relationship thing at all.

And yet, they are. Couples everywhere continue to make their vows. And as I write this, despite political resistance, same-sex couples are tying the knot legally for the first time in history. While many view gay marriage as radical, I see it differently. Gay couples want the same thing everyone else wants—lifelong commitment and family—so they are actually making very traditional choices. What’s amazing to me is that even though we have so many lifestyle alternatives today, we all seem to share a common goal—a fulfilling life partnership.

\* \* \*

*At the gym, Angela cranked up the speed dial on the treadmill, imagining that she was the one running away from Matt. “Go, go, go!” she repeated to her herself, beads of sweat dripping down the sides of her face. “He’s such a spoiled brat. He doesn’t know how good he had it with me.”*

*Her back was wet. She hurried, as if she were late for her own plane.*

*Matt had been her first long-term relationship since her divorce ten years earlier. Angela knew that divorcing before age thirty was not uncommon. She’d just read a story in the morning’s paper about the so-called “starter marriage,” a phenomenon happening in every demographic of society, in which a union lasts just a few years and ends before children arrive. The article said the most common time for a marriage to end in divorce was in the first five years.*

*Angela and Matt had celebrated her fortieth birthday the previous month with a weekend getaway to a beach house at Cape*

*Lookout. Matt had always treated her like a princess. Every Saturday, after her son's father picked him up, she and Matt dashed off to a local bed and breakfast, drank mimosas at brunch, and picked up box seats for the symphony in the evening. Matt had been living off an inheritance for the past few years since his father had died. Angela's salary as a social worker had never afforded her much room to splurge, so weekends out of town with Matt were a treat.*

---

***Angela's salary as a social worker  
had never afforded her  
much room to splurge, so weekends  
out of town with Matt were a treat.***

---

*Still, she was never sure how he spent his days, exactly. Whenever she asked, Matt rambled on about playing bridge, watching basketball, or going fishing. He didn't have many close friends. Matt often talked about moving in together someday and how he wanted to be a role model for her son.*

*"God, I'm such a fool!" Angela thought. Then she laughed, wondering if she was talking to the same God who had spoken to Matt.*

*"Hey there," a deep voice resonated from beside her. "How's it going?"*

*Angela opened her eyes (not realizing they were closed) and turned to see Jerry jogging on the treadmill to her right. He was going much slower than she was.*

*"Fine," she lied, feeling resentful for the interruption in her thoughts. "And you?"*

*“What a nice surprise to see you here in the morning. Usually I see you working out after work.”*

*“Yes,” Angela replied, thinking that if she kept her answers short, he would leave her alone. She wasn’t feeling very social.*

*Jerry was a tall, athletic, gray-haired man in his mid-forties. They usually ran into each other in the sauna following an after-work workout. Last week, they talked about her clogged kitchen sink. Jerry had suggested a way she could get all that gunk out of her pipes without calling a plumber. Although he was a nice guy and she was impressed by his plumbing knowledge, she didn’t feel like talking to him right now. She focused her blue-gray eyes back on the treadmill screen and sped up her pace.*

*“Maybe I’ll see you in the sauna,” Jerry said, stepping off the treadmill onto the rug next to her.*

*“Yeah, maybe.” She didn’t want to meet him in the sauna today, so she decided to wait until he left, even if it meant being late for work. Upset about Matt, she spent this “waiting” time sadly reflecting on yet another failed relationship.*

\* \* \*

## **PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE**

Until recent generations, men and women dated, married, had families, and rarely divorced. Not long ago, there were clear rules for relationships—in which couples did not focus on personal fulfillment or happiness—and stayed together “till death do us part.”

Then our society changed. I think that the biggest change impacting relationships is that we’ve developed a need to be “happy.” This is a dramatic shift from past generations who were quite satisfied

surviving and achieving some measure of comfort and security for themselves and their family.

The need for happiness sounds very simple and innocent, but it's the primary reason for failed relationships today. As a consequence, we have consistently high incidences of divorce, single-parent families, mental and physical health problems, juvenile delinquency, welfare, and so on. While we seek to be happy in relationships, we don't seem to know how.

But how did all the rules change, exactly? During the '60s, we saw a tremendous shift in the roles of men and women in our society. As we started to question our tasks in the household and workplace, technology was changing rapidly too. Women now had access to birth control, which meant that sex could be for recreation, not just procreation. In 1973, abortion was legalized and the stigma of divorce was disappearing. With the rise of feminism, women had so many more choices. This dramatically changed the rules and, for better or worse, the dance of courtship changed too.

A couple of generations back, it was the man who asked the woman out on a date and paid the bill. Today, there is no set protocol. The most common response I hear from single women when I ask them who should pay for the date is "We'll go dutch." Moreover, most women are going to drive themselves to a first date, rather than wait by the door to be picked up. Today's woman does not want to be beholden to a man. Sometimes I witness that women feel uncomfortable with this new and powerful role. Other times, it is men who are feeling insecure or intimidated, unsure about how to relate to assertive and strong females.

Having no set rules in dating can be confusing. While many single women prefer to split the bill on a first date, I've heard many stories about women who "test" the man by waiting for him to first offer to pay—even though, in the end, she'll insist on splitting it. And I've heard that some men will "test" a woman on the first date, say, by unlocking the car door on her side and opening it for her,

and then waiting to see if she reaches across and unlocks his door. It seems as if both men and women want to be reassured that if they're going to give, they're also going to receive.

The fact that families look different today has also changed the dance of courtship. Now it's common to have two-career households—in which the woman sometimes earns more than the man—so the role of provider is up for grabs. Many are putting off marriage and childbearing until later in life, focusing more on career and self first. Then, when couples do finally get together, they might hear the woman's biological clock ticking. Or, after the babies arrive, they might have a hard time dealing with the loss of autonomy. Moreover, now that gays and lesbians are mostly out of the closet and in the mainstream, they are creating their own dance of courtship.

In general, I think that we are smarter nowadays, and perhaps more cynical. We fear commitment today more than we did in the past. We no longer believe that tying the knot equals a happily-ever-after fairy tale.

To be sure, there are many cultures around the world that follow the conservative traditions of past generations, in which men and women have very defined roles in a family. This is further proven by the popularity of radio talk show hosts such as Dr. Laura Schlessinger and Rush Limbaugh and by groups such as the Promise Keepers. Leaders such as President George W. Bush are attempting to bring back life-long monogamy with programs to promote healthy marriage.

These groups seem to be clashing with the predictions of some futurists who say that Americans will marry at least four times and have extramarital affairs. One futurist bases her predictions on trends showing women becoming more financially independent, with marriage and childbearing becoming more “delinked,” “serial monogamy” becoming more acceptable, and extramarital sexual affairs occurring more frequently and with less public outcry. She sees singles of the next century moving through at least four kinds of marriages, which are the following:<sup>4</sup>

## **FUTURIST VISION OF MARRIAGE**

### **1. The Icebreaker Marriage**

This has many similarities to the “starter marriage” that was mentioned above. The first union will be “the icebreaker marriage,” in which couples learn how to live together and become sexually experienced. Icebreaker marriages are likely to last no more than five years. Once disillusionment sets in, couples will split up, as divorce will not carry any stigma.

### **2. The Parenting Marriage**

The second marriage, known as “the parenting marriage,” will last fifteen to twenty years. These couples will view raising children as their primary purpose, although child-rearing in the future will be in communal settings, not nuclear families.

### **3. The Self-Marriage**

After the second marriage ends, couples may enter a third union, called a “self-marriage,” in which partners pursue self-discovery and self-actualization.

### **4. The Soul Mate Marriage**

Finally, because people will be living until age 120, many couples will reach for a late-in-life “soul mate connection.” In this fourth kind of marriage, couples will discover “marital bliss, shared spirituality, physical monogamy and equal partnership.”

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## **FUTURIST VISION OF MARRIAGE**

- 1. Icebreaker marriage**
  - 2. Parenting marriage**
  - 3. Self-marriage**
  - 4. Soul mate marriage**
- 

As the past and future bump into one another in today’s world, singles seem to be focused on these five critical questions:

1. How can I find my life partner?
2. Where do I meet compatible singles?

3. Why, in spite of my best efforts and intentions, do my relationships seem to fail?
4. Why do relationships seem to be so natural and easy for some, and so challenging for others?
5. Why do so many people claim that marriage and family are their highest priorities, and then act indifferent—or even hostile—to those closest to them?

It's an interesting phenomenon that even though we are not following any set of rules, in the end, most of us want to be in a committed relationship. Linda J. Waite and Maggie Gallagher, researchers who have conducted hundreds of studies and surveys, concluded that most young Americans want marriage but at the same time fear it. In their book, *The Case for Marriage: Why Married People Are Happier, Healthier, and Better Off Financially*, they state that marriage is more than just a sheet of paper. Marriage is an “insurance policy” that more often than not brings couples long lives, good health, fat bank accounts, and personal happiness.<sup>5</sup>

---

***Marriage is an “insurance policy”***

***that more often than not brings couples long lives,  
good health, fat bank accounts,  
and personal happiness.***

—Waite and Gallagher

---

Yet with this freedom of choice, I see so many singles leaping into relationships without using good judgment. They make choices based on impulse without much conscious thought. What's astounding to me is that when we enter a committed relationship, we do not intend to fail. We truly believe this is going to be for life. I entered

each of my first two marriages with 100 percent commitment. I did not envision myself getting divorced. What motivated me to specialize in working with couples were the serious and traumatic consequences of divorce. Getting together is a natural drive. We are social beings, and getting together with a partner is a strong instinct. In spite of the fear of many singles of being alone forever, relationships happen naturally. We're going to get together anyway. The trick is staying together.

\* \* \*

*Angela was a social worker in early intervention and prevention services. At work, she was relieved to focus on something other than Matt and his sudden departure. At lunch, Angela had plans to meet her friend Gretchen at the cafeteria downstairs. They had been friends since college and worked two blocks away from each other. When Angela trudged into the cafeteria, her face was sullen.*

*"Come here, Honey," Gretchen said. "You look like a wreck."*

*"Oh, thanks for the compliment," Angela said, half-jokingly. She talked for ten minutes nonstop, telling Gretchen about Matt's urgent call about his "order from God." She gazed out the window. "Maybe he's out in the Arizona desert right now, speaking with God."*

*Gretchen looked into her eyes: "Honey, you're the one who's just been saved."*

\* \* \*

Like Angela, most of us need and want a committed relationship. However, the divorce rate is not going down, and the marriage rate is not going up. I asked a roundtable of relationship coaches what they considered to be the biggest challenges facing singles today. There is still such a stigma about being single in our society, and a

prime motivation for me as a relationship coach is to overcome this.

The coaches came up with a long list of challenges, including:

1. Not knowing what you're looking for; having unclear expectations
2. Having a long "grocery list" and looking for the one person to match it
3. Living in fear that you will repeat past experiences
4. Not healing before starting a new relationship
5. For women, feeling that their biological clock is running out
6. For men, fearing to start a family and stay committed
7. Lowering of standards by older singles, or giving up or settling because they're afraid they will always be alone
8. Knowing where to meet other singles with whom you might be compatible
9. Too busy to date or cultivate a relationship
10. Discouragement of not finding someone that meets your expectations
11. Expectations for sex
12. Cynicism
13. Getting involved too quickly
14. Not knowing where to meet suitable partners
15. "There are no good men, no good women" mentality
16. Pressure from family or peers to be coupled
17. Not having the skills to create a successful relationship
18. Fear of failure
19. Fear of rejection
20. Fear of commitment
21. Shyness
22. Seems easier to stay single

23. Exhaustion—children, careers, hobbies consume your energy
24. Determining when to introduce children

Today's singles carry around many fears. For those of us who grew up surrounded by confusing relationships—like bickering parents who ended up divorcing—it can be challenging to envision a successful relationship. Many of us have been affected so deeply by our pasts that we carry around negative attitudes about relationships. Many singles are feeling frustrated, discouraged, and cynical about relationships. Yet our biggest goal in life remains to love and be loved by a life partner. ✨

### **CONSCIOUS DATING PLAN EXERCISE NO. 1:**

*Please refer to Chapter 15 to write your answers.*

#### **Are you ready to date?**

1. Have you been hurt in a relationship? How does being hurt affect your being single?
2. Do you believe that happiness in a relationship is really possible? (In subsequent chapters, you will see how your beliefs affect your life decisions.)
3. Do you believe that your next relationship can really be your last? (In subsequent chapters, you will look at how your beliefs affect your life choices.)
4. What do you think a fulfilling life partnership would look like?

# What Do We Really Want?

# 2

We all want to love and be loved. But what does this actually mean? A committed relationship is more than a biological drive to ensure the survival of species. I will show the many real benefits to being in a loving and committed relationship.

## STARTING OVER

*Cathy, age thirty-eight, was grieving the end of her ten-year codependent marriage. She had been battling depression for years, and was now reaching out to experience a more supportive community. Cathy was devastated that she and her husband were splitting up.*

*Cathy decided to leave Denver, where she'd spent the past fifteen years. At the same time, she was worried that maybe she was running away from all her anger and grief. Still, she wanted a radical change to lift her out of her sadness. She just wanted to start over again. Cathy was already making some bold changes. For one, she called her father and had a heart-to-heart talk in which she told him how bad things really were in her marriage. She told her father the truth: that her ex had refused to see a therapist or attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Her father, a recovering alcoholic himself, was very supportive. He asked Cathy to move back home for a while. She felt grateful.*

*In the meantime, Cathy was working hard in her RESTS class. She spent every night for one week working on a collage that*

*illustrated how she envisioned her life. Since she was about to embark on a big change—leaving her job and home, moving back in with her father—creating a picture of what she wanted in her life seemed like a good idea. Cathy sat on her floor with numerous magazines about travel, family, and adventure. She cut out about fifty pictures and glued them onto a poster board. There were beaches, families eating together, children laughing, flowers, and couples dancing and kissing. After hanging the collage on her living room wall, Cathy stood back and admired it. Maybe, just maybe, she would love again.*

---

***After hanging the collage  
on her living room wall, Cathy stood  
back and admired it. Maybe,  
just maybe, she would love again.***

---

## **WANTING A SOUL MATE**

No matter how old we are, we all want to love and be loved. A recent national survey conducted by the Gallup Organization stated that 94 percent of young adults said that finding a “soul mate” was one of their highest goals. There was a discussion about this survey on one of the discussion lists I subscribe to. Shannon, an articulate eighteen-year-old about to graduate from high school, was writing about her anxieties about the future. “Unlike our parents and grandparents, my generation hasn’t worried about suffering through the Great Depression or surviving Vietnam,” she said. “Instead, we’ve grown up fearing AIDS, divorce, and school shootings.”<sup>1</sup>

Shannon’s parents, like many of her friends’ parents, were divorced. She could think of only three friends whose mothers and fathers were still together. In third grade, Shannon had attended a support group for children of divorced families. I asked her about it. “My

counselor seemed very old, with too much eye makeup and crookedly applied orange lipstick,” she told me. “The last thing I wanted to do was sit in her office with ten other kids, discussing my private family life. At our first meeting, the counselor had us repeat this phrase: ‘It is not my fault that my parents got a divorce.’ The thought that the divorce had been my fault had never crossed my mind.”

---

***When I get married, I will never entertain  
the idea of divorce. Never.***

***If I have to wait until***

***I'm eighty to find the right person, I will.***

***Marriage is not like going steady—it's forever.***

---

“I know that for my parents, divorce was best,” she added. “But I also know that when I get married, I will never entertain the idea of divorce. Never. If I have to wait until I’m eighty to find the right person, I will. Marriage is not like going steady—it’s forever. I hope the rest of my generation feels the same way.”

Shannon’s certainty about relationships struck me. She’s not alone. In 2005, two nationally prominent family experts—David Popenoe, a professor and former dean at Rutgers University, and Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, an author and social critic—published their annual “State of Our Unions” report, saying that 82 percent of girls and 70 percent of boys stated that having a good marriage and family life was “extremely important” to them.<sup>2</sup> In 2001, these two researchers had published a Gallup survey on young adults in their twenties that found that most singles today are looking for a spouse who will be their soul mate for life. Some of the highlights from the report—called “Who Wants to Marry a Soul Mate?”—include:

- Ninety-four percent of never-married singles agree that “when you marry, you want your spouse to be your soul mate, first and foremost.”
  - A large majority of young adults (82 percent) agree it is unwise for a woman to rely on marriage for financial security.
  - Over 80 percent of women agree it is more important to them to have a husband who can communicate about his deepest feelings than to have a husband who makes a good living.
  - A high percentage of young adults (86 percent) agree that marriage is hard work and a full-time job.
  - Close to nine out of ten (88 percent) agree that the divorce rate is too high, and 47 percent say that the laws should be changed so that divorces are more difficult to get.
- 

***“When you marry you want your spouse  
to be your soul mate, first and foremost.”***

---

The Gallup survey highlighted the hopes of young people, but what’s really going on with today’s couples? Nearly nine in ten people expect to marry sometime in their lives, but about half of first marriages end in divorce according to a report released in 2002 by the Commerce Department’s Census Bureau. The same month that the Census Bureau released its report—the first comprehensive portrait of marriage and divorce in nearly ten years—*The Christian Science Monitor* ran an article headlined “America’s on/off relationship with wedlock.”<sup>3</sup>

Staff writer Laurent Belsie summed up the report in this way: “Americans revere wedlock. Nearly nine out of ten of them will tie the knot sometime in their lives, more than the citizens of most other countries. There’s only one problem. Americans seem more enamored with the institution than with each other.”

Indeed, the figures seemed to prove just that. Two-thirds of twenty-five- to twenty-nine-year-old women had married, but only 12 percent had been through a divorce. Using a mathematical model and the assumption that today's newly married couples would go through the same transitions as their predecessors, the Census Bureau projected that half of those marriages could fall apart.

"Those figures are really ballpark," cautioned Rose Kreider, coauthor of the report, in *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Still, Belsie concluded: "In the view of some experts, America's newest newlyweds, for all their idealism about finding a soul mate, often fall short on the glue that makes match-ups last."

Popenoe and Whitehead conclude that Americans haven't given up on marriage as a cherished ideal. Indeed, most continue to prize and value it as an important life goal, and the vast majority (an estimated 85 percent) will marry at least once in a lifetime.<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

*Angela, the divorced single mother whom you met in Chapter 1, was devastated after Matt split town. Every weekend, she came home to a dark and empty house. She turned on the oven to heat up a frozen dinner. One Friday, she sat down at the kitchen table and flipped through the bills. The only sound was the shuffling of papers. Her ex-husband had picked their son up from school.*

*Then she noticed that her answering machine was blinking. Maybe Matt had left a message saying this had all been a big mistake and he was flying back to Raleigh. She pushed the play button:*

*"Hi Honey! Wondered if you wanted to go out for dinner downtown, my treat—"*

*It was her friend Gretchen, who probably knew that Angela was*

*moping around. But she didn't have the energy to drag herself out tonight. Maybe tomorrow.*

*Angela set up a tray in front of the TV, something she prohibited her son from doing. (They always ate dinner together in the dining room so they could talk.) She poured herself a beer and sat down with her dinner. Flipping through the channels, she passed a few sitcoms. Then she paused for a moment on a news special about grieving. She put down the remote.*

*The news anchor was interviewing a middle-aged male psychologist: "It's important to make time for the healing process. Too often, we are encouraged to be strong and keep it all inside."*

*The doctor raised his hands for effect: "This only serves to keep the former loved one on your mind and you frustrated."*

*Then the camera focused on a woman in her early forties, dressed in a blue suit: "After my ex-husband and I split up, I spent three years alone. When I finally started dating again, I thought I'd found the love of my life—"*

*Angela picked at her enchilada without looking, paying close attention to the TV. "Wow, that could be me!" she thought.*

*The woman on TV went on to say that after one year, her boyfriend suddenly dumped her. She vowed to remain single until the end of her life, gained twenty pounds, and spent nights and weekends alone at home. Then, for her birthday, a friend signed her up for a local self-help class on grieving and healing. Not wanting to hurt her friend's feelings, she reluctantly went. The first night, the class leader instructed everyone to write out a list detailing 100 things they wanted to do and to have in their lives.*

*Angela listened carefully, taking mental notes. After the show ended, she turned the TV off and got a notebook from her desk. She imagined that she had ten billion dollars and only ten years*

*left to live. What would she want to do? What would she want to be? What would she want to have?*

---

***She imagined that she had ten billion dollars and only ten years left to live. What would she want to do? What would she want to be? What would she want to have?***

---

*At first, the list flowed easily: “I want to have a house with a large garden and a swimming pool. I want to have picnic dinners with my friends and family, with fresh grilled vegetables and lots of laughter. I want to learn how to swing dance. I want to feel loved and worthy and supported.” An hour passed, and she had written down over fifty items. She was exhausted. She left her notebook open and went to bed.*

*The next morning, over coffee, Angela continued her list and easily got to one hundred items. She couldn’t believe how easy it was to write about her dream life. It made her feel alive to imagine what she wanted instead of focusing on her broken heart.*

\* \* \*

## **THE MIRACLE OF CONNECTION**

The desire for partnership is pervasive and universal. It reaches back to the origin of species and spans almost every culture and civilization. We all seek relationships to find love, happiness, security, healing. But what exactly is a “soul mate”? Is it the same as your life

partner? Is it your husband or wife? Is it your significant other? In your own life, who and what exactly are you looking for?

Finding your soul mate is not about putting together two pieces of a puzzle. There is not just one possible match for everyone. You don't have to go out and find your one other, unique piece. There are many possible partners with whom you could have a loving and lasting relationship—as long as they are aligned with your requirements, wants, and needs. (You will read more about this in Chapter 5.) Finding your soul mate isn't just a romantic idea—it's a functional one. The chemistry between you is strong. You love this person and feel loved by him/her. You have a connection on every level—mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual.

---

***Your soul mate can be the person***

***who's best suited to bring out (what can seem to be)  
your worst nightmare.***

---

One of my colleagues, Hedy Schleifer, who conducts workshops for couples worldwide, refers to being with your soul mate as “the miracle of connection.” While we are often attracted to “incompatible” people, our differences actually create our best opportunities for connection. According to Hedy, your soul mate can be the person who's best suited to bring out (what can seem to be) your worst nightmare. While there's an alignment between you and your partner—he/she fits your goals and values—there's also enough difference so that this person encourages you to grow and evolve. We all want to be connected, but connecting can be challenging when life gets busy and our minds are so full of noise. Hedy—who has been married to her partner, Yumi, for over forty years—says that they spent many years preoccupied with their own individual thoughts and feelings. They had to learn how to be truly present for each

other when there was tension or conflict. Hedy says the real miracle is that when we experience a conflict we have the ability to “leave the country we live in and walk over the narrow bridge to visit the other person... In this moment, we relax together and feel something that we were born to feel—completely connected and aligned with each other.”<sup>5</sup>

In the midst of conflict, when one partner is actually able to hold the other partner in his/her experience with a completely open mind, “limbic resonance” results. “Limbic resonance” is a physical experience in which both nervous systems connect and relax together in a blissful state of essence that allows us to let go and transcend even our biggest differences. Isn’t this the state we would all strive to experience consistently? Hedy assures us that when we learn and apply the tools to resolve conflict, we evolve into our true essential nature and can experience the connection and fulfillment in our relationships that we really want.

---

***Happiness is limited, self-centered, and unconscious;  
it is prone to boredom,  
saturation, and satiation.***

***But fulfillment in a relationship is conscious and  
unlimited, and can only be achieved  
in connection with our partner.***

---

Your limbic system can be your friend, but it can also be destructive. What’s interesting is that this same limbic system that causes us to feel good can also cause us to feel threatened and make us feel that our partner is a threat, and then we argue. The very source of a lot of relationship pain and conflict is also the source of bliss.

That's why Hedy calls our limbic system "the old brain" (which controls our fight or flight response). Staying in conscious connection with our partner creates new neural pathways in the brain and enhances "object constancy" so we can experience love even when hurting or upset. We really can stay connected and give and receive love deeply, even during conflict.

I used to tell singles that we all want to be happy in a fulfilled partnership. Then Hedy pointed out that "happiness" and "fulfillment" are different: happiness is limited, self-centered, and unconscious; it is prone to boredom, saturation, and satiation. But fulfillment is conscious and unlimited, and can only be achieved in connection with our partner.

---

***We want to be independent, yet we don't want  
to be alone. We want to avoid pain,  
yet we compel ourselves to find someone  
with whom we can be vulnerable.***

---

## LOVE AND SURVIVAL

In her book *Anatomy of Love: A Natural History of Mating, Marriage and Why We Stray*, Helen Fisher, Ph.D., points out that "marriage is a cultural universal; it predominates in every society in the world. Over 90 percent of all American men and women marry; modern census records go back to the mid-1800s."<sup>6</sup> Yet, why do we marry? And moreover, why do we get divorced and then remarry? We seem to have a powerful need and desire for coupling that drives us into and out of relationships.

We want to be independent, yet we don't want to be alone. We want to avoid pain, yet we compel ourselves to find someone with whom

we can be vulnerable. Are committed relationships simply a biological drive to ensure the survival of the species? I don't think so. As humans, we pride ourselves in rising above our primitive instincts and biological programming. So, what do we really want? Certainly, the young adults interviewed in the Gallup poll knew that finding a soul mate was very important in their future.

Still, we have no good relationship model to follow. While marriage is "a cultural universal," so is divorce. Fisher traces the history of marriage through the agrarian age and the Industrial Revolution. She writes that "all sorts of sociological, psychological, and demographic forces contribute to divorce rates." Some of these forces, according to Fisher, are individualism, self-fulfillment, financial freedom, and "nomadism" (the fact that most of us have moved away from home):<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes we are so overwhelmed by thoughts and feelings that we don't really know what we want. Some of us are exhausted by our careers, children, or hobbies. We feel too busy to date or begin to cultivate a relationship. We find it difficult to express our feelings. We are still dealing with baggage from previous relationships. We are afraid of failure or rejection.

---

***"Love and intimacy are at the root  
of what makes us sick and  
what makes us well,  
what causes sadness and what brings happiness,  
what makes us suffer and what leads to healing."***

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I've always been impressed by the way Dr. Dean Ornish, clinical professor of medicine at the University of California in San

Francisco, writes about love. In his book *Love and Survival*, he says “love and intimacy are at the root of what makes us sick and what makes us well, what causes sadness and what brings happiness, what makes us suffer and what leads to healing. If a new drug had the same impact, virtually every doctor in the country would be recommending it for their patients.”<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Ornish says we are creatures of community:

Those individuals, societies, and cultures who learned to take care of each other, to love each other, and to nurture relationships with each other during the past several hundred years were more likely to survive than those who did not.... The real epidemic in our culture is not only physical heart disease, but also what I call emotional and spiritual heart disease—that is, the profound feelings of loneliness, isolation, alienation, and depression that are so prevalent in our culture with the breakdown of the social structures that used to provide us with a sense of connection and community.

As a society, we have secured our physical needs. Psychologist Abraham Maslow defines a “hierarchy of needs.” In this hierarchy, once our physical needs for food, air, sleep, shelter, and sex are met, we pursue our higher-order needs, such as emotional needs for love and pleasure, belonging, and spiritual needs of meaning and purpose. As one need is satisfied, we move to fulfill another need. Our needs for belonging, meaning, and self-actualization also drive us to search for committed, monogamous relationships.

## **SEVEN BENEFITS OF A COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP**

There are many benefits to a committed relationship beyond the obvious survival of the species. I was a marriage counselor for many years, yet I didn’t know what the real benefits of a relationship were. Based on recent research, I believe these are what we really want in our lives:

### **1. Companionship**

We are social beings who are comforted by closeness. Married people are healthier and happier and live longer than singles.

Most people have similar needs for companionship. At the end of the day, we all need appreciation, positive strokes, and quality time together. If you look behind these basics, all of us have an emotional need to love and be loved.

## 2. Intimacy

Intimacy means connection, not just feeling good. All of us want intimacy in our lives, but it can be challenging. We want to be close, but not too close. We can't handle too much closeness. There's this closeness-distance dance that most of us do: "Come here, come here, come here. Oh, that's too close!" And then, "Get away, get away, get away!" In a committed relationship, emotional closeness, love, trust, and mutual support improve over time. These qualities are much more difficult to achieve outside of a committed relationship.

Author Pat Love, Ed.D., in her book *The Truth About Love* explains that one of the physical benefits of intimacy is oxytocin. This "cuddle drug" is the hormone secreted by nursing mothers and after orgasm by both partners. Moreover, it is released in positive and healthy relationships in the presence of a long-term partner. Oxytocin is what makes us feel connected and blissful just being with him/her.

In an intimate relationship, we can truly grow emotionally. Satisfying intimacy requires skills that can only be learned in a committed relationship. You can't learn relationship skills alone! My colleague, Hedy Schleifer, once expressed this in a way that really struck me. She said, "Intimacy and love expand our essence and can deepen and grow infinitely." Over time, in a committed and intimate relationship, we can learn to:

- a. be fully present and receive our partner fully during good and hard times.
- b. communicate our issues and needs immediately with love and acceptance of our partner.
- c. stay connected when upset (instead of withdrawing or attacking)

- d. express frustration positively, with an attitude of generosity and adventure for the opportunity to connect more deeply and grow even more.
- e. receive our partner's issues and requests positively, welcoming them as opportunities to connect more deeply and grow even more.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to be in this kind of an intimate relationship? It is completely possible. Philosopher Martin Buber sums up intimacy beautifully: "When I meet thou, we are in eternal time."

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***Intimacy and love  
expand our essence and can  
deepen and grow infinitely.***

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### 3. Family

Both children and adults thrive in an environment of stable, long-term, multigenerational relationships. Indeed, we all have a survival of the species drive within us. The fact that we come together to have children is outside of our awareness; it's an inborn force. Still, in the end, it's certainly a benefit to stay together in a supportive environment.

In 2002, *Why Marriage Matters: Twenty-One Conclusions from the Social Sciences*, emphasized the fact that children do well when raised by loving, healthy, and committed parents. (My motive here is not to push unmarried people to get married as if that in itself could help them and their children. I'm talking about two parents who get along, i.e., are not an abusive relationship.) In this report, thirteen of the top scholars on family life shared their findings on decades of research. The report showed that parental divorce reduces the likelihood that children will graduate from college and achieve high-status jobs. Children who live with their own two married parents enjoy better physical health on average than chil-

dren in other family forms. The health advantages of married homes remain even after taking into account socioeconomic status. Moreover, parental divorce approximately doubles the odds that adult children will end up divorced.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4. Economics

Committed couples are usually financially more successful than singles and non-committed partners. Once again, it was Dr. Waite who concluded that married people have more money. From her own analysis of a National Institute of Aging survey of 12,000 people ages fifty-one to sixty-one, Dr. Waite found that married people have more than twice as much money on average than unmarried people. Married couples not only save more, but married men also earn up to 26 percent more than single men.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, married women earn more than unmarried women, but only if they have no children. When they have children, “they trade some of their earning time for time with their children,” Dr. Waite said. If the women continue to work, she added, they have difficulty getting child care, and experience stress trying to balance two sets of demands.

Moreover, committed couples appear to be less anxious when it comes to money. *Redbook* and *SmartMoney* magazines teamed up on a story called “The Truth About Women, Men and Money” in which couples across the country divulged information about their financial lives. They surveyed more than a thousand men and women between the ages of eighteen and fifty, all married or part of a committed relationship. The conclusion: “For years we’ve been hearing about how men and women clash over cash, but these days things are different. Whether both partners make the same salary, one of them earns more or there’s a stay-at-home mom (or dad) in the house, most couples aren’t wasting time arguing over finances, our survey revealed.... When asked, ‘Is money a source of fights in your relationship?’ only 7 percent of respondents said that it’s the biggest cause, while the majority (62 percent) said ‘rarely or never.’”<sup>12</sup>

Lastly, a 2003 Census Bureau report shows that married couples have higher median incomes (\$62,405) than do single females (\$29,307) or single males (\$41,959).

### 5. Community

Extended family, neighbors, churches, and other forms of networks of supportive relationships thrive on the stability of committed relationships. Sometimes during a lecture, Dr. Dean Ornish asks his audience whether all four of the following statements are true for them:

- You live in the same neighborhood in which you were born and raised and most of your old neighbors are still there
- You've been going to the same church or synagogue for at least ten years
- You've been at the same job for at least ten years and most of your coworkers from ten years ago are still there
- You have an extended family living nearby whom you see regularly

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***Extended family, neighbors, churches, and other forms of networks of supportive relationships thrive on the stability of committed relationships.***

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Dr. Ornish reports that in an audience of three thousand people, maybe ten or twenty of them will raise their hands. And not just in San Francisco or New York or Los Angeles, but also in Ames, Iowa, or Omaha, Nebraska. So, the community that we have by being in a committed relationship keeps us from being isolated and provides a supportive connection for others.

## 6. Regular, safe, good sex

Committed, monogamous partners have more and better sex than singles and noncommitted partners. *Redbook* magazine ran a feature—“How to Make Love to a Married Man (Your Husband)”—based on the findings from a 2001 University of Chicago study on sexual satisfaction. In this study, Linda J. Waite and Kara Joyner revealed an important fact: married men, not their single counterparts, are the most physically and emotionally fulfilled when it comes to sex.

One forty-four-year-old married man interviewed for the story said, “Maybe some of the crazy lust has dissipated, but the love has expanded and become more profound. So the feelings of sharing have never been stronger than in the moments that follow sex. That’s when I think to myself, ‘This is what sex is all about.’”

But it’s not just about better sex. In today’s world, a monogamous relationship also equates to safer sex. As a single, you know that dating can mean putting yourself at risk. When you’re in a committed, monogamous partnership, you don’t have to live in fear of HIV or STDs.

## 7. Mental/emotional/physical health

Married adults live longer and have fewer mental and emotional problems than single adults. In fact, a ten-year study of ten thousand people in the United Kingdom found that living alone might shave several years off a single person’s life. The findings, published in the *Journal of Health Economics*, show that long-term singles are at risk of mental illness and depression and of becoming sicker earlier. In *The Case for Marriage*, Gallagher and Waite sum up their research, “Being unmarried can actually be a greater risk to one’s life than having heart disease or cancer” and “marital status was one of the most important predictors of happiness.”

Dr. Waite also found that “marriage changes people’s behavior in ways that make them better off.” Married partners monitor each

other's health, for example. They drink less alcohol and use less marijuana and cocaine. From detailed reports on fifty thousand men and women followed from their senior year in high school to the age of thirty-two by University of Michigan researchers, Dr. Waite discerned a steep increase in "bad behaviors" among those who stayed single, but a "precipitous drop" in bad behaviors like the use of alcohol or illegal drugs among those who married.

Drawing heavily on a study of thirteen thousand adults assessed in 1987 and 1988 and again in 1992 and 1993, Dr. Waite demonstrated the positive impact that marriage has on mental health. The study, conducted by two psychologists at the University of Wisconsin, Nadine F. Marks and James D. Lambert, and published in *The Journal of Family Issues*, states it is not just that people who remained married reported significantly higher levels of happiness than those who remained single.<sup>11</sup> The data showed that those who separated or divorced over the five-year period became, in Dr. Waite's word, miserable.

In 1998, the University of Chicago's Dr. Waite presented her findings at the second annual Smart Marriages Conference in Washington. Countering conventional wisdom that marriage is bad for women but good for men, Dr. Waite found that marriage brings considerable benefits to both women and men. It lengthens life and substantially boosts physical and emotional health. In a large national sample of adults followed for eighteen years beginning at the age of forty-eight, slightly more than 60 percent of divorced and never-married women made it to sixty-five, as opposed to nearly 90 percent of married women. Widowed women, for reasons not entirely clear, fared almost as well as married women. Among men, however, those unmarried for any reason—whether widowed, divorced, or never married—had only a 60 to 70 percent chance of living to sixty-five, versus 90 percent for married men.

Dr. Waite further proved her case in *The Case for Marriage*, written with Maggie Gallagher in 2000. Waite and Gallagher address

what they term the five myths of marriage, including “Marriage is mostly about children” and “Divorce is usually the best answer for kids when a marriage becomes unhappy.”

The book is based on eighteen years of research by Waite; Gallagher is director of the Marriage Program at the Institute for American Values. “Marriage is not just a label or a piece of paper, marriage is a creative act,” Gallagher told the Washington Post in an interview. “When people invest in a marriage, it changes the way they look at the world and act—they’re more willing to invest in their future together—and it also changes the way people look at you. You do get special status.”

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## **SEVEN BENEFITS OF A COMMITTED RELATIONSHIP**

- 1. Companionship**
- 2. Intimacy**
- 3. Family**
- 4. Economics**
- 5. Community**
- 6. Regular, safe, good sex**
- 7. Mental/emotional/physical health**

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In the book, Waite and Gallagher state that:

- Nine out of ten married men will make it to age sixty-five, but only six out of ten single guys will do so.
- Only 5 percent of dating men who said they didn’t expect their relationship to last reported they were extremely emotionally satisfied with sex, compared with 48 percent of married men. Meanwhile, 7 percent of single women in short-term relationships said they were extremely satisfied physically with sex, compared with 41 percent of married women.

- Married people—with or without children—were less depressed and more emotionally healthy than comparable singles.

“Marriage gives us a starring role in someone else’s life,” Gallagher wrote. “We talk about single people being free to do whatever they want. People who matter a lot to others aren’t free to do whatever they want. It’s a trade-off.”

\* \* \*

*Indeed, Angela was feeling miserable. But she was grateful for her good friend Gretchen, who kept trying to pull Angela out of her funk. Gretchen was training as a relationship coach. Previously a social worker, Gretchen had switched careers and completed six months of classes so far. On Saturday, the two friends met at their favorite Italian restaurant for Caesar salad and pasta. As they sat together in a quiet corner booth, Angela told Gretchen about her list—the one in which she detailed the hundred things she wanted to do, be, and have in her life.*

*“I really want to hear it! Come on, tell me!” Gretchen said.*

*Having anticipated her friend’s reaction, Angela had brought along her notebook.*

*She pulled out her list and started to read: “People who love and honor me. A big house with lots of light and vibrant plants. I want to be strong and fearless—” As she read her list out loud, her eyes filled with tears.*

*“You’re incredible!” Gretchen said, putting her arm around Angela. “I’m so proud of you for doing this. Keep going!”*

*When Angela had finished reading, Gretchen said that she noticed certain themes in her list. It was obvious that Angela really valued family, and being in an open and communicative relationship.*

*“I’m sorry to point this out,” Gretchen added, “but Matt didn’t seem to value the same things you do.”*

*“But I do have a lot about traveling here!” Angela said, defensively.*

*“That’s true. But it seems that your list is mainly focused on having a life that is filled with love, honesty, and support.”*

*“I guess you’re right. Matt didn’t really give me any notice about taking off. He was gone, just like that. He didn’t even say good-bye to my son.”*

*Gretchen nodded.*

*“He was so distant from his own family,” Angela continued. “And he didn’t have any close friends, unless you count me.”*

*“I know you enjoyed all those weekend getaways,” Gretchen said. “They sounded like fun.”*

*“Fun,” Angela repeated. “That’s what the relationship was in a nutshell. But within a few months, we jumped from dating to mating. I was waiting for him to move in with me. I guess I was so desperate to be with a man that I was blind to the reality of who he really was.”*

*“Well, if it makes you feel any better, I ran into our mutual friend Chris today at the grocery store, and he heard that Matt was just hanging out in Arizona by himself, playing bridge all day on the computer.”*

*“Aaaaahhh!” moaned Angela. She put her head on Gretchen’s shoulder and started to laugh uncontrollably.*

\* \* \*

While I've desired a successful life partnership as long as I can remember, I never really understood why it was so important until learning the facts shared in this chapter. We appear to be wired to thrive in a committed relationship, and the research shows that there are good, solid reasons to "find the love of your life and the life that you love."

Today, we are like relationship pioneers, following our dreams into uncharted territory without actually knowing exactly where we will end up or what our destination will look like. Some of us have vague fantasies or idealistic dreams. Some of us have rebelled against commitment by getting divorced to pursue mirages of greener pastures. Some of us have "hooked up" for fun and recreation, cohabited for sex and companionship, or gave up the dream of finding a life partner and reproduced using anonymous donors. We have learned in this chapter that the overwhelming majority of people do want a committed relationship with a soul mate. However, we all start this quest as singles. ♀

### **CONSCIOUS DATING PLAN EXERCISE NO. 2:**

*Please refer to Chapter 15 to write your answers.*

#### **What can you do when you're single to prepare to find your life partner?**

1. Imagine that you have ten billion dollars and ten years to live. Sit down in a quiet place and imagine one hundred things you would want to do in your remaining years.
2. Don't forget the small things in your list, especially those things that make you feel loved.
3. If you get stuck, put the list down and pick it up again in a day or so.

# Why “Dating” Doesn’t Work: The 14 Dating Traps

**D**o you like the way the singles scene works? Truth be told, most of us don't. The old ways of dating and mating just aren't effective anymore. Why not? What exactly is going wrong? This chapter explains why current dating practices don't work.

When talking about these Dating Traps, I often share my tongue-in-cheek unwritten “Dr. Laura” title for singles: “Fourteen Stupid Things Singles Do to Mess Up Their Lives.” We’ve all been there. A “dating trap” is an unsolvable problem that results in unhappiness in a relationship. Getting out of the trap often means leaving the relationship. When single, you can do a lot more than you realize to avoid these traps and better prepare for a successful and lasting relationship.

This list of dating traps is based on my personal experiences, my friends’ and clients’ experiences, and just plain observation. Most of the traps are obvious: they are inauthentic and fear-based and result in poor relationship choices. Perhaps you’re afraid that you’re not going to get what you really want, or that you’ll be single for the rest of your life and always be unhappy. When you’re afraid, you try to protect yourself. But the truth is that when you act out of fear, you end up creating the very things that you’re afraid of.

One of my favorite introductory seminars that I lead for singles is the “Dating Traps Game,” a takeoff of the Dating Game. First, we split into small groups, and each group is assigned a set of two to four dating traps. The groups share their “war stories” and then vote

on the best war story for their assigned traps. Finally, the small groups come together and as a large group we share the winning war stories for each trap. It's amazing how easily participants can relate to each other's experiences, and how funny these follies seem after the fact!

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***A "dating trap" is an unsolvable problem that results in unhappiness in a relationship. Getting out of the trap often means leaving the relationship. When single, you can do a lot more than you realize to avoid these traps and prepare for a successful and lasting relationship.***

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At the end of the seminar, we also go over the "Ten Principles of Conscious Dating," which are discussed in Chapters 5-14. At the end of the Dating Traps Game participants complete a handout that you'll find at the end of this chapter. After reading this chapter, I urge you to answer the questions at the end as honestly as possible.

### **1. Marketing Trap**

You believe that you need to make yourself more appealing to attract and "sell" yourself with attractive packaging and presentation. When you fall into the Marketing Trap, you fear that nobody will want you as you really are.

If you browse through your local personal ads, you'll see that most of them are just marketing hype. They tell you very little about the

real person behind them. When dating, many single people assume they will not be attractive or acceptable as they are. In fear of rejection, they use a "marketing" approach to attract potential partners.

I know a single forty-year-old man whom his friends refer to as "Mr. Casual." His favorite place to shop for clothes is the local surplus store. He wears hiking boots every day. However, when one of his friends sets him up with an attractive young woman who loves the opera, he wants to impress her. A week after their first coffee date, he invites her to the opera (although personally, he abhors opera music). Not only does he buy box seats, but also he dresses up in a tuxedo. When he shows up at his date's door awkward and uncomfortable, it's painfully obvious that he is trying to impress her. Presenting a version of someone else does not work.

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***Be your best when you show up for a date, but don't present yourself as someone you're not. By "marketing" yourself, you risk disappointment and relationship failure.***

---

I've also seen women fall into the marketing trap. I recently spoke with one rather conservative woman who wears a dress suit to work and slacks and sweaters on weekends. Yet, on a recent date with a man who was four years younger, she splurged on a new outfit: a slinky skirt with a long slit up one side and a V-neck silk blouse that showed some cleavage. She showed up as a woman who was not her.

It's normal and fine to dress up for a date. But there's a difference between primping and getting an extreme makeover. While it's

important to look your best when you show up for a date, don't present yourself as someone you're not. By "marketing" yourself, you risk disappointment and relationship failure. When the excitement and promise of the "sizzle" conflicts with the reality of the "steak," one or both of you are left feeling disappointed and angry.

## 2. Packaging Trap

The Packaging Trap is the opposite of the Marketing Trap. Instead of seeking to sell yourself with attractive packaging, you focus on the packaging of others.

Women commonly dislike being evaluated or pursued by men solely for their physical attractiveness, and are offended by comments such as "She's so hot!" Similarly, men commonly dislike being evaluated or pursued by women for their job or money, and wonder sometimes why women can't see past their bank account.

When we don't know someone, it is natural to focus on the outside packaging. It is also understandable to be attracted to something that is very important to us, such as looks or money. Deep down we know that potential partners are just like us. We all want to be viewed as multidimensional beings—not just a body or a wallet. Yet, in dating—whether we are straight or gay, young or old—unconscious singles commonly focus on a packaging quality that attracts them, and then wonder why their relationships don't work.

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*Deep down we know*

*that potential partners are just like us.*

*We all want to be viewed as multidimensional*

*beings—not just a body or a wallet.*

---

In our culture, we commonly objectify people by focusing on their age, gender, race, clothes, hair, weight, job, finances, and other external characteristics. Then we often make generalizations about who they are. When scouting for potential partners, it is common for some singles to focus on the packaging first, then not see much else beyond that. This works both ways—rejecting some people because of their packaging, and pursuing others because of their packaging.

It is understandable to have preferences and reactions to external packaging; however, if our goal is an internal experience—such as to be happy, loved, and fulfilled in a relationship—we must balance external preferences with internal ones. We all have some requirements related to packaging—such as race, height, age, and even body type or weight—but I recommend de-emphasizing external characteristics that don't have much to do with a quality relationship, and instead emphasizing what you require to have the life and relationship you want.

The 2001 movie *Shallow Hal* is a great example of the packaging trap. Hal (played by Jack Black), a single guy obsessed with external packaging, was hypnotized by Anthony Robbins to see only the person inside and pursued Gwyneth Paltrow's illusionary slim character. Then, when the hypnotic spell broke and he saw her actual obesity, he decided that her weight didn't interfere with his love and desire for her.

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***When you expect less, you get less.***

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### 3. Scarcity Trap

You believe there is a limited supply of possible partners, and therefore think that you have to take what you can get or be alone. The Scarcity Trap results in relationship failure because there is a temptation to settle for less: you believe you can't get

what you really want because there is not enough to go around. Unfortunately, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy because when you expect less, you get less.

*Forbes* magazine runs an annual feature called “Best Cities for Singles.” The article ranks the forty largest U.S. metropolitan centers as the best and worst places to live if you're single. Each metro area is ranked based on supposed “quantitative data” including nightlife, culture, job growth, number of singles, cost of living alone, and “coolness.”<sup>1</sup>

The piece leaves readers with the impression that if they don't live in one of the top ten cities—such as Austin, Denver, or Boston—their chances of finding a mate are very slim. Not only does this article instill fear in singles—such as, “How sorry is the singles scene in Cleveland?... most Clevelanders flee the city for the burbs as soon as they can”—but the artwork further feeds into the scarcity trap. The photos shown alongside the “Top Ten Cities for Singles” article show couples touching each other and laughing; while the “Top Worst Cities for Singles” illustrate singles standing far apart from each other at a bar, and a single checking his cell phone.

Readers living in one of the worst-ranked cities are left feeling, “Well, does that mean I'm screwed?” It's scary for many who read such articles. Readers can feel desperate, thinking, “Man, I'm going to have to take what I can get here. I can't afford to be choosy.” Or, “It's not in the cards for me.” Or, “There aren't enough potential partners to go around.” Or even, “I'll have to move if I ever want to have a meaningful relationship.” If readers don't know any better, they might settle for less. Many do.

The idea that dating is a numbers game is nonsense. The truth is: it just takes one! Finding your life partner has no relation at all to how many singles are living in your area. It's about quality, not quantity, as well as applying the strategies for conscious dating that we will cover later in this book.

#### 4. Compatibility Trap

Singles who fall into the Compatibility Trap believe that if they're having fun with someone and getting along well, then they are compatible and a committed relationship will work. The Compatibility Trap is a very common one because when you first meet someone, it is so easy and seductive to assume that if you're having a good time together, then you're well-matched. Unfortunately, short-term fun and long-term compatibility are not the same.

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***There is a vast difference between a dating relationship—in which the focus is on fun and recreation—and a serious, long-term, committed relationship.***

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First and foremost, there is a vast difference between a dating relationship—in which the focus is on fun and recreation—and a serious, long-term, committed relationship. The criteria and process for choosing somebody whom you date casually are very different from choosing a life partner. Many couples end up making a commitment because they have fun dating. But when the dating ends—and you both decide to become an exclusive couple—the fun ends, too. Just because you are having fun together doesn't mean a successful life partnership will result.

Certainly, singles need to be out there and have fun! But for a lot of people, fun is the primary criteria they use for dating. The pattern in our culture is one in which we pursue people who are fun and attractive to us. But time and time again, "recreational dating"—socializing and spending time with people in order to have a good time—quickly turns into a "mini-marriage."

I recall one woman in her mid-fifties, Sharon, who came regularly to our Friday Night Socials for singles. One evening, she told me how frustrated she was with dating. Sharon had been planning and saving for retirement, an important focus in her life. She had no problem finding men to date. Most had lucrative jobs, but they were not security-minded like her. One man was a ski bum. Another man was putting all his money into his boat. She would get involved with these men, and then break up because they didn't meet her requirements for financial security. When I asked Sharon why she continued to date them, she said, "But they're so much fun!"

I pointed out to her that just having fun didn't mean these men would meet her requirements, or "nonnegotiables." (I discuss requirements in more detail in Chapter 5. In short, requirements are what you must have for your relationship to work for you; if one requirement is missing, the relationship will fail.) Sharon slapped her forehead: "Yeah, you're right!"

It is possible to convert a recreational relationship into a serious, long-term, committed one—but only if 100 percent of your requirements are met. If one requirement is not met, it will become an "unsolvable problem." Unsolvable problems are the ones that usually cause relationships to break up. Imagine the clarity you would have if all your requirements were spelled out before you entered a relationship. And before making a commitment, you would be certain that all your requirements were being met. Then, any problems that arise are going to be solvable ones. Wouldn't that be great? Well, it's completely possible, but it takes some preparation and self-awareness.

## 5. Fairy-tale Trap

In the Fairy-tale Trap, you believe that finding your soul mate will just happen. You expect your ideal partner to magically appear and whisk you off to live happily ever after—with no effort at all on your part!

As children, we all fantasize. When you were a kid, you might have thought "I'm going to live in a castle one day!" or "I'm going to be a football hero." As adults, how many of us dream about winning the lottery? Growing up can feel scary, and some people have a hard time letting go of childhood fantasies. Many of us unconsciously expect that what we want in our lives will somehow just happen, and we can't, or we don't need to, do anything but wait passively for it to happen.

Every week, we watch fantasy relationships play out on TV with reality shows like *The Bachelor*, *The Bachelorette*, *Joe Millionaire*, *Hooking Up*, *Blind Date*, *eliminate*, *Date My Mom*. We see a handsome Texas lawyer eliminate nineteen princesses—their hair shining and eyes sparkling—one by one until he chooses the winner. A few nights later, the inheritor of his family's estate is deciding which young lovely beauty will dine with him at the countryside villa. These women—who often appear desperate and scared—simply hope to be "the one."

Maintaining this fantasy mind-set in real life does not work. Finding the love of your life is not about hoping to be picked. Nor is it about sitting down and making a list of your future partner's ideal traits—what your prince or princess is like—and waiting for the magic to happen. It's about knowing yourself first so that you can be the chooser, rather than waiting to be chosen. (In Chapters 6 and 7, we will discuss the strategies you can use to take personal responsibility for your relationship choices and outcomes.)

---

***Finding the love of your life is not about hoping to  
be picked... It's about knowing yourself  
first so that you can be the chooser, rather than  
waiting to be chosen.***

---

## 6. Date to Mate Trap

In this trap, you become an “instant couple” with someone you are dating. Many couples will say, after just a couple of weeks or a month of dating— “We really want this to work,” or “We’re very committed to each other.” In the Date to Mate Trap, you believe that if you develop an exclusive relationship with someone when you are dating, a successful committed relationship will eventually happen. This dynamic is also known as the “mini-marriage” or “serial monogamy.”

I compare this trap to taking an extended test drive with a car. When you are car shopping, you visit the dealer and try out a variety of cars for short rides around the block. You ask questions, keep your options open, and have fun. Those who fall into the Date to Mate Trap sign the lease for the first car they test drive without investigating possible unsolvable problems that might arise along the way.

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***There is a very big difference  
between a dating relationship and  
the complexity and challenges of a  
long-term relationship.***

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This approach is a costly use of time and emotional energy. The Date to Mate Trap results in relationship failure because there is a big difference between a dating relationship and the complexity and challenges of a long-term relationship. Can you imagine entering a relationship with everybody you date? There’s a certain amount of inertia created because you’re going out with this person and are exclusive with him/her. There is a pressure for this person to be “the one,” and for this relationship to work.

The Date to Mate Trap is like trying to fit the round peg into the square hole: "OK, it doesn't quite fit, but it is close enough." And people attempt to solve unsolvable problems. Unsolvable problems are heart-wrenching and you shouldn't need to deal with them unless you're in a committed relationship. If you choose carefully, you may not need to deal with unsolvable problems at all.

When I explain the Date to Mate Trap to singles, they often respond, "But if you don't date to mate, then what do you do?" Unfortunately, this trap is the cultural norm in dating. Fortunately, singles can learn how to date consciously, as you will discover in the next few chapters.

## **7. Attraction Trap**

You fall into the Attraction Trap when you make your choices based solely on feelings of attraction. You interpret a strong attraction to someone as a sign that this relationship is a good choice and is meant to be. In the midst of infatuation, you ignore red flags and the relationship eventually fails.

The Attraction Trap is a kind of paradox because we do need to feel attracted. The chemistry has to be there. You can't just get together with someone you're not attracted to! But this trap is about following your feelings of attraction as if that's all you need to make a relationship work. When you were twelve or thirteen, you probably had a crush on someone in class. Everything looked good and felt good. You didn't stop to think about the consequences and just went for it. I'm NOT saying that we should ignore all this junior high school excitement. I'm saying that attraction should be a given, but by itself is not enough to keep us together.

Attraction is like the radar that helps you find your target. But the Attraction Trap is blindly following this radar. In conscious dating, we use our feelings of attraction as information. We need to stop and ask ourselves why we are attracted to this person

and whether he/she meets our requirements. Author Harville Hendrix, Ph.D., calls the unconscious partner choice the “imago,” meaning that you’re attracted to someone because of your childhood, your caretakers, and your past experiences. These unconscious choices often result in repeating unproductive past patterns and results in failed relationships.

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*Attraction is like the radar  
that helps you find your target.*

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### 8. Love Trap

The Love Trap is powerful and alluring because we all deeply want to love and be loved. You fall into the Love Trap when you interpret infatuation, attraction, need, good sex, and/or emotional attachment as “love.” Subsequently, after you discover that love is not enough to meet your requirements, your relationship fails.

Romantics are especially vulnerable to getting caught in this trap. Romantics believe that “if it feels good, it must be love” and think that “love is all you need” and “love conquers all.” Romantics use these beliefs as their primary motivators when seeking a relationship. Then, when the relationship isn’t working out, they spend their time trying to recreate their initial experience of infatuation. Time and time again, I’ve heard people say—after the first two weeks of a relationship—“This has been the best time of my life!” They feel so in love, so they believe it must be a good relationship. In a short time, the initial infatuation is gone; then they spend the rest of their time together struggling to get it back.

### 9. Sex Trap

The Sex Trap is similar to the Love Trap, where singles interpret good sex as love. But those who fall into the Sex Trap go even

further, because for these singles, having sex carries immense meaning and consequences. A great summation of the Sex Trap is that often-heard stereotype, "Women use sex to get love, and men use love to get sex."

Falling into the Sex Trap usually means one of two things: singles believe that sex is a necessary test of compatibility; that is, if the sex is good, then the relationship will be good as well. Or, more commonly, all consciousness goes out the window, and one or both formerly level-headed singles consider themselves a committed couple as soon as they have sex.

Rather than looking at whether this other person might be a match on levels other than physical attraction—such as long-term requirements, needs, and wants—you are blindsided by the chemistry under the covers. It can be challenging to keep in touch with reality and stay conscious when all those hormones are running wild.

Our body reacts to someone we are attracted to by producing hormones such as PEA or phenylethylamine (natural amphetamine), dopamine and norepinephrine (natural mood enhancers), and testosterone (increased sexual desire), which makes the opportunity to have sex with someone we are attracted to extremely hard to resist. Then, after orgasm, we produce oxytocin (which acts on the hypothalamus to produce emotions), which makes us feel very close to and bonded with our sex partner. These chemical reactions are involuntary and strong, leading to powerful feelings of attraction, excitement, love, closeness, and well-being. But when problems arise, you often rationalize by thinking, "Well, we've got problems, but the sex is great." By falling into the Sex Trap, you (although it's hard to admit it) prioritize physical intimacy and regard the rest as optional. Whether you are aware of it or not, your main criterion for a relationship is sexual attraction and physical compatibility.

I do want to point out that chemistry is very important. Yet, chemistry is a given that we can't control in a relationship; it is

either there or not there, and it must be there for the partnership to work. If it is not there, we can't "make" it happen, though sometimes it can grow over time. Those who pursue a relationship based upon sexual chemistry risk relationship failure when the hormone-induced intoxication wears off and reality hits.

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***It can be challenging to keep in touch with reality  
when all those hormones are running wild.***

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### 10. Rescue Trap

The Rescue Trap is enticing as you hope that a relationship will solve your emotional and financial difficulties and bring you happiness and fulfillment. It's like winning the lottery. You then avoid taking responsibility for your life challenges and expect to be rescued from them. When problems multiply instead of disappear, the Rescue Trap results in desperation, neediness, and relationship failure.

I've seen women especially jump into this trap over and over: "When I meet the right partner, my life will be wonderful. Oh please hurry and rescue me!" They feel like they can't make it on their own, whether it's about paying the bills or raising their children. This attitude typically results in neediness and desperation.

In the Rescue Trap, you're not taking responsibility for your life because you're expecting some outside magical solution. You tend to live with your problems rather than solve them. And then, in a relationship, your problems multiply instead of disappear. In the end, your debt increases, your children get rowdier, and your relationship eventually fails.

### 11. Codependent Trap

The Codependent Trap and the Rescue Trap both capture those of

us who don't like to be alone and need to focus our life on someone else. You expect someone will love you and give you what you want by giving the other person what he/she wants. You attempt to earn love and happiness by acquiescing, nurturing, giving, and helping. Needing to be needed often results in unconsciously attracting and choosing a relationship with a person who needs you but—as you later discover—is unable to give you what you want.

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***Although it feels good to be needed,  
someone who needs you  
is not necessarily able  
to give you what you need.***

---

Codependents are convinced that no one would want them for who they are, and thus feel good when they are needed. This is my own most common and riskiest trap. My first two marriages were to women who attracted me because they needed me—first to leave home and escape controlling parents, then to leave a dead first marriage. It felt so good to help them make their transition toward the life they wanted, but neither was a good foundation for a committed relationship.

Codependents really want to be in a relationship. You feel unworthy as you are and that you need to earn love. You pursue relationships because you feel incomplete when you're not in one. You want to be the hero and therefore seek someone who wants to be helped. But you learn the hard way that although it feels good to be needed, someone who needs you is not necessarily able to give you what you need in return.

## 12. Entitlement Trap

Those who fall into the Entitlement Trap seem to believe (often

unconsciously) that you deserve to get what you want in your life and relationships without effort or change on your part. As you rely on your partner to bring happiness and fulfillment, you inevitably experience disappointment.

We're bombarded daily by messages that reinforce the Entitlement Trap. The media's message is: you deserve to drive that new SUV and to live in that two-story house with the manicured yard and view of the water. In a relationship, this translates into feeling that you're entitled and deserving. Your attitude toward your partner is "What can you do for me?"

Very attractive and/or wealthy people seem to fall into the Entitlement Trap most often. For example, I have met many beautiful women who feel that they deserve to be catered to. From early on, they have been given the message that the whole world will wait on them. All they have to do is sit back and look pretty. And I have spoken to wealthy men who think that they don't have to work on relationships. Just as they buy things in everyday life that make them feel good—whether it's a new DVD player or a hot tub with jets—they can buy love. Unfortunately, a relationship doesn't work out when you believe that you're entitled.

### 13. Virtual Reality Trap

In this trap, you believe that "what you see is what you get." Instead of using actual experience and knowledge to make long-term relationship choices, you make your decisions based on short-term impressions and inferences. By seeing only what you want to see, you are blinded to the reality and the relationship fails.

With my second marriage, I fell into the Virtual Reality Trap. After numerous failures to get pregnant, my wife and I decided to give in vitro fertilization (IVF) a try. It was a long and costly process and, in 1998, our twin boys were born. After their birth, I didn't think much about the medicine bottles floating around our house; I'd gotten used to seeing various kinds of prescription medication during IVF. When I did bring up the issue, my

wife denied there was a problem. I believed her. Nonetheless, within a short time, I discovered that indeed she was addicted to the prescriptions. She went into rehab with many promises to change, which I also believed. When she got out, she relapsed and made more promises. Instead of dealing with the reality before me—that my wife was addicted to these medications—I saw what I wanted to see and clung to our marriage. I lived in “virtual reality.” But when the pattern continued to repeat—rehab and relapse, rehab and relapse—I finally gained the insight to look behind her promises and see that from the beginning, I had overlooked what was truly real.

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***Instead of dealing with the reality  
before me—that my wife was  
addicted to these medications—I saw what  
I wanted to see and clung to our marriage.  
I lived in "virtual reality."***

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The Virtual Reality Trap is the opposite side of the Marketing Trap. In this case, you're reacting to the external presentation and packaging as if they are real. How many of us have gotten involved in relationships focusing on “potential” (another word for the Virtual Reality Trap), hoping that some things that we really need to happen will get better or change over time?

#### **14. Lone Ranger Trap**

The Lone Ranger Trap is one of the most pervasive and common. You live your single life focused on your goal of finding your life partner and believe that the other relationships in your life are less important and that you don't need anyone's help. You evaluate the people you meet for their relationship potential and

don't take the opportunity to cultivate new friends. In turn, you feel isolated and think there's a scarcity of potential partners. Therefore, you risk settling for less than what you really want because you are alone yet so focused on finding a partner.

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***Lone Rangers focus so much on the goal of finding a mate, they isolate themselves, feeling even more alone and desperate.***

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Those of us who fall into the Lone Ranger Trap go about dating by shoving friends and family out of the way while asking, "Is this the one? No. Is this the one? No." By focusing so much on the goal of finding a mate, you isolate yourself. You have not developed a support system or network, and you do not have experiences with a variety of people. So, in the end, you truly feel alone.

The Lone Rangers share a few basic characteristics. First, you want to feel grown up and live your life thinking, "I can do it myself!" Second, you are ashamed about being single and want to have a partner at your side as soon as possible so you can look and feel better. Third, as an isolated single, you then become an isolated couple. Sadly, Lone Rangers exclude others and focus their needs on their partner. Lastly, Lone Rangers also often fall into the Scarcity Trap. When you can't see beyond your own resources, it feels like no one is out there for you.

I believe that to be successful in any area of life, you need to have supportive people involved. We are social beings; no one is successful alone. The complexities and conflicts of any relationship—whether it's a partner, friend, or family member—can prove to be challenging. But how you relate with friends and family

will play out in your life partnership, so you might as well set yourself up for success and learn how to handle relationship challenges when you're single. ♪

**CONSCIOUS DATING PLAN EXERCISE NO. 3:**

*Please refer to Chapter 15 to write your answers.*

**Let's play the Dating Traps Game!**

1. Which dating traps have you fallen into?
2. Which trap is your riskiest?
3. If you could give yourself some expert advice, what would you say?
4. What will you do to follow your own advice?

# Being Single Is an Opportunity!

**B**eing single is like being on a sabbatical from a committed relationship. When you take a sabbatical from your job, you focus on professional goals, personal goals, and activities that you couldn't pursue while working full time. While you are on this sabbatical, what goals and activities will help you have the life and relationship you really want? What personal, lifestyle or professional goals can you accomplish while you're single that will enhance your life and future relationship? Being single is an opportunity to ready yourself to attract the love of your life.

## **BEING SINGLE IS NOT A DISEASE**

If you were to take an informal survey of single relatives and friends, you might hear an overwhelming “I just want to be in a relationship!” Many singles view their status as an undesirable state that they want to change as soon as humanly possible. Many singles unknowingly subscribe to a myth that if only they were in a relationship they would be happy.

As a single, if you are not happy with your life or yourself, a relationship will not fix that. Many singles sign up for my Conscious Dating Relationship Success Training for Singles (RESTS) classes because they don't want to be single anymore. Often, they send in their applications out of desperation and fear. They are hoping that by the end

of the course, they will have met the love of their lives. However, many realize by the end of the class that their job right now is to pursue their dreams while they're single, that being single is an opportunity to enjoy their current life while preparing themselves for future success in having the life and relationship they really want.

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***If you are not happy with your life or yourself,  
a relationship will not fix it.***

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*Cathy taped up her last cardboard box and sighed. She would be leaving Denver in two weeks. While she was devastated that her marriage was over, she was slowly realizing that her divorce was turning into an opportunity. Cathy's life would no longer revolve around Brad, her alcoholic husband. For a decade, she had suppressed her dream of having a family while she took care of Brad's hangovers.*

*Now, instead of waiting for her hung-over husband to wake up every Sunday, Cathy walked to the downtown bookstore and zoomed straight for the self-help section. She picked up one book on alcoholism that said that adult children of alcoholics often enter relationships in which they take on a codependent savior role. They feel a need to save and look after their substance-abusing mates as they did for their parents. Cathy clearly remembered nursing her father's hangovers. And her mother's role-modeling had taught her from an early age to cover up the alcoholism by throwing out empty bottles before friends came over or by explaining that her father needed to take a nap when he was really sleeping off the previous night's binge.*

*Cathy was going to move back to her hometown of Cincinnati. The move would be scary and daunting, but she was ready to deal with her pain. When the big day arrived, Cathy dropped her last box in the back of the moving truck with a thump and a sigh of relief.*

*Everything she'd accumulated over the past two decades was there: the pottery she had made in college, the dolls she had collected from rummage sales, kitchen supplies, bedding, stereo system, and sofa. However, she intentionally left behind the bed she and Brad had shared. It felt very symbolic not to take it with her.*

*Cathy's friend, Melissa, was driving with her from Denver to Cincinnati. Melissa was the only friend whom Cathy had hung onto during her isolated marriage. They had packed a special picnic basket for the long drive and brought along a stack of their favorite CDs. As Melissa took the wheel, Cathy stared out the window. She was thinking about her past. When she had married Brad at age twenty-eight, she knew he had a drinking problem. During the fast and furious six months they dated before getting engaged, he was often hung over on weekends. He worked long hours as a carpenter, and she had chalked off the extra beers as something he did to ease the heavy day's work load. Still, she had figured that after they were married, he would stop going out with his buddies. Not so. At least one Friday a month, Brad would stumble home at 3 a.m. and fall asleep on their sofa. Cathy tried to remember what exactly attracted her to Brad. When they met, most of her friends were already married and had children. She had been feeling like an old maid. Dating had been easy—men were drawn to her fire-red hair and blue eyes—but she had been feeling desperate to settle down. Brad, who was then thirty-two, had been under a lot of pressure from his family to tie the knot. He and Cathy had met through mutual friends at a party and quickly jumped into seeing each other a few times a week, leaving little space for introspection.*

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***You have a full and rich life ahead of you.***

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*A few years into the marriage, after Cathy had difficulty getting pregnant, the relationship turned rocky. They had intense discussions about fertility treatments—would IVF work? could they*

*afford it?—after which Brad often went out drinking. At that point, Cathy went to see a therapist and starting taking antidepressants. She questioned the future of her marriage, but the last thing she wanted to do was break up as her own parents had. Eventually, she gave up trying to have children.*

*As they drove on, Melissa told her that she'd felt so worried when Cathy hadn't returned her phone calls.*

*“I'm sorry,” Cathy said. “I was so ashamed. It got so crazy at one point that if he didn't come home by 10 o'clock on Fridays, I actually went down to the bar to find him. I thought I could drag him home, but we would end up screaming at each other on the street corner.”*

*Melissa turned her eyes away from the road and looked at Cathy. “You have a full and rich life ahead of you.”*

\* \* \*

## **THE SINGLES BLUES**

David Bentley, one of my colleagues who coaches singles, has identified a “syndrome” which he calls “The Singles Blues.”<sup>1</sup> It's when you feel inferior because you don't have a partner, or when being single overwhelms you so much that you just want to crawl under the covers and hide. David identifies four “symptoms” of the Singles Blues. Do you recognize any of them in yourself?

**1. Holding onto the Past:** When it comes to dating, do you hesitate to make the first move because in the past you got snubbed by someone or turned down for a date? Are you waiting for others to approach you? Do you become depressed and/or angry when they don't? Holding on to the past can cause us to take the same unsuccessful actions we've always taken, expecting them to work this time if we just try harder. Sometimes we even hold onto physical objects from the past. Do you still have love let-

ters from a former sweetheart who is now married and has six children? Is that faded rose from your first date still pressed between pages of Rumi poems? Isn't it time to get rid of the physical and emotional remnants of the past and embrace your present and future?

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## **DO YOU HAVE THE SINGLES BLUES?**

- **Holding onto the Past**
  - **Negativity**
  - **Excessive Guilt**
  - **The Paralysis of Analysis**
- 

2. **Negativity:** Do you make derogatory remarks about previous partners? Are you cynical about your friends' relationships? Do you obsess over the negative aspects of being single or about being successfully partnered? When you're positive and feel good about yourself, you find positive qualities in the world around you.

3. **Excessive Guilt:** Many of us assume too much responsibility for what happens to us in our world. For example, if you're over twenty-five and not in a long-term relationship, you might think that something is wrong with you. If you've broken up with a lover or divorced your spouse, you might feel no one else will want you. We all make mistakes, but the only failures are the mistakes from which we fail to learn. Guilt is a useless emotion that prevents us from dusting ourselves off and getting back into the saddle. It is important to accept responsibility for our part in any situation, but only our part.

4. **The Paralysis of Analysis:** Do you ever find yourself unable to move in any direction? Have you looked at every possible angle of past, present, and future relationships until you are

totally confused? Are you filled with fear about the misfortunes awaiting you on the relationship scene? If so, stop analyzing and take some action. Any action, even the wrong one, is going to get you moving. Action absorbs anxiety. Decide what first baby steps would be appropriate and take them. After you've moved a bit, decide what steps to take next. If the first action produced positive results, keep moving in the same direction. If not, then choose a new direction. Standing still and analyzing only prevents you from moving down the path of your life.

### **LEARNING BY FALLING DOWN**

A new relationship is not the “cure” for the loneliness of your last breakup. Instead, the cure can lie in the breakup itself. When a significant relationship ends, we can feel like a failure. But what if we turn this around and see the breakup as an opportunity to evolve? Significant life challenges—such as relationship breakups—present us with the opportunity to grow, learn, become better people, and accomplish more in our lives. Notice that I use the word “challenge,” and not “failure.” That’s because if we are challenged, there must be something that we need to learn.

I recall teaching my children to ride two-wheeled bikes. At times it was scary for them, but I helped them overcome their fear to learn this important skill. I’ve always enjoyed bike riding, and have taken my children in bike trailers and seat carriers when they were little, followed by giving them bikes with training wheels as they got older. It’s been my tradition to get each of my children a new two-wheeled bike on his/her fifth birthday and teach him/her how to ride. My oldest daughter caught on fast and learned to ride on her own after just an hour of assistance. My twins and former step-daughter needed multiple lessons spaced out over a few weeks, but they caught on pretty fast. My former stepson, however, had a fear of getting hurt and cried a lot when he fell down, even though he wasn’t really hurt. I encouraged him, telling him how important it was to get back up after you fall. Falling down is not a failure! This story applies to the challenges we have in relationships: You don’t

learn by avoiding risk or giving up and being hard on yourself for making mistakes or failing. Falling down is how we learn.

## **YOU'RE SINGLE FOR A REASON**

One of the hardest things for me to accept is that I create my own outcomes, whether I like them or not, my failures as well as my successes.

As a child of divorce I swore that when I got married it would be for life, yet I've been married and divorced twice. I wish it were different, but that is the reality I must accept about my life, and since I made my relationship choices, I can't blame my exes, my mother, father, or anyone else for my outcomes.

I strongly believe in taking ownership for my life, choices, and outcomes, so much so that I call it The Most Important Relationship Skill. While my actions and choices largely determine my outcomes, paradoxically I also believe in "fate" or "destiny," that things happen as they're meant to happen. This force can also be called "The Law of Attraction" (see Chapter 10), which helps me to embrace and accept "what is," believing that I'm exactly where I need to be, going where my life purpose needs to go.

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***Things happen for a reason.***

***When something happens that I don't like***

***I've found that if I ask myself***

***"What's the purpose or reason for this event?"***

***I can always come up with one pretty easily.***

---

I don't believe in chance or randomness. Things happen for a reason. When something happens that I don't like (divorce, car accident, etc) I've found that if I ask myself "What's the purpose or reason for this event?"

I can always come up with one pretty easily, especially if I'm honest with myself. And darn it, the answer always seems to be something I need to learn, something the Universe is trying to teach me that I'm resisting. As RCI coach LeAnn O'Neal says "Each painful moment is an opportunity for new expansion." I'll try to remember that next time...

After 50 years on this planet I finally "got" that "what you resist, persists," and learned to examine and accept life's lessons. My attitude used to be "I know" and "I can handle it" and "I have it under control" (Hey, at least it wasn't "It's not my fault" and "Why me?" and "I deserve better!"). Now my attitude is a little more humble, such as "What do I need to learn?" and "What's the reason or purpose behind this event?"

I'm very clear now that my outcomes are largely determined by how I show up, which is driven mostly by my attitudes. What's inside shows up on the outside and what I'm thinking will become reality, so I must monitor and make conscious choices about what I allow my thoughts to focus upon. Wow, not only do I need to take responsibility for my actions, I have to own the consequences of my private thoughts and beliefs!

### **YOUR MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION**

If you're single and would prefer to be in a fulfilling relationship, I believe that the most important question for you is "Why are you single?"

"Why" doesn't mean "What happened?" or "Whose fault is it?" In this case "Why" refers to big picture questions such as "What is the purpose or reason for you being single at this time in your life?" and "What do you need to learn that is getting in the way of your relationships?"

### **WHAT DO YOU NEED TO LEARN?**

If you're single and want a life partnership, what are the major life lessons that must be mastered before you can find your soul mate and live happily ever after?

Here are five possibilities that occur to me-

1. Heal old wounds (emotional baggage)
2. Learn relationship skills (we're not born with a manual)
3. Learn to accept responsibility for your life, needs and outcomes
4. Identify and change unproductive habits and patterns
5. Identify and change unproductive attitudes and beliefs

As I review the above honestly I can see the things that my two divorces helped me to learn. As I look back on all the events that happened in my life that didn't go the way I wanted (like the time I crashed my sailboat into the rocks of Alcatraz!) I can see they all happened for a reason related to one or more of the above that I needed to learn.

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***Life doesn't give you what you want,  
need, or expect;***

***Life gives you what you need to learn.***

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To paraphrase Jim Rohn, "Life doesn't give you what you want, need, or expect; Life gives you what you need to learn."

So, if you're single and reading this, why are you single at this time in your life? What do you need to learn to find and have a fulfilling relationship? I sincerely hope that reading this book and your answers to these questions lead you to the life and love that you really want.

## **THE NEW SINGLE VERSUS THE OLD SINGLE**

Fortunately, the stigma of being single is changing.

Just a couple of decades ago, many singles felt there was something wrong with them if they were not in a relationship. I refer to this

mind-set as the “Old Single,” meaning one who lives in fear that something is wrong with them because they’re single. In the 1980s, books such as *Singles: The New Americans* were published, in which the experts psychoanalyzed singles who placed personal ads. (One professor of psychology said this “reminds me of the casting couch—impersonal, for sex only, exploitative.”) These books highlighted singles who talked about their boring nights, all the money they spent on going out, and their loneliness.

Today, however, you’ll find very positive books about what I call the “New Single,” who is conscious and embraces being single. Books such as *Urban Tribes: A Generation Redefines Friendship, Family, and Commitment* and *Quirkyalone: A Manifesto for Uncompromising Romantics* are geared toward singles who see the value of being single, and know there are learning opportunities in relationships that don’t work out for the long term. The New Single has a goal of finding a life partner, but is truly satisfied by being single for now. The New Single has goals, but there is no panic or desperation because he/she has not yet achieved these goals. The New Single is content being where he/she is right now. In our culture we always want to be ahead of where we are. But the conscious single is not in a hurry.

Ethan Watters, who wrote *Urban Tribes*, defines an urban tribe as a group of city dwellers who have formed a bond through a common interest, such as work or a social or recreational activity. Watters is referring to the rise of support networks for the growing class of creative single people inhabiting leading urban centers in the United States and around the world.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Sasha Cagen coined the word “quirkyalone” in her book, which “stands in opposition to saccharine, archaic notions of romantic love. It stands for self-respect, independent spirit, creativity, true love, and confidence.” *Quirkyalone* begins with a timeline of Quirkyalones Throughout History, in which she quotes Socrates (“The unexamined life is not worth living”); Virginia Woolf (whose book *A Room of One’s Own* articulates the need for space to be creative and develop as an individual); and the notorious 1986 Newsweek article, “Single Women Over 40 Have Less Chance to Marry than to Be Killed By a Terrorist,”

after which shock waves of anger, despair, and disillusionment swept the country. Cagen dispels the myth that wanting to be alone is negative or strange: “Putting *quirky* together with alone implies the ability to enjoy one’s aloneness, whether one is single or not.”<sup>3</sup>

Cagen’s first-person essay—“The Quirkyalone: Loners Are the Last True Romantics”—was published in 2000 by *Utne* Reader. In it, Cagen wrote: “For the quirkyalone, there is no patience for dating just for the sake of not being alone.” That’s because quirkyalones have “unique traits and an optimistic spirit; a sensibility that transcends relationship status.” Her book includes a chapter called “Marry Yourself First: The Mini-Trend of Self-matrimony,” in which she details what some single people are doing today instead of getting married: throwing a bigger thirtieth or fortieth birthday party; buying their own homes; or even signing up for their own registries (formerly known as bridal registries) to get their share of flatware, crystal, and slow cookers.

The New Single is also very aware of the high failure rate of committed relationships. In her chapter “Quirkytogether,” Cagen writes: “At the core, quirkytogether values the idea of two fully formed human beings coming together for a partnership rather than a merging of souls—it’s not the soul mate idea of finding the other half to complete you, but about finding a lively and dynamic partnership that still allows you to be fully yourself.”

In today’s world, when you’re more cautious and conscious about relationship choices, you might find yourself more cynical and staying away from romantic illusions. However, the current trend of increased cohabitation and a decreasing marriage rate implies that many are attempting to avoid failure by avoiding commitment, which doesn’t work either. While being single is not a disease, it need not be a chronic condition.

## **MAKING THE MOST OF BEING SINGLE**

One of the reasons that I enjoy working with singles is that they are

usually very motivated. Often, they come to me very excited to share their goals. Together, we talk about the many advantages of being single. You have the freedom and flexibility to live the life you want, how you want, and where you want. It is a bit like being in college: You can have fun, learn a lot, and prepare for the rest of your life. But just as you can party and skate through college, you can party through your single life until the fun ends and the reality of life catches up with you. You might be unprepared for what comes next. However, with effort, awareness, and intention, you can have fun while preparing yourself for the life and relationship you really want.

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***You have the freedom and flexibility  
to live the life you want,  
how you want, and where you want.***

---

*When Cathy returned to Cincinnati with all her belongings in the back of the moving van, her father met her and wrapped his arms around her. He helped her move her belongings into the in-law unit behind his house, a small, sunny studio with a fuchsia blooming outside her door. She promptly hung her collage of her life vision over her bed.*

*Within a week, thanks to the contacts she'd made in Denver, Cathy had a new job and a new therapist. The antidepressants kept her energy up, and the adrenaline from the excitement of her big move energized her. She even called a couple of girlfriends from high school, also recently divorced, and they started to meet regularly for dinner.*

*Still, at night, when Cathy climbed under the covers alone, she thought about all the things she had given up for her marriage. Rather than pursuing her dreams—for example, having a family—she had adapted to her alcoholic husband. Ever since she*

*could remember, she had been passionate about children. After trying unsuccessfully to have children for years, Cathy came up with the idea of opening a daycare facility in their home. But Brad had said: "If we can't have children, I don't want to take care of other people's children!"*

*Cathy knew that it was time to figure out what she really wanted in her life. She decided that for the next few months she was going to focus on three things: her new job, her search for her own apartment, and her life vision. She had the perfect opportunity to recreate her life, but she wasn't sure how to go about it. For now, she was not interested in dating anybody. She wanted to focus on what she was really passionate about: children!*

*In therapy, Cathy often said that she felt like a failure because she'd married an alcoholic, enabled his alcoholism, and stayed in an unhappy marriage for so many years. But her therapist told her over and over, "Cathy, you have not failed. Your marriage was an opportunity to learn about yourself, and you are certainly doing that." Cathy's therapist recommended a variety of support groups. The first one, about recovering from divorce, was a group of six women who focused on a number of topics: stages of recovery, anger and grief, self-identity, loneliness, forgiveness, and beginning again. Occasionally speakers came and Cathy took mental notes. She also made some new friends. Cathy felt like she'd finally faced the reality that her marriage had been an unhealthy one. While Cathy felt far from ever being in a committed relationship again, she wanted to take the next step to discover more about herself, with the possibility of loving again. One night she turned on her laptop. She searched for "relationships" and "conscious" and found herself on my site called, "Conscious Dating: Finding the Love of Your Life in Today's World."*

*Cathy was familiar with the profession of relationship coaching, having been part of the therapy world for years. Right then, she decided to sign up for my Conscious Dating Relationship Success Training for Singles (RESTS) course online.*

\* \* \*

Unfortunately, many singles are uncomfortable being single and want to be in a relationship, even if it means repeating past patterns. Rather than looking at their lives and relationships as intertwined dynamic processes, they view relationships as a commodity to possess or “have.” The truth is that a relationship is a long-term project, not a short-term venture. Finding the right relationship is not like buying clothes; you cannot just choose one off the rack and take it home—mission accomplished!

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***Relationships are a long-term project,  
not a short-term venture.***

***Finding the right relationship is not like  
buying clothes; you cannot  
just choose one off the rack and take it home.***

---

It can be challenging to step back and examine whether you are ready for a relationship, and to know what you really want. Getting divorced can be quite a wake-up call for someone who strongly desires and intends to be married for life. Being single can be a time for carefully planning how to get what you really want in your life and in a relationship. Life lessons, such as divorce, force us to confront our shortcomings and teach us that our expectations and goals are not a guaranteed reality.

Because we are all single for a significant part of our lives, we should embrace and make the most of being single. In Chapter 3, we discussed the “dating traps,” those unsolvable problems that result in unhappiness in a relationship. Getting out of the trap often means

leaving the relationship. What's important to remember is that when you are single, you can use this time and space to avoid these traps and prepare for a successful and lasting relationship. The next ten chapters of this book will cover the Ten Principles of Conscious Dating, which detail how to avoid the dating traps and find your life partner. Right now is your chance to use being single to:

- let go of the past
- take responsibility for your life
- discover who you are
- re-create your life
- have the fun and freedom you had (or wish you had had) as a child

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***Being single can be a time  
for carefully planning how to get what you really  
want in your life and in a relationship.***

---

*You may recall Angela in Chapter 2, whose boyfriend Matt split town because God supposedly commanded him to go. Now that Angela was single again, she had time to reflect on her life. For the first time in years, she was writing in her journal. Every morning, Angela woke up at sunrise and wrote. Sometimes she felt whiny, writing about her frozen dinners and being alone on the weekends. But other days, she let her mind wander to an imaginary future in which she woke up next to an incredibly warm and supportive partner, a man who served her coffee in bed and left love notes under her pillow.*

*Exactly one month after Matt took off, Angela was back on the treadmill at the gym. "Hi there! Long time no see," said a voice behind her. Angela turned her head to see Jerry, the good-looking middle-aged man who often chatted with her in the sauna. His brow glowed with sweat as he got on the treadmill next to*

*her. He looked taller than she'd remembered, and his eyes were a very clear hazel.*

*"Oh, hi," Angela said, feeling shy, but glad to see him. Jerry told her that he'd just come back from a one-week meditation retreat in the mountains. She commented that it must have been a great way to spend a vacation and recharge oneself from work. But Jerry corrected her: "Actually, I'm not working right now."*

*Angela turned her eyes back toward the treadmill screen, suddenly guarded. Jerry tried to explain: "Ten years ago, I started my own computer programming business and worked hard, long hours. I sold it six months ago and decided to take some time off to enjoy life as I figure out my next move."*

*A man who didn't work turned Angela off. Lazy, she thought. Just like Matt. The last thing she needed to was to get involved with another unemployed man. She stepped off the treadmill to work out with weights in the next room. She gave Jerry a wave.*

*Twenty minutes later, who should walk into the sauna behind her but Jerry. Angela breathed in deeply, all that hot, dry air getting stuck in her chest. They chatted about his retreat in the Virginia mountains, and her plans to take her son ice skating on Christmas Day. Then Jerry cleared his throat, and asked Angela if she'd like to go out for dinner some time. Angela wasn't sure. She felt flattered, but was turned off by the fact that Jerry didn't have a job. He told her that he was going to leave his card at the front desk.*

*When Angela got home, she called her best friend, Gretchen, who was training as a relationship coach.*

*"It sounds wonderful!" Gretchen said.*

*"Wonderful?" Angela said. "But he doesn't have a job. How come I get all these guys without jobs?"*

*“It sounds like he’s a hard worker, though, and he’s just taking some time off.”*

*“Yeah, that was Matt’s story, too,” Angela said.*

---

***Now that she was single, Angela could  
step back and examine  
what she really wanted in a relationship.***

---

*“No,” Gretchen corrected her. “Matt inherited his money from his family. He hadn’t held a real job for years.”*

*“Well, I don’t want to go out with another guy who might suddenly decide to take off—”*

*“Angela, just because someone has a job doesn’t mean he’s going to stick around. What if his company suddenly offers to transfer him to another state?”*

*Angela was silent, taking in her friend’s wisdom.*

*“Look,” Gretchen continued. “Is it really about having a job? Isn’t it actually about stability?”*

*“I guess you’re right,” Angela said. Now that she was single, Angela could step back and examine what she really wanted in a relationship. She was taking the time to get clear about her expectations. She could proceed cautiously, without rushing into anything.*

\* \* \*

## USING OUR RELATIONSHIPS AS MIRRORS

Single again, Angela was using her time wisely to reflect on her past. Shakti Gawain, a pioneer in the field of personal growth, has written and spoken much about relationships as mirrors, which is the process of letting our relationships reveal what we need to learn. (This will also be covered more in depth in Chapters 10 and 11.) Gawain believes that our primary relationship is with ourselves:

Our relationships with other people continually reflect exactly where we are in that process. For example, for many years I yearned to find the right man to be my life partner. I created many relationships with men who were unavailable or inappropriate in certain ways. Eventually, I realized they were reflecting my own inner ambivalence about committed relationship and the ways that I didn't truly love myself. It was only after I did some deep emotional healing work, learning to truly love and be committed to myself, that I met a wonderful man who is now my husband.<sup>4</sup>

\* \* \*

*Curled up on her sofa with her notebook and pen, Angela jotted down what she remembered about her relationship with Matt. She and her husband of ten years had divorced when she was thirty-eight. They had grown apart, but remained good friends. She had gone out with a couple of men, but the attraction died out after a couple of months. Her son was entering adolescence and although he spent every other weekend with his father, she felt an inner pressure to find a good male role model for him. She had been set on the idea of having a traditional nuclear family. Time had seemed to be running out—when she met Matt.*

*Matt had approached her at a reading by one of her favorite authors—Margaret Atwood—and they'd gone out for coffee. He was fun and made her laugh. Like her, he enjoyed reading and seeing out-of-the-mainstream movies. While walking Angela back to her car, Matt stopped and bought her a red rose. His romancing was hard to resist after the dry spell she'd been*

*through. Within a month, they were spending all their time together and going on weekend trips to the mountains and ocean.*

*Angela initially saw Matt as future partner material, but she soon discovered that he was distant from his family and only saw them once a year. He had few friends, and he was not very enthusiastic about hanging out with her son. Still, he had swept Angela off her feet with weekend getaways and expensive gifts. Also, the sparks had been flying. Angela had not slept with anyone for a year and Matt had been eager to please her in bed.*

*As time passed, she chose to ignore her important criteria for a life partner, such as a man with a clear and purposeful vision and close relationships with his family and friends. Angela also realized that, initially, she had kept Matt from her friends. She had feared they would be put off by his sometimes sarcastic sense of humor. And most of the time, they had been skipping town for the weekend. By the time three months had passed, Matt and Angela had become a couple and were in what seemed like a committed relationship. So, when Gretchen finally met Matt—and openly disapproved—Angela got defensive.*

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Gawain compares this process of reflection to being an artist. When you are painting, you typically have a sense of what colors you want to use, or what brush stroke you're going to try. As you paint, you get feedback from the painting itself. You are looking at your creation and it's telling you about yourself. Gawain says that this is how she looks at her own life.

She adds:

It's very difficult to look inside ourselves and see what's going on in there—particularly to see what we're unaware of. That's why it's important to look at our relationships as mirrors of our inner processes. Used in this way, relationships become one of the most valuable sources of healing and teaching in our lives. To understand how this works, we need to remind ourselves that

we each, through our individual consciousness, create and shape how we experience external reality. This is as true in our relationships as in every other area of our lives—the relationships we create and shape reflect back to us what we are holding within our consciousness. We draw to us and are drawn to people who match and reflect some aspect of ourselves.<sup>5</sup>

\* \* \*

*After staying up late reflecting, Angela went to bed and fell into a deep sleep. The next morning, she called Jerry. His machine picked up. She said: “Hi, Jerry. It’s Angela. I would be pleased to join you for dinner one night.” She was curious to see which parts this new man would reflect of herself. She was ready to be conscious.*

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***Being conscious means taking  
ownership for your part in what  
happens in your life.***

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Being conscious means taking ownership for your part in what happens in your life. If you see your relationships as mirrors, you can see yourself more clearly in every interaction you have with others. Being unconscious often means that you attribute your outcomes to external forces, events, and people. Being conscious gives you the opportunity to choose to learn and grow. Conscious Dating is about using this time in your life to learn more about yourself and relationships so you can truly find the love of your life and the life that you love.

## **CREATING A SUPPORT COMMUNITY**

The most common lament I hear from today’s singles is the difficulty they have meeting potential partners. This problem did not

occur in past generations when we lived and worked in a community of family, friends, neighbors, and coworkers, all of whom would typically help introduce singles to each other. Without this support system, today's singles increasingly rely upon dating services and personal ads, and then wonder why they have so little in common with the people they meet through these services. Remember that relationships are about connection, and start by asking yourself how you can improve the quality and quantity of ALL your relationships. Without a built-in community, today's singles must create their own support system, like Ethan Watters' urban tribes.

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***Without a built-in community,  
today's singles must intentionally create  
their own support system.***

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When you take a sabbatical from your job, you focus on goals and activities that you typically couldn't do while working full time. While you are on this sabbatical from romantic relationships, it's an opportunity to build your support community. You can make new friends and allow new people into your life when you're not looking at everyone as a potential partner. You can take more risks to enrich your life when you're free to make choices and aren't worried about how your partner will react. You can focus on yourself instead of your partner when you try new things.

\* \* \*

*Cathy was finding a supportive community in her Conscious Dating Relationship Success Training for Singles (RESTS) class. Every Thursday night, Cathy got home from work at 5 p.m. and "met" on the phone with her class, a group of eight men and*

women. The first couple of weeks, Cathy had a blast envisioning her perfect life by writing out all the things she wanted to do, be, and have in her life. It became clear that she really wanted to get the proper credentials to open a daycare center. She also met separately one night a week with her coach, Patty, to further clarify her thoughts and feelings.

One of the most challenging classes for Cathy focused on her values and life purpose. In one exercise, she needed to envision her family and friends toasting her on her eightieth birthday. She was asked to write what significant people in her life would say about her: how they appreciated her, what she meant to them, how she was important to them, and why they loved and respected her.

Cathy felt so silly, as if she were bragging about herself.

But Patty encouraged her: “Go for it, Cathy! This is a celebration of your life! This is your opportunity to talk about how you shine!”

Cathy took a deep breath and read her toast on the phone: My eightieth birthday party takes place on top of a mountain as the sun is shining. My father is there, along with my brother and his family. All my close friends from the past and present are with me too.

---

**When Cathy got off the phone,  
she was giddy and excited. She knew that now she  
could finally do what she'd always wanted...**

---

First, my friends take turns talking about me. They say, “Cathy is an incredibly generous, warm, and loving woman. She is one of those unique people to whom children are drawn. She has the most

*contagious laughter, and you can't help but smile in her presence. She's very intuitive, especially when it comes to young children. We have witnessed her growth over the years and felt intense pride."*

*Then, it's my father's turn. He says, "Cathy has always been a giver, and I've witnessed with pride as she learned to give more and more to herself as she got older. I watched her grow in many ways, whether it was in her career or in her love life. It has made me so proud to be the father of such a beautiful woman, both on the inside and outside."*

*Lastly, a group of my nieces, nephews, and grandchildren speak. They say, "We want to acknowledge Cathy for being one of the most generous human beings in the world. We also thank her for always opening both her heart and her home to us."*

*By the time Cathy stopped reading, tears were falling down her cheeks. "I love it!" Patty cheered. "Bravo!"*

*When Cathy got off the phone, she was giddy and excited. She knew that now she could finally do what she'd always wanted: open a daycare center! Now that she was single, she would embrace life as an adventure and finally live the life she wanted.*

Both Angela and Cathy were grieving the ends of their relationships. But they were also using the time to turn their situations into opportunities. That's why Angela decided to write in her journal again. And why Cathy decided to sign up for my Conscious Dating Relationship Success Training for Singles (RESTS) class. When you're single, you can take the personal growth workshop that you always wanted to take. You can go back to school. You can travel to a faraway country. You're free to expand your world and yourself. A relationship can narrow these opportunities tremendously as you make plans and decisions with your relationship in mind.

Relationships happen anyway. They do! If you look back on your life, you will find that you met people and formed relationships

without any plan or intention. As social beings, this is what we humans do. When you are single, you may feel alone and desperate, but even if you did nothing to meet a partner, eventually you would have opportunities to do so and form a relationship. Since relationships happen anyway, you can relax and not push the outcome. Instead, you can focus on the process of living your life consciously, building a community of emotionally satisfying relationships all around you and allowing your support community to help you attract the kind of partner you really want.

\* \* \*

The remainder of this book covers my Ten Principles of Conscious Dating and will give you the information and tools you need to make good relationship choices while single. These choices can result in the life and relationship you really want. While there is no quick fix, I think you will find that *Conscious Dating* is very doable and can set you on a path that will help you find your life partner sooner than you might expect as you are living the life that you love. ✨

**CONSCIOUS DATING PLAN EXERCISE NO. 4:**

*Please refer to Chapter 15 to write your answers.*

**How can you turn being single into an opportunity?**

1. At this point in the book, can you come up with at least three things that you've always wanted to do but have not done, due to finances, time constraints, or the fact that you were in a relationship?
2. On a scale of 0 to 10, does being single feel like an opportunity to you? (With 10 being very excited and positive)
3. If you did not write down a 10, how can you close the gap to be closer to being a 10? For example, is there something that you let go of or suppressed in your last relationship that you can do now? What have you always wanted to do in your life that you held back from doing until now?
4. Finally, pick one of the three things from Question 1 that you will act on today!

# Pre-Commitment: Is This “The One”?

U  
Until this point I have focused on you as a single. You should be proud for choosing the path of consciousness to create a successful life for yourself. What happens next when you fall in love and wonder if he/she is “the one”? In this chapter I describe what happens when you, a conscious single, become a couple. Now it's time for you to look deeply at this relationship: will it evolve into a successful long-term partnership?

## **COMMITTED VERSUS PRE-COMMITTED ... WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?**

When I travel around the country to give workshops about pre-commitment, I often display one of my favorite cartoons. It's about “The Quigmans,” in which Francine is in the foreground with tears streaming down her face. Bob, her husband, is seen in the background throwing his hands up in the air. “You've cried every day since our wedding,” he's saying. “I don't believe it's your allergies anymore.”

After a good laugh, I explain to my audience that this married couple most likely skipped the pre-commitment stage when they were dating. They did not take the time to see if their relationship would really be a good long-term choice; instead, they jumped right into commitment. Evidently, for Francine, at least, marriage to Bob might not have been a good long-term choice.

So, what exactly does “pre-commitment” mean? I’m very proud of coining this term, since most relationship experts and literature have not yet recognized this stage. The pre-commitment stage is when singles become a couple and they ask themselves, “Is this the right relationship for me? Do I want to make a commitment here?” Pre-commitment is an opportunity for a couple to gain experience and knowledge about their relationship. It is a phase that is used by conscious couples to make a good long-term relationship choice, whether it means staying together and taking the next step toward commitment or un-choosing the relationship because it is not aligned with what one or both partners want for a life partnership.

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***Pre-commitment is an opportunity for  
a conscious couple to gain experience and  
knowledge about their relationship.***

---

A few years ago, without any marketing on my part, I started to see a new kind of couple show up in my practice. This couple would announce to me that they had been seeing each other for a while and were thinking of taking the next step toward commitment, and want my help in determining if this would be a good long-term relationship choice for them. Sometimes an individual would consult me for a “reality check,” but more often it was the couple. This is the hallmark of the pre-commitment stage: one or both partners are unsure of the future of their relationship, so they’re asking themselves, “Is this the one? Should I spend the rest of my life with this person?”

I had not yet come up with the term “pre-commitment,” and I wasn’t quite sure what to do with these couples. I recall that first couple who came to my office, saying, “We’ve been dating for three months now, and we’d like to know if we’re making the right choice—” I was astounded. I didn’t know what to do with them! I didn’t have a crystal ball and couldn’t find an existing model of

helping these clients determine if this relationship was a good long-term choice. They were not a committed couple, and most of my training, experience, and tools did not apply. I didn't even know what to call them; the language of my profession did not seem to recognize this kind of couple.

---

***One or both partners are unsure of  
the future of their relationship,  
so they're asking themselves, "Is this  
the One? Should I spend the rest  
of my life with this person?"***

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Like most other therapists in this position whom I have talked to since, I started working with these couples from a "premarital" perspective, but that didn't seem right to me. In premarital counseling, two people have made a commitment to each other and now are seeking support to get their relationship off to a good start. Since these new couples were not yet committed—and trying to decide whether to take that step—I decided to call them "pre-committed."

Indeed, the pre-committed couple is a phenomenon of our times. The divorce rate and its incredibly high social costs permeate our culture. The marriage rate has declined. I believe these are signs that we are moving toward "quality" over "quantity." But does this mean that fewer people want a Life Partnership? No. The majority of singles still want a committed relationship; however, I think they are becoming better informed consumers who don't want to be sold a lemon. But the desire for committed relationships seems to remain constant.

### **AM I STILL IN THE TESTING STAGE?**

I find that most singles today are more realistic about their futures,

but also more skeptical, cautious, and fearful of failure. Are you single and over thirty? Have you let go of that romantic ideal in which you “follow your heart” and plunge blindly into a committed relationship? Most of us want to be in a successful, committed relationship, but we are not sure how to achieve it. Maybe this is why you picked up my book in the first place.

At this point, I’m confident that you are clear about who you are and what you want. You now have the tools to make good relationship choices. In Chapter 11, “Gain Relationship Skills and Knowledge,” I wrote about relationship attitudes, and said that you can choose your own attitudes. If you’re dating right now, what’s your attitude? Are you gaining experience and knowledge as you get to know people? Are you testing the reality before deciding if you’re going to become a couple? If so, you are in the testing phase, which I covered in Chapter 6, “Learn How to Get What You Want,” and discussed Scouting, Sorting, Screening, and Testing.

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***A pre-committed relationship is not  
the same as a premarital one.***

***You are not engaged to be married.***

---

Have you found someone you’d like to get serious with? Are you in an exclusive relationship and asking yourself, “Is this the right relationship for me?” If so, you are in the pre-commitment stage, which means that you’re really asking, “Should I commit?” Again, if you are in a pre-committed relationship, this is not the same as a premarital one. You are not engaged to be married. Rather, you are asking yourself if you want to commit to this other person. You are at a point where it’s still possible to “un-choose” the relationship if you two are not aligned. You know that having a happy and successful life is more important to you than this particular relationship being “it.”

## **TRYING TO "MAKE" THE RELATIONSHIP WORK**

What if you are ready to commit, but your boyfriend/girlfriend isn't so sure? When I hear this as a coach, a red flag starts waving in front of me. I've learned the hard way that you cannot "make" a relationship work by yourself. If you came to me and said that you wanted to start relationship coaching without your partner, I would caution you that this is probably a pattern you're starting. As a coach, I would not want you to try to "fix" a pre-committed relationship on your own. Rather, I would work with you to help you see the reality of "what is" and make conscious choices about it.

---

*In a pre-committed relationship,  
working too hard to make the round  
peg fit the square hole can  
be a sign that it is not a good fit.*

---

When a relationship is "new"—as are most pre-committed relationships—this is the time that most couples are most motivated to be together. This is when they really want to experience and enhance the relationship. If someone in this stage doesn't appear to have much energy for doing so during this period, and/or takes a "my way or no way" attitude, it sends up a big red flag. Certainly, this reflects a serious lack of mutuality, flexibility and open-mindedness.

Behavior is not random. Nothing ever happens just once. If your boyfriend/girlfriend is closed to what you're suggesting or rigid to your proposal, I would ask, "Is this part of a pattern?" If you're hearing that things are "Just fine" or "I'm too busy," that doesn't wash well. You better believe that if he/she had a priority in which he wanted his/her partner's participation—such as finances—he/she wouldn't accept a brush-off.

We need to carefully judge when to “work” on a relationship. When you’re in a committed relationship, this is a no-brainer. You’re going to do what it takes. In a pre-committed relationship, working too hard to make the round peg fit the square hole can be a sign that it is not a good fit.

### **ATTACHMENT VERSUS LOVE**

Have you noticed that it takes a while to get someone out of your system after a breakup? Recently, I was talking to one of our trainers at Relationship Coaching Institute, Lynne Michelson, about this experience. “Singles know perhaps the relationship was not healthy, or that they are better off without the other person, but they still feel hooked,” she said. “They might also know their Requirements were not being met, but they cannot get the person ‘out’ of them.”

We talked about how tortuous it is to feel strongly about someone, really want it to work, but choose to let the relationship go because you must. I think that what keeps relationships together and makes breaking up hard to do is more than love; it is attachment.

---

***What keeps relationships  
together and makes breaking up hard to do is more  
than love; it is attachment.***

---

What is attachment? We talked about this in Chapter 8. Attachment can mean many things, ranging from emotional affection to physical fixation. Psychologists have whole theories around attachment and identify clinical disorders caused by it. I like to define it simply as a “strong emotional bond.” As humans, we get attached. We are attached to objects, such as cars, houses, money, books, and clothes. We get attached to routines, such as washing our hands or reading before bed. We are attached to beliefs, such as killing is wrong. We are attached to

sensations and experiences, such as orgasm. We are attached to certain activities, such as work or exercise. And we also get attached to people. In the extreme, our attachment can be an addiction.

---

***Love is a positive feeling toward something or somebody. On the other hand, attachment is an emotional need for something or somebody.***

---

But how are love and attachment different? Love is a positive feeling toward something or somebody. On the other hand, attachment is an emotional need for something or somebody. The major difference seems to be that love is other-directed and attachment is self-centered. So what do you do if you feel attached? Well, you're on your way, because the first step in letting go of an attachment is to be clear about love versus attachment.

---

#### **WHY ATTACHMENT DOES NOT SERVE YOU:**

- Attachment is not love
  - Attachment is about me and my needs
  - Attachment has consequences: if you continue to pursue a relationship that doesn't work, you're setting yourself up for failure
- 

It can be hard to let go of someone if you fear falling into a chasm of pain and emptiness. I urge you to get the support you need to move on and pursue involvement in activities and with people that are productive for you. A coach and/or support group is great for this.

## **IS THIS THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIP FOR ME?**

Most of us want a fulfilling life partnership and have little idea of how to create one. Even couples in successful long-term relationships have little insight into why they are successful. As recently as one generation ago, powerful social and economic pressures brought and kept couples together. For thousands of years, marriage was a contract to create an economic unit for the purpose of raising children and ensuring the survival of the species. Our society has evolved to the point where survival is taken for granted. Instead, it is our desire for love and emotional fulfillment that brings us together. Unfortunately, while we want to be happy, we do not seem to know exactly what we want or how to get what we want.

If you're in the pre-commitment stage, hopefully you are living in the present and focused on your connection with this other person. Hopefully you're not overly attached to a specific future outcome for this relationship, nor wanting to be with this person as some sort of prize. This person seems to fit with your life Vision, and both of you are striving to be authentic and honest.

When you enter a relationship consciously, the pre-commitment stage can enhance your chances for long-term success. It requires a delicate balance of investing in the relationship while staying objective. You need to be prepared to end things if your Vision, Purpose, and Requirements do not align well with the reality. The goal of the pre-commitment stage is to take the time needed to gain experience and knowledge—instead of relying upon hope and potential. This requires patience, awareness, and grounding in reality. You need to be willing to break off the relationship if it's not a good fit even though, as we all know, breaking up is hard to do.

If you think of entering a committed relationship as being like sky-diving, are you going to plan ahead by studying at ground school before putting on your parachute? Or, will you finally be motivated to learn when you are at thirty thousand feet and about to jump? The couples I coach in the pre-commitment stage strive to be conscious and objective about the future of their relationship.

## **COUPLES WHO ARE PRE-COMMITTED AIM TO:**

- **become clear about whether this relationship is right for them**
  - **get a reality check**
  - **stay on track with what they really want**
  - **develop strategies for testing and decision-making**
  - **address emotional and compatibility issues**
- 

## **EVOLVE VS. PUSH VS. TWIST**

When I speak to singles around the country about pre-commitment, I tell them, “We need to let the relationship evolve as it’s meant to be, not force it to be what we want it to be.” Too often we sabotage our future success because we “push” a relationship too fast toward commitment or “twist” a relationship to fit what we want.

Once in a relationship we need to relax and go with the flow, take time to get to know who our partner really is, stay grounded in reality and let the relationship be what it is instead of focusing on our fantasies, hopes and dreams of what we want it to be. Only then can we know if there is enough true alignment to proceed towards commitment.

How do you let a relationship evolve naturally? First, give yourself as much time as necessary. Have enough self-love to not settle! This means asking yourself: What’s the minimum amount of time you need before you commit yourself to someone? Only you know the answer to this. Do you need three months? Six months? One year? I’ve worked with some couples who needed five years before deciding to get married.

This question is very similar to asking, “How long should I date someone before I have sex?” Look closely at your own comfort lev-

els, and give yourself the gift of time. I caution you against pressuring yourself into jumping into the illusion of living happily ever after. So often, we want to be ahead of where we are. When we are single, we want to be in a relationship. And when we are in a relationship, we want to be committed and live happily ever after. But the conscious single does not decide to be a couple after two dates.

## PRE-COMMITMENT AND COHABITATION

“When ‘living together’ waits for marriage, ‘commitment’ and ‘forever’ are more likely to be part of the package,” says Diane Sollee, MSW, founder and director of the Washington, D.C.-based Coalition for Marriage, Family and Couples Education and director of Smart Marriages.

She was responding as “Dr. Romance”—an advice column at [www.smartmarriages.com](http://www.smartmarriages.com)—to a letter sent to her by a young woman who was thinking about having her boyfriend move in with her. The young woman wrote: “He says it makes no sense to pay rent on two places when he’s here all the time anyway. He also says we need to see if we can live together before we get married, and I can see his point.”<sup>3</sup>

But she was concerned because her mother had just told her about a study that said couples who live together before marriage actually have a higher divorce rate. One study about marriage and cohabitation, for example, from the Centers for Disease Control in 2002 (yes, the CDC does see marriage as a part of disease control!) showed that unmarried cohabitations overall are less stable than marriages. The probability of a first marriage ending in separation or divorce within five years is 20 percent, but the probability of a premarital cohabitation breaking up within five years is 49 percent. After ten years, the probability of a first marriage ending is 33 percent, compared with 62 percent for cohabitations.

“Dr. Romance” had this to say:

Your boyfriend is right—you would save money living together. He is using the prevailing logic, that with the current 50 percent

divorce rate it makes sense to try things out in advance. But studies have found that cohabitation isn't enough like marriage to be a good test. Cohabitation can also set up a destructive way of thinking: "If this isn't working, we should bail out."

Sollee also urged this young woman to read the research, which shows "that couples who are formally engaged, set the date, and reserve the hall before they move in together improve their odds. Moving in with your 'fiancé' is different than moving in with your 'boyfriend.'"

Many of us have a fear of commitment. It can feel easier to cohabitate without actually committing to each other. This is a "mini-marriage." Many couples feel like they'll minimize emotional risk by not committing. But the truth is—cohabitation actually increases risk! The fact is, you're living together, but your attitudes are leaving the back door wide open (the one with the "Exit" sign above it), which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

David Popenoe, professor of sociology and co-director of the National Marriage Project at Rutgers University, has referred to cohabitation as "the marriage enemy:"

Hollywood stars are doing it. Most American young people are doing it. Even some politicians now do it. When blushing brides and dashing grooms walk down the aisle today, more than half have already lived together. Cohabitation is replacing marriage as the first living-together experience for young men and women.<sup>4</sup>

Popenoe acknowledges that living together seems like a good way to achieve some of the benefits of marriage without the risk of divorce. You can share expenses and learn more about each other. You can find out whether your partner has what it takes to be married. If things don't work out, breaking up is easier to do. You don't have to seek legal or religious permission to dissolve your union.

But, Popenoe warns, evidence suggests that living together is not a good way to prepare for marriage or to avoid divorce: "Cohabiting unions tend to weaken the institution of marriage and pose clear

dangers for women and children.” He says that unmarried couples have lower levels of happiness and well-being than married couples. Between 1960 and 2004, the number of unmarried couples in America increased by nearly 1,200 percent, according to the National Marriage Project.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, over half of all first marriages are now preceded by living together, compared to virtually none fifty years ago.

“The belief that living together before marriage is a useful way ‘to find out whether you really get along,’ and thus avoid a bad marriage and an eventual divorce, is now widespread among young people,” say Popenoe and Whitehead in their report on *The State of Our Unions: The Social Health of Marriage in America 2005*. “But the available data on the effects of cohabitation fail to confirm this belief. In fact, a substantial body of evidence indicates that those who live together before marriage are more likely to break up after marriage.”

The National Marriage Project offers four principles to help guide the thinking of pre-marrieds on the question “Should we live together?”

1. **Consider not living together at all before marriage.** There is no evidence that if you decide to cohabit before marriage you will have a stronger marriage than those who don’t live together, and there is some evidence to suggest that if you live together before marriage, you are more likely to divorce.
2. **Don’t make a habit of cohabiting.** Multiple cohabiting is a strong predictor of the failure of future relationships.
3. **Limit cohabitation to the shortest possible period of time.** The longer you live together with a partner, the more likely it is that the low-commitment ethic of cohabitation will take hold, the opposite of what is required for a successful marriage.
4. **Do not cohabit if children are involved.** Children need and should have parents who are committed to staying together.

You don't need to live together to determine long-term compatibility if you're clear about who you are, what you want, and you consciously use the pre-commitment phase to allow the relationship to evolve. Be sure to watch for unmet requirements and red flags. Use the Dating Red Flags Checklist from Chapter 8 any time you want a reality check to help you decide the future of your pre-committed relationship.

## **FACT VERSUS ATTITUDE**

Commitment is both a **FACT** demonstrated by behavior, and an **ATTITUDE** consisting of thoughts and beliefs. Saying vows and exchanging rings in front of witnesses establishes the fact of commitment, as does the behavior of staying in an unhappy relationship no matter what. A committed attitude involves thoughts and beliefs to stay in the relationship under all circumstances.

The example of the pre-committed couple above, where the man announced, "We've been dating for two months now and we're real committed," is an example of premature commitment and a misalignment of fact and attitude. They are pre-committed in fact, with a committed attitude. I've worked with many married couples on the verge of divorce where one or both partners had an uncommitted attitude such as "I'm not so sure this is the right relationship for me." In my experience, couples who have a disconnect between fact and attitude rarely stay together.

Making a commitment to a relationship is a serious and irreversible choice, not to be taken lightly or entered into quickly, because you can never go back to the way your life was before. When you are single, dating is your opportunity to explore possibilities. A pre-committed relationship is your chance to fully compare your requirements with the reality. Ideally, you then make a commitment with full consciousness and clarity that this is what you want, accepting all challenges and obstacles as part of the package.

A committed couple has typically performed an identifiable act, symbolic or formal, to become committed; usually, but not always,

with the intention of staying together for Life. The fact is: you are married. Your attitudes are aligned. This means that your commitment is explicit, and both of you are well aware of it. In this context, most of us would say there are no exits, and unhappiness alone is not a viable reason to leave the relationship.

Commitment is usually a gradual process, starting with agreeing to the first meeting and the first date, planning future dates, spending time and money together, becoming exclusive, becoming sexually involved, meeting each other's family, spending the weekend together, etc.

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**If you're in a relationship right now, what's your attitude? This is the array of couples I've worked with:**

- Are you both pre-committed?
- Is one of you pre-committed while the other is committed?
- Are both of you committed?
- Are both of you committed, but still holding onto pre-committed attitudes?
- Do both of you have a prematurely committed attitude?

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If you are both pre-committed with commitment as your goal, you need to work to achieve the clarity to make a decision to commit or not. It is important that each of you has clarity about your Vision and Requirements. If one of you is pre-committed and the other has a committed attitude, there is incongruence here. I worked with one couple who had been living together for seven years; she was talking about commitment and marriage the entire time, while he continually put her off until he was "sure."

If you are both committed in fact and attitude, the challenges in your relationship are not reasons to think or talk about leaving. This

kind of commitment sustains couples through the hard times and strengthens their relationship. As a relationship coach, I love working with couples in this stage!

If you are both committed in action or fact—yet have a pre-committed attitude—you need to ask yourself why you're leaving the door open. Perhaps you're unmarried but have children together, bought property, cohabitate, or have made clear commitments by your actions, but still feel unsure. Or, perhaps you're married and you see divorce as a way to escape the pain and challenges that are overwhelming you.

If both of you have a prematurely committed attitude, you need to look at why it's premature. Are you trying to force this relationship rather than letting it evolve naturally? Are you truly ready and available for commitment? I had a couple seek my help who were both still married to other people when they had an affair with each other and decided they wanted to be together, but were having problems. It was clear that their commitment to each other was premature, as neither was ready and available for the other.

If a committed couple comes in and wants my help to determine whether to stay in the relationship, I explain that if they have made a commitment, my job is to help them make it work. I talk with them about their level of commitment and have them examine their attitudes and choices. While neutral about the outcome of pre-committed relationships, I am not neutral about commitment. I assume that their agenda is to keep their commitment, and we need to discuss and agree on that agenda if we are to work together.

## **CONSCIOUS MATING**

*You remember Cathy, the almost-forty-year-old woman who had divorced and gone back to school to earn her daycare license. Now, joyous children were bouncing around her home, and she was the happiest she'd ever been. She had met Samuel, a forty-five-year-old divorced lawyer with two school-aged children,*

online. Like Cathy, he had done much soul-searching to figure out his life Vision and Requirements. They'd been dating for six months when they decided to seek a pre-commitment coach.

One of their biggest issues was their religious differences. Cathy, a Christian, went to church every Sunday. Samuel, a Jew, had raised his kids to be Jewish but only went to the synagogue on high holidays. Cathy felt that it was very important for her partner to come to church with her, but Samuel wasn't interested. So, they found a coach through my Conscious Mating program to help them evaluate the compatibility of their life Vision together.

For the next three months, they worked on enhancing their communication skills. Cathy did not want to convert Samuel to Christianity, but she really wanted his company in church on Sundays. He did go every once in a while, but begrudgingly. In the end, he was unhappy next to her in the chapel, and she was unsatisfied.

Their coach introduced to them the concept of "Gimme." This is a relationship strategy, which their coach explained as follows:

*"When you want something from your partner, and he/she is reluctant to do it, you can ask for a Gimme. Essentially, this is a gift you give to your partner, even if you really don't want to it. You do it simply to make your partner happy."*

Over the months, Samuel and Cathy learned how to compromise with their religious differences. Samuel joined Cathy at church a couple of Sundays a month, and she in turn went to baseball games with him on a couple of Saturdays. They worked hard to make their relationship fulfilling, creating a new shared Vision for their life together.

Cathy asked herself: "Am I prepared to live with the fact that Samuel will not go to church with me every Sunday, as I'd like?"

... Am I hoping that Samuel will be different one day?"

## **TO BE SUCCESSFUL LIFE PARTNERS IN TODAY'S WORLD YOU MUST:**

- **Be clear about who you are and what you want**
  - **Make a good partner choice aligned with what you want**
  - **Learn how to get what you want**
- 

## **CONSCIOUS VERSUS UNCONSCIOUS PRE-COMMITMENT**

Pre-committed couples generally fall into two categories:

**UNCONSCIOUS:** typically following the “mini-marriage” model of trying the relationship out, acting committed without actually making the commitment. A misalignment of fact and attitude.

**CONSCIOUS:** aware that they are not yet committed, usually have commitment as a goal, asking themselves “Is this the right relationship for me? Should I make a commitment?” An alignment of fact and attitude.

## **WHAT IS COMMITMENT?**

When couples come to counseling or coaching, they usually want the relationship to work and are not aware of the difference between pre-commitment and commitment. Since I discovered the significance of the pre-commitment stage and the role of fact versus attitude in determining the success of a relationship, I usually begin coaching an unmarried couple by asking about the status of the relationship. Most couples will describe their relationship as committed and are confused about making a distinction between committed or pre-committed. The conversation that follows is often enlightening to all of us!

To help answer the question “What is commitment” when the couple isn’t married, I offer the following:

**You are NOT in a committed relationship if:**

1. Your partner is not aware your relationship is committed
2. You are wondering if this relationship is committed
3. You and your partner have differences of opinion about the status of your relationship
4. Your family and friends have different perceptions about the status of your relationship
5. You and your partner have not acted to explicitly formalize your commitment in some way
6. You are relying on verbal promises of commitment without a significant track record of them being kept

A commitment is explicit and unambiguous. A commitment is a formal event of some kind between two people. A commitment is something you DO over time. A real commitment is usually legally enforceable and there are consequences for breaking it. And, for a relationship to be truly committed, there are no exits—mentally, emotionally, or physically. When the going gets rough, you make it work.

So, when is a relationship committed? When there is an alignment of fact and attitude. What creates the “fact” of commitment?

**I propose these three criterion to determine if a relationship is committed:**

**CRITERIA #1:** Promises made to each other about the permanent nature of the relationship that are kept

**CRITERIA #2:** Explicit, formal, public declaration

**CRITERIA #3:** Unambiguous to partners and others

In today's world, if all three of the above are met, I would say it is a committed relationship, whether legally married or not.

## **CONCLUSION**

I hope that you recognize that the pre-commitment stage represents an opportunity to gain experience and knowledge about the reality of a relationship that can greatly increase your chances for long-term success. I hope you'll have the courage to stay conscious and make a good long-term relationship choice, whether it's to stay together or not. For more on this topic see my next book *Conscious Mating: Is This the Right Relationship for Me?* ♪

## CONSCIOUS DATING PLAN EXERCISE NO. 16:

### Appreciations and Issues

*If you are in a pre-committed relationship:*

1. Pause for a moment and think about what you appreciate about your relationship with your partner. List the first ten things that come to your mind, without judgment. They can be big or small, important or unimportant. If you run out of ideas, take a break and return to the list.

2. Now list ten issues that you experience with your partner or the relationship. List everything that comes to you, without judgment. They can be big or small, important or unimportant.

3. Review your appreciations and rate each one on a scale from 0 (unimportant) to 10 (very important) on their level of importance to you. A low number means that you could get by without it, and a high number means you would not be happy in a relationship without it.

4. Review your issues and mark each one with "R" if it's a Requirement, "N" if it's a Need and "W" if it's a Want.

- Remember that Requirements are nonnegotiable: they must happen for the relationship to continue.
- Needs must happen for the relationship to work for you, but they are negotiable: you would not break up if they weren't met.
- Wants are pleasurable, changeable, and can be substituted.

5. What challenges do you have in your relationship right now? If you have a coach or therapist, it's best to share your findings with him/her.

Please check out [www.ConsciousMating.com](http://www.ConsciousMating.com) for more information and resources for pre-committed and premarital couples.

# It CAN Happen For You!

Congratulations! You have learned the Ten Principles of Conscious Dating and are starting to apply them in your daily life. By doing so, you are not settling for less. You are no longer living in fear that you won't find what you really want.

You are the pioneer of your own life. If you started reading this book with some anxiety or fear about relationships, I hope you now are more confident. You can live anywhere. You can make a living doing just about anything you want. You can start the business you've always dreamed about. You can be a self-made millionaire or a monk. You can have a community of people who support you.

If you were feeling lonely before—or alone, even in a relationship—now you have the tools and strategies to consciously choose to have positive people in your life and be in a loving relationship. It's up to you! You are capable of finding and having the relationship you really want.

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***It's not too late to have the life and relationship that are genuinely for you.***

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The truth has been there all along, but you might not have noticed it. You are not too old, overweight, or unattractive. You are not too poor, busy, or uneducated. Now that you're single, you have the opportunity to find or reinvent yourself. It's not too late to have the life and relationship that are genuinely for you. You can create the life that you really want; you can prepare for and find the relationship that you really want.

# Appendixes

## A. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### 1. What causes relationship failure?

*People want to be happy, but they don't know how. We want a fulfilling relationship, but often choose partners who are not aligned with who we really are and what we really want. Singles fall into "Dating Traps" and make unconscious partner choices, assuming they can "make" a relationship work.*

*Often, when singles enter a pre-committed relationship, they realize the person they are with is not a good long-term choice, but they stay together because they don't want to be alone. They have a variety of self-sabotaging beliefs such as assuming they can't get what they really want, all the "good ones are taken," they're "too old," "too overweight," etc.*

*Making a good long-term partner choice starts with taking the trouble to be very clear about who you are and what you really want, and learning how to get what you want in your life and relationships.*

### 2. How can I find my life partner?

*If you are ready for a committed relationship (see #6 below) and you are very clear about who you are and what you want, there are many effective strategies for being successful in finding your life partner. For starters, review the "Ten Principles of Conscious Dating" (Chapters 5-15); apply the "Four Steps for Conscious Dating" (Chapter 6); and design your Relationship Plan (Chapter 15), which*

*includes your best “Attraction Venues” (Chapter 6, and #11 below) for who you are and what you are seeking.*

### 3. How do I know if this relationship is right for me?

*To be a sustainable Life Partnership, all your Requirements must be met. It’s the Requirement you are not aware of that appears later, or the problem you assume is solvable that isn’t, that will typically cause relationship failure. When you Sort and Screen, you are gathering information about a prospective partner. Then, make sure to Test the information and get EXPERIENCE and KNOWLEDGE that the relationship meets all your Requirements BEFORE making a commitment.*

*There’s no hurry. Take all the time you need to be very clear that this relationship will really work for you in the long run so you can make a commitment confidently, with your whole heart AND your head.*

### 4. Should I date to have fun, or be serious about finding a partner?

*Are you ready for a committed relationship? If you met the person you are looking for TODAY, would you be ready and available for him or her? These are hard questions for many singles who want the benefits of being in a relationship, but who are not really ready or available.*

*If you are already in an intimate relationship (even a bad one), have unfinished business from a past relationship, are going through divorce, are in a transition of some kind in your life, or have problems you need to work out (emotional, financial, legal, etc.), then you are probably not ready and available to meet your life partner. If this is the case, we recommend recreational dating (preferably nonexclusively) for fun while getting to the place in your life when you are ready.*

### 5. What’s wrong with single men/women?

*There tends to be a gender difference in the way men and women*

# A Message From the Author



I sincerely hope you enjoyed this Conscious Dating book excerpt!

Conscious Dating worked for me and I know it can work for you too. Be sure to order your own copy of this book right now and I'll include a personalized inscription and audio CD and ship it to you right away.

This book will change your life. Order yours now at [www.ConsciousDating.com](http://www.ConsciousDating.com)

My best wishes in your journey to find the love of your life and the life that you love.

*David Steele*

# If you are single and seeking your life partner, this is the only book you need

**Finally! Real-world, practical, effective, comprehensive, do-able advice and information for singles.**

In *Conscious Dating*, David Steele provides a new concept for dating and insightful advice, effective exercises and useful illustrations that will help anyone who uses them make their journey to love successful. We recommend this book to anyone looking for love.

— Harville Hendrix, Ph. D. and Helen LaKelly Hunt, Ph. D.,  
authors of *Receiving Love: Transform Your Relationship*  
by *Letting Yourself Be Loved*

Unconscious dating can lead to disaster. Given the serious effect of relationships gone awry, *Conscious Dating* is a must-read for singles who want to make better relationship choices. David Steele provides sound guidance and practical advice for today's singles.

— Pat Love, Ed.D.,  
author of *The Truth About Love and Hot Monogamy*

David Steele has made a significant contribution to the world of relationships by mapping two previously foreign countries—consciousness and dating, bringing them together at last in this customized guide. Packed with practical strategies that really work, *Conscious Dating* is THE book for helping singles navigate the dating world.

— Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks,  
authors of *Conscious Loving and Spirit-Centered Relationships*

This book is filled with practical strategies that work. Packed with solid advice, assessments and exercises, as well as interesting stories, *Conscious Dating* is a book that will completely change the way singles view dating and relating. A must-read for anyone who wants to create his or her next great relationship.

— Eve Eschner Hogan,  
author of *Intellectual Foreplay and How to Love Your Marriage*

## ***Conscious Dating* will help you:**

- Decipher dating in today's confusing world
- Avoid the deadly dating traps
- Learn the secrets to finding your perfect partner
- Make a plan to get what you really want in your life and relationships
- Find the love of your life and the life that you love!

Self Help / Relationships  
Web site: [www.consciousdating.com](http://www.consciousdating.com)

