

CO-COMMITTED: TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR RELATIONSHIPS

Close relationships of any kind require a certain level of awareness that I have only recently come to understand. I have never been much of a self-help person, but when *Conscious Loving* was recommended to me by basically the wisest person I have ever met, it had a huge impact on my life. The fact that we create and are responsible for the difficulties in our relationships was difficult to digest at first, but as I read on, I realized that Gay and Kate Hendricks' approach was not only groundbreaking, but was changing the way I related to the people I love and also, myself.

Love,

gp

Q

Can you tell us a little bit about it and how you developed your particular methodology?

A

We have basically chosen to turn our relationship into a living experiment and exploration to see if it is possible to actually be fully authentic and real, to shift from the culturally pervasive blame game to wonder, to own problem-solving and to use the increased energy of our relationship to expand creativity and contribution. That's an experiment that continues to this day, because we have no secrets, and everything we share with others is something we practice. We met and immediately launched into what is now a 32-year practice. Here's how we met:

Kate: I fell in love with Gay the first time I saw him years ago in 1980. He came to give a presentation at the graduate school where I was getting my Ph.D. and serving as the movement therapy professor. I went up to ask a question at the morning break, but before I could say anything, Gay changed my world by saying the most unusual thing I'd ever heard...

Gay: I'd been in a painful on-again, off-again relationship for a few years. One day, in the midst of an argument, I had an insight that changed my life. I suddenly had a flash that this wasn't our 500th argument, it was our 500th run-through of the same argument. In that moment of insight, I saw how I created every struggle we had by the same pattern. First I would withhold something—it might be something I was mad at her about or something I'd done that I felt guilty about. Whatever it was, I wouldn't tell the truth about it, and because of that concealment I would start to criticize her. I'd never seen the connection before: The moment I lied to another person I would start criticizing him or her to justify the lying. So, concealment would lead to blaming, which would in turn trigger the other person into getting defensive. Then we'd go around and around in a game of Musical Blame until we got exhausted and made up. Once I had that insight, I realized I couldn't keep repeating the pattern anymore. I decided to end the relationship. A month later, I walked into a room with about 50 people in it

and immediately saw Katie for the first time. She came up to me to ask a question. To this day we can't remember what the question was, because I said, "Before I answer that, I want to let you know I feel attracted to you and would love to ask you to have a cup of coffee with me. However, I need to let you know that I've just made a big commitment: I'm only interested in relationships where both people are committed to honesty, taking responsibility instead of blaming, and have a deep commitment to your creative path. On those terms, would you like to have a cup of coffee with me?"

Kate: This was it! I said, "Yes, I'd love to have coffee with you on those terms," but I knew what I was really saying yes to was what I'd always wanted.

Q

In your book, you speak a lot about the "conscious" relationship. Can you quickly define what makes a conscious relationship versus a co-dependent one?

A

A conscious relationship is one in which people are awake to themselves, their feelings and thoughts, and are open to the flow of love and attention with one another. In a conscious relationship you can be completely yourself and completely connected. In a co-dependent relationship you have two halves trying to become whole: one person who doesn't love him/herself trying to get the other person to love them anyway. **In a conscious relationship, both people know they're**

whole in themselves; they know they don't "need" the other person to complete them. In a conscious relationship, it's about two people celebrating together, not trying to get something from the other.

Q

What are some examples of co-dependent versus conscious behavior?

A

We excerpted our book, [Conscious Loving](#) for a few examples of co-dependent behavior. Here, we've reframed each co-dependent behavior into a conscious, and more positive one.

Co-dependent: You have difficulty allowing others to feel their feelings. If someone feels bad, you rush in to make it better because you think it's your fault. You worry about other people's feelings frequently.

Conscious: You are able to be present and attentive when people around you are feeling their emotions. You encourage them to feel their emotions deeply and to express those feelings openly.

Co-dependent: In spite of your "best efforts" people around you do not change their bad habits.

Conscious: You commit to stop enabling the bad habits of people you care about.

Instead, you take effective actions that give people the opportunity to take full responsibility for their own wellbeing.

Co-dependent: You have secrets. There are things you have done or not done that you are hiding from another person.

Conscious: You have no secrets. You reveal rather than conceal. You understand that hiding your feelings causes you to withdraw from intimacy, and you take every opportunity to speak honestly about your feelings.

Co-dependent: You do not let yourself feel the full range of your feelings. You are out of touch with one or more core emotions such as anger, fear, or sadness. Anger is a particular problem for you. You find it hard to admit that you're angry, and you have trouble expressing it to other people.

Conscious: You recognize the body sensations that let you know you're angry. You communicate about all your feelings in a straightforward, easy manner that others can understand.

Co-dependent: You criticize or get criticized frequently. You have a strong, nagging internal critic that keeps you feeling bad even in moments when you could be feeling good.

Conscious: You experience very little criticism, either from outside or within. Your internal critic is in full retirement, having been replaced by a strong inner appreciator.

Co-dependent: You try to control other people, to get them to feel and be a certain way, and you spend a lot of energy being controlled or avoiding being controlled by others.

Conscious: You are aware of those things you can control and the things you

cannot control. You put your attention on things you can change, such as expressing what's true and keeping your agreements, and you make choices that support those areas you can actually influence.

Co-dependent: In arguments, much energy is spent in trying to find out whose fault it is. Both people struggle to prove that they are right, or to prove the other wrong.

Conscious: When difficulties or differences arise, you shift into wonder and healthy responsibility, asking, "Hmmm... how am I creating this, and what could I do differently to create a better result?"

Co-dependent: In arguments, you find yourself pleading victim or agreeing that you were at fault.

Conscious: You take full responsibility for the events that happen in your relationship. You invite the other person to take full responsibility, too. You understand that a relationship can only take place between two people who are equals, both taking full responsibility for events that occur; anything else is an entanglement, not a relationship.

Co-dependent: You frequently agree to do things you do not want to do, feel bad about it, but say nothing.

Conscious: You consider every agreement before making it, and listen closely to your body wisdom as well as your mind as to whether you should make it. You keep the agreements you make and know how to change an agreement that isn't working.

Q

What are the most important elements of a lasting relationship?

A

Commitment and re-commitment: Lasting relationships use wholehearted commitment as a place to come home to and to steer the relationship.

Commitment locates you on your relationship map so you can move from where you are to where you want to be. Recommitting when you mess up is the key, and recommitting to reveal your true self and your true feelings is the crux of it. For example, committing to reveal gains real traction when, in the moment of noticing that you're concealing anger, you take a breath, recommit to revealing, and share the experience of being angry. What doesn't work is concealing, noticing the concealing, blaming yourself for concealing, feeling like a failure, noticing that your partner conceals too and jumping on the blame merry-go-round.

Blame to wonder: When issues or differences arise, lasting relationships cultivate and use the wonder move rather than the popular blame move. Each person gets genuinely curious about how s/he is contributing to the issue. It might sound like this: "Hmmm... I wonder how I'm creating this?"

Emotional transparency: People in lasting relationships savor their inner experiences and communicate them easily to each other. The art of being present, giving loving attention to what's going on and describing that in a way that not only matches the feelings and sensations, but also lands for the listeners, turns

talking into discovery. Truth changes from a report of what just happened to a flow of renewed interest in each other. It's also really sexy.

Appreciation: Partners engaged in lasting relationships understand that the flow of love is most quickly enhanced by the ongoing and multi-faceted practice of appreciating. We appreciate verbally, non-verbally, in song and spontaneous dances, with notes, through special foods, with essays and flowers. We especially enjoy assisting others to expand their appreciation vocabularies and have created menus of appreciation that people can find on our website.

Creativity: A close relationship liberates a huge amount of energy, and many people waste that energy in conflict and power struggles. Lasting relationships fuel their creativity and co-creativity with the free attention and flow of love that allows them to co-create. Instead of pushing against each other, they join to move powerfully in chosen directions.

Q

How can a couple recover from infidelity?

A

Allow yourself to feel all the emotions that come up. These are usually anger, sadness, and fear. That includes feeling all the emotions and sharing those as authentically as possible over time.

Each person should take healthy responsibility for the events that have taken place. Both people need to ask themselves, "Hmmm, why was it inevitable that

this situation occurred in my life at this particular time?” Asking a powerful question like that takes you out of thinking of yourself as a victim.

Talk through what happened, listen generously to each other, and focus on what can be learned. This way, partners can actually create a stronger relationship than before. Blame and withholding after infidelity, on the other hand, make it very difficult to recover.

Partners then can commit to each other to resolve the issue and create a new relationship based on what they really want.

Q

What do you advise singles to do to be ready to find love?

A

We've worked with more than 20,000 singles in our seminars and our [eCourses](#). From that experience, two things make the biggest difference for singles wanting to attract genuine love. First, and most importantly, is to love any aspect of yourself you think is unlovable. When you deeply love yourself, you're more likely to attract someone who values and loves him or herself. If you don't love, accept, and value yourself, you will attract people who don't love, accept, and value themselves, either. Second, get clear on your three absolute yes's and three absolute no's. These are the qualities and traits that you most value and those behaviors and traits that are deal-breakers for you. Knowing your absolute yes's and no's creates a clear doorway for the person you most want to attract.

Q

Why is learning to love yourself important to making a relationship with another person work? How do we even begin to learn how to do that?

A

Something unloved lurks at the base of almost all relationship issues. The more each of us gives loving presence to all of ourselves, the more available we become to receive and enjoy the flow of love and harmony. An unloved part of ourselves has a tendency to look like it lives over there in the other person and leads to control and power struggles. It's much easier, more efficient, and more productive to love yourself thoroughly than to try to get others to change. And we've noticed that the more people genuinely love themselves, the more harmony and creativity they generate around them. The simplest exercise we teach in our seminars is something anyone can benefit from:

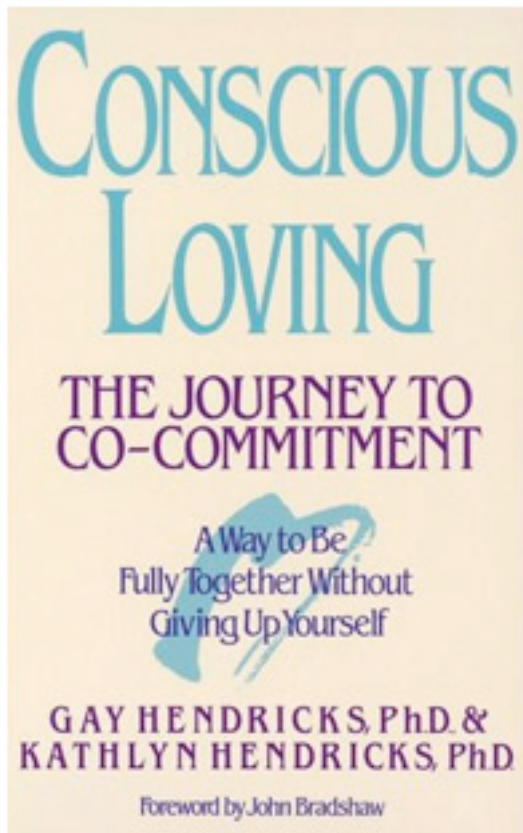
Take a moment to think of someone you know you love. Bring that person to mind and feel how you love him or her. Keep focusing on that person until you generate a genuine felt-experience of loving.

Turn the love toward yourself. Love yourself just the same way you love that person you were thinking of.

Feel that love toward something you've been afraid is unlovable in yourself.

Perhaps you feel a deep hurt or harbor an old fear that you're unlovable. Love

each of those things, just as you would love a child who occasionally makes mistakes. All you need to do is love as much as you can from wherever you are.



Gay Hendricks, Ph.D., and Kathlyn Hendricks, Ph.D., BC-DMT founded [the Hendricks Institute](#) together. Based in Ojai, California, it is an international learning center that teaches core skills for conscious living and loving. They have worked together for over 30 years, and with over 30,000 people, to assist them in opening to more creativity and love through the power of conscious relationships and whole-person learning. They are authors of many best-selling books on relationships. Their book, [Conscious Loving](#) continues to be a huge success and is used as a textbook in many graduate programs.