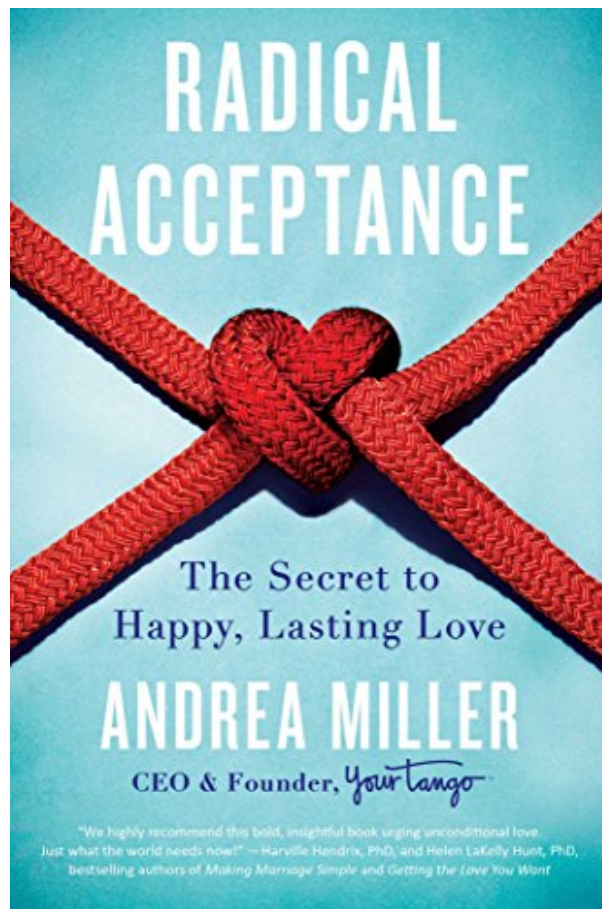
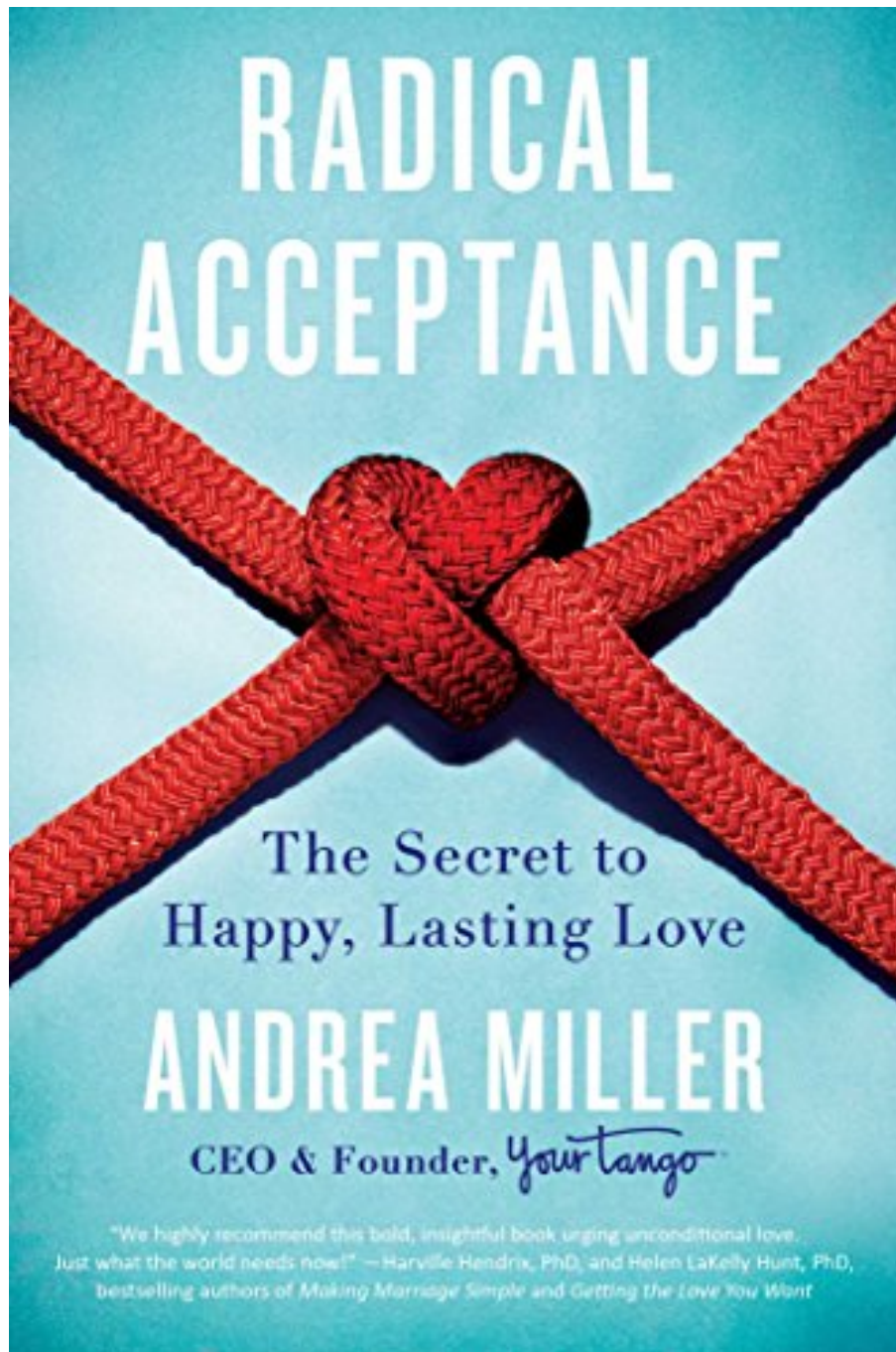


# **RADICAL ACCEPTANCE: THE SECRET TO HAPPY, LASTING LOVE BY ANDREA MILLER**



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## Review

“This bold, insightful book is the most unequivocal challenge to love unconditionally that we have ever read. Radical Acceptance is just what the world needs now. We highly recommend it!”

(Harville Hendrix, PhD, and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD, bestselling authors of Making Marriage Simple and Getting the Love You Want)

“A warm, honest approach to prioritizing your partner and creating true happiness in your relationship--and in yourself. Andrea is like the friend everyone needs in not only the tough moments, but the good ones too. A compelling book.”

(John Gray, PhD, New York Times bestselling author of Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus)

"Miller has written a fascinating, original, and highly courageous book on that issue dear to all of us—the eternal drive of partners to build and sustain a happy and fulfilling relationship. It’s full of poignant stories, smart advice, and good science. And it’s a great read."

(Helen Fisher, PhD, biological anthropologist, bestselling author of Why We Love)

“A wonderful new book. Relatable and emotional, Andrea Miller divulges her own and others’ marriage and dating stories that have benefited from learning how to practice Radical Acceptance.”

(Stan Tatkin, PsyD, MFT, clinician, teacher & author of Wired for Love)

“In this important book, Andrea Miller succeeds in making us feel like we are having the most life-changing talk with our BFF. Jam-packed with wisdom for the ages, it compassionately pushes us to reclaim more from ourselves and our relationships.” (Pat Love, EdD, therapist, bestselling author of The Truth About Love)

"By embracing the enlightening concept of Radical Acceptance, couples can far more easily make the leap from silent desperation to loving interconnection."

(Ian Kerner, PhD LMFT, bestselling author of She Comes First)

"Perhaps no one is better qualified than Andrea to simplify the secret to love and intimacy. She brings together the wisdom of YourTango's amazing experts and the millions of visitors and their experiences. A beautiful work."

(David Bell, chairman emeritus of the Interpublic Group)

"Andrea Miller brilliantly illuminates how the conflict between our expectations and the actual attributes of our partner can destroy relationships, while acceptance leads to trust and love."

(Stephen W. Porges, PhD, Distinguished University Scientist, Indiana University, author of *The Polyvagal Theory*)

"Andrea Miller debunks many of the destructive myths that have arisen around "romance". In their place she offers practical and sage advice on "love," told in the context of real stories and the new science of relationships—all presented in a remarkably entertaining, enjoyable style."

(Sue Carter, PhD, Director of the Kinsey Institute, Rudy Professor of Biology, Indiana University)

#### About the Author

Andrea Miller is the founder and CEO of YourTango, the leading digital media company dedicated to love and relationships, whose mission is to help people love better and connect more meaningfully. Andrea earned a degree in mechanical engineering from Tulane University and an MBA from Columbia Business School. She has a private pilot's license; a black belt in Shotokan karate, awarded by the Japan Karate Association; and serves as a trustee of New York Theatre Workshop. Andrea lives in New York City with her husband and two boys.

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Radical Acceptance COMMIT TO RADICAL ACCEPTANCE: THE BEST GIFT EVER

IT'S EASY TO complain that your partner isn't living up to your expectations. But what's actually effective—what puts the energy of love in motion—is seeing someone who has flaws, yes, but realizing you can help this person become the best version of himself through unconditional love. This is Radical Acceptance.

A friend of mine once described Radical Acceptance as the "EpiPen of relationships." I love that metaphor, but it needs a very big caveat. What she meant was how unbelievably helpful Radical Acceptance can be in a flash—that is, when things are about to spiral out of control and you are about to react badly to some dumb little thing. In that regard, Radical Acceptance is an instant, ready-made injection that can stave off toxic, avoidable outcomes. When my blood is boiling after Sanjay says something irritating, I always try to ask myself, "Are you practicing Radical Acceptance right now?" Instead of reacting badly, I try exercising restraint and extending tenderness to him. As we'll explore later in the book, controlling our emotional reactions is key to Radical Acceptance.

But here's where the metaphor breaks down: Unlike an actual EpiPen, which is merely a temporary fix and is unable to permanently rid the body of life-threatening allergies, Radical Acceptance effects profound, lasting change. It's built to work for the long haul—and while it can work wonders in a pinch, significant effort is required for it to truly take root in a transformative, healing way. I will provide you with a ton of data and offer many suggestions for how to make your journey easier, but the absolutely essential key is that you have to practice Radical Acceptance for it to really work.

I know. Buzzkill. Barely three paragraphs in and we're already talking about hard work.

But here's the good news: Radical Acceptance can introduce (or reintroduce) healing, grace, confidence, and, ultimately, tremendous love, into your relationship. You will replace that vicious cycle of negativity

with a virtuous cycle of positivity. Yes, you will face resistance and setbacks during your journey, and you will slip up from time to time. That's okay. The key is not to be discouraged. Radical Acceptance will only remain a great idea and an interesting theory if you do not make the regular, daily effort to practice it. After all, fundamentally changing your habits and your way of thinking doesn't happen overnight. By consciously choosing to accept his unlovable parts (and your own!), by focusing on the positive and overlooking the negative, you will actually establish new neural pathways. Thankfully, our brains are more than capable of changing in positive, profound ways, even well into adulthood. This is called neuroplasticity, and we'll revisit this and related concepts regularly in this book.

Not long ago, I received a message on Facebook from Kevin, a very old friend who had read some of my early writing on Radical Acceptance. He wrote:

I think the last we talked I was showing my appreciation for your take on Radical Acceptance. I must tell you, I try to put it into practice as often as I can. Accepting those that I love for who they are . . . not what I want them to be. It's been life changing. I am the happiest I have ever been.

I have had so many people share their praise for Radical Acceptance, but Kevin's note is powerful in part due to its brevity. It's incredibly rewarding to hear testimonials of how the simple idea of Radical Acceptance can lead to what we all seek: lasting love and happiness.

I want to raise some foundational points before we progress further the heart of the program. The first are the most burning concerns people have about Radical Acceptance: "What if I practice Radical Acceptance but he never gets it? What if he never reciprocates? Won't this put me in a position of weakness?" I touch on reciprocation, along with how Radical Acceptance makes you stronger, below, and address these themes in depth throughout this book.

Next we'll take a look at trust in a relationship and why it is so crucially important to establish in your Radical Acceptance journey. Loving and being loved unconditionally means taking a leap of faith. It means feeling safe in your relationship and making room for vulnerability. It means taking off your mask and enabling him to do the same, so that you can both be truly seen for who you are. This level of security may take time to develop, but I will hold your hand as you learn this process.

#### RECIPROCATION

Just loving him fully without expecting immediate reciprocation . . . that sounds tough. Will it work? Will opening your heart actually make you feel stronger and more confident in your relationship and in your life?

You can't possibly know unless you try. And what you will get, no matter what, is clarity. Clarity on whether you should stay in the relationship or if you should end it. After you have done everything you can to love and radically accept him, if the relationship still isn't working or if his behavior just proves too challenging, you know it's time to say good-bye. You've tried everything. The what-ifs—What if I tried harder? What if he wasn't seeing the real me? What if I needed to give him a chance?—will evaporate. You may be sad and angry for a time, but you will harbor much less—if any—uncertainty or doubt. Because of that, you will find how much easier it is for you to move on.

Understandably, most people want to ensure their efforts aren't "wasted." To those I say: love is never wasted. When it comes to love, there are never guarantees of success. All you can do in the relationship is your part, which is why I always urge each partner to initially quit worrying about how the other is reciprocating. It rarely works to go halfway and expect him to immediately meet you there, fifty-fifty, even-steven. In fact, when I offer advice to people who want to improve their relationship, I always encourage them to each go all in, to each give 150 percent. This might feel scary for a little while, but it's a winning

long-run approach.

“There is no safe investment.<sup>2</sup> To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.”

—C. S. LEWIS, THE FOUR LOVES

But won't you look desperate if you offer your undivided love and affection to your partner without knowing if you'll get something in return? Won't you just be a doormat? And shouldn't the guy always love the girl just a tiny bit more?

Nope, definitely not, and heck no!

Radical Acceptance requires radical giving—giving more, giving your all, and doing it all again, over and over. I know this may be a different way of thinking about love and life than you're used to. We live in an instant-gratification world in which we are conditioned to get what we pay for, stat. Radical Acceptance requires a fundamental recalibration of your relationship expectations. It's about not expecting someone else to “make you happy,” but thinking much more about what you have to offer your partner. The relationship has to make you happy. As Katharine Hepburn once said, “Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get, only with what you are expecting to give, which is everything.”

While you will ultimately need and deserve reciprocation, giving love to others is still self-serving. At the same time, it's about remembering that you are worthy of tremendous love from others and yourself.

Far too often, we are our own worst enemies. We think shitty, defeating thoughts about ourselves as often as pop radio stations play Taylor Swift—again and again and again. We beat ourselves up and refuse to give ourselves a break. And then we expect someone else to magically treat us as rock stars.

Um, do you see the paradox here? I always say that love starts with you. It is the opposite of selfish to love yourself, to know your worth, and to claim your beauty. As we will discuss in part 3, even the most successful women fall prey to a very debilitating “confidence gap” in which they are mired in self-doubt. No one can stop this debilitating cycle but you. You have to believe that you are worthy of love, praise, sacrifice, tenderness, and, yes, because we are all flawed, that you are worthy of forgiveness and compassion. As my wise big sis Maria says, “It's an inside job!”

Practicing Radical Acceptance is the ultimate inside job—it's doing that crucial inner work that leads to personal transformation and your ability to be a far better partner (and friend, parent, son or daughter, etc.).

Friend: I am here to tell you that YOU. ARE. WORTHY. You are worthy of love. You are worthy of respect. You are worthy of admiration. Believe it.

As we all know, it's a common fallacy to “just put a ring on it” and expect that we will live happily ever after. My close friend Kimberly's experience in her marriage exemplifies this problem. She wrote to me,

I had all sorts of fantasies about “happily ever after” that I was not aware of when my boyfriend Phillip and I decided to marry. What I was aware of was that Phillip possessed many qualities I found attractive and important in a lifelong partner. However, over the years, I found myself developing resentment, as my needs—ones that I was not even aware of—went unmet.

I blamed my husband.

In the deep emotional recess of my heart, I really, really thought that marriage (and raising a family) would make me feel fulfilled: I thought this was supposed to make me happy. What made it harder was my resistance to the truth of my marriage. I looked to my husband to give me validation, affirmation, help (on my timetable), attention, and friendship. If I’m rigorously honest, I demanded that Phillip give me what I wanted or I’d feel let down by him.

Basically what I wanted from him was what I imagined was a male version of myself. Naturally, that is not who he is! Although I didn’t ask him to “change,” I did measure his behavior against an internalized image of how I thought he “should” be. And when I wanted to talk about us, what I really wanted to do was point fingers and dwell on what he was doing wrong.

As I have started to practice Radical Acceptance, I can’t help but see how I am in our way. I realize that one of our biggest challenges is my expectations of Phillip. And that’s not going to change by coming up with rules or making suggestions on how we can “improve” or “do it differently.”

What I’m now much more tuned into is that my husband truly means well and loves me dearly. If he drops the ball, it’s not because he doesn’t care about or love me. In loving without judgment, I am reminded that Phillip is who he is and how he is. We have areas of similarity and areas of complete differentness. Frankly, when I really allow myself to see him, I thoroughly value who he is. And when I do, magic happens!

Our life together now is a pleasure. I realize blaming him never ever fixes me or helps us. It simply doesn’t. When I am “blaming,” Radical Acceptance helps me bring my focus back to me. For me, Radical Acceptance is tuning into Grace.

I love this beautiful testimonial because Kimberly is so honest about experiences that are incredibly common in relationships. She blamed and judged her husband and projected her own insecurities onto him. She clung to an idealized version of her partner—essentially, a man that was her flawless mirror image—instead of loving him for who he was, right there in front of her. We will delve into these common traps in greater detail throughout this book.

Kimberly’s experience encapsulates a crucial but simple insight, one that should be self-evident but often isn’t. I said it above and I am going to say it again here, but more emphatically.

**LOVE STARTS WITH YOU.**

You must be prepared to give it and not be obsessed with a preconceived, perfect version coming right back to you. Why aren’t we taught this in school as, like, a basic life lesson? I suppose Paul and John tried when they sang that “the love you take is equal to the love you make.” But seriously, it’s time for some government-sponsored PSAs and billboards.

I suspect some Christians (and others of faith) might tell me, “Girl, we’ve been saying that for a long time. Get with the program!” Maybe my haphazard Catholic upbringing failed to sufficiently educate me on this,

but I also don't think love is the exclusive province of the church. This should be social doctrine rooted in science, medicine, and cultural norms. Let love and kindness start with you. Let loving without judgment start with you.

I had a fascinating conversation with Dr. Dan Siegel, a clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine and bestselling author of *Mindsight*, among many other brilliant books. Based on his groundbreaking research in interpersonal neurobiology, Dan has reached a provocative conclusion: "Rather than relationships shaping people,<sup>3</sup> my research shows that relationships make people." The implication is that relationships have vastly more impact on individual development and well-being than is commonly believed.

"Take South Africans, for example," Dan told me. "Many communities subscribe to a philosophy known as Ubuntu, which means that you as an individual exist in the response of someone else." Among the Zulu people of South Africa, a customary greeting has two parts. The first, *Sikhona*, means, "I am here to be seen." The second, *Sawubona*, means, "I see you." This same idea of being seen is also the core of Radical Acceptance. Being truly seen allows vulnerability to take root, creating fertile ground for intimacy and connection to flourish. See, and be seen.

Ubuntu has roots in pluralism—community and togetherness is emphasized over the individual. In Ubuntu culture, Dan told me, "Yelling at another person and yelling at yourself are literally synonyms for the same thing. You exist within the connections to others and because of them." (For more about Dan's exploration into the mysteries of the human mind, I urge you to pick up his latest book, *Mind: A Journey to the Heart of Being Human*.) In the same spirit, Radical Acceptance urges couples to see themselves as one self-supporting unit. Negativity and hurt directed at one partner is directed at the relationship as a whole, while joy for one partner should be joy for both.

Dan advocates passionately for a new definition of self, one that is not determined by "you" and "me." Given the crucial role our relationships play in every aspect of our being, self is really a version of "we." There was a famous antidrug PSA<sup>4</sup> during the 1980s that showed a rat alone in a cage with two water bottles. One bottle was filled with pure water and the other was laced with cocaine. Unsurprisingly, the rat became addicted to the cocaine water. The ad ominously warned: "Nine out of ten laboratory rats<sup>5</sup> will use it . . . and use it . . . and use it . . . until they are dead."

But here's the catch: These tests were done in isolation. Each rat was by itself, alone in a cage for a prolonged period of time. The experiment was repeated a second time, but the rats were now living together. This time, the rats mostly ignored the cocaine water. They didn't like it, and no rats died. Community and togetherness, it turns out, can often overpower the most self-destructive threats. Like many people, these rats were less interested in getting high than in escaping a profound sense of loneliness.

Human beings are fundamentally wired for connection—physiologically, emotionally, sexually, and in so many other ways. There's even evidence of this in the mystical realm! Lorell Frysh, who has a doctorate in East-West psychology and was a key catalyst for this book, emphatically agrees with me. (She's the one who told me to "just love" Sanjay, as you may recall from the introduction.) Lorell has spent over forty-five years exploring, studying, and receiving initiation in many of the great spiritual, mystical, and healing traditions of the world.

"From a mystical perspective,<sup>6</sup> relationships are seen in the context of a greater wholeness," she told me. "Mystics understand that we are all connected as the fabric and expression of One Being. People feel complete when every aspect of themselves can show up, be seen, and loved. Very often problems occur in

relationships when we feel unseen, unheard, and unacknowledged. But in truth, as we ease our own barriers and defenses, we become better equipped to serve each other. As we release pain and disconnection from ourselves and our past trauma, it becomes easier to find a deeper home in love.” The primacy of our connectedness offers an existential truth that we should all act upon.

This is why I am incredibly motivated to spur Radical Acceptance into a beautiful, powerful movement. A sense of belonging and being seen are paramount to our well-being. But this mutuality doesn’t happen by itself. It must start somewhere. Why not let it start with you?

## LOVE IS A BIOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE

I had the great fortune of interviewing Dr. C. Sue Carter and her husband, Dr. Stephen Porges. They are both brilliant scientists who have performed groundbreaking work in neurophysiology, biology, behavioral neuroendocrinology, and psychophysiology.

A biologist and behavioral neurobiologist, Dr. Carter is the director of the Kinsey Institute and Rudy Professor of Biology at Indiana University, and she was the first person to identify the physiological mechanisms responsible for social monogamy. Dr. Porges is a Distinguished University Scientist at the Kinsey Institute and research professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and he is responsible for the Polyvagal Theory, which I touch upon later in the book. In 2013 they cowrote an article in *European Molecular Biology Organization Reports* entitled “The Biochemistry of Love: An Oxytocin Hypothesis,” which truly stopped me in my tracks. One big Ah Ha after another!

The article makes a compelling case for the crucial role love plays on a physiological as well as emotional level: how it not only impacts the circuitry of our brains and the physiological health of our hearts, but how love even affects the expression of our genes, potentially impacting future generations. Based on Sue’s research, we now know that oxytocin, an important hormone that serves as a neurotransmitter and is known as “the cuddle drug,” plays a crucial role in this phenomenon.

I have excerpted some of my favorite portions of the text, but will start with a bit of commentary to clarify key points. (I know for some readers this may be a bit tough to grasp. It’s powerful, fascinating stuff that helps clarify why love and loss impact us so deeply, but please don’t stress if a lot of it reads like a foreign language to you!)

The vagus nerve is the tenth cranial nerve, originating in the brain’s medulla, and it has two branches, the dorsal and ventral. The ventral vagus connects the brain to our heart, middle ears, eyes, larynx, and pharynx, among other places in our bodies and is affiliated with how we communicate with others. For this reason, it is often referred to as the “social vagus,” and in addition to assisting with how we communicate and socialize with others, it plays a key role in how we self-soothe and calm ourselves. Oxytocin is often activated by the presence of infants, and it’s heightened in new and nursing mothers, as well as in positive social interactions. Oxytocin assists with attachment from early life to old age. Highlights of the article are as follows:

The biology of love originates in the primitive parts of the brain—the emotional core of the human nervous system—that evolved long before the cerebral cortex. The brain of a human “in love” is flooded with sensations, often transmitted by the (ventral) vagus nerve, creating much of what we experience as emotion.

Love is an epigenetic phenomenon: social behaviors, emotional attachment to others and long-lasting reciprocal relationships are plastic and adaptive and so is the biology on which they are based. Infants of traumatized or highly stressed parents might be chronically exposed to vasopressin (also a neuropeptide and

close cousin to oxytocin), either through their own increased production of the peptide, or through higher levels of vasopressin in maternal milk. Such increased exposure could sensitize the infant to defensive behaviors or create a life-long tendency to overreact to threat.

Both parental care and exposure to oxytocin in early life can permanently modify hormonal systems, altering the capacity to form relationships and influence the expression of love across the lifespan.

Given the power of positive social experiences, it is not surprising that a lack of social relationships might also lead to alterations in behavior and concurrently changes in oxytocin and vasopressin pathways.

Although research has only begun to examine the physiological effects of these peptides beyond social behavior, there is a wealth of new evidence indicating that oxytocin influences physiological responses to stress and injury. Thus, oxytocin exposure early in life not only regulates our ability to love and form social bonds; it also has an impact on our health and well-being.

In “modern” societies humans can survive, at least after childhood, with little or no human contact. Communication technology, social media, electronic parenting and many other technological advances of the past century might place both children and adults at risk for social isolation and disorders of the autonomic nervous system, including deficits in their capacity for social engagement and love.

Social engagement actually helps us to cope with stress. The same hormones and areas of the brain that increase the capacity of the body to survive stress also enable us to better adapt to an ever-changing social and physical environment. Individuals with strong emotional support and relationships are more resilient in the face of stressors than those who feel isolated or lonely. Lesions in bodily tissues, including the brain, heal more quickly in animals that are living socially compared with those in isolation. The protective effects of positive sociality seem to rely on the same cocktail of hormones that carry a biological message of “love” throughout the body.

Oxytocin receptors are expressed in the heart, and precursors for oxytocin seem to be crucial for the development of the fetal heart. Oxytocin exerts protective and restorative effects in part through its capacity to convert undifferentiated stem cells into cardiac muscle cells. Oxytocin can facilitate adult neurogenesis and tissue repair, especially after a stressful experience. We know that oxytocin has direct anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties in in vitro models of heart disease. The heart seems to rely on oxytocin as part of a normal process of protection and self-healing.

Although research into mechanisms through which love protects us against stress and disease is in its infancy, this knowledge will ultimately increase our understanding of the way that our emotions have an impact on health and disease. We have much to learn about love and much to learn from love.”

In other words, love is a biological imperative and so much more! Loving, healthy relationships contribute significantly to your heart health, specifically, as well as to your overall health and well-being. We simply cannot thrive as human beings in the absence of healthy relationships.

We have such a powerful opportunity as sisters, mothers, daughters, friends, wives, girlfriends, and caregivers to provide these healing benefits to those we love.

## TRUST

Let’s talk a little more about trust, an indispensable ingredient of Radical Acceptance. Simply put: you must trust yourself and your partner—I cannot underscore this strongly enough. After all, loving your partner

without judgment is only possible, of course, if you truly trust him. Otherwise, how do you know that he won't take advantage of you?

Trust can be a bit of a fickle mistress, even for those people in strong, secure relationships. It's good to hold your own feet to the fire when he irritates you and your trust in him suddenly feels a bit illusive.

When your partner does something stupid, how often do you throw trust out the window and assume he is being deliberately hurtful toward you? Do you regularly assume the worst about his motives? You may feel these pangs of doubt on your Radical Acceptance journey. Trust means offering your partner the benefit of the doubt, even when you are not sure whether he deserves it. That said, if you find yourself frequently making excuses for him, or if you're seeing red flags, have confidence in yourself to determine whether your trust in him is misplaced.

You may think that your ability to trust someone resets with every new person you meet. This is not true. The ability to develop a high degree of trust for other people typically begins during infancy. Based on the care and attention we did or did not receive from our parents or another caregiver as babies and young children, our brains became neurologically wired in a way that either facilitates trust throughout or lives—or inhibits it. The brilliant clinician and author Dr. Stan Tatkin corroborated the above and added, “The ability to trust another person<sup>7</sup> has everything to do with our earliest experiences.” Stan explains this process beautifully in his book *Wired for Love*:

Ideally, all babies have a parent<sup>8</sup> or other caregiver who puts their relationship before all other matters. The baby feels loved and secure, and the adult also enjoys the feeling of being loved and of being with and caring for the baby. These two are in it together. We call this a primary attachment relationship, because the baby and caregiver are bonded, or attached, to one another.

. . . This baby bubble sets the stage for enjoyable relationships with others later in life.

• • •

As I've observed over the years, and as research has proven, individuals who experienced less-than-secure relationships with their caregivers during childhood are much more likely to be insecure in adulthood. Their brains have not yet learned to form the neurological connections necessary to develop deep trust for another person. Thankfully, due to the neuroplastic nature of the brain—meaning that with effort, it can be changed in meaningful ways as we age, causing us to feel and think differently—most people who didn't receive secure attachment from their parents or caregivers can, effectively, rewire their brains to facilitate trust, attachment, and intimacy as adults. Granted, this is not easy. We have all heard endless bitching and moaning from individuals who blame their parents for this and that. It's tempting to merely tell them, “Get over it already! You're an adult now!” Unfortunately, for many people, it's not that simple. But with a concerted effort, there's reason to be optimistic.

Stan likens a strong relationship to being in a foxhole: You have your partner's back and he has yours. No matter what happens, you deal with problems together and with unwavering security and trust in one another. But how do you build it?

We're going to talk about this in depth throughout this book, but here's a quick exercise you can start practicing right now. Practice graciously and sincerely saying things like, “You were right. I was wrong” (only when this is true, of course), and “I am sorry.” Rather than being defensive and deflecting blame back to him, be willing to admit when you are wrong—whether your mistake was intentional or not. The effect is

instantly disarming. Using these techniques is a powerful way to build trust and foster connection, provided they're said with sincerity. Being able to admit you are wrong and being apologetic makes you stronger, not weaker, and it gives you more power. You are offering a hand and choosing to move the relationship forward as opposed to retreating and putting up walls.

That said, do not make a habit of apologizing for every tiny thing. Don't let this technique fuel a self-sabotaging situation. Don't put yourself on trial. Trust yourself to understand when you are at fault and when you are not. An ex-boyfriend of mine—to whom I am forever grateful—used to say during our fights, exasperated: “Andrea, I am in your corner! We are on the same team.” Oh Jesus, I'd think. Of course we are. Why is that so easy to forget? I always try to remember that now, and you should, too. Even when you feel like he deserves the Pain in the Ass of the Year Award, even when he is so incredibly, obviously, maddeningly wrong, just remember: You are on the same team. You both want the same thing. Even if you “win” the fight, what have you gained?

I know this can all be hard but it is a key means to fortify trust in your relationship. It used to be extremely hard for me, I will admit. Here was a common dynamic for Sanjay and myself: I don't like criticism and I get defensive pretty easily, while Sanjay is naturally critical. Add some stress, two young kids, and sprinkle in a few primeval hurt feelings, and BAM! A full-blown fight has ensued. (I partly blame my aversion to criticism on my star sign. This is a common issue for Aries. In fact, Virgos—which is Sanjay's star sign—tend to be critical. I felt weirdly overjoyed to discover this.)

We survived this pattern for many painful years, but since we discovered Radical Acceptance this cycle has become much less prevalent. I am better able to say, “I'm sorry,” or “I was wrong.” I know I can trust Sanjay, and he knows he can trust me. As a result, we've trained ourselves to not be so defensive. A little anecdote comes to mind: We were getting ready to renovate our apartment and we had been looking at photos of potential interiors. Then Sanjay made a semi-mocking, critical comment about the flooring I had liked. It was a light moment. I mentioned to him what I had learned about Virgos being critical. He chuckled, and then I said: “So, in other words, it's you, not me!” We laughed and high-fived. While it was lighthearted, it was also very meta. For so long I had reacted poorly to his critical commentary. I used to take it so personally! But I have learned to restrain myself and accept that being critical is part of who he is. It makes Sanjay a shrewd businessman in the boardroom, but it can also make him a difficult husband in the living room. I must emphasize: as Radical Acceptance has taken root, he has become considerably less critical.

While prepping for your Radical Acceptance journey, take this to heart: similar to Ubuntu culture, how you treat your partner is, effectively, how you treat yourself. The amazing author and activist Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt concurs, and further explains that this requirement is rooted in neurobiology—activating upper and lower regions of the brain. The upper region gets most of the sexy research and publicity. It's divided into the logical and analytical “left” side, and the creative and imaginative “right” side. But the more primitive “lower” region, which includes the thalamus, hypothalamus, and the hippocampus, controls most of our emotional processes.

As Helen explained,<sup>9</sup> if you give your partner a gift, your upper brain registers whom you're giving it to and why. But your lower brain does not recognize the recipient or even the source of this kindness—it merely registers kindness and processes pleasure hormones. Helen notes that because the lower brain cannot make this differentiation, “Being kind to others is being kind to yourself.” The same goes when you are expressing anger and negativity. Your lower brain cannot differentiate between being angry or being the recipient of anger. So if you yell at your partner (or at that crazy driver ahead of you), your lower brain registers anger and pumps out the same stress hormones as if he were yelling at you.

In short, by being kind and loving toward him, by minimizing or even eliminating negativity and criticism, you not only strengthen your relationship and make him feel better, you treat yourself better.

“The less you open your heart to others, the more your heart suffers.”

—DEEPAK CHOPRA

• • •

When friends would ask what this book is about while I was writing it, Sanjay would quip with a smile, “She’s writing a book about me! It’s about how to make your marriage work despite your husband.” It was always a light-hearted statement—Sanjay is incredibly generous in his support of this book, even though it reveals a lot about our personal lives—but my reply would always be, “Yes, you’re a key character, but the book is as much about my desire for Radical Acceptance and my own journey about loving myself, being seen, and being able to both love, and be loved, fully.”

A dozen years ago, Sanjay gave me a card inscribed with a quote by the Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore: “Love’s gift cannot be given. It waits to be accepted.” I kept it on my bedside table until it was yellow and faded, to the point of being illegible, as a reminder that Sanjay’s love for me is always there—even if I sometimes had trouble accepting the form it was taking.

We have always had a lot of love for one another—despite how we suffered and struggled with how to successfully express it. It took me a while to understand and to be able to fully accept his love, in large part because of my own trust and vulnerability issues, as well as my fierce independence. I regret how my instinct was to push him away when our conflict seemed insurmountable. My marriage brought me to my knees: I loved this man dearly, yet we fought so much and experienced so much hurt. The deep, painful sadness and anger were often like open wounds. Finally, though, there was a point at which I realized that I couldn’t live with him and I couldn’t live without him.

I came to the last possible conclusion: I had to change for the sake of the relationship. I had to take the lead.

Before I go any further, I am eager to take a moment to share why I was willing to go to such lengths for the sake of our relationship.

Like many other couples, Sanjay and I met at work. He was overseeing a very large team undertaking a massive project in India, where he is from. I had previously been to India, where I was taken in by its cultural richness and the kindness of its people, and I was extremely interested in Eastern philosophy, so I leapt at the first opportunity to join Sanjay’s team.

I had heard a lot about Sanjay before we met. Everyone said that he was an incredible leader and that he was one of the smartest guys in the room—as evidenced by his master’s degree in engineering from Stanford and MBA with distinction from Harvard Business School, along with the fact that he graduated with distinction from India’s vaunted Indian Institute of Technology. His intense drive and work ethic were the stuff of legend.

I couldn’t wait to learn from him. But I never expected that I would fall head over heels in love within minutes of meeting him. I remember calling my friend Brenda after that initial encounter and confessing I had a big problem. As the consummate professional, I knew I had to ignore this huge crush and focus on my work. Besides, he had a serious girlfriend at the time.

We continued to work together very closely. Our team stayed at the Oberoi Hotel in Mumbai for weeks and sometimes months on end, living and breathing the project. My infatuation with Sanjay only increased. It was like classic teenage love, butterflies and all, even though I was in my late twenties. I would daydream about him endlessly. I would get nervous and excited any time we were in a meeting together. I loved his confidence and his sense of humor. He was handsome and totally sexy.

Eventually, he and his girlfriend broke up. We started to date. I left the company and moved to New York to attend Columbia Business School. I remember standing in the shower counting the weeks and then months that we were together. Our chemistry was ridiculous. I wrote him poems that he devoured like a dehydrated man gulps down cold, fresh water.

We always felt heartbroken to be apart for any extended length of time. In the fall of my first year, I remember sitting with Sanjay in a restaurant on Columbus Avenue several hours before his flight back to India and lamenting his impending departure. We sat, sadly holding hands. I asked him if he could delay it by just one more day, but he could not.

Even in our early dating phase, Sanjay would give me these incredible, long-lasting, full-body hugs. I remember thinking, He must really love me to hug me like this. As the months and eventually years wore on, he would periodically hug me this way, communicating to me just how deeply he felt about me. It was the best feeling in the world. I felt so treasured, so loved.

As time has gone on, while the intense magnetism has worn off, we still have a chemistry that energizes and feeds our relationship. We continue to learn about each other as we grow and change.

Of course, there is so much that draws us together. I love his powerful mind and his big heart. I love that he knows so much about virtually every topic. I love to learn from him, ski with him, and discuss political and social issues. Knowing that we are on the same team, that he always has my back is beyond invaluable.

Naturally, Sanjay has his challenging parts. But I know now that my Radical Acceptance journey has been as much about my need to be seen and accepted for who I really am—imperfect, flawed, and in some ways deeply inadequate—as it was to see and accept Sanjay for who he really is. Tired of grappling with my hurt and doubt, I wanted Sanjay to love me even as I went to the ends of the earth, down into an endless abyss, to fix my broken parts and reclaim that essential part of me that had long felt lost. I had shouldered these defeating, sometimes even devastating, feelings for so long. I wanted someone to make them go away, to convince me that they were no longer true.

This is why I connect so deeply with the work of Brené Brown, the brilliant researcher and bestselling author of *Daring Greatly*, *Rising Strong* and *The Gifts of Imperfection*, which I will talk about at greater length later in this book. I think often about her prophetic first TED Talks in which she revealed powerful, relatable insights about shame and vulnerability. Her talk reached a crescendo when she revealed what so many people who suffer simply need to hear: “You are enough,” she said. That’s it. This is something that I have long struggled with. I know so many others have, too.

In my case, something missing inside prevented me from feeling a strong sense of belonging. It’s a weird paradox. I have many spectacular friends and family members who love me and who would do anything for me. I know this and am grateful for it. And yet, I still needed to prove myself; to ingratiate myself, even. I was a people-pleaser. I felt that I was not enough, that I was on the outside looking in. I would go to great lengths to be liked and avoid conflict. Conflict was very threatening to me, probably because I erroneously equated it with rejection.

This is my seriously warped truth. I am smart, have strong moral fiber, and I have accomplished quite a lot. But deep down, and sometimes not so deep down, it was just not enough. It didn't occur to me that the answer to this would be found on the other side of the crucible with my husband. Ha! Looking back, there was a time when such an idea would have been laughable. Then, the only possible antidote, in my mind, was to forge my own path and work tirelessly to prove my worth.

I knew I could rely on myself and I was comfortable being alone. I wore my independence like a badge of honor. It had served me well. But it has its shadowy side. Independence has made me immensely capable, yes, but in some ways it's like a shell: strong on the outside but empty on the inside.

In retrospect, I can see why my deep-seated propensity was to go solo and why conflict with Sanjay was so painful and so threatening to me. Isolating myself emotionally and minimizing my reliance on others was my adaptive behavior. It is a self-destructive coping method.

Instead of trying to work through challenging differences, my instinct had been to assert my independence by putting up walls or simply by doing my own thing. When our conflict was especially intractable, I would punish him for the hurt I felt by retreating even further. Sanjay, who grew up in a super interdependent, close-knit culture, would always accuse me of "having no idea what togetherness is about."

My logic amounted to: Why always compromise and do things together? Why bother arguing or feeling bad about it? Let's just do our own thing when we are not in alignment, and then connect where we are. It made sense to me, but I was rejecting what Sanjay needed. My MO of doing things on my own was painful and foreign to him, just like ceding control and striving to be in lockstep as a couple was equally painful and foreign to me. Just as I was unable to extend compassion or tenderness to my own weaknesses, I was a harsh judge of Sanjay and his shortcomings. Making matters worse, as our relationship fractured and split, I retreated into the safety of work—my proudly crafted and preserved fortress of independence. But all this did was isolate us from one another, both physically and emotionally.

Our worst disagreements triggered intense, irrational reactions for me. I didn't know how to manage these overwhelming feelings. I frequently felt consumed by rage or completely depleted, compounded by feeling I had no control. For someone who prided herself on her ability to keep it together, who otherwise kept her emotions close to the vest, these feelings were incredibly frustrating and confounding to me.

I felt "so not understood." Whatever Sanjay said to me, all I heard was: YOUR FEELINGS DON'T MATTER. YOU'RE WRONG. YOU'RE NOT ENOUGH. YOU ARE UNLOVABLE.

Which meant being alone. Once again on the outside.

As I look back, I know that he, too, was in pain. I don't think he understood that I was so fragile, nor that it would sometimes take me weeks to recover from our blowouts. I know now that we were equally at fault for what was going on, even though at the time I blamed him. If I were to be brutally honest, I would have to admit that I wanted him to change. Sometimes, I even wanted him to come and rescue me. I eventually concluded that I needed to radically accept myself and break the vicious cycle that was tearing us apart. While I hoped that Sanjay would eventually see those lonely, desperate fragments that skulked behind my brave mask of independence, that he would tenderly reach in, and quietly embrace them, I refused to let him in, continuing to try and work it out on my own.

What I finally figured out—FINALLY!—is that I needed to do these things for myself, and that I needed to give Sanjay what I so desperately sought. I realized that I needed to tenderly reach for those broken parts of

him and quietly embrace them as opposed to rebelling and feeling hurt that he couldn't or wouldn't do this for me.

Inadvertently, by withdrawing from him and rejecting the parts of him that I did not like, I unwittingly bred and fed the exact opposite of what I deeply desired and—go figure!—we both, along with our relationship, suffered greatly.

Through Radical Acceptance I have now managed to bring out the best in my husband. This didn't happen by denying his challenging parts or by insisting that he change. Instead, I have extended more tenderness to him and to myself. I have practiced and practiced. I have learned to take the high road and I have stretched myself in ways that I never thought possible.

“Go and love someone exactly as they are. And then watch how quickly they transform into the greatest, truest version of themselves. When one feels seen and appreciated in their own essence, one is instantly empowered.”

—WES ANGELOZZI10

I have become brutally honest with myself so that I can challenge the painful feelings that used to haunt me. I don't let them ride roughshod like they once did. I have developed much more empathy for myself and for others. I am less reactive and more emotionally mature and resilient.

I am super blessed to have a partner as loving, generous, supportive, wise, and wonderful as Sanjay is. As individuals and as a couple, we have benefitted enormously from Radical Acceptance. It has created a beautiful cycle wherein love and understanding beget more love and understanding. As a result, we have built an incredible relationship. Thanks to how much we have opened our hearts and let go of our egos, we have given each other the best gift ever. Our marriage has become brilliantly transformed over the years.

I want to do the same for you and your relationship. I want you to learn from my experiences so you can reverse the negative habits that are preventing lasting love from taking root and that are causing you to be awash in doubt.

Gandhi-ji said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” I say, “Give the love you want to feel in the world.” Love is more than a feeling, though. Nearly twenty years ago, my friend Dahl told me, “Love is an action word.” I have adopted that as my mantra. It's millions of actions, words, and intentions. It's actively exercising compassion, empathy, and nonjudgment—especially when it's hard. It's exercising restraint. It's exhibiting kindness and generosity. It's extending yourself in the spirit of love, even when it's the hardest thing you've ever done, even when you have to beat back your ego, your anger, and your fear. And it's finding serenity and bliss on the other side. This is why I say that committing to Radical Acceptance is truly the greatest gift ever—both for him and yourself.

And so, while I will talk a lot about your partner in this book, Radical Acceptance begins with you. We expect our partners to gaze deeply into our eyes and profess that we complete them. We expect someone to magically understand and sponge up all those hurts that haunt us. We expect to get swept off our feet by Prince Charming and live happily ever after. Well, it doesn't work that way. You only get to live happily ever after if you put in the work. Of course, there are times when you may decide not to, and that is what we will discuss next.

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- When you're with someone you love or who has real potential, get ready to go ALL IN. Go 150% of the way and don't expect him to meet you halfway, 50/50, every step of the way—especially in the beginning.
- To practice Radical Acceptance successfully, you'll need to trust yourself and your partner. It may take some time to develop, but it's imperative to do so. This includes extending him the benefit of the doubt, even when you're inclined to assume the worst of his intentions or his abilities.
- Do not expect instant reciprocation when you begin to practice Radical Acceptance. Give your partner time to step it up. If Radical Acceptance doesn't eventually come back to you, you may be in an untenable relationship.

# **RADICAL ACCEPTANCE: THE SECRET TO HAPPY, LASTING LOVE BY ANDREA MILLER PDF**

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# **RADICAL ACCEPTANCE: THE SECRET TO HAPPY, LASTING LOVE BY ANDREA MILLER PDF**

Loving your partner without judgment is the ultimate gift you can give them—and yourself.

Loving the lovable parts of your partner is easy. He's funny, charming, smart, successful, and kind. He's perfect. Except for when he is not. Like when he is late. Or short-tempered. Or impatient. Or lazy. Or he has just loaded the dishwasher incorrectly (again). Maybe he suddenly feels like the most frustrating person on the planet. Or maybe you're simply not feeling heard or seen. Or loved enough.

It's these proverbial unlovable parts that make loving all of him so tough. But imagine if you let go of your itch to fix, judge, improve, or control your partner. Imagine if you replaced judgment with compassion and empathy. Tremendous empowerment and liberation come from loving someone—and being loved—for who we really are. This is called Radical Acceptance. Whether you're looking for Mr. Right or are already with him, this is your powerful five-step guide to attaining life's ultimate prize: unconditional love.

Through Radical Acceptance, you'll learn how to increase your emotional resilience, feel more confident, determine whether you're settling, quiet those doubt-filled voices in your head, get out of that endless cycle of dead-end dates, reduce conflict, and build a deeply fulfilling, affirming relationship—all through highly actionable advice. Best of all, you will discover how amazing it feels to have your heart expanded by an abundance of love and compassion for your partner and yourself.

Featuring compelling stories from real-life couples and insights from the foremost thought-leaders and researchers in brain science, sexuality, psychotherapy, and neurobiology, Radical Acceptance illustrates that embracing your partner for exactly who they are will lead to a more harmonious relationship—and provides an unexpected path to your own personal transformation.

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## Review

“This bold, insightful book is the most unequivocal challenge to love unconditionally that we have ever read. Radical Acceptance is just what the world needs now. We highly recommend it!”

(Harville Hendrix, PhD, and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD, bestselling authors of Making Marriage Simple and Getting the Love You Want)

“A warm, honest approach to prioritizing your partner and creating true happiness in your relationship--and in yourself. Andrea is like the friend everyone needs in not only the tough moments, but the good ones too. A

compelling book.”

(John Gray, PhD, New York Times bestselling author of *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*)

"Miller has written a fascinating, original, and highly courageous book on that issue dear to all of us—the eternal drive of partners to build and sustain a happy and fulfilling relationship. It's full of poignant stories, smart advice, and good science. And it's a great read."

(Helen Fisher, PhD, biological anthropologist, bestselling author of *Why We Love*)

“A wonderful new book. Relatable and emotional, Andrea Miller divulges her own and others’ marriage and dating stories that have benefited from learning how to practice Radical Acceptance.”

(Stan Tatkin, PsyD, MFT, clinician, teacher & author of *Wired for Love*)

“In this important book, Andrea Miller succeeds in making us feel like we are having the most life-changing talk with our BFF. Jam-packed with wisdom for the ages, it compassionately pushes us to reclaim more from ourselves and our relationships.” (Pat Love, EdD, therapist, bestselling author of *The Truth About Love*)

"By embracing the enlightening concept of Radical Acceptance, couples can far more easily make the leap from silent desperation to loving interconnection."

(Ian Kerner, PhD LMFT, bestselling author of *She Comes First*)

"Perhaps no one is better qualified than Andrea to simplify the secret to love and intimacy. She brings together the wisdom of YourTango's amazing experts and the millions of visitors and their experiences. A beautiful work."

(David Bell, chairman emeritus of the Interpublic Group)

“Andrea Miller brilliantly illuminates how the conflict between our expectations and the actual attributes of our partner can destroy relationships, while acceptance leads to trust and love.”

(Stephen W. Porges, PhD, Distinguished University Scientist, Indiana University, author of *The Polyvagal Theory*)

“Andrea Miller debunks many of the destructive myths that have arisen around "romance". In their place she offers practical and sage advice on "love," told in the context of real stories and the new science of relationships—all presented in a remarkably entertaining, enjoyable style.”

(Sue Carter, PhD, Director of the Kinsey Institute, Rudy Professor of Biology, Indiana University)

#### About the Author

Andrea Miller is the founder and CEO of YourTango, the leading digital media company dedicated to love and relationships, whose mission is to help people love better and connect more meaningfully. Andrea earned a degree in mechanical engineering from Tulane University and an MBA from Columbia Business School. She has a private pilot's license; a black belt in Shotokan karate, awarded by the Japan Karate Association; and serves as a trustee of New York Theatre Workshop. Andrea lives in New York City with her husband and two boys.

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Radical Acceptance COMMIT TO RADICAL ACCEPTANCE: THE BEST GIFT EVER

IT'S EASY TO complain that your partner isn't living up to your expectations. But what's actually effective—what puts the energy of love in motion—is seeing someone who has flaws, yes, but realizing you can help this person become the best version of himself through unconditional love. This is Radical Acceptance.

A friend of mine once described Radical Acceptance as the “EpiPen of relationships.” I love that metaphor, but it needs a very big caveat. What she meant was how unbelievably helpful Radical Acceptance can be in a flash—that is, when things are about to spiral out of control and you are about to react badly to some dumb little thing. In that regard, Radical Acceptance is an instant, ready-made injection that can stave off toxic, avoidable outcomes. When my blood is boiling after Sanjay says something irritating, I always try to ask myself, “Are you practicing Radical Acceptance right now?” Instead of reacting badly, I try exercising restraint and extending tenderness to him. As we’ll explore later in the book, controlling our emotional reactions is key to Radical Acceptance.

But here’s where the metaphor breaks down: Unlike an actual EpiPen, which is merely a temporary fix and is unable to permanently rid the body of life-threatening allergies, Radical Acceptance effects profound, lasting change. It’s built to work for the long haul—and while it can work wonders in a pinch, significant effort is required for it to truly take root in a transformative, healing way. I will provide you with a ton of data and offer many suggestions for how to make your journey easier, but the absolutely essential key is that you have to practice Radical Acceptance for it to really work.

I know. Buzzkill. Barely three paragraphs in and we’re already talking about hard work.

But here’s the good news: Radical Acceptance can introduce (or reintroduce) healing, grace, confidence, and, ultimately, tremendous love, into your relationship. You will replace that vicious cycle of negativity with a virtuous cycle of positivity. Yes, you will face resistance and setbacks during your journey, and you will slip up from time to time. That’s okay. The key is not to be discouraged. Radical Acceptance will only remain a great idea and an interesting theory if you do not make the regular, daily effort to practice it. After all, fundamentally changing your habits and your way of thinking doesn’t happen overnight. By consciously choosing to accept his unlovable parts (and your own!), by focusing on the positive and overlooking the negative, you will actually establish new neural pathways. Thankfully, our brains are more than capable of changing in positive, profound ways, even well into adulthood. This is called neuroplasticity, and we’ll revisit this and related concepts regularly in this book.

Not long ago, I received a message on Facebook from Kevin, a very old friend who had read some of my early writing on Radical Acceptance. He wrote:

I think the last we talked I was showing my appreciation for your take on Radical Acceptance. I must tell you, I try to put it into practice as often as I can. Accepting those that I love for who they are . . . not what I want them to be. It’s been life changing. I am the happiest I have ever been.

I have had so many people share their praise for Radical Acceptance, but Kevin’s note is powerful in part due to its brevity. It’s incredibly rewarding to hear testimonials of how the simple idea of Radical Acceptance can lead to what we all seek: lasting love and happiness.

I want to raise some foundational points before we progress further the heart of the program. The first are the most burning concerns people have about Radical Acceptance: “What if I practice Radical Acceptance but he never gets it? What if he never reciprocates? Won’t this put me in a position of weakness?” I touch on reciprocation, along with how Radical Acceptance makes you stronger, below, and address these themes in depth throughout this book.

Next we’ll take a look at trust in a relationship and why it is so crucially important to establish in your Radical Acceptance journey. Loving and being loved unconditionally means taking a leap of faith. It means feeling safe in your relationship and making room for vulnerability. It means taking off your mask and

enabling him to do the same, so that you can both be truly seen for who you are. This level of security may take time to develop, but I will hold your hand as you learn this process.

#### RECIPROCATION

Just loving him fully without expecting immediate reciprocation . . . that sounds tough. Will it work? Will opening your heart actually make you feel stronger and more confident in your relationship and in your life?

You can't possibly know unless you try. And what you will get, no matter what, is clarity. Clarity on whether you should stay in the relationship or if you should end it. After you have done everything you can to love and radically accept him, if the relationship still isn't working or if his behavior just proves too challenging, you know it's time to say good-bye. You've tried everything. The what-ifs—What if I tried harder? What if he wasn't seeing the real me? What if I needed to give him a chance?—will evaporate. You may be sad and angry for a time, but you will harbor much less—if any—uncertainty or doubt. Because of that, you will find how much easier it is for you to move on.

Understandably, most people want to ensure their efforts aren't "wasted." To those I say: love is never wasted. When it comes to love, there are never guarantees of success. All you can do in the relationship is your part, which is why I always urge each partner to initially quit worrying about how the other is reciprocating. It rarely works to go halfway and expect him to immediately meet you there, fifty-fifty, even-stein. In fact, when I offer advice to people who want to improve their relationship, I always encourage them to each go all in, to each give 150 percent. This might feel scary for a little while, but it's a winning long-run approach.

"There is no safe investment.<sup>2</sup> To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell."

—C. S. LEWIS, THE FOUR LOVES

But won't you look desperate if you offer your undivided love and affection to your partner without knowing if you'll get something in return? Won't you just be a doormat? And shouldn't the guy always love the girl just a tiny bit more?

Nope, definitely not, and heck no!

Radical Acceptance requires radical giving—giving more, giving your all, and doing it all again, over and over. I know this may be a different way of thinking about love and life than you're used to. We live in an instant-gratification world in which we are conditioned to get what we pay for, stat. Radical Acceptance requires a fundamental recalibration of your relationship expectations. It's about not expecting someone else to "make you happy," but thinking much more about what you have to offer your partner. The relationship has to make you happy. As Katharine Hepburn once said, "Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get, only with what you are expecting to give, which is everything."

While you will ultimately need and deserve reciprocation, giving love to others is still self-serving. At the same time, it's about remembering that you are worthy of tremendous love from others and yourself.

Far too often, we are our own worst enemies. We think shitty, defeating thoughts about ourselves as often as pop radio stations play Taylor Swift—again and again and again. We beat ourselves up and refuse to give ourselves a break. And then we expect someone else to magically treat us as rock stars.

Um, do you see the paradox here? I always say that love starts with you. It is the opposite of selfish to love yourself, to know your worth, and to claim your beauty. As we will discuss in part 3, even the most successful women fall prey to a very debilitating “confidence gap” in which they are mired in self-doubt. No one can stop this debilitating cycle but you. You have to believe that you are worthy of love, praise, sacrifice, tenderness, and, yes, because we are all flawed, that you are worthy of forgiveness and compassion. As my wise big sis Maria says, “It’s an inside job!”

Practicing Radical Acceptance is the ultimate inside job—it’s doing that crucial inner work that leads to personal transformation and your ability to be a far better partner (and friend, parent, son or daughter, etc.).

Friend: I am here to tell you that **YOU. ARE. WORTHY.** You are worthy of love. You are worthy of respect. You are worthy of admiration. Believe it.

As we all know, it’s a common fallacy to “just put a ring on it” and expect that we will live happily ever after. My close friend Kimberly’s experience in her marriage exemplifies this problem. She wrote to me,

I had all sorts of fantasies about “happily ever after” that I was not aware of when my boyfriend Phillip and I decided to marry. What I was aware of was that Phillip possessed many qualities I found attractive and important in a lifelong partner. However, over the years, I found myself developing resentment, as my needs—ones that I was not even aware of—went unmet.

I blamed my husband.

In the deep emotional recess of my heart, I really, really thought that marriage (and raising a family) would make me feel fulfilled: I thought this was supposed to make me happy. What made it harder was my resistance to the truth of my marriage. I looked to my husband to give me validation, affirmation, help (on my timetable), attention, and friendship. If I’m rigorously honest, I demanded that Phillip give me what I wanted or I’d feel let down by him.

Basically what I wanted from him was what I imagined was a male version of myself. Naturally, that is not who he is! Although I didn’t ask him to “change,” I did measure his behavior against an internalized image of how I thought he “should” be. And when I wanted to talk about us, what I really wanted to do was point fingers and dwell on what he was doing wrong.

As I have started to practice Radical Acceptance, I can’t help but see how I am in our way. I realize that one of our biggest challenges is my expectations of Phillip. And that’s not going to change by coming up with rules or making suggestions on how we can “improve” or “do it differently.”

What I’m now much more tuned into is that my husband truly means well and loves me dearly. If he drops the ball, it’s not because he doesn’t care about or love me. In loving without judgment, I am reminded that Phillip is who he is and how he is. We have areas of similarity and areas of complete differentness. Frankly, when I really allow myself to see him, I thoroughly value who he is. And when I do, magic happens!

Our life together now is a pleasure. I realize blaming him never ever fixes me or helps us. It simply doesn’t. When I am “blaming,” Radical Acceptance helps me bring my focus back to me. For me, Radical

Acceptance is tuning into Grace.

I love this beautiful testimonial because Kimberly is so honest about experiences that are incredibly common in relationships. She blamed and judged her husband and projected her own insecurities onto him. She clung to an idealized version of her partner—essentially, a man that was her flawless mirror image—instead of loving him for who he was, right there in front of her. We will delve into these common traps in greater detail throughout this book.

Kimberly's experience encapsulates a crucial but simple insight, one that should be self-evident but often isn't. I said it above and I am going to say it again here, but more emphatically.

## LOVE STARTS WITH YOU.

You must be prepared to give it and not be obsessed with a preconceived, perfect version coming right back to you. Why aren't we taught this in school as, like, a basic life lesson? I suppose Paul and John tried when they sang that "the love you take is equal to the love you make." But seriously, it's time for some government-sponsored PSAs and billboards.

I suspect some Christians (and others of faith) might tell me, "Girl, we've been saying that for a long time. Get with the program!" Maybe my haphazard Catholic upbringing failed to sufficiently educate me on this, but I also don't think love is the exclusive province of the church. This should be social doctrine rooted in science, medicine, and cultural norms. Let love and kindness start with you. Let loving without judgment start with you.

I had a fascinating conversation with Dr. Dan Siegel, a clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine and bestselling author of *Mindsight*, among many other brilliant books. Based on his groundbreaking research in interpersonal neurobiology, Dan has reached a provocative conclusion: "Rather than relationships shaping people,<sup>3</sup> my research shows that relationships make people." The implication is that relationships have vastly more impact on individual development and well-being than is commonly believed.

"Take South Africans, for example," Dan told me. "Many communities subscribe to a philosophy known as Ubuntu, which means that you as an individual exist in the response of someone else." Among the Zulu people of South Africa, a customary greeting has two parts. The first, *Sikhona*, means, "I am here to be seen." The second, *Sawubona*, means, "I see you." This same idea of being seen is also the core of Radical Acceptance. Being truly seen allows vulnerability to take root, creating fertile ground for intimacy and connection to flourish. See, and be seen.

Ubuntu has roots in pluralism—community and togetherness is emphasized over the individual. In Ubuntu culture, Dan told me, "Yelling at another person and yelling at yourself are literally synonyms for the same thing. You exist within the connections to others and because of them." (For more about Dan's exploration into the mysteries of the human mind, I urge you to pick up his latest book, *Mind: A Journey to the Heart of Being Human*.) In the same spirit, Radical Acceptance urges couples to see themselves as one self-supporting unit. Negativity and hurt directed at one partner is directed at the relationship as a whole, while joy for one partner should be joy for both.

Dan advocates passionately for a new definition of self, one that is not determined by "you" and "me." Given the crucial role our relationships play in every aspect of our being, self is really a version of "we." There was a famous antidrug PSA<sup>4</sup> during the 1980s that showed a rat alone in a cage with two water bottles. One

bottle was filled with pure water and the other was laced with cocaine. Unsurprisingly, the rat became addicted to the cocaine water. The ad ominously warned: “Nine out of ten laboratory rats<sup>5</sup> will use it . . . and use it . . . and use it . . . until they are dead.”

But here’s the catch: These tests were done in isolation. Each rat was by itself, alone in a cage for a prolonged period of time. The experiment was repeated a second time, but the rats were now living together. This time, the rats mostly ignored the cocaine water. They didn’t like it, and no rats died. Community and togetherness, it turns out, can often overpower the most self-destructive threats. Like many people, these rats were less interested in getting high than in escaping a profound sense of loneliness.

Human beings are fundamentally wired for connection—physiologically, emotionally, sexually, and in so many other ways. There’s even evidence of this in the mystical realm! Lorell Frysh, who has a doctorate in East-West psychology and was a key catalyst for this book, emphatically agrees with me. (She’s the one who told me to “just love” Sanjay, as you may recall from the introduction.) Lorell has spent over forty-five years exploring, studying, and receiving initiation in many of the great spiritual, mystical, and healing traditions of the world.

“From a mystical perspective,<sup>6</sup> relationships are seen in the context of a greater wholeness,” she told me. “Mystics understand that we are all connected as the fabric and expression of One Being. People feel complete when every aspect of themselves can show up, be seen, and loved. Very often problems occur in relationships when we feel unseen, unheard, and unacknowledged. But in truth, as we ease our own barriers and defenses, we become better equipped to serve each other. As we release pain and disconnection from ourselves and our past trauma, it becomes easier to find a deeper home in love.” The primacy of our connectedness offers an existential truth that we should all act upon.

This is why I am incredibly motivated to spur Radical Acceptance into a beautiful, powerful movement. A sense of belonging and being seen are paramount to our well-being. But this mutuality doesn’t happen by itself. It must start somewhere. Why not let it start with you?

## LOVE IS A BIOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE

I had the great fortune of interviewing Dr. C. Sue Carter and her husband, Dr. Stephen Porges. They are both brilliant scientists who have performed groundbreaking work in neurophysiology, biology, behavioral neuroendocrinology, and psychophysiology.

A biologist and behavioral neurobiologist, Dr. Carter is the director of the Kinsey Institute and Rudy Professor of Biology at Indiana University, and she was the first person to identify the physiological mechanisms responsible for social monogamy. Dr. Porges is a Distinguished University Scientist at the Kinsey Institute and research professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and he is responsible for the Polyvagal Theory, which I touch upon later in the book. In 2013 they cowrote an article in European Molecular Biology Organization Reports entitled “The Biochemistry of Love: An Oxytocin Hypothesis,” which truly stopped me in my tracks. One big Ah Ha after another!

The article makes a compelling case for the crucial role love plays on a physiological as well as emotional level: how it not only impacts the circuitry of our brains and the physiological health of our hearts, but how love even affects the expression of our genes, potentially impacting future generations. Based on Sue’s research, we now know that oxytocin, an important hormone that serves as a neurotransmitter and is known as “the cuddle drug,” plays a crucial role in this phenomenon.

I have excerpted some of my favorite portions of the text, but will start with a bit of commentary to clarify key points. (I know for some readers this may be a bit tough to grasp. It's powerful, fascinating stuff that helps clarify why love and loss impact us so deeply, but please don't stress if a lot of it reads like a foreign language to you!)

The vagus nerve is the tenth cranial nerve, originating in the brain's medulla, and it has two branches, the dorsal and ventral. The ventral vagus connects the brain to our heart, middle ears, eyes, larynx, and pharynx, among other places in our bodies and is affiliated with how we communicate with others. For this reason, it is often referred to as the "social vagus," and in addition to assisting with how we communicate and socialize with others, it plays a key role in how we self-soothe and calm ourselves. Oxytocin is often activated by the presence of infants, and it's heightened in new and nursing mothers, as well as in positive social interactions. Oxytocin assists with attachment from early life to old age. Highlights of the article are as follows:

The biology of love originates in the primitive parts of the brain—the emotional core of the human nervous system—that evolved long before the cerebral cortex. The brain of a human "in love" is flooded with sensations, often transmitted by the (ventral) vagus nerve, creating much of what we experience as emotion.

Love is an epigenetic phenomenon: social behaviors, emotional attachment to others and long-lasting reciprocal relationships are plastic and adaptive and so is the biology on which they are based. Infants of traumatized or highly stressed parents might be chronically exposed to vasopressin (also a neuropeptide and close cousin to oxytocin), either through their own increased production of the peptide, or through higher levels of vasopressin in maternal milk. Such increased exposure could sensitize the infant to defensive behaviors or create a life-long tendency to overreact to threat.

Both parental care and exposure to oxytocin in early life can permanently modify hormonal systems, altering the capacity to form relationships and influence the expression of love across the lifespan.

Given the power of positive social experiences, it is not surprising that a lack of social relationships might also lead to alterations in behavior and concurrently changes in oxytocin and vasopressin pathways.

Although research has only begun to examine the physiological effects of these peptides beyond social behavior, there is a wealth of new evidence indicating that oxytocin influences physiological responses to stress and injury. Thus, oxytocin exposure early in life not only regulates our ability to love and form social bonds; it also has an impact on our health and well-being.

In "modern" societies humans can survive, at least after childhood, with little or no human contact. Communication technology, social media, electronic parenting and many other technological advances of the past century might place both children and adults at risk for social isolation and disorders of the autonomic nervous system, including deficits in their capacity for social engagement and love.

Social engagement actually helps us to cope with stress. The same hormones and areas of the brain that increase the capacity of the body to survive stress also enable us to better adapt to an ever-changing social and physical environment. Individuals with strong emotional support and relationships are more resilient in the face of stressors than those who feel isolated or lonely. Lesions in bodily tissues, including the brain, heal more quickly in animals that are living socially compared with those in isolation. The protective effects of positive sociality seem to rely on the same cocktail of hormones that carry a biological message of "love" throughout the body.

Oxytocin receptors are expressed in the heart, and precursors for oxytocin seem to be crucial for the

development of the fetal heart. Oxytocin exerts protective and restorative effects in part through its capacity to convert undifferentiated stem cells into cardiac muscle cells. Oxytocin can facilitate adult neurogenesis and tissue repair, especially after a stressful experience. We know that oxytocin has direct anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties in in vitro models of heart disease. The heart seems to rely on oxytocin as part of a normal process of protection and self-healing.

Although research into mechanisms through which love protects us against stress and disease is in its infancy, this knowledge will ultimately increase our understanding of the way that our emotions have an impact on health and disease. We have much to learn about love and much to learn from love.”

In other words, love is a biological imperative and so much more! Loving, healthy relationships contribute significantly to your heart health, specifically, as well as to your overall health and well-being. We simply cannot thrive as human beings in the absence of healthy relationships.

We have such a powerful opportunity as sisters, mothers, daughters, friends, wives, girlfriends, and caregivers to provide these healing benefits to those we love.

## TRUST

Let’s talk a little more about trust, an indispensable ingredient of Radical Acceptance. Simply put: you must trust yourself and your partner—I cannot underscore this strongly enough. After all, loving your partner without judgment is only possible, of course, if you truly trust him. Otherwise, how do you know that he won’t take advantage of you?

Trust can be a bit of a fickle mistress, even for those people in strong, secure relationships. It’s good to hold your own feet to the fire when he irritates you and your trust in him suddenly feels a bit illusive.

When your partner does something stupid, how often do you throw trust out the window and assume he is being deliberately hurtful toward you? Do you regularly assume the worst about his motives? You may feel these pangs of doubt on your Radical Acceptance journey. Trust means offering your partner the benefit of the doubt, even when you are not sure whether he deserves it. That said, if you find yourself frequently making excuses for him, or if you’re seeing red flags, have confidence in yourself to determine whether your trust in him is misplaced.

You may think that your ability to trust someone resets with every new person you meet. This is not true. The ability to develop a high degree of trust for other people typically begins during infancy. Based on the care and attention we did or did not receive from our parents or another caregiver as babies and young children, our brains became neurologically wired in a way that either facilitates trust throughout or lives—or inhibits it. The brilliant clinician and author Dr. Stan Tatkin corroborated the above and added, “The ability to trust another person<sup>7</sup> has everything to do with our earliest experiences.” Stan explains this process beautifully in his book *Wired for Love*:

Ideally, all babies have a parent<sup>8</sup> or other caregiver who puts their relationship before all other matters. The baby feels loved and secure, and the adult also enjoys the feeling of being loved and of being with and caring for the baby. These two are in it together. We call this a primary attachment relationship, because the baby and caregiver are bonded, or attached, to one another.

. . . This baby bubble sets the stage for enjoyable relationships with others later in life.

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As I've observed over the years, and as research has proven, individuals who experienced less-than-secure relationships with their caregivers during childhood are much more likely to be insecure in adulthood. Their brains have not yet learned to form the neurological connections necessary to develop deep trust for another person. Thankfully, due to the neuroplastic nature of the brain—meaning that with effort, it can be changed in meaningful ways as we age, causing us to feel and think differently—most people who didn't receive secure attachment from their parents or caregivers can, effectively, rewire their brains to facilitate trust, attachment, and intimacy as adults. Granted, this is not easy. We have all heard endless bitching and moaning from individuals who blame their parents for this and that. It's tempting to merely tell them, "Get over it already! You're an adult now!" Unfortunately, for many people, it's not that simple. But with a concerted effort, there's reason to be optimistic.

Stan likens a strong relationship to being in a foxhole: You have your partner's back and he has yours. No matter what happens, you deal with problems together and with unwavering security and trust in one another. But how do you build it?

We're going to talk about this in depth throughout this book, but here's a quick exercise you can start practicing right now. Practice graciously and sincerely saying things like, "You were right. I was wrong" (only when this is true, of course), and "I am sorry." Rather than being defensive and deflecting blame back to him, be willing to admit when you are wrong—whether your mistake was intentional or not. The effect is instantly disarming. Using these techniques is a powerful way to build trust and foster connection, provided they're said with sincerity. Being able to admit you are wrong and being apologetic makes you stronger, not weaker, and it gives you more power. You are offering a hand and choosing to move the relationship forward as opposed to retreating and putting up walls.

That said, do not make a habit of apologizing for every tiny thing. Don't let this technique fuel a self-sabotaging situation. Don't put yourself on trial. Trust yourself to understand when you are at fault and when you are not. An ex-boyfriend of mine—to whom I am forever grateful—used to say during our fights, exasperated: "Andrea, I am in your corner! We are on the same team." Oh Jesus, I'd think. Of course we are. Why is that so easy to forget? I always try to remember that now, and you should, too. Even when you feel like he deserves the Pain in the Ass of the Year Award, even when he is so incredibly, obviously, maddeningly wrong, just remember: You are on the same team. You both want the same thing. Even if you "win" the fight, what have you gained?

I know this can all be hard but it is a key means to fortify trust in your relationship. It used to be extremely hard for me, I will admit. Here was a common dynamic for Sanjay and myself: I don't like criticism and I get defensive pretty easily, while Sanjay is naturally critical. Add some stress, two young kids, and sprinkle in a few primeval hurt feelings, and BAM! A full-blown fight has ensued. (I partly blame my aversion to criticism on my star sign. This is a common issue for Aries. In fact, Virgos—which is Sanjay's star sign—tend to be critical. I felt weirdly overjoyed to discover this.)

We survived this pattern for many painful years, but since we discovered Radical Acceptance this cycle has become much less prevalent. I am better able to say, "I'm sorry," or "I was wrong." I know I can trust Sanjay, and he knows he can trust me. As a result, we've trained ourselves to not be so defensive. A little anecdote comes to mind: We were getting ready to renovate our apartment and we had been looking at photos of potential interiors. Then Sanjay made a semi-mocking, critical comment about the flooring I had liked. It was a light moment. I mentioned to him what I had learned about Virgos being critical. He chuckled, and then I said: "So, in other words, it's you, not me!" We laughed and high-fived. While it was lighthearted, it was also very meta. For so long I had reacted poorly to his critical commentary. I used to take it so personally! But I have learned to restrain myself and accept that being critical is part of who he is. It makes

Sanjay a shrewd businessman in the boardroom, but it can also make him a difficult husband in the living room. I must emphasize: as Radical Acceptance has taken root, he has become considerably less critical.

While prepping for your Radical Acceptance journey, take this to heart: similar to Ubuntu culture, how you treat your partner is, effectively, how you treat yourself. The amazing author and activist Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt concurs, and further explains that this requirement is rooted in neurobiology—activating upper and lower regions of the brain. The upper region gets most of the sexy research and publicity. It's divided into the logical and analytical “left” side, and the creative and imaginative “right” side. But the more primitive “lower” region, which includes the thalamus, hypothalamus, and the hippocampus, controls most of our emotional processes.

As Helen explained,<sup>9</sup> if you give your partner a gift, your upper brain registers whom you're giving it to and why. But your lower brain does not recognize the recipient or even the source of this kindness—it merely registers kindness and processes pleasure hormones. Helen notes that because the lower brain cannot make this differentiation, “Being kind to others is being kind to yourself.” The same goes when you are expressing anger and negativity. Your lower brain cannot differentiate between being angry or being the recipient of anger. So if you yell at your partner (or at that crazy driver ahead of you), your lower brain registers anger and pumps out the same stress hormones as if he were yelling at you.

In short, by being kind and loving toward him, by minimizing or even eliminating negativity and criticism, you not only strengthen your relationship and make him feel better, you treat yourself better.

“The less you open your heart to others, the more your heart suffers.”

—DEEPAK CHOPRA

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When friends would ask what this book is about while I was writing it, Sanjay would quip with a smile, “She’s writing a book about me! It’s about how to make your marriage work despite your husband.” It was always a light-hearted statement—Sanjay is incredibly generous in his support of this book, even though it reveals a lot about our personal lives—but my reply would always be, “Yes, you’re a key character, but the book is as much about my desire for Radical Acceptance and my own journey about loving myself, being seen, and being able to both love, and be loved, fully.”

A dozen years ago, Sanjay gave me a card inscribed with a quote by the Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore: “Love’s gift cannot be given. It waits to be accepted.” I kept it on my bedside table until it was yellow and faded, to the point of being illegible, as a reminder that Sanjay’s love for me is always there—even if I sometimes had trouble accepting the form it was taking.

We have always had a lot of love for one another—despite how we suffered and struggled with how to successfully express it. It took me a while to understand and to be able to fully accept his love, in large part because of my own trust and vulnerability issues, as well as my fierce independence. I regret how my instinct was to push him away when our conflict seemed insurmountable. My marriage brought me to my knees: I loved this man dearly, yet we fought so much and experienced so much hurt. The deep, painful sadness and anger were often like open wounds. Finally, though, there was a point at which I realized that I couldn’t live with him and I couldn’t live without him.

I came to the last possible conclusion: I had to change for the sake of the relationship. I had to take the lead.

Before I go any further, I am eager to take a moment to share why I was willing to go to such lengths for the sake of our relationship.

Like many other couples, Sanjay and I met at work. He was overseeing a very large team undertaking a massive project in India, where he is from. I had previously been to India, where I was taken in by its cultural richness and the kindness of its people, and I was extremely interested in Eastern philosophy, so I leapt at the first opportunity to join Sanjay's team.

I had heard a lot about Sanjay before we met. Everyone said that he was an incredible leader and that he was one of the smartest guys in the room—as evidenced by his master's degree in engineering from Stanford and MBA with distinction from Harvard Business School, along with the fact that he graduated with distinction from India's vaunted Indian Institute of Technology. His intense drive and work ethic were the stuff of legend.

I couldn't wait to learn from him. But I never expected that I would fall head over heels in love within minutes of meeting him. I remember calling my friend Brenda after that initial encounter and confessing I had a big problem. As the consummate professional, I knew I had to ignore this huge crush and focus on my work. Besides, he had a serious girlfriend at the time.

We continued to work together very closely. Our team stayed at the Oberoi Hotel in Mumbai for weeks and sometimes months on end, living and breathing the project. My infatuation with Sanjay only increased. It was like classic teenage love, butterflies and all, even though I was in my late twenties. I would daydream about him endlessly. I would get nervous and excited any time we were in a meeting together. I loved his confidence and his sense of humor. He was handsome and totally sexy.

Eventually, he and his girlfriend broke up. We started to date. I left the company and moved to New York to attend Columbia Business School. I remember standing in the shower counting the weeks and then months that we were together. Our chemistry was ridiculous. I wrote him poems that he devoured like a dehydrated man gulps down cold, fresh water.

We always felt heartbroken to be apart for any extended length of time. In the fall of my first year, I remember sitting with Sanjay in a restaurant on Columbus Avenue several hours before his flight back to India and lamenting his impending departure. We sat, sadly holding hands. I asked him if he could delay it by just one more day, but he could not.

Even in our early dating phase, Sanjay would give me these incredible, long-lasting, full-body hugs. I remember thinking, He must really love me to hug me like this. As the months and eventually years wore on, he would periodically hug me this way, communicating to me just how deeply he felt about me. It was the best feeling in the world. I felt so treasured, so loved.

As time has gone on, while the intense magnetism has worn off, we still have a chemistry that energizes and feeds our relationship. We continue to learn about each other as we grow and change.

Of course, there is so much that draws us together. I love his powerful mind and his big heart. I love that he knows so much about virtually every topic. I love to learn from him, ski with him, and discuss political and social issues. Knowing that we are on the same team, that he always has my back is beyond invaluable.

Naturally, Sanjay has his challenging parts. But I know now that my Radical Acceptance journey has been as much about my need to be seen and accepted for who I really am—imperfect, flawed, and in some ways

deeply inadequate—as it was to see and accept Sanjay for who he really is. Tired of grappling with my hurt and doubt, I wanted Sanjay to love me even as I went to the ends of the earth, down into an endless abyss, to fix my broken parts and reclaim that essential part of me that had long felt lost. I had shouldered these defeating, sometimes even devastating, feelings for so long. I wanted someone to make them go away, to convince me that they were no longer true.

This is why I connect so deeply with the work of Brené Brown, the brilliant researcher and bestselling author of *Daring Greatly*, *Rising Strong* and *The Gifts of Imperfection*, which I will talk about at greater length later in this book. I think often about her prophetic first TED Talks in which she revealed powerful, relatable insights about shame and vulnerability. Her talk reached a crescendo when she revealed what so many people who suffer simply need to hear: “You are enough,” she said. That’s it. This is something that I have long struggled with. I know so many others have, too.

In my case, something missing inside prevented me from feeling a strong sense of belonging. It’s a weird paradox. I have many spectacular friends and family members who love me and who would do anything for me. I know this and am grateful for it. And yet, I still needed to prove myself; to ingratiate myself, even. I was a people-pleaser. I felt that I was not enough, that I was on the outside looking in. I would go to great lengths to be liked and avoid conflict. Conflict was very threatening to me, probably because I erroneously equated it with rejection.

This is my seriously warped truth. I am smart, have strong moral fiber, and I have accomplished quite a lot. But deep down, and sometimes not so deep down, it was just not enough. It didn’t occur to me that the answer to this would be found on the other side of the crucible with my husband. Ha! Looking back, there was a time when such an idea would have been laughable. Then, the only possible antidote, in my mind, was to forge my own path and work tirelessly to prove my worth.

I knew I could rely on myself and I was comfortable being alone. I wore my independence like a badge of honor. It had served me well. But it has its shadowy side. Independence has made me immensely capable, yes, but in some ways it’s like a shell: strong on the outside but empty on the inside.

In retrospect, I can see why my deep-seated propensity was to go solo and why conflict with Sanjay was so painful and so threatening to me. Isolating myself emotionally and minimizing my reliance on others was my adaptive behavior. It is a self-destructive coping method.

Instead of trying to work through challenging differences, my instinct had been to assert my independence by putting up walls or simply by doing my own thing. When our conflict was especially intractable, I would punish him for the hurt I felt by retreating even further. Sanjay, who grew up in a super interdependent, close-knit culture, would always accuse me of “having no idea what togetherness is about.”

My logic amounted to: Why always compromise and do things together? Why bother arguing or feeling bad about it? Let’s just do our own thing when we are not in alignment, and then connect where we are. It made sense to me, but I was rejecting what Sanjay needed. My MO of doing things on my own was painful and foreign to him, just like ceding control and striving to be in lockstep as a couple was equally painful and foreign to me. Just as I was unable to extend compassion or tenderness to my own weaknesses, I was a harsh judge of Sanjay and his shortcomings. Making matters worse, as our relationship fractured and split, I retreated into the safety of work—my proudly crafted and preserved fortress of independence. But all this did was isolate us from one another, both physically and emotionally.

Our worst disagreements triggered intense, irrational reactions for me. I didn’t know how to manage these

overwhelming feelings. I frequently felt consumed by rage or completely depleted, compounded by feeling I had no control. For someone who prided herself on her ability to keep it together, who otherwise kept her emotions close to the vest, these feelings were incredibly frustrating and confounding to me.

I felt “so not understood.” Whatever Sanjay said to me, all I heard was: YOUR FEELINGS DON’T MATTER. YOU’RE WRONG. YOU’RE NOT ENOUGH. YOU ARE UNLOVABLE.

Which meant being alone. Once again on the outside.

As I look back, I know that he, too, was in pain. I don’t think he understood that I was so fragile, nor that it would sometimes take me weeks to recover from our blowouts. I know now that we were equally at fault for what was going on, even though at the time I blamed him. If I were to be brutally honest, I would have to admit that I wanted him to change. Sometimes, I even wanted him to come and rescue me. I eventually concluded that I needed to radically accept myself and break the vicious cycle that was tearing us apart. While I hoped that Sanjay would eventually see those lonely, desperate fragments that skulked behind my brave mask of independence, that he would tenderly reach in, and quietly embrace them, I refused to let him in, continuing to try and work it out on my own.

What I finally figured out—FINALLY!—is that I needed to do these things for myself, and that I needed to give Sanjay what I so desperately sought. I realized that I needed to tenderly reach for those broken parts of him and quietly embrace them as opposed to rebelling and feeling hurt that he couldn’t or wouldn’t do this for me.

Inadvertently, by withdrawing from him and rejecting the parts of him that I did not like, I unwittingly bred and fed the exact opposite of what I deeply desired and—go figure!—we both, along with our relationship, suffered greatly.

Through Radical Acceptance I have now managed to bring out the best in my husband. This didn’t happen by denying his challenging parts or by insisting that he change. Instead, I have extended more tenderness to him and to myself. I have practiced and practiced. I have learned to take the high road and I have stretched myself in ways that I never thought possible.

“Go and love someone exactly as they are. And then watch how quickly they transform into the greatest, truest version of themselves. When one feels seen and appreciated in their own essence, one is instantly empowered.”

—WES ANGELOZZI10

I have become brutally honest with myself so that I can challenge the painful feelings that used to haunt me. I don’t let them ride roughshod like they once did. I have developed much more empathy for myself and for others. I am less reactive and more emotionally mature and resilient.

I am super blessed to have a partner as loving, generous, supportive, wise, and wonderful as Sanjay is. As individuals and as a couple, we have benefitted enormously from Radical Acceptance. It has created a beautiful cycle wherein love and understanding beget more love and understanding. As a result, we have built an incredible relationship. Thanks to how much we have opened our hearts and let go of our egos, we have given each other the best gift ever. Our marriage has become brilliantly transformed over the years.

I want to do the same for you and your relationship. I want you to learn from my experiences so you can

reverse the negative habits that are preventing lasting love from taking root and that are causing you to be awash in doubt.

Gandhi-ji said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” I say, “Give the love you want to feel in the world.” Love is more than a feeling, though. Nearly twenty years ago, my friend Dahl told me, “Love is an action word.” I have adopted that as my mantra. It’s millions of actions, words, and intentions. It’s actively exercising compassion, empathy, and nonjudgment—especially when it’s hard. It’s exercising restraint. It’s exhibiting kindness and generosity. It’s extending yourself in the spirit of love, even when it’s the hardest thing you’ve ever done, even when you have to beat back your ego, your anger, and your fear. And it’s finding serenity and bliss on the other side. This is why I say that committing to Radical Acceptance is truly the greatest gift ever—both for him and yourself.

And so, while I will talk a lot about your partner in this book, Radical Acceptance begins with you. We expect our partners to gaze deeply into our eyes and profess that we complete them. We expect someone to magically understand and sponge up all those hurts that haunt us. We expect to get swept off our feet by Prince Charming and live happily ever after. Well, it doesn’t work that way. You only get to live happily ever after if you put in the work. Of course, there are times when you may decide not to, and that is what we will discuss next.

• • •

- When you’re with someone you love or who has real potential, get ready to go ALL IN. Go 150% of the way and don’t expect him to meet you halfway, 50/50, every step of the way—especially in the beginning.
- To practice Radical Acceptance successfully, you’ll need to trust yourself and your partner. It may take some time to develop, but it’s imperative to do so. This includes extending him the benefit of the doubt, even when you’re inclined to assume the worst of his intentions or his abilities.
- Do not expect instant reciprocation when you begin to practice Radical Acceptance. Give your partner time to step it up. If Radical Acceptance doesn’t eventually come back to you, you may be in an untenable relationship.

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# **RADICAL ACCEPTANCE: THE SECRET TO HAPPY, LASTING LOVE BY ANDREA MILLER PDF**

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## Review

"This bold, insightful book is the most unequivocal challenge to love unconditionally that we have ever read. Radical Acceptance is just what the world needs now. We highly recommend it!"

(Harville Hendrix, PhD, and Helen LaKelly Hunt, PhD, bestselling authors of Making Marriage Simple and Getting the Love You Want)

"A warm, honest approach to prioritizing your partner and creating true happiness in your relationship--and in yourself. Andrea is like the friend everyone needs in not only the tough moments, but the good ones too. A compelling book."

(John Gray, PhD, New York Times bestselling author of Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus)

"Miller has written a fascinating, original, and highly courageous book on that issue dear to all of us—the eternal drive of partners to build and sustain a happy and fulfilling relationship. It's full of poignant stories, smart advice, and good science. And it's a great read."

(Helen Fisher, PhD, biological anthropologist, bestselling author of Why We Love)

"A wonderful new book. Relatable and emotional, Andrea Miller divulges her own and others' marriage and dating stories that have benefited from learning how to practice Radical Acceptance."

(Stan Tatkin, PsyD, MFT, clinician, teacher & author of Wired for Love)

"In this important book, Andrea Miller succeeds in making us feel like we are having the most life-changing talk with our BFF. Jam-packed with wisdom for the ages, it compassionately pushes us to reclaim more from ourselves and our relationships." (Pat Love, EdD, therapist, bestselling author of The Truth About Love)

"By embracing the enlightening concept of Radical Acceptance, couples can far more easily make the leap from silent desperation to loving interconnection."

(Ian Kerner, PhD LMFT, bestselling author of She Comes First)

"Perhaps no one is better qualified than Andrea to simplify the secret to love and intimacy. She brings together the wisdom of YourTango's amazing experts and the millions of visitors and their experiences. A beautiful work."

(David Bell, chairman emeritus of the Interpublic Group)

"Andrea Miller brilliantly illuminates how the conflict between our expectations and the actual attributes of

our partner can destroy relationships, while acceptance leads to trust and love.”

(Stephen W. Porges, PhD, Distinguished University Scientist, Indiana University, author of *The Polyvagal Theory*)

“Andrea Miller debunks many of the destructive myths that have arisen around "romance". In their place she offers practical and sage advice on "love," told in the context of real stories and the new science of relationships—all presented in a remarkably entertaining, enjoyable style.”

(Sue Carter, PhD, Director of the Kinsey Institute, Rudy Professor of Biology, Indiana University)

#### About the Author

Andrea Miller is the founder and CEO of YourTango, the leading digital media company dedicated to love and relationships, whose mission is to help people love better and connect more meaningfully. Andrea earned a degree in mechanical engineering from Tulane University and an MBA from Columbia Business School. She has a private pilot's license; a black belt in Shotokan karate, awarded by the Japan Karate Association; and serves as a trustee of New York Theatre Workshop. Andrea lives in New York City with her husband and two boys.

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Radical Acceptance COMMIT TO RADICAL ACCEPTANCE: THE BEST GIFT EVER

IT'S EASY TO complain that your partner isn't living up to your expectations. But what's actually effective—what puts the energy of love in motion—is seeing someone who has flaws, yes, but realizing you can help this person become the best version of himself through unconditional love. This is Radical Acceptance.

A friend of mine once described Radical Acceptance as the “EpiPen of relationships.” I love that metaphor, but it needs a very big caveat. What she meant was how unbelievably helpful Radical Acceptance can be in a flash—that is, when things are about to spiral out of control and you are about to react badly to some dumb little thing. In that regard, Radical Acceptance is an instant, ready-made injection that can stave off toxic, avoidable outcomes. When my blood is boiling after Sanjay says something irritating, I always try to ask myself, “Are you practicing Radical Acceptance right now?” Instead of reacting badly, I try exercising restraint and extending tenderness to him. As we'll explore later in the book, controlling our emotional reactions is key to Radical Acceptance.

But here's where the metaphor breaks down: Unlike an actual EpiPen, which is merely a temporary fix and is unable to permanently rid the body of life-threatening allergies, Radical Acceptance effects profound, lasting change. It's built to work for the long haul—and while it can work wonders in a pinch, significant effort is required for it to truly take root in a transformative, healing way. I will provide you with a ton of data and offer many suggestions for how to make your journey easier, but the absolutely essential key is that you have to practice Radical Acceptance for it to really work.

I know. Buzzkill. Barely three paragraphs in and we're already talking about hard work.

But here's the good news: Radical Acceptance can introduce (or reintroduce) healing, grace, confidence, and, ultimately, tremendous love, into your relationship. You will replace that vicious cycle of negativity with a virtuous cycle of positivity. Yes, you will face resistance and setbacks during your journey, and you will slip up from time to time. That's okay. The key is not to be discouraged. Radical Acceptance will only remain a great idea and an interesting theory if you do not make the regular, daily effort to practice it. After all, fundamentally changing your habits and your way of thinking doesn't happen overnight. By consciously choosing to accept his unlovable parts (and your own!), by focusing on the positive and overlooking the negative, you will actually establish new neural pathways. Thankfully, our brains are more than capable of

changing in positive, profound ways, even well into adulthood. This is called neuroplasticity, and we'll revisit this and related concepts regularly in this book.

Not long ago, I received a message on Facebook from Kevin, a very old friend who had read some of my early writing on Radical Acceptance. He wrote:

I think the last we talked I was showing my appreciation for your take on Radical Acceptance. I must tell you, I try to put it into practice as often as I can. Accepting those that I love for who they are . . . not what I want them to be. It's been life changing. I am the happiest I have ever been.

I have had so many people share their praise for Radical Acceptance, but Kevin's note is powerful in part due to its brevity. It's incredibly rewarding to hear testimonials of how the simple idea of Radical Acceptance can lead to what we all seek: lasting love and happiness.

I want to raise some foundational points before we progress further the heart of the program. The first are the most burning concerns people have about Radical Acceptance: "What if I practice Radical Acceptance but he never gets it? What if he never reciprocates? Won't this put me in a position of weakness?" I touch on reciprocation, along with how Radical Acceptance makes you stronger, below, and address these themes in depth throughout this book.

Next we'll take a look at trust in a relationship and why it is so crucially important to establish in your Radical Acceptance journey. Loving and being loved unconditionally means taking a leap of faith. It means feeling safe in your relationship and making room for vulnerability. It means taking off your mask and enabling him to do the same, so that you can both be truly seen for who you are. This level of security may take time to develop, but I will hold your hand as you learn this process.

#### RECIPROCATION

Just loving him fully without expecting immediate reciprocation . . . that sounds tough. Will it work? Will opening your heart actually make you feel stronger and more confident in your relationship and in your life?

You can't possibly know unless you try. And what you will get, no matter what, is clarity. Clarity on whether you should stay in the relationship or if you should end it. After you have done everything you can to love and radically accept him, if the relationship still isn't working or if his behavior just proves too challenging, you know it's time to say good-bye. You've tried everything. The what-ifs—What if I tried harder? What if he wasn't seeing the real me? What if I needed to give him a chance?—will evaporate. You may be sad and angry for a time, but you will harbor much less—if any—uncertainty or doubt. Because of that, you will find how much easier it is for you to move on.

Understandably, most people want to ensure their efforts aren't "wasted." To those I say: love is never wasted. When it comes to love, there are never guarantees of success. All you can do in the relationship is your part, which is why I always urge each partner to initially quit worrying about how the other is reciprocating. It rarely works to go halfway and expect him to immediately meet you there, fifty-fifty, even-steven. In fact, when I offer advice to people who want to improve their relationship, I always encourage them to each go all in, to each give 150 percent. This might feel scary for a little while, but it's a winning long-run approach.

"There is no safe investment.<sup>2</sup> To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark,

motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.”

—C. S. LEWIS, THE FOUR LOVES

But won't you look desperate if you offer your undivided love and affection to your partner without knowing if you'll get something in return? Won't you just be a doormat? And shouldn't the guy always love the girl just a tiny bit more?

Nope, definitely not, and heck no!

Radical Acceptance requires radical giving—giving more, giving your all, and doing it all again, over and over. I know this may be a different way of thinking about love and life than you're used to. We live in an instant-gratification world in which we are conditioned to get what we pay for, stat. Radical Acceptance requires a fundamental recalibration of your relationship expectations. It's about not expecting someone else to “make you happy,” but thinking much more about what you have to offer your partner. The relationship has to make you happy. As Katharine Hepburn once said, “Love has nothing to do with what you are expecting to get, only with what you are expecting to give, which is everything.”

While you will ultimately need and deserve reciprocation, giving love to others is still self-serving. At the same time, it's about remembering that you are worthy of tremendous love from others and yourself.

Far too often, we are our own worst enemies. We think shitty, defeating thoughts about ourselves as often as pop radio stations play Taylor Swift—again and again and again. We beat ourselves up and refuse to give ourselves a break. And then we expect someone else to magically treat us as rock stars.

Um, do you see the paradox here? I always say that love starts with you. It is the opposite of selfish to love yourself, to know your worth, and to claim your beauty. As we will discuss in part 3, even the most successful women fall prey to a very debilitating “confidence gap” in which they are mired in self-doubt. No one can stop this debilitating cycle but you. You have to believe that you are worthy of love, praise, sacrifice, tenderness, and, yes, because we are all flawed, that you are worthy of forgiveness and compassion. As my wise big sis Maria says, “It's an inside job!”

Practicing Radical Acceptance is the ultimate inside job—it's doing that crucial inner work that leads to personal transformation and your ability to be a far better partner (and friend, parent, son or daughter, etc.).

Friend: I am here to tell you that **YOU. ARE. WORTHY.** You are worthy of love. You are worthy of respect. You are worthy of admiration. Believe it.

As we all know, it's a common fallacy to “just put a ring on it” and expect that we will live happily ever after. My close friend Kimberly's experience in her marriage exemplifies this problem. She wrote to me,

I had all sorts of fantasies about “happily ever after” that I was not aware of when my boyfriend Phillip and I decided to marry. What I was aware of was that Phillip possessed many qualities I found attractive and important in a lifelong partner. However, over the years, I found myself developing resentment, as my needs—ones that I was not even aware of—went unmet.

I blamed my husband.

In the deep emotional recess of my heart, I really, really thought that marriage (and raising a family) would make me feel fulfilled: I thought this was supposed to make me happy. What made it harder was my resistance to the truth of my marriage. I looked to my husband to give me validation, affirmation, help (on my timetable), attention, and friendship. If I'm rigorously honest, I demanded that Phillip give me what I wanted or I'd feel let down by him.

Basically what I wanted from him was what I imagined was a male version of myself. Naturally, that is not who he is! Although I didn't ask him to "change," I did measure his behavior against an internalized image of how I thought he "should" be. And when I wanted to talk about us, what I really wanted to do was point fingers and dwell on what he was doing wrong.

As I have started to practice Radical Acceptance, I can't help but see how I am in our way. I realize that one of our biggest challenges is my expectations of Phillip. And that's not going to change by coming up with rules or making suggestions on how we can "improve" or "do it differently."

What I'm now much more tuned into is that my husband truly means well and loves me dearly. If he drops the ball, it's not because he doesn't care about or love me. In loving without judgment, I am reminded that Phillip is who he is and how he is. We have areas of similarity and areas of complete differentness. Frankly, when I really allow myself to see him, I thoroughly value who he is. And when I do, magic happens!

Our life together now is a pleasure. I realize blaming him never ever fixes me or helps us. It simply doesn't. When I am "blaming," Radical Acceptance helps me bring my focus back to me. For me, Radical Acceptance is tuning into Grace.

I love this beautiful testimonial because Kimberly is so honest about experiences that are incredibly common in relationships. She blamed and judged her husband and projected her own insecurities onto him. She clung to an idealized version of her partner—essentially, a man that was her flawless mirror image—instead of loving him for who he was, right there in front of her. We will delve into these common traps in greater detail throughout this book.

Kimberly's experience encapsulates a crucial but simple insight, one that should be self-evident but often isn't. I said it above and I am going to say it again here, but more emphatically.

## LOVE STARTS WITH YOU.

You must be prepared to give it and not be obsessed with a preconceived, perfect version coming right back to you. Why aren't we taught this in school as, like, a basic life lesson? I suppose Paul and John tried when they sang that "the love you take is equal to the love you make." But seriously, it's time for some government-sponsored PSAs and billboards.

I suspect some Christians (and others of faith) might tell me, "Girl, we've been saying that for a long time. Get with the program!" Maybe my haphazard Catholic upbringing failed to sufficiently educate me on this, but I also don't think love is the exclusive province of the church. This should be social doctrine rooted in science, medicine, and cultural norms. Let love and kindness start with you. Let loving without judgment start with you.

I had a fascinating conversation with Dr. Dan Siegel, a clinical professor of psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine and bestselling author of *Mindsight*, among many other brilliant books. Based on his groundbreaking research in interpersonal neurobiology, Dan has reached a provocative conclusion: "Rather

than relationships shaping people,<sup>3</sup> my research shows that relationships make people.” The implication is that relationships have vastly more impact on individual development and well-being than is commonly believed.

“Take South Africans, for example,” Dan told me. “Many communities subscribe to a philosophy known as Ubuntu, which means that you as an individual exist in the response of someone else.” Among the Zulu people of South Africa, a customary greeting has two parts. The first, Sikhona, means, “I am here to be seen.” The second, Sawubona, means, “I see you.” This same idea of being seen is also the core of Radical Acceptance. Being truly seen allows vulnerability to take root, creating fertile ground for intimacy and connection to flourish. See, and be seen.

Ubuntu has roots in pluralism—community and togetherness is emphasized over the individual. In Ubuntu culture, Dan told me, “Yelling at another person and yelling at yourself are literally synonyms for the same thing. You exist within the connections to others and because of them.” (For more about Dan’s exploration into the mysteries of the human mind, I urge you to pick up his latest book, *Mind: A Journey to the Heart of Being Human*.) In the same spirit, Radical Acceptance urges couples to see themselves as one self-supporting unit. Negativity and hurt directed at one partner is directed at the relationship as a whole, while joy for one partner should be joy for both.

Dan advocates passionately for a new definition of self, one that is not determined by “you” and “me.” Given the crucial role our relationships play in every aspect of our being, self is really a version of “we.” There was a famous antidrug PSA<sup>4</sup> during the 1980s that showed a rat alone in a cage with two water bottles. One bottle was filled with pure water and the other was laced with cocaine. Unsurprisingly, the rat became addicted to the cocaine water. The ad ominously warned: “Nine out of ten laboratory rats<sup>5</sup> will use it . . . and use it . . . and use it . . . until they are dead.”

But here’s the catch: These tests were done in isolation. Each rat was by itself, alone in a cage for a prolonged period of time. The experiment was repeated a second time, but the rats were now living together. This time, the rats mostly ignored the cocaine water. They didn’t like it, and no rats died. Community and togetherness, it turns out, can often overpower the most self-destructive threats. Like many people, these rats were less interested in getting high than in escaping a profound sense of loneliness.

Human beings are fundamentally wired for connection—physiologically, emotionally, sexually, and in so many other ways. There’s even evidence of this in the mystical realm! Lorell Frysh, who has a doctorate in East-West psychology and was a key catalyst for this book, emphatically agrees with me. (She’s the one who told me to “just love” Sanjay, as you may recall from the introduction.) Lorell has spent over forty-five years exploring, studying, and receiving initiation in many of the great spiritual, mystical, and healing traditions of the world.

“From a mystical perspective,<sup>6</sup> relationships are seen in the context of a greater wholeness,” she told me. “Mystics understand that we are all connected as the fabric and expression of One Being. People feel complete when every aspect of themselves can show up, be seen, and loved. Very often problems occur in relationships when we feel unseen, unheard, and unacknowledged. But in truth, as we ease our own barriers and defenses, we become better equipped to serve each other. As we release pain and disconnection from ourselves and our past trauma, it becomes easier to find a deeper home in love.” The primacy of our connectedness offers an existential truth that we should all act upon.

This is why I am incredibly motivated to spur Radical Acceptance into a beautiful, powerful movement. A sense of belonging and being seen are paramount to our well-being. But this mutuality doesn’t happen by

itself. It must start somewhere. Why not let it start with you?

## LOVE IS A BIOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE

I had the great fortune of interviewing Dr. C. Sue Carter and her husband, Dr. Stephen Porges. They are both brilliant scientists who have performed groundbreaking work in neurophysiology, biology, behavioral neuroendocrinology, and psychophysiology.

A biologist and behavioral neurobiologist, Dr. Carter is the director of the Kinsey Institute and Rudy Professor of Biology at Indiana University, and she was the first person to identify the physiological mechanisms responsible for social monogamy. Dr. Porges is a Distinguished University Scientist at the Kinsey Institute and research professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and he is responsible for the Polyvagal Theory, which I touch upon later in the book. In 2013 they cowrote an article in *European Molecular Biology Organization Reports* entitled “The Biochemistry of Love: An Oxytocin Hypothesis,” which truly stopped me in my tracks. One big Ah Ha after another!

The article makes a compelling case for the crucial role love plays on a physiological as well as emotional level: how it not only impacts the circuitry of our brains and the physiological health of our hearts, but how love even affects the expression of our genes, potentially impacting future generations. Based on Sue’s research, we now know that oxytocin, an important hormone that serves as a neurotransmitter and is known as “the cuddle drug,” plays a crucial role in this phenomenon.

I have excerpted some of my favorite portions of the text, but will start with a bit of commentary to clarify key points. (I know for some readers this may be a bit tough to grasp. It’s powerful, fascinating stuff that helps clarify why love and loss impact us so deeply, but please don’t stress if a lot of it reads like a foreign language to you!)

The vagus nerve is the tenth cranial nerve, originating in the brain’s medulla, and it has two branches, the dorsal and ventral. The ventral vagus connects the brain to our heart, middle ears, eyes, larynx, and pharynx, among other places in our bodies and is affiliated with how we communicate with others. For this reason, it is often referred to as the “social vagus,” and in addition to assisting with how we communicate and socialize with others, it plays a key role in how we self-soothe and calm ourselves. Oxytocin is often activated by the presence of infants, and it’s heightened in new and nursing mothers, as well as in positive social interactions. Oxytocin assists with attachment from early life to old age. Highlights of the article are as follows:

The biology of love originates in the primitive parts of the brain—the emotional core of the human nervous system—that evolved long before the cerebral cortex. The brain of a human “in love” is flooded with sensations, often transmitted by the (ventral) vagus nerve, creating much of what we experience as emotion.

Love is an epigenetic phenomenon: social behaviors, emotional attachment to others and long-lasting reciprocal relationships are plastic and adaptive and so is the biology on which they are based. Infants of traumatized or highly stressed parents might be chronically exposed to vasopressin (also a neuropeptide and close cousin to oxytocin), either through their own increased production of the peptide, or through higher levels of vasopressin in maternal milk. Such increased exposure could sensitize the infant to defensive behaviors or create a life-long tendency to overreact to threat.

Both parental care and exposure to oxytocin in early life can permanently modify hormonal systems, altering the capacity to form relationships and influence the expression of love across the lifespan.

Given the power of positive social experiences, it is not surprising that a lack of social relationships might also lead to alterations in behavior and concurrently changes in oxytocin and vasopressin pathways.

Although research has only begun to examine the physiological effects of these peptides beyond social behavior, there is a wealth of new evidence indicating that oxytocin influences physiological responses to stress and injury. Thus, oxytocin exposure early in life not only regulates our ability to love and form social bonds; it also has an impact on our health and well-being.

In “modern” societies humans can survive, at least after childhood, with little or no human contact. Communication technology, social media, electronic parenting and many other technological advances of the past century might place both children and adults at risk for social isolation and disorders of the autonomic nervous system, including deficits in their capacity for social engagement and love.

Social engagement actually helps us to cope with stress. The same hormones and areas of the brain that increase the capacity of the body to survive stress also enable us to better adapt to an ever-changing social and physical environment. Individuals with strong emotional support and relationships are more resilient in the face of stressors than those who feel isolated or lonely. Lesions in bodily tissues, including the brain, heal more quickly in animals that are living socially compared with those in isolation. The protective effects of positive sociality seem to rely on the same cocktail of hormones that carry a biological message of “love” throughout the body.

Oxytocin receptors are expressed in the heart, and precursors for oxytocin seem to be crucial for the development of the fetal heart. Oxytocin exerts protective and restorative effects in part through its capacity to convert undifferentiated stem cells into cardiac muscle cells. Oxytocin can facilitate adult neurogenesis and tissue repair, especially after a stressful experience. We know that oxytocin has direct anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties in in vitro models of heart disease. The heart seems to rely on oxytocin as part of a normal process of protection and self-healing.

Although research into mechanisms through which love protects us against stress and disease is in its infancy, this knowledge will ultimately increase our understanding of the way that our emotions have an impact on health and disease. We have much to learn about love and much to learn from love.”

In other words, love is a biological imperative and so much more! Loving, healthy relationships contribute significantly to your heart health, specifically, as well as to your overall health and well-being. We simply cannot thrive as human beings in the absence of healthy relationships.

We have such a powerful opportunity as sisters, mothers, daughters, friends, wives, girlfriends, and caregivers to provide these healing benefits to those we love.

## TRUST

Let’s talk a little more about trust, an indispensable ingredient of Radical Acceptance. Simply put: you must trust yourself and your partner—I cannot underscore this strongly enough. After all, loving your partner without judgment is only possible, of course, if you truly trust him. Otherwise, how do you know that he won’t take advantage of you?

Trust can be a bit of a fickle mistress, even for those people in strong, secure relationships. It’s good to hold your own feet to the fire when he irritates you and your trust in him suddenly feels a bit illusive.

When your partner does something stupid, how often do you throw trust out the window and assume he is

being deliberately hurtful toward you? Do you regularly assume the worst about his motives? You may feel these pangs of doubt on your Radical Acceptance journey. Trust means offering your partner the benefit of the doubt, even when you are not sure whether he deserves it. That said, if you find yourself frequently making excuses for him, or if you're seeing red flags, have confidence in yourself to determine whether your trust in him is misplaced.

You may think that your ability to trust someone resets with every new person you meet. This is not true. The ability to develop a high degree of trust for other people typically begins during infancy. Based on the care and attention we did or did not receive from our parents or another caregiver as babies and young children, our brains became neurologically wired in a way that either facilitates trust throughout or lives—or inhibits it. The brilliant clinician and author Dr. Stan Tatkin corroborated the above and added, “The ability to trust another person<sup>7</sup> has everything to do with our earliest experiences.” Stan explains this process beautifully in his book *Wired for Love*:

Ideally, all babies have a parent<sup>8</sup> or other caregiver who puts their relationship before all other matters. The baby feels loved and secure, and the adult also enjoys the feeling of being loved and of being with and caring for the baby. These two are in it together. We call this a primary attachment relationship, because the baby and caregiver are bonded, or attached, to one another.

. . . This baby bubble sets the stage for enjoyable relationships with others later in life.

• • •

As I've observed over the years, and as research has proven, individuals who experienced less-than-secure relationships with their caregivers during childhood are much more likely to be insecure in adulthood. Their brains have not yet learned to form the neurological connections necessary to develop deep trust for another person. Thankfully, due to the neuroplastic nature of the brain—meaning that with effort, it can be changed in meaningful ways as we age, causing us to feel and think differently—most people who didn't receive secure attachment from their parents or caregivers can, effectively, rewire their brains to facilitate trust, attachment, and intimacy as adults. Granted, this is not easy. We have all heard endless bitching and moaning from individuals who blame their parents for this and that. It's tempting to merely tell them, “Get over it already! You're an adult now!” Unfortunately, for many people, it's not that simple. But with a concerted effort, there's reason to be optimistic.

Stan likens a strong relationship to being in a foxhole: You have your partner's back and he has yours. No matter what happens, you deal with problems together and with unwavering security and trust in one another. But how do you build it?

We're going to talk about this in depth throughout this book, but here's a quick exercise you can start practicing right now. Practice graciously and sincerely saying things like, “You were right. I was wrong” (only when this is true, of course), and “I am sorry.” Rather than being defensive and deflecting blame back to him, be willing to admit when you are wrong—whether your mistake was intentional or not. The effect is instantly disarming. Using these techniques is a powerful way to build trust and foster connection, provided they're said with sincerity. Being able to admit you are wrong and being apologetic makes you stronger, not weaker, and it gives you more power. You are offering a hand and choosing to move the relationship forward as opposed to retreating and putting up walls.

That said, do not make a habit of apologizing for every tiny thing. Don't let this technique fuel a self-sabotaging situation. Don't put yourself on trial. Trust yourself to understand when you are at fault and when

you are not. An ex-boyfriend of mine—to whom I am forever grateful—used to say during our fights, exasperated: “Andrea, I am in your corner! We are on the same team.” Oh Jesus, I’d think. Of course we are. Why is that so easy to forget? I always try to remember that now, and you should, too. Even when you feel like he deserves the Pain in the Ass of the Year Award, even when he is so incredibly, obviously, maddeningly wrong, just remember: You are on the same team. You both want the same thing. Even if you “win” the fight, what have you gained?

I know this can all be hard but it is a key means to fortify trust in your relationship. It used to be extremely hard for me, I will admit. Here was a common dynamic for Sanjay and myself: I don’t like criticism and I get defensive pretty easily, while Sanjay is naturally critical. Add some stress, two young kids, and sprinkle in a few primeval hurt feelings, and BAM! A full-blown fight has ensued. (I partly blame my aversion to criticism on my star sign. This is a common issue for Aries. In fact, Virgos—which is Sanjay’s star sign—tend to be critical. I felt weirdly overjoyed to discover this.)

We survived this pattern for many painful years, but since we discovered Radical Acceptance this cycle has become much less prevalent. I am better able to say, “I’m sorry,” or “I was wrong.” I know I can trust Sanjay, and he knows he can trust me. As a result, we’ve trained ourselves to not be so defensive. A little anecdote comes to mind: We were getting ready to renovate our apartment and we had been looking at photos of potential interiors. Then Sanjay made a semi-mocking, critical comment about the flooring I had liked. It was a light moment. I mentioned to him what I had learned about Virgos being critical. He chuckled, and then I said: “So, in other words, it’s you, not me!” We laughed and high-fived. While it was lighthearted, it was also very meta. For so long I had reacted poorly to his critical commentary. I used to take it so personally! But I have learned to restrain myself and accept that being critical is part of who he is. It makes Sanjay a shrewd businessman in the boardroom, but it can also make him a difficult husband in the living room. I must emphasize: as Radical Acceptance has taken root, he has become considerably less critical.

While prepping for your Radical Acceptance journey, take this to heart: similar to Ubuntu culture, how you treat your partner is, effectively, how you treat yourself. The amazing author and activist Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt concurs, and further explains that this requirement is rooted in neurobiology—activating upper and lower regions of the brain. The upper region gets most of the sexy research and publicity. It’s divided into the logical and analytical “left” side, and the creative and imaginative “right” side. But the more primitive “lower” region, which includes the thalamus, hypothalamus, and the hippocampus, controls most of our emotional processes.

As Helen explained,<sup>9</sup> if you give your partner a gift, your upper brain registers whom you’re giving it to and why. But your lower brain does not recognize the recipient or even the source of this kindness—it merely registers kindness and processes pleasure hormones. Helen notes that because the lower brain cannot make this differentiation, “Being kind to others is being kind to yourself.” The same goes when you are expressing anger and negativity. Your lower brain cannot differentiate between being angry or being the recipient of anger. So if you yell at your partner (or at that crazy driver ahead of you), your lower brain registers anger and pumps out the same stress hormones as if he were yelling at you.

In short, by being kind and loving toward him, by minimizing or even eliminating negativity and criticism, you not only strengthen your relationship and make him feel better, you treat yourself better.

“The less you open your heart to others, the more your heart suffers.”

—DEEPAK CHOPRA

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When friends would ask what this book is about while I was writing it, Sanjay would quip with a smile, “She’s writing a book about me! It’s about how to make your marriage work despite your husband.” It was always a light-hearted statement—Sanjay is incredibly generous in his support of this book, even though it reveals a lot about our personal lives—but my reply would always be, “Yes, you’re a key character, but the book is as much about my desire for Radical Acceptance and my own journey about loving myself, being seen, and being able to both love, and be loved, fully.”

A dozen years ago, Sanjay gave me a card inscribed with a quote by the Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore: “Love’s gift cannot be given. It waits to be accepted.” I kept it on my bedside table until it was yellow and faded, to the point of being illegible, as a reminder that Sanjay’s love for me is always there—even if I sometimes had trouble accepting the form it was taking.

We have always had a lot of love for one another—despite how we suffered and struggled with how to successfully express it. It took me a while to understand and to be able to fully accept his love, in large part because of my own trust and vulnerability issues, as well as my fierce independence. I regret how my instinct was to push him away when our conflict seemed insurmountable. My marriage brought me to my knees: I loved this man dearly, yet we fought so much and experienced so much hurt. The deep, painful sadness and anger were often like open wounds. Finally, though, there was a point at which I realized that I couldn’t live with him and I couldn’t live without him.

I came to the last possible conclusion: I had to change for the sake of the relationship. I had to take the lead.

Before I go any further, I am eager to take a moment to share why I was willing to go to such lengths for the sake of our relationship.

Like many other couples, Sanjay and I met at work. He was overseeing a very large team undertaking a massive project in India, where he is from. I had previously been to India, where I was taken in by its cultural richness and the kindness of its people, and I was extremely interested in Eastern philosophy, so I leapt at the first opportunity to join Sanjay’s team.

I had heard a lot about Sanjay before we met. Everyone said that he was an incredible leader and that he was one of the smartest guys in the room—as evidenced by his master’s degree in engineering from Stanford and MBA with distinction from Harvard Business School, along with the fact that he graduated with distinction from India’s vaunted Indian Institute of Technology. His intense drive and work ethic were the stuff of legend.

I couldn’t wait to learn from him. But I never expected that I would fall head over heels in love within minutes of meeting him. I remember calling my friend Brenda after that initial encounter and confessing I had a big problem. As the consummate professional, I knew I had to ignore this huge crush and focus on my work. Besides, he had a serious girlfriend at the time.

We continued to work together very closely. Our team stayed at the Oberoi Hotel in Mumbai for weeks and sometimes months on end, living and breathing the project. My infatuation with Sanjay only increased. It was like classic teenage love, butterflies and all, even though I was in my late twenties. I would daydream about him endlessly. I would get nervous and excited any time we were in a meeting together. I loved his confidence and his sense of humor. He was handsome and totally sexy.

Eventually, he and his girlfriend broke up. We started to date. I left the company and moved to New York to attend Columbia Business School. I remember standing in the shower counting the weeks and then months that we were together. Our chemistry was ridiculous. I wrote him poems that he devoured like a dehydrated man gulps down cold, fresh water.

We always felt heartbroken to be apart for any extended length of time. In the fall of my first year, I remember sitting with Sanjay in a restaurant on Columbus Avenue several hours before his flight back to India and lamenting his impending departure. We sat, sadly holding hands. I asked him if he could delay it by just one more day, but he could not.

Even in our early dating phase, Sanjay would give me these incredible, long-lasting, full-body hugs. I remember thinking, He must really love me to hug me like this. As the months and eventually years wore on, he would periodically hug me this way, communicating to me just how deeply he felt about me. It was the best feeling in the world. I felt so treasured, so loved.

As time has gone on, while the intense magnetism has worn off, we still have a chemistry that energizes and feeds our relationship. We continue to learn about each other as we grow and change.

Of course, there is so much that draws us together. I love his powerful mind and his big heart. I love that he knows so much about virtually every topic. I love to learn from him, ski with him, and discuss political and social issues. Knowing that we are on the same team, that he always has my back is beyond invaluable.

Naturally, Sanjay has his challenging parts. But I know now that my Radical Acceptance journey has been as much about my need to be seen and accepted for who I really am—imperfect, flawed, and in some ways deeply inadequate—as it was to see and accept Sanjay for who he really is. Tired of grappling with my hurt and doubt, I wanted Sanjay to love me even as I went to the ends of the earth, down into an endless abyss, to fix my broken parts and reclaim that essential part of me that had long felt lost. I had shouldered these defeating, sometimes even devastating, feelings for so long. I wanted someone to make them go away, to convince me that they were no longer true.

This is why I connect so deeply with the work of Brené Brown, the brilliant researcher and bestselling author of *Daring Greatly*, *Rising Strong* and *The Gifts of Imperfection*, which I will talk about at greater length later in this book. I think often about her prophetic first TED Talks in which she revealed powerful, relatable insights about shame and vulnerability. Her talk reached a crescendo when she revealed what so many people who suffer simply need to hear: “You are enough,” she said. That’s it. This is something that I have long struggled with. I know so many others have, too.

In my case, something missing inside prevented me from feeling a strong sense of belonging. It’s a weird paradox. I have many spectacular friends and family members who love me and who would do anything for me. I know this and am grateful for it. And yet, I still needed to prove myself; to ingratiate myself, even. I was a people-pleaser. I felt that I was not enough, that I was on the outside looking in. I would go to great lengths to be liked and avoid conflict. Conflict was very threatening to me, probably because I erroneously equated it with rejection.

This is my seriously warped truth. I am smart, have strong moral fiber, and I have accomplished quite a lot. But deep down, and sometimes not so deep down, it was just not enough. It didn’t occur to me that the answer to this would be found on the other side of the crucible with my husband. Ha! Looking back, there was a time when such an idea would have been laughable. Then, the only possible antidote, in my mind, was to forge my own path and work tirelessly to prove my worth.

I knew I could rely on myself and I was comfortable being alone. I wore my independence like a badge of honor. It had served me well. But it has its shadowy side. Independence has made me immensely capable, yes, but in some ways it's like a shell: strong on the outside but empty on the inside.

In retrospect, I can see why my deep-seated propensity was to go solo and why conflict with Sanjay was so painful and so threatening to me. Isolating myself emotionally and minimizing my reliance on others was my adaptive behavior. It is a self-destructive coping method.

Instead of trying to work through challenging differences, my instinct had been to assert my independence by putting up walls or simply by doing my own thing. When our conflict was especially intractable, I would punish him for the hurt I felt by retreating even further. Sanjay, who grew up in a super interdependent, close-knit culture, would always accuse me of “having no idea what togetherness is about.”

My logic amounted to: Why always compromise and do things together? Why bother arguing or feeling bad about it? Let's just do our own thing when we are not in alignment, and then connect where we are. It made sense to me, but I was rejecting what Sanjay needed. My MO of doing things on my own was painful and foreign to him, just like ceding control and striving to be in lockstep as a couple was equally painful and foreign to me. Just as I was unable to extend compassion or tenderness to my own weaknesses, I was a harsh judge of Sanjay and his shortcomings. Making matters worse, as our relationship fractured and split, I retreated into the safety of work—my proudly crafted and preserved fortress of independence. But all this did was isolate us from one another, both physically and emotionally.

Our worst disagreements triggered intense, irrational reactions for me. I didn't know how to manage these overwhelming feelings. I frequently felt consumed by rage or completely depleted, compounded by feeling I had no control. For someone who prided herself on her ability to keep it together, who otherwise kept her emotions close to the vest, these feelings were incredibly frustrating and confounding to me.

I felt “so not understood.” Whatever Sanjay said to me, all I heard was: **YOUR FEELINGS DON'T MATTER. YOU'RE WRONG. YOU'RE NOT ENOUGH. YOU ARE UNLOVABLE.**

Which meant being alone. Once again on the outside.

As I look back, I know that he, too, was in pain. I don't think he understood that I was so fragile, nor that it would sometimes take me weeks to recover from our blowouts. I know now that we were equally at fault for what was going on, even though at the time I blamed him. If I were to be brutally honest, I would have to admit that I wanted him to change. Sometimes, I even wanted him to come and rescue me. I eventually concluded that I needed to radically accept myself and break the vicious cycle that was tearing us apart. While I hoped that Sanjay would eventually see those lonely, desperate fragments that skulked behind my brave mask of independence, that he would tenderly reach in, and quietly embrace them, I refused to let him in, continuing to try and work it out on my own.

What I finally figured out—**FINALLY!**—is that I needed to do these things for myself, and that I needed to give Sanjay what I so desperately sought. I realized that I needed to tenderly reach for those broken parts of him and quietly embrace them as opposed to rebelling and feeling hurt that he couldn't or wouldn't do this for me.

Inadvertently, by withdrawing from him and rejecting the parts of him that I did not like, I unwittingly bred and fed the exact opposite of what I deeply desired and—go figure!—we both, along with our relationship, suffered greatly.

Through Radical Acceptance I have now managed to bring out the best in my husband. This didn't happen by denying his challenging parts or by insisting that he change. Instead, I have extended more tenderness to him and to myself. I have practiced and practiced. I have learned to take the high road and I have stretched myself in ways that I never thought possible.

“Go and love someone exactly as they are. And then watch how quickly they transform into the greatest, truest version of themselves. When one feels seen and appreciated in their own essence, one is instantly empowered.”

—WES ANGELOZZI10

I have become brutally honest with myself so that I can challenge the painful feelings that used to haunt me. I don't let them ride roughshod like they once did. I have developed much more empathy for myself and for others. I am less reactive and more emotionally mature and resilient.

I am super blessed to have a partner as loving, generous, supportive, wise, and wonderful as Sanjay is. As individuals and as a couple, we have benefitted enormously from Radical Acceptance. It has created a beautiful cycle wherein love and understanding beget more love and understanding. As a result, we have built an incredible relationship. Thanks to how much we have opened our hearts and let go of our egos, we have given each other the best gift ever. Our marriage has become brilliantly transformed over the years.

I want to do the same for you and your relationship. I want you to learn from my experiences so you can reverse the negative habits that are preventing lasting love from taking root and that are causing you to be awash in doubt.

Gandhi-ji said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” I say, “Give the love you want to feel in the world.” Love is more than a feeling, though. Nearly twenty years ago, my friend Dahl told me, “Love is an action word.” I have adopted that as my mantra. It's millions of actions, words, and intentions. It's actively exercising compassion, empathy, and nonjudgment—especially when it's hard. It's exercising restraint. It's exhibiting kindness and generosity. It's extending yourself in the spirit of love, even when it's the hardest thing you've ever done, even when you have to beat back your ego, your anger, and your fear. And it's finding serenity and bliss on the other side. This is why I say that committing to Radical Acceptance is truly the greatest gift ever—both for him and yourself.

And so, while I will talk a lot about your partner in this book, Radical Acceptance begins with you. We expect our partners to gaze deeply into our eyes and profess that we complete them. We expect someone to magically understand and sponge up all those hurts that haunt us. We expect to get swept off our feet by Prince Charming and live happily ever after. Well, it doesn't work that way. You only get to live happily ever after if you put in the work. Of course, there are times when you may decide not to, and that is what we will discuss next.

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- When you're with someone you love or who has real potential, get ready to go ALL IN. Go 150% of the way and don't expect him to meet you halfway, 50/50, every step of the way—especially in the beginning.
- To practice Radical Acceptance successfully, you'll need to trust yourself and your partner. It may take some time to develop, but it's imperative to do so. This includes extending him the benefit of the doubt, even when you're inclined to assume the worst of his intentions or his abilities.

- Do not expect instant reciprocation when you begin to practice Radical Acceptance. Give your partner time to step it up. If Radical Acceptance doesn't eventually come back to you, you may be in an untenable relationship.

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