

Terry Real in *The New Rules of Marriage* states the following: Are you happy with the relationship you're in today? Or are you frustrated, knowing that no matter how hard you try, the openheartedness that first drew you and your partner together seems awfully hard to win back? Perhaps you're in a difficult relationship that needs substantial change, or perhaps you are in a good-enough relationship that could be made better. Maybe you're looking for a new relationship that doesn't repeat the mistakes of the past. In any case, if you are reading these words, chances are, you feel that something has been missing. It may be tempting to avoid acknowledging that feeling, but I'd like to ask you to trust your intuition. Roughly half of all marriages fail altogether, and of those marriages left standing, how many are really fulfilling? How many truly great relationships do you see around you?

Contemporary women want to be more than companions with their spouses; they want to remain friends and lovers. If the twentieth century marriage was companionable, the new marriage is intimate—physically, sexually, intellectually, and, above all, emotionally. The fly in the ointment is that while some men might be thrilled if their wives remained as sexually provocative and generous as a mistress; the rest of the new package—particularly emotional closeness—leaves them feeling inadequate and mystified, if not downright put upon. And while women's new empowerment may well equip them to stand up for themselves, it does a terrible job of teaching them how to stand up for the relationship.

No matter how hard you may try to take the high road, the discrepancy between the marriage you want and the one you've got gnaws away at you like a slow growing cancer. When you back away from your real needs, when you stop telling the truth—to your partner and to yourself—you shut down. We humans are not clever enough to surgically clamp down on our feelings, denying this one but keeping these others open. When you shut down the truth, you shut down yourself—your generosity, your sexuality, your vitality.

RULE: INTIMACY OCCURS WHEN TWO OR MORE MATURE INDIVIDUALS CHOOSE TO SHARE THEMSELVES WITH ONE ANOTHER. Healthy sharing is like breathing—inhalating and exhaling, receiving and transmitting. The partners must be open enough to receive each other, while at the same time not so open that they lose themselves in the relationship. Sharing is a process of connection that occurs in the five areas of human experience: intellectual, emotional, physical, sexual, and spiritual. If you have optimal intimacy in a particular domain, you feel satisfied that your partner fully receives who you are and fully expresses who he is. In the intellectual domain you would enjoy sharing your thoughts with your partner, your ambitions, concerns, questions, and insights.

As with the intellectual domain, so too with the other four; intimacy means that the channel is open, that giving of yourself and taking in what your partner offers—spiritually, physically, sexually, and emotionally—is valued and happens

easily. When a couple shares spiritually, they share ideals, values, and a sense of purpose. They share dedication to some higher good beyond their personal concerns. Such a shared value could be spiritual in the religious sense, but it could also be dedication to art, a political belief, charity, mentoring, or raising children. Relationship empowerment helps us understand that if I win and you lose, we both lose in the long run. Healthy intimacy always demands dedication to the higher good of the relationship itself. In this sense, every form of real intimacy is spiritual. I believe that you can actually feel the spirituality of authentic connection if you're attuned to it. In a workshop, for example, when a participant in a state of angry indignation reaches beyond himself to experience—perhaps for the first time in years—real empathy and compassion for his partner, everyone looking on can sense a palpable change. We are moved by such moments when a new force, love, seems to enter the room.

Physical sharing means hugs and holding each other in nonsexual ways, but it also extends to all sorts of physical care, such as exercise, shared health concerns, and sharing physical space—building a house together, or even bringing flowers into a room. Sexual sharing simply means giving and receiving erotic pleasure, teaching each other how to be good lovers, which requires each partner to be neither overly selfish (and un giving) nor overly selfless (and unreceptive).

Of all the domains of intimacy, the one that most couples find most difficult is emotional sharing. And nothing better illustrates the conundrum for both sexes than when women try to have twenty first century relationships with twentieth century guys. Why is this issue so fraught? Because a central aspect of traditional, twentieth century masculinity is the denial of emotions. Traditional masculinity commands: Thou shalt not be vulnerable. As boys “learn” to be men, they are taught to disown their own vulnerability and to deride vulnerability in others. This is most obvious when men are contemptuous of “weakness” in other men. But it's also why men have such a hard time listening empathetically to their partners. Most men, even if they try to “be good,” really just want women to “stop being emotional and do something about it!”

We all desire to be more connected. We can't do that from behind a wall. The people we love want more from us, both as husbands and as fathers, than our paychecks. They need our open hearts.