

Making Love Real

The Intelligent Couple's Guide to Lasting Intimacy and Passion

by

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Keenan and Sarah came to see us after having been together for a little over 12 years. “It’s not that we are unhappy, exactly,” Sarah told us. “Things just seem off.” When we asked them about the relationship’s beginning, Keenan, with a gleam in his eye, said, “At first Sarah wouldn’t give me the time of day. She thought I was going to be flaky and a player. But when I saw Sarah for the first time, I thought, ‘This is the most gorgeous woman I’ve ever met and I’m going to do whatever it takes to get her.’”

Sarah started laughing. “I thought he was super sexy too, but he was so light and easy about everything, I was sure he just wanted to play around. Here we are, 12 years and two kids later.”

When we asked them how they are now, they looked at each other helplessly, and Keenan finally tried to explain. “Everything seems to upset Sarah. I do the same things I’ve been doing for years, play in my band, go out with my friends, but she gets so upset, and then I feel like I can’t do anything right. I wish she could just accept me for who I am.”

Sarah continued, “It’s not like I want him to give up his friends. I just wish he was more focused on us, on me and the family, and when I ask for that he eventually gets pissed

off and defends himself, and finally shuts down completely. Needless to say, we rarely have sex these days, we can't seem to communicate about anything, and we're both so busy we can't get ahead of the curve."

Keenan nodded and finished, "Yeah, she's just angry a lot of the time. I really thought I could make Sarah happy, or I wouldn't have chased after her so hard."

You Want to Have a Real and Loving Relationship

If you have picked up this book, we assume that, like Keenan and Sarah, you want to have a long-term, fulfilling, and loving relationship where both of you can be accepted for who you really are. Keenan and Sarah's story is a very common one. They met, fell in love, and, with the tools they had, forged a beautiful relationship. Over time, they began to notice that the qualities they had once found so sexy and adorable, like Sarah's almost OCD-like organization and Keenan's absent-minded spontaneity, began to get on each other's nerves. They had little spats and wavered between trying to change each other and trying to return to their earlier happiness.

Like Keenan and Sarah's, all relationships have challenges. There can be many barriers that get in the way of love and

fulfillment, and being in a relationship is rarely simple or easy. While our society has the fantasy that relationships last a lifetime, most relationships do not last forever and more than half of all marriages end in divorce. Whether or not you end up being together forever, a relationship is an opportunity to go deeper into who you are, to grow, and to feel loved and connected. Research shows that the best predictor of individual happiness is being surrounded by a loving family, friends, and community.

During the highs, relationships offer love, deep connection, excitement, nurturing, acceptance, joy, sharing, and companionship. During the lows, they bring pain, fear, insecurity, conflict, and disappointment. What most people don't realize is that ups and downs in relationships are completely normal.

The experience of seeing others have relationships or having them yourself teaches you a lot about what it is like to share your life with another person. Unfortunately, the relationship examples in our society rarely offer a road map for consciously creating the supportive and satisfying relationships you'd like to have. As sex and relationship therapists, we have studied, experimented with, and explored the different relationship road maps. We have worked with countless couples to help them create the relationships they truly desire. Through our work we have developed the Somatica Method – a road map to sustainable sex and

intimacy that will help you and your partner Make Love Real by meeting your incredible potential for love, connection, and pleasure in your relationship.

The Problem with Current Road Maps to Relationship Success

The current road maps that are available to teach you about relationships generally take one of two approaches – attachment or individuation – and then offer couples ways to improve their relationships based on one of these models.

Proponents of the attachment approach remind you that you need the bonds of **love** to survive as a species. This is true: human survival is predicated on the ability to form long-term attachments with caregivers. As you move from the parent-child relationship into adulthood and romantic love, your basic need for attachment persists. In a relationship, if your sense of attachment is threatened, you go into survival-like fight, flight, or freeze patterns, which often lead to relationship-damaging behaviors. In the attachment model, the focus of therapy is to maintain the relationship by helping each person in the couple understand the other's fears and anxieties and shift their own behaviors to minimize these fears and strengthen the attachment. This is what Sarah is focused on, and it is one of the two key relationship needs.

Proponents of the individuation approach point out that, in order to have a fulfilling life and relationship, you must be **real** in a relationship. In other words, you have to be true to your authentic self and follow your deepest desires without letting your partner's fears and anxieties stand in the way of this self-actualization. In this model, the way to a fulfilling relationship is for each of the individuals to be true to themselves and to work on their own fears and anxieties so as to support their partner in being real as well. This is what Keenan is focused on, and it is the other of the two key relationship needs.

Both of these methods have merits, but each fulfills only half of what you need from a relationship. As Keenan and Sarah are discovering, a combination of love and being real is necessary to a fulfilling relationship. Striking the delicate and ongoing balance of creating safe attachment and being true to yourself in a relationship is the focus of the Somatica Method and what you will learn in this book.

Let's look at one of Keenan and Sarah's fights through the lenses of attachment and individuation. Every time Keenan goes out for a ride on his motorcycle, Sarah is afraid he is going to die. While Keenan is away, images of him crashing and dying spin through her head. She sees herself alone and destitute with their two young children. She feels shaky and fearful and is so worked up that, as soon as Keenan walks in the door, she starts yelling at him about how selfish he is to

put her through this all the time. Keenan feels like his wife doesn't care at all about his need for freedom to be himself. Sarah then gets defensive and shuts down, spending time in her art studio until she thinks Keenan has calmed down and it is okay to come back out.

An attachment road map would help Keenan see that Sarah isn't just being crazy, that she is actually having a fight, flight, or freeze response. While her way of sharing with Keenan is not helpful, she is trying to tell him that she loves him, depends on him, and fears for his life, her life, and the lives of their children. If only Keenan could see that his wife is terrified and not just judging and attacking him, he would stop riding the motorcycle in order to help her feel safe and stable.

While a sense of attachment is essential to long-term relationship success, and is foundational to people's sense of safety and connection, the problem with the attachment road map is that couples often over-compromise. In other words, they give up on their individual needs for the sake of the relationship, which often leads to resentment, midlife crisis, and emotional disconnection or ending the relationship because it demands that they not be their true selves.

The individuation road map, on the other hand, is based on the idea that you do not always have to be enslaved to childlike fears. It is about helping couples to grow up, move

beyond that scared child inside, and accept their partner's need to be who they are. They are focused on freedom, self-actualization, and the understanding that you cannot and should not control others.

In the case of Sarah and Keenan, an individuation road map would help Sarah grow up and face her fears. Sarah would be encouraged to have compassion and sympathy for Keenan's desires, take an actuated, adult perspective on how he expresses his selfhood, and develop a grown-up sense of safety within herself. A therapist using this model would point out that Keenan is not riding his motorcycle to hurt Sarah but that his motorcycle riding is an essential part of his sense of self. The therapist would help Sarah see that she cannot control everything and that if Keenan stops riding his motorcycle he might lose his sense of self and freedom in the relationship, causing resentment and distance. Instead of stopping Keenan's riding, Sarah could support his desire to ride and thus support him in being true to himself.

Individuation is also essential to relationships and important to people's long-term fulfillment, growth, and acceptance of who they are. The problem with the individuation road map is that people are expected to just “grow up” and “get over” their fears of loss, abandonment, and insecurity all on their own. Unfortunately, your wounds and insecurities are not so easily overcome – you cannot just will them away; you need to heal them, and you can only do this by being vulnerable

with the people you love. The feeling that you need to get over your fears creates a sense of shame when you cannot. To avoid feeling this shame, people do not let themselves be vulnerable, so their relationships stay distant and superficial. In order to deepen your relationship, you must be able to share your strengths as well as your fears and insecurities.

The Somatica Method: A Holistic Road Map for Making Love Real

What we have found in working with countless couples is that every human being needs *both* a sense of attachment and a feeling that they are free to be who they are. This is the only way to have a sustainable relationship—to Make Love Real. The truth is that good attachment creates safety and trust, allowing people to explore who they are and move towards self-actualization. At the same time, when your partner supports you in being true to who you are, you feel more accepted and therefore more attached.

At the beginning of a relationship, people naturally tend towards creating attachment. As they feel more attached and safe, they begin to want to fulfill their own personal dreams and desires, and this is where conflict starts to arise. Through the Somatica Method, we help each individual in a couple learn how to identify their own individual needs, while at the same time helping them learn how to understand their own

and their partner's fears and care for each other in the midst of these fears. The Somatica Method focuses on interdependence and supports both attachment and freedom.

This, of course, is much more easily said than done, and it takes real work and commitment to create this kind of relationship – but it is the most sustainable relationship you can have. If you want a lifetime of deep connection, fulfillment, and pleasure, you need to cultivate attachment, make space for survival fears, and build empathy and resilience. With these tools you can support your partner in being true to who they are.

In our work with Keenan and Sarah, we helped Keenan see the ways his actions brought up Sarah's attachment fears. We also helped Sarah see that Keenan's desire to ride was about his identity and was not a personal attack on her. After each of them was able to empathize with the other's needs—the need for attachment and the need for individual freedom—Sarah felt ready to support Keenan in riding and Keenan felt comfortable making changes to his riding habits. He agreed that he would not ride on rainy days and that he would only ride at night once a month. They both agreed that they would listen to each other – Keenan to Sarah's fears and Sarah to Keenan's need to be true to himself. This is an example of how the Somatica Method supports both attachment and individuation needs and invites couples to bridge and connect through their differences.

Disappointment: What the Other Road Maps Leave Out

Long-term relationships provide you with an opportunity to grow because they cause you to face your deepest longings and fears as you connect with another human being whose needs, feelings, and desires differ from yours. Similarities between you and your partner and attunement to differing needs help you relax into a sense of safety and stability. This relaxation creates a foundation for growth. At the same time, the challenging differences between you and your partner provide the growth-promoting tension in your relationship. In the face of these differences, we have found, some amount of disappointment is not only inevitable but also an important path to growth and a deeper connection.

While there are no studies measuring the fulfillment you get from a relationship, we would guess that a really good relationship gives you about 70% of what you want. This means that you will experience at least 30% disappointment. While most people don't want to think about disappointment, we have found that couples who have an empowered approach to disappointment have the most successful and resilient relationships. We do so much work with couples on dealing with disappointment in their relationships that we felt disappointment deserved its own section in this book.

After all, almost every relationship problem derives from the inherent differences between any two people and the misunderstandings and disappointments that come from those differences. These may be differences that seem trivial, such as disagreement about how clean the house should be, or differences that most people would see as highly challenging, such as disagreement about practicing non-monogamy versus monogamy. The Somatica Method reflects our belief that learning how to navigate your differences and the disappointments that come from them is an essential part of relationship success. In this book you will learn tools to deal with disappointment in order to move from stagnation and isolation into expansion and cohesion.

What's Sex Got to Do with It?

Sex can be a big part of the glue that holds people together in relationship. When you have sex, hormones that promote bonding and relaxation are released and help to keep you connected and lower the day-to-day frustrations that couples face. Sex is a way that you can express your love and desire for your partner as well as experience acceptance for your uniqueness, therefore sex can be an expression of both attachment and individuation. Unfortunately, the attachment and individuation road maps both fall short when it comes to creating a healthy and satisfying sex life.

The attachment approach assumes that if you have good attachment and communication, warm, loving, and fulfilling sex will follow. The individuation road map suggests that if each of you just pursues what you want sexually from your partner, you are most likely to get it. Both of these approaches can be helpful to create a great sex life, but they are not enough. Sexual knowledge and skills don't develop merely as a result of being more connected or pursuing your sense of self. Since we have so little good education and information about sex, in order to have a great sex life, you will also need to learn about sex, what makes it hot as well as the sexual skills involved in achieving this hotness.

Because our society trivializes sex and shames us for our sexual desires, modern-day couples generally have limited understanding of sex and many end up in low-sex or sexless relationships. They know very little about their options, and therefore experience the bare minimum sexually. They think that sex is just about positions, orgasms, and the new hot tip of the week. But sex is so much more than that. It is about a desire to be met and accepted, sexually as well as emotionally. This is why the Somatica Method doesn't assume sex will just happen. We help our clients overcome negative socialization around sex and fill in the learning gaps that this socialization has created.

We have found that, for sex to be great, couples need both a solid connection and the ability to know what each person

wants, and they need to find ways to support each other in pursuing it. Because no two people are alike and no two people are interested in exactly the same thing, people need to be able to communicate what they want and need. Unfortunately, socialization around sexuality is very negative and that makes it very difficult for people to know what they need, let alone honestly and openly communicate about it. In the section on sex, we will introduce you to a large sexual and emotional menu, as well as help you identify what you like on that menu. On this journey you will develop a language of sex, arousal, and desire. You will learn to let go of the idea that sex should just happen and approach sex as something you are cultivating on an ongoing basis. By doing this, you can create the sexual connection that is right and fulfilling for you and your partner.

How to Use This Book

This book is full of in-depth information and practical exercises that will help you and your partner become more connected, empathetic, loving, and turned on by each other. Not every part of this book will be helpful for every couple who reads it. We invite you to find the chapters and exercises that feel most inspiring and important to you. When you follow your desire and delight and when you feel ready for

something more than just going through the motions, it is much more likely to result in transformation and satisfaction.

You don't have to believe every single word written in this book or complete every single exercise to get something out of it. Just taking the time to read, share, play, and practice with your partner around your relationship will either help bring you closer together or bring whatever challenges you are having to the surface.

If you find that those challenges are arising and you need more help than just this book, you can reach out to us and our practitioners for help. Sometimes when habits and patterns have formed over long periods of time and there is built-up resentment, it can be very difficult to get out of the negative patterns on your own. Also, sometimes it's just fun and exciting to have another person help you expand and try out new experiences that you might not even know are possible. Either way, we are here to help.