

# HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR MARRIAGE WITHOUT TALKING ABOUT IT BY PATRICIA LOVE, STEVEN STOSNY

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“**Inspirational** . . . a practical guide for men and women to overcome their challenges and come together outside and inside the bedroom.”

—JOHN GRAY, PH.D.,

*Author of Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus*

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## Review

“If you've ever told your spouse, 'I talk until I'm blue in the face,' or 'It's in one ear and out the other,' stop whatever you're doing and read this book immediately! You're about to discover why talking things out isn't always the best way to get through to your spouse or achieve more closeness and connection. More important, you'll learn exactly what you need to do today to truly transform your relationship forever.”

---Michele Weiner-Davis, MSW, founder of [divorcebusting.com](#) and author of *Divorce Busting* and *The Sex-Starved Marriage*

## About the Author

Patricia Love, Ed.D., is an acclaimed therapist and speaker and author of four books, including *Hot Monogamy* and *The Truth About Love*. She has appeared on Oprah and Today and on CNN, and has contributed to many magazines, including *Cosmopolitan* and *Self*.

Steven Stosny, Ph.D., is a therapist who specializes in men's issues and has appeared on Oprah in two highly rated shows on men and marriage. He is the author of *You Don't Have to Take It Anymore: Turn Your Resentful, Angry, or Emotionally Abusive Relationship into a Compassionate, Loving One*.

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ONE

## How We Break The Connection Fear and Shame

Things weren't always so bad for Marlene and Mark. At one time they cherished the closeness they felt—all their friends used to marvel at how close and connected they were. They can still vividly recall the good

times, but instead of comforting them, these memories of the closeness they once had now fill them with sadness and a deep sense of loss. They often wonder how they got to this lonely state. Their story is all the more sad because it is so common.

Marlene and Mark arrived at their chronic state of disconnection without either of them doing anything wrong. Marlene has never grasped that Mark, like most men, has a heightened sensitivity to feeling shame and inadequacy. (How could she? His impulse when he feels shame is to hide, so he can't tell her about it. Instead, he disguises it with annoyance, impatience, or anger.) She does not understand that each time she tries to make improvements in their relationship, the overriding message Mark hears is that he is not meeting her expectations—he's failing her—which sends him into the pain of his own inadequacy. While trying to ward off feeling like a failure, Mark is no longer sensitive to Marlene's fear of being isolated and shut out. In the beginning of their relationship, he sensed her need for connection and wouldn't have dreamed of shutting her out. But now he has no idea that each time he rejects her overtures or raises his voice in anger—purely to protect himself—he's pushing her further away and deeper into the pain of isolation.

It's so easy for couples to slip into this pattern, because the different vulnerabilities that so greatly influence the way men and women interact with each other are virtually invisible. In the beginning of the relationship, the falling-in-love chemicals our brains secrete make it easy to focus on each other's more subtle emotions. But once the effects of those chemicals wear off—within three to nine months—we need to make a more conscious effort to protect each other's vulnerabilities. To do this, we first need to understand the different vulnerabilities of men and women and how we manage them in our relationships.

#### How We're Different: Fear and Pain

The differences that underlie male and female vulnerabilities are biological and present at birth. Baby girls, from day one, are more sensitive to isolation and lack of contact. No doubt this sensitivity evolved as an important survival skill designed to keep the female in contact not only with her offspring but also with others in the group who would offer her protection. In the days of roaming predators, the only hope of survival was to help one another ward off an enemy. A woman or child left alone was sure prey. So over the millennia, females developed a kind of internal GPS that keeps them aware of closeness and distance in all their relationships. When a woman feels close, she can relax; when she feels distant, she gets anxious. This is why a baby girl can hold your gaze for a long period of time. She is comforted by the closeness the eye-to-eye contact provides. It also explains why, left alone for the same period of time, a girl baby will fuss and complain before a boy baby. This heightened sensitivity to isolation makes females react strongly to another person's anger, withdrawal, silence, or other sign of unavailability. It is more frightening to her to be out of contact than it is for a male. This is not to say that males prefer isolation or distance; it's just that females feel more discomfort when they are not in contact.

Men have a hard time understanding a woman's fear and the pain associated with it. One reason is that a woman's fear provokes shame in a man: "You shouldn't be afraid with me as your protector!" This is why he gets angry when she gets anxious or upset. But there's another reason men just don't get women's fear. They don't know what it feels like. Research shows the single biggest sex difference in emotions is in the frequency and intensity of fear—how often you get afraid and how afraid you get. Girls and women both experience and express far more fear, as measured in social contexts and in laboratory experiments that induce fear. Newborn girls are more easily frightened than boys. Girls and women are more likely to feel fear in response to loud noises and sudden changes in the environment. They have more anxiety and worry a lot more than boys and men. Women have a markedly higher fear of crime, even though they are far less

often the victims of it. They are more likely to think about the harmful consequences of their behavior, which helps them avoid most risky behavior. They suffer more phobias and greatly exceed men in fear of medical and dental care. The fact that they go to doctors and dentists more often may be a tribute to their courage (ability to overcome fear) or a result of their general sensitivity to anxiety and worry, which could make them fear the consequences of not going even more.

Another reason that females have more fear of harm may be that they feel more pain. The scientific data suggest that women suffer quite a bit more physical pain than males, not counting childbirth. As early as two weeks old, girls cry louder and more vigorously than boys in response to mild pain stimulus. The higher anxiety levels of females only ratchet up their sensitivity to pain. Around 90 percent of chronic pain disorders afflict women. Men have a hard time empathizing with the pain and fear of their wives, both because they're conditioned from toddlerhood to suck it up, and because it doesn't hurt them as much!

### How We're Different: Hyperarousal and Shame

Although boy babies feel less fear and pain than girls, they have a heightened sensitivity to any type of abrupt stimulation, which gives them a propensity for hyperarousal, that is, hair-trigger reactions. Male infants startle five times more often than female infants and are provoked by a much lower stimulus—a loud stomach gurgle will do it. (You can observe this difference if you visit a neonatal nursery in a hospital.) A male's hair-trigger propensity for hyperarousal has a distinct survival advantage. Due to his greater strength and muscle mass, the male is better equipped than the female to fight off predators. Since the primary predators of early humans stalked and attacked stealthily, males needed to respond with fight-or-flight behavior in a fraction of a second.

Because of their high sensitivity to arousal, newborn boys have to guard against the discomfort of overstimulation. This is why boy babies have to take eye contact and other intimate contact in small doses. If you have a boy and a girl, you may have noticed this difference. Your baby girl was able to hold eye contact almost as soon as you brought her home from the hospital. You could gaze into her big eyes (she widens them to draw in your gaze) for hours on end. But your little boy was less likely to hold that kind of eye contact before six to nine months of age, if at all. When you looked deeply into his eyes, he probably looked down, then back at your eyes, then up, then back at your eyes, then down the other side, then back at your eyes, then up the other side, then back at your eyes. He was interested in you—or he wouldn't have kept looking back—and he certainly wasn't afraid of you. His intermittent attention was his way of staying in contact with you without becoming overwhelmed. It's important to note that this is a function of his sensitivity to arousal, not his ability to focus, as many parents mistakenly infer. Boy babies can focus on you if you do not look directly into their eyes, and they have no trouble focusing on inanimate objects.

When it comes to relationships, women often mistake this guarded response, which many males retain throughout life, for lack of interest or even loss of love. Most of the time, he hasn't lost interest; he's merely trying to avoid the overwhelming discomfort of a cortisol dump that comes with hyperarousal. Cortisol is a hormone secreted during certain negative emotions. Its job is to get your attention by making you uncomfortable so that your discomfort drives you to do something to make the situation better. The pain a woman feels when her man shouts at her is caused by the sudden release of cortisol. A man feels this same discomfort when he is confronted with her unhappiness or criticism. He may look like he is avoiding her, but he is essentially trying to avoid a cortisol hangover for the next several hours.

So how does the male propensity for hyperarousal translate into hypersensitivity to shame? First of all, boys

and girls both experience shame, which is a stop-and-hide response. The root meaning of the word shame is “to cover or conceal.” When you’re embarrassed you want to crawl into a hole, and a child feeling shame wants to cover his face because he can’t bear to look at you. If you are playing with a boy or girl infant and you suddenly break eye contact and turn away, he or she will experience the physical displays of shame: reddened face, contorted facial expressions, writhing muscles, and other signs of more general distress, especially if he/she was interested in or enjoying the eye contact. In this way, shame is an auxiliary of interest and enjoyment—babies have to be interested in something or feel enjoyment to experience shame when it stops abruptly. (We learn to label this abrupt drop in interest or enjoyment as “rejection,” which is what you feel when your interesting phone conversation with a friend is abruptly interrupted by his call-waiting.) Because little girls are more comfortable with longer periods of eye contact, caregivers tend to stay engaged and break contact with them less often, meaning little girls experience the shame response associated with abrupt disconnection far less often. On the other hand, if parents or caregivers don’t understand a little boy’s need for smaller doses of eye contact, they will break the intimate contact abruptly when the little boy looks away, constantly reinforcing the shame response, which is amplified by the extra kick of cortisol that the response produces. Males who experience this over and over develop a hypersensitivity to shame. Studies show that parents gaze into the eyes of their little girls (and talk sweetly to them while doing it) 50 percent more than they look into the eyes of their little boys. With their sons they laugh and make nonverbal utterances, wave toys in front of them, tickle them, or pick them up to shake and roughhouse with them. Both kinds of play are of high quality—children and parents enjoy them immensely. But they are qualitatively different. Little boys need the intimate contact—albeit in small doses—just as much as they need the active play. Little girls need active play as much as they need intimate contact.

Intimacy is riskier for little boys when they have consistently felt shame in conjunction with it—if I like it too much, the boys learn, they’ll take it away, because I don’t do it right. From the very beginning, many little boys don’t feel like they can measure up in intimate relationships. Little girls can hold eye contact, while little boys are easily overwhelmed and have to look away. The eye-contact gap is especially sad because eye contact is our principal source of intimacy throughout our lives. Boys and men are deprived of the very intimacy that would help them overcome their vulnerability to shame. If you have a baby boy, you must understand that he likes eye contact, but you have to be more patient with him and not start tickling him when he looks away from you. The best thing you can do for your infant son to help him manage shame in the future is allow him to feel the comfort of eye contact gradually, at his pace. Keep looking at him, and you should notice that he will stay focused on your eyes for longer and longer periods. Just being sensitive to the invisible differences in male and female vulnerabilities can shift your perception and deepen your connection—without talking about it.

## How We Avoid Fear and Shame

Most of the time a woman’s fear and a man’s shame are unconscious—outside awareness. You can live a lifetime without ever hearing a man say, “I feel ashamed when you get scared of my driving” or a woman say, “I want that Gucci bag to keep my fear of deprivation at bay.” Instead you will see the tip-off indicators of fear and shame: resentment and anger (blaming your shame or fear on someone else); materialism (providing illusions of status for a man and security for a woman); people pleasing (doing things detrimental to the self to gain the admiration or approval of others); obsessions (thoughts you can’t get out of your mind); and compulsive behavior like impulsive shopping, overeating, and binge drinking. All the above have temporary pain-relieving effects that work for both shame and fear.

It is not our innate differences in fear and shame that drive us apart; it is how we manage the differences. If

you manage them with criticism, defensiveness, withdrawal, or blame, your relationship will fail; it's as simple as that. If you manage them with the inspiration to improve, appreciate, connect, or protect—as you'll learn to do in this book—your relationship will flourish. But it will take conscious attention for a while to overcome the force of habits that began forming very early in your life.

From early childhood, girls avoid fear by building alliances and forging emotional bonds—there is comfort and strength in numbers. Without thinking about it, Marlene reacted to her unconscious fear of isolation by seeking more closeness from Mark and her friends. This predominant female coping mechanism is called tend and befriend. (\*) Women respond to stressful situations by protecting themselves and their young through nurturing behaviors—the tend part of the model—and forming alliances with others, particularly women—the befriend part. Women bond around helping one another through troubled times. The more they talk about their troubles, the closer they feel.

Because emotional bonds serve as a woman's primary source of comfort, it appalls women when men try to cope with stress in ways that seem to threaten emotional bonds, for example: distraction (work, TV, computer, hobbies); status seeking (work, sports, acquiring expensive toys); emotional shutdown (if you feel nothing, you won't feel inadequate); anger (if you numb the pain you won't feel it); and aggression (if you exert power and control, you won't feel the powerlessness of failure and inadequacy).

What women have an even harder time understanding is this: For the average male, relationships are not a reliable source of comfort. A man's greatest pain comes from shame, due to the inadequacy he feels in relationships; therefore, going to the relationship for comfort is like seeking solace from the enemy. Talking about the relationship, which is guaranteed to remind him of his inadequacy, is the last method he would use for comfort, in the same category as choosing a bed of nails for a good night's sleep. This is why he often goes to a fight-or-flight response to ease his distress and not to a heart-to-heart talk with the woman in his life. Fight or flight is the male equivalent of tend and befriend.

From the Hardcover edition.

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Men are right. The “relationship talk” does not help. Dr. Patricia Love’s and Dr. Steven Stosny’s *How to Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It* reveals the stunning truth about marital happiness:

Love is not about better communication.  
It's about connection.

You'll never get a closer relationship  
with your man by talking to him like you  
talk to one of your girlfriends.

Male emotions are like women's sexuality:  
you can't be too direct too quickly.

There are four ways to connect with a man: touch, activity, sex, routines.

Men want closer marriages just as much as women do, but not if they have to act like a woman.

Talking makes women move closer;  
it makes men move away.

The secret of the silent male is this:  
his wife supplies the meaning in his life.

The stunning truth about love is that talking doesn't help.

Have you ever had this conversation with your spouse?

Wife: “Honey, we need to talk about us.”  
Husband: “Do we have to?”

Drs. Patricia Love and Steven Stosny have studied this all-too-familiar dynamic between men and women and have reached a truly shocking conclusion. Even with the best of intentions, talking about your relationship doesn't bring you together, and it will eventually drive you apart.

The reason for this is that underneath most couples' fights, there is a biological difference at work. A woman's vulnerability to fear and anxiety makes her draw closer, while a man's subtle sensitivity to shame makes him pull away in response. This is why so many married couples fall into the archetypal roles of nagging wife/stonewalling husband, and why improving a marriage can't happen through words.

How to Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It teaches couples how to get closer in ways that don't require "trying to turn a man into a woman." Rich in stories of couples who have turned their marriages around, and full of practical advice about the behaviors that make and break marriages, this essential guide will help couples find love beyond words.

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#### Review

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---Michele Weiner-Davis, MSW, founder of [divorcebusting.com](http://divorcebusting.com) and author of *Divorce Busting* and *The Sex-Starved Marriage*

#### About the Author

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ONE

#### How We Break The Connection

##### Fear and Shame

Things weren't always so bad for Marlene and Mark. At one time they cherished the closeness they felt—all their friends used to marvel at how close and connected they were. They can still vividly recall the good times, but instead of comforting them, these memories of the closeness they once had now fill them with sadness and a deep sense of loss. They often wonder how they got to this lonely state. Their story is all the more sad because it is so common.

Marlene and Mark arrived at their chronic state of disconnection without either of them doing anything wrong. Marlene has never grasped that Mark, like most men, has a heightened sensitivity to feeling shame and inadequacy. (How could she? His impulse when he feels shame is to hide, so he can't tell her about it. Instead, he disguises it with annoyance, impatience, or anger.) She does not understand that each time she

tries to make improvements in their relationship, the overriding message Mark hears is that he is not meeting her expectations—he's failing her—which sends him into the pain of his own inadequacy. While trying to ward off feeling like a failure, Mark is no longer sensitive to Marlene's fear of being isolated and shut out. In the beginning of their relationship, he sensed her need for connection and wouldn't have dreamed of shutting her out. But now he has no idea that each time he rejects her overtures or raises his voice in anger—purely to protect himself—he's pushing her further away and deeper into the pain of isolation.

It's so easy for couples to slip into this pattern, because the different vulnerabilities that so greatly influence the way men and women interact with each other are virtually invisible. In the beginning of the relationship, the falling-in-love chemicals our brains secrete make it easy to focus on each other's more subtle emotions. But once the effects of those chemicals wear off—within three to nine months—we need to make a more conscious effort to protect each other's vulnerabilities. To do this, we first need to understand the different vulnerabilities of men and women and how we manage them in our relationships.

### How We're Different: Fear and Pain

The differences that underlie male and female vulnerabilities are biological and present at birth. Baby girls, from day one, are more sensitive to isolation and lack of contact. No doubt this sensitivity evolved as an important survival skill designed to keep the female in contact not only with her offspring but also with others in the group who would offer her protection. In the days of roaming predators, the only hope of survival was to help one another ward off an enemy. A woman or child left alone was sure prey. So over the millennia, females developed a kind of internal GPS that keeps them aware of closeness and distance in all their relationships. When a woman feels close, she can relax; when she feels distant, she gets anxious. This is why a baby girl can hold your gaze for a long period of time. She is comforted by the closeness the eye-to-eye contact provides. It also explains why, left alone for the same period of time, a girl baby will fuss and complain before a boy baby. This heightened sensitivity to isolation makes females react strongly to another person's anger, withdrawal, silence, or other sign of unavailability. It is more frightening to her to be out of contact than it is for a male. This is not to say that males prefer isolation or distance; it's just that females feel more discomfort when they are not in contact.

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Because of their high sensitivity to arousal, newborn boys have to guard against the discomfort of overstimulation. This is why boy babies have to take eye contact and other intimate contact in small doses. If you have a boy and a girl, you may have noticed this difference. Your baby girl was able to hold eye contact almost as soon as you brought her home from the hospital. You could gaze into her big eyes (she widens them to draw in your gaze) for hours on end. But your little boy was less likely to hold that kind of eye contact before six to nine months of age, if at all. When you looked deeply into his eyes, he probably looked down, then back at your eyes, then up, then back at your eyes, then down the other side, then back at your eyes, then up the other side, then back at your eyes. He was interested in you—or he wouldn't have kept looking back—and he certainly wasn't afraid of you. His intermittent attention was his way of staying in contact with you without becoming overwhelmed. It's important to note that this is a function of his sensitivity to arousal, not his ability to focus, as many parents mistakenly infer. Boy babies can focus on you if you do not look directly into their eyes, and they have no trouble focusing on inanimate objects.

When it comes to relationships, women often mistake this guarded response, which many males retain throughout life, for lack of interest or even loss of love. Most of the time, he hasn't lost interest; he's merely trying to avoid the overwhelming discomfort of a cortisol dump that comes with hyperarousal. Cortisol is a hormone secreted during certain negative emotions. Its job is to get your attention by making you uncomfortable so that your discomfort drives you to do something to make the situation better. The pain a woman feels when her man shouts at her is caused by the sudden release of cortisol. A man feels this same discomfort when he is confronted with her unhappiness or criticism. He may look like he is avoiding her, but he is essentially trying to avoid a cortisol hangover for the next several hours.

So how does the male propensity for hyperarousal translate into hypersensitivity to shame? First of all, boys and girls both experience shame, which is a stop-and-hide response. The root meaning of the word shame is "to cover or conceal." When you're embarrassed you want to crawl into a hole, and a child feeling shame wants to cover his face because he can't bear to look at you. If you are playing with a boy or girl infant and you suddenly break eye contact and turn away, he or she will experience the physical displays of shame: reddened face, contorted facial expressions, writhing muscles, and other signs of more general distress, especially if he/she was interested in or enjoying the eye contact. In this way, shame is an auxiliary of interest and enjoyment—babies have to be interested in something or feel enjoyment to experience shame when it stops abruptly. (We learn to label this abrupt drop in interest or enjoyment as "rejection," which is

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Intimacy is riskier for little boys when they have consistently felt shame in conjunction with it—if I like it too much, the boys learn, they'll take it away, because I don't do it right. From the very beginning, many little boys don't feel like they can measure up in intimate relationships. Little girls can hold eye contact, while little boys are easily overwhelmed and have to look away. The eye-contact gap is especially sad because eye contact is our principal source of intimacy throughout our lives. Boys and men are deprived of the very intimacy that would help them overcome their vulnerability to shame. If you have a baby boy, you must understand that he likes eye contact, but you have to be more patient with him and not start tickling him when he looks away from you. The best thing you can do for your infant son to help him manage shame in the future is allow him to feel the comfort of eye contact gradually, at his pace. Keep looking at him, and you should notice that he will stay focused on your eyes for longer and longer periods. Just being sensitive to the invisible differences in male and female vulnerabilities can shift your perception and deepen your connection—without talking about it.

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Most of the time a woman's fear and a man's shame are unconscious—outside awareness. You can live a lifetime without ever hearing a man say, “I feel ashamed when you get scared of my driving” or a woman say, “I want that Gucci bag to keep my fear of deprivation at bay.” Instead you will see the tip-off indicators of fear and shame: resentment and anger (blaming your shame or fear on someone else); materialism (providing illusions of status for a man and security for a woman); people pleasing (doing things detrimental to the self to gain the admiration or approval of others); obsessions (thoughts you can't get out of your mind); and compulsive behavior like impulsive shopping, overeating, and binge drinking. All the above have temporary pain-relieving effects that work for both shame and fear.

It is not our innate differences in fear and shame that drive us apart; it is how we manage the differences. If you manage them with criticism, defensiveness, withdrawal, or blame, your relationship will fail; it's as simple as that. If you manage them with the inspiration to improve, appreciate, connect, or protect—as you'll learn to do in this book—your relationship will flourish. But it will take conscious attention for a while to overcome the force of habits that began forming very early in your life.

From early childhood, girls avoid fear by building alliances and forging emotional bonds—there is comfort and strength in numbers. Without thinking about it, Marlene reacted to her unconscious fear of isolation by seeking more closeness from Mark and her friends. This predominant female coping mechanism is called

tend and befriend. (\*) Women respond to stressful situations by protecting themselves and their young through nurturing behaviors—the tend part of the model—and forming alliances with others, particularly women—the befriend part. Women bond around helping one another through troubled times. The more they talk about their troubles, the closer they feel.

Because emotional bonds serve as a woman's primary source of comfort, it appalls women when men try to cope with stress in ways that seem to threaten emotional bonds, for example: distraction (work, TV, computer, hobbies); status seeking (work, sports, acquiring expensive toys); emotional shutdown (if you feel nothing, you won't feel inadequate); anger (if you numb the pain you won't feel it); and aggression (if you exert power and control, you won't feel the powerlessness of failure and inadequacy).

What women have an even harder time understanding is this: For the average male, relationships are not a reliable source of comfort. A man's greatest pain comes from shame, due to the inadequacy he feels in relationships; therefore, going to the relationship for comfort is like seeking solace from the enemy. Talking about the relationship, which is guaranteed to remind him of his inadequacy, is the last method he would use for comfort, in the same category as choosing a bed of nails for a good night's sleep. This is why he often goes to a fight-or-flight response to ease his distress and not to a heart-to-heart talk with the woman in his life. Fight or flight is the male equivalent of tend and befriend.

From the Hardcover edition.

Most helpful customer reviews

488 of 507 people found the following review helpful.

Oversimplifies gender roles a bit, not for somewhat healthy marriages looking to get even healthier

By Joshua Merritt

Honestly, this is probably a case of me buying the "wrong book" for my needs. I bought this based on the largely positive feedback. Upon reading, I discovered the book is largely directed to couples that have broken off communication altogether, are on the defensive with each other constantly, and are steps away from breaking it off. I gathered from the title that it would address communication barriers, certainly, which I believe men and women have between each other naturally. I just didn't realize the extent to which the author would build a case tying nearly everything wrong in a marriage back to the male's need for unabashed acceptance and glorification (i.e. not being shamed) and the female need for security.

I DO actually agree with the author that, in general, these are traits of the genders, accordingly. I just feel the book oversimplifies and generalizes things a bit too much. It paints men as neanderthals, unable (biologically) to communicate, while women are all incessant naggers and nit pickers.

In my own relationship, this simply isn't the case. No relationship is perfect, and certainly my marriage is far from it, but I (the husband) am quite often the instigator of relationship talk. She seldom nags, we do tell each other we love one another regularly, and there is a general respect and kindness in our home.

We certainly could use improvement in many areas, which I hoped to find in this book. Instead, by far and large, I found a certainly well developed case that shame and fear are at the core of nearly every relational challenge.

The book did have a few high points for me, which will make the \$10 Kindle download pay itself back fairly quickly. The last chapter, a formula for marital improvement, is (although a bit hokey) more than likely a gold pot. It's a short list of super simple routines you can perform daily to demonstrate your love and build a

stronger relationship. Also, buried within the rhetoric on shame and fear are some very true but ugly behaviors we nearly all exhibit, and some great ways to accept and acknowledge their root cause and

If your marriage truly is on the very brink of being over and done with, I would definitely read this book. If you feel, or have even been told, that you are the typical male that "never listens, never wants to talk and just shuts yourself off," this book is for you. Women, if you find yourself chasing your husband around the house trying to engage your husband in confrontation, are burdened with fear of not being protected, provided for, your dreams are being neglected, this book will no doubt be a great resource for you.

I learned a little, skimmed over a lot. I'm still searching for the best book on strengthening the marital bond (as opposed to pretty much restoring a marriage that has been so severely neglected), intimacy, etc. Perhaps the secret is to do what I have been doing. . . . take in a lot of books, and extract a few "nuggets" from each one until you are properly armed.

338 of 350 people found the following review helpful.

Wonderful wonderful book!!

By Elenor

My husband (of nine years) and I are having trouble, and despite a couple of visits over the years to a therapist we both respect and like, we may be heading toward a divorce (his choice). I began reading this book, and then began reading it out loud to him. (I always read to him while he drives us to and from work; we've gotten through many, many history and philosophy books, and the very occasional marriage and intersex relations books.)

When I would ask if I should continue reading, he always said yes. (!) He was surprised and disappointed when I reached the end of the book. This book explains SO much about the conflicting ways we see things, and each other! Especially this, from page 196:

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The Compassion Paradox: If Available Whenever Needed, It's Rarely Needed

Research shows that when people - men and women - feel secure that compassion and support will be there if they need it, they are far more independent. Worry that it won't be available when needed creates a deprivation mentality. You can think of deprivation mentality the following way. If you haven't eaten for over a week, are you likely to hold out for a gourmet dinner and eat it with your napkin in place and cut up your food carefully? Or will you shovel whatever food you can get into your mouth as fast as you can? You're likely to resemble a hungry wolf more than a well-mannered diner. Well, the last thing you want is for your partner to be as hungry as a wolf for emotional support. That will make her think about her emotional needs all the time and want more and more attention, until it seems to you that she can never get enough. The trick is applying preventive compassion in small doses, so that she knows it will always be there when she needs it. Once she knows that, she will hardly ever need it.

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The book also discusses at length the physiological reactions of both sexes, and how that plays out in our reactions to each other. Starting at birth, males react more strongly, and act to avoid over-stimulation (hence, for instance, the boy baby looking away from a direct gaze way sooner than a girl baby who enjoys it. Boy babies enjoy it too, but it is too stimulating and so they must look away and look back to reduce their stress.) Girls and women "repair" relationship breaches and problems by talking; for men talking makes them feel

worse (physiologically -- not emotionally or mentally...)

Fantastic book -- buy it whether you're married or not; it will help you understand ALL the men (and women) around you!

249 of 266 people found the following review helpful.

**A MUST READ FOR EVERY HUSBAND!!!**

By A Reader...

I've never written a review, but five minutes after finishing this book I was logging on to Amazon to give some honest feedback to the potential shoppers out there wondering if this book is worth the money. First off, I'll let you know that it was WORTH EVERY PENNY (and I actually went out in the snow to get it at full price from a B&N bookstore in the middle of the night). This book puts into words exactly what I've been unable to express for the past 5 years of marriage. It describes not only what I've been feeling, it describes what my wife has been trying to get through to me, why I felt how I did, why my wife responded how she did, everything. I have a handful of relationship books from a variety of different authors, and none of the other ones were as useful or powerful as this one. The book doesn't just throw out a few "answers" and treat them as though they're intuitive facts. Instead it goes into supportive information for these simple "truths" that have elements that are physiological, psychological, biological, sociological, (and a few other - logicals to boot). I found it interesting to read about real life anecdotes, historical anthropological findings, and chemical brain reactions all on the same page.

The main idea of the book is to show how women are hypersensitive to Fear, Isolation, & Deprivation, and men are hypersensitive to Shame & Dread of Failure. When I actually sat back and thought about it I realized that almost all of my negative emotions can be traced back to either Shame or the Dread of Failure, and most of my wife's emotions fell into one of her F/I/D categories as well. This bit of information alone was useful and worth the the price. The book also goes into a chapter specifically for the male to understand the female point of view, and also one for the females. At the end there's a "Man to Man" chapter written by Steve that's interesting as well. The book spends a lot of time ensuring that the reader fully understands the power of our Fear/Shame emotions and how they're the basis for the disconnection that occurs so often in a marriage. Throughout the book there's advice for breaking the pattern, and the "secret formula" at the end seems so simple and yet is so hard to consistently do.

All in all it's a well-written easy to understand book that I thoroughly enjoyed reading and will be reading again soon to get a more in depth understanding of the material and to actually work through the various exercises and surveys.

See all 351 customer reviews...



# HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR MARRIAGE WITHOUT TALKING ABOUT IT BY PATRICIA LOVE, STEVEN STOSNY PDF

However, reading the book **How To Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It By Patricia Love, Steven Stosny** in this website will lead you not to bring the printed publication all over you go. Just save guide in MMC or computer system disk as well as they are available to check out any time. The thriving system by reading this soft data of the How To Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It By Patricia Love, Steven Stosny can be leaded into something brand-new routine. So currently, this is time to show if reading can improve your life or otherwise. Make How To Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It By Patricia Love, Steven Stosny it undoubtedly function and obtain all benefits.

## Review

“If you've ever told your spouse, 'I talk until I'm blue in the face,' or 'It's in one ear and out the other,' stop whatever you're doing and read this book immediately! You're about to discover why talking things out isn't always the best way to get through to your spouse or achieve more closeness and connection. More important, you'll learn exactly what you need to do today to truly transform your relationship forever.”

---Michele Weiner-Davis, MSW, founder of [divorcebusting.com](http://divorcebusting.com) and author of *Divorce Busting* and *The Sex-Starved Marriage*

## About the Author

Patricia Love, Ed.D., is an acclaimed therapist and speaker and author of four books, including *Hot Monogamy* and *The Truth About Love*. She has appeared on Oprah and Today and on CNN, and has contributed to many magazines, including *Cosmopolitan* and *Self*.

Steven Stosny, Ph.D., is a therapist who specializes in men's issues and has appeared on Oprah in two highly rated shows on men and marriage. He is the author of *You Don't Have to Take It Anymore: Turn Your Resentful, Angry, or Emotionally Abusive Relationship into a Compassionate, Loving One*.

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ONE

## How We Break The Connection

### Fear and Shame

Things weren't always so bad for Marlene and Mark. At one time they cherished the closeness they felt—all their friends used to marvel at how close and connected they were. They can still vividly recall the good times, but instead of comforting them, these memories of the closeness they once had now fill them with sadness and a deep sense of loss. They often wonder how they got to this lonely state. Their story is all the more sad because it is so common.

Marlene and Mark arrived at their chronic state of disconnection without either of them doing anything wrong. Marlene has never grasped that Mark, like most men, has a heightened sensitivity to feeling shame and inadequacy. (How could she? His impulse when he feels shame is to hide, so he can't tell her about it.

Instead, he disguises it with annoyance, impatience, or anger.) She does not understand that each time she tries to make improvements in their relationship, the overriding message Mark hears is that he is not meeting her expectations—he's failing her—which sends him into the pain of his own inadequacy. While trying to ward off feeling like a failure, Mark is no longer sensitive to Marlene's fear of being isolated and shut out. In the beginning of their relationship, he sensed her need for connection and wouldn't have dreamed of shutting her out. But now he has no idea that each time he rejects her overtures or raises his voice in anger—purely to protect himself—he's pushing her further away and deeper into the pain of isolation.

It's so easy for couples to slip into this pattern, because the different vulnerabilities that so greatly influence the way men and women interact with each other are virtually invisible. In the beginning of the relationship, the falling-in-love chemicals our brains secrete make it easy to focus on each other's more subtle emotions. But once the effects of those chemicals wear off—within three to nine months—we need to make a more conscious effort to protect each other's vulnerabilities. To do this, we first need to understand the different vulnerabilities of men and women and how we manage them in our relationships.

### How We're Different: Fear and Pain

The differences that underlie male and female vulnerabilities are biological and present at birth. Baby girls, from day one, are more sensitive to isolation and lack of contact. No doubt this sensitivity evolved as an important survival skill designed to keep the female in contact not only with her offspring but also with others in the group who would offer her protection. In the days of roaming predators, the only hope of survival was to help one another ward off an enemy. A woman or child left alone was sure prey. So over the millennia, females developed a kind of internal GPS that keeps them aware of closeness and distance in all their relationships. When a woman feels close, she can relax; when she feels distant, she gets anxious. This is why a baby girl can hold your gaze for a long period of time. She is comforted by the closeness the eye-to-eye contact provides. It also explains why, left alone for the same period of time, a girl baby will fuss and complain before a boy baby. This heightened sensitivity to isolation makes females react strongly to another person's anger, withdrawal, silence, or other sign of unavailability. It is more frightening to her to be out of contact than it is for a male. This is not to say that males prefer isolation or distance; it's just that females feel more discomfort when they are not in contact.

Men have a hard time understanding a woman's fear and the pain associated with it. One reason is that a woman's fear provokes shame in a man: "You shouldn't be afraid with me as your protector!" This is why he gets angry when she gets anxious or upset. But there's another reason men just don't get women's fear. They don't know what it feels like. Research shows the single biggest sex difference in emotions is in the frequency and intensity of fear—how often you get afraid and how afraid you get. Girls and women both experience and express far more fear, as measured in social contexts and in laboratory experiments that induce fear. Newborn girls are more easily frightened than boys. Girls and women are more likely to feel fear in response to loud noises and sudden changes in the environment. They have more anxiety and worry a lot more than boys and men. Women have a markedly higher fear of crime, even though they are far less often the victims of it. They are more likely to think about the harmful consequences of their behavior, which helps them avoid most risky behavior. They suffer more phobias and greatly exceed men in fear of medical and dental care. The fact that they go to doctors and dentists more often may be a tribute to their courage (ability to overcome fear) or a result of their general sensitivity to anxiety and worry, which could make them fear the consequences of not going even more.

Another reason that females have more fear of harm may be that they feel more pain. The scientific data

suggest that women suffer quite a bit more physical pain than males, not counting childbirth. As early as two weeks old, girls cry louder and more vigorously than boys in response to mild pain stimulus. The higher anxiety levels of females only ratchet up their sensitivity to pain. Around 90 percent of chronic pain disorders afflict women. Men have a hard time empathizing with the pain and fear of their wives, both because they're conditioned from toddlerhood to suck it up, and because it doesn't hurt them as much!

## How We're Different: Hyperarousal and Shame

Although boy babies feel less fear and pain than girls, they have a heightened sensitivity to any type of abrupt stimulation, which gives them a propensity for hyperarousal, that is, hair-trigger reactions. Male infants startle five times more often than female infants and are provoked by a much lower stimulus—a loud stomach gurgle will do it. (You can observe this difference if you visit a neonatal nursery in a hospital.) A male's hair-trigger propensity for hyperarousal has a distinct survival advantage. Due to his greater strength and muscle mass, the male is better equipped than the female to fight off predators. Since the primary predators of early humans stalked and attacked stealthily, males needed to respond with fight-or-flight behavior in a fraction of a second.

Because of their high sensitivity to arousal, newborn boys have to guard against the discomfort of overstimulation. This is why boy babies have to take eye contact and other intimate contact in small doses. If you have a boy and a girl, you may have noticed this difference. Your baby girl was able to hold eye contact almost as soon as you brought her home from the hospital. You could gaze into her big eyes (she widens them to draw in your gaze) for hours on end. But your little boy was less likely to hold that kind of eye contact before six to nine months of age, if at all. When you looked deeply into his eyes, he probably looked down, then back at your eyes, then up, then back at your eyes, then down the other side, then back at your eyes, then up the other side, then back at your eyes. He was interested in you—or he wouldn't have kept looking back—and he certainly wasn't afraid of you. His intermittent attention was his way of staying in contact with you without becoming overwhelmed. It's important to note that this is a function of his sensitivity to arousal, not his ability to focus, as many parents mistakenly infer. Boy babies can focus on you if you do not look directly into their eyes, and they have no trouble focusing on inanimate objects.

When it comes to relationships, women often mistake this guarded response, which many males retain throughout life, for lack of interest or even loss of love. Most of the time, he hasn't lost interest; he's merely trying to avoid the overwhelming discomfort of a cortisol dump that comes with hyperarousal. Cortisol is a hormone secreted during certain negative emotions. Its job is to get your attention by making you uncomfortable so that your discomfort drives you to do something to make the situation better. The pain a woman feels when her man shouts at her is caused by the sudden release of cortisol. A man feels this same discomfort when he is confronted with her unhappiness or criticism. He may look like he is avoiding her, but he is essentially trying to avoid a cortisol hangover for the next several hours.

So how does the male propensity for hyperarousal translate into hypersensitivity to shame? First of all, boys and girls both experience shame, which is a stop-and-hide response. The root meaning of the word shame is "to cover or conceal." When you're embarrassed you want to crawl into a hole, and a child feeling shame wants to cover his face because he can't bear to look at you. If you are playing with a boy or girl infant and you suddenly break eye contact and turn away, he or she will experience the physical displays of shame: reddened face, contorted facial expressions, writhing muscles, and other signs of more general distress, especially if he/she was interested in or enjoying the eye contact. In this way, shame is an auxiliary of interest and enjoyment—babies have to be interested in something or feel enjoyment to experience shame

when it stops abruptly. (We learn to label this abrupt drop in interest or enjoyment as “rejection,” which is what you feel when your interesting phone conversation with a friend is abruptly interrupted by his call–waiting.) Because little girls are more comfortable with longer periods of eye contact, caregivers tend to stay engaged and break contact with them less often, meaning little girls experience the shame response associated with abrupt disconnection far less often. On the other hand, if parents or caregivers don’t understand a little boy’s need for smaller doses of eye contact, they will break the intimate contact abruptly when the little boy looks away, constantly reinforcing the shame response, which is amplified by the extra kick of cortisol that the response produces. Males who experience this over and over develop a hypersensitivity to shame. Studies show that parents gaze into the eyes of their little girls (and talk sweetly to them while doing it) 50 percent more than they look into the eyes of their little boys. With their sons they laugh and make nonverbal utterances, wave toys in front of them, tickle them, or pick them up to shake and roughhouse with them. Both kinds of play are of high quality—children and parents enjoy them immensely. But they are qualitatively different. Little boys need the intimate contact—albeit in small doses—just as much as they need the active play. Little girls need active play as much as they need intimate contact.

Intimacy is riskier for little boys when they have consistently felt shame in conjunction with it—if I like it too much, the boys learn, they’ll take it away, because I don’t do it right. From the very beginning, many little boys don’t feel like they can measure up in intimate relationships. Little girls can hold eye contact, while little boys are easily overwhelmed and have to look away. The eye–contact gap is especially sad because eye contact is our principal source of intimacy throughout our lives. Boys and men are deprived of the very intimacy that would help them overcome their vulnerability to shame. If you have a baby boy, you must understand that he likes eye contact, but you have to be more patient with him and not start tickling him when he looks away from you. The best thing you can do for your infant son to help him manage shame in the future is allow him to feel the comfort of eye contact gradually, at his pace. Keep looking at him, and you should notice that he will stay focused on your eyes for longer and longer periods. Just being sensitive to the invisible differences in male and female vulnerabilities can shift your perception and deepen your connection—without talking about it.

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seeking more closeness from Mark and her friends. This predominant female coping mechanism is called tend and befriend. (\*) Women respond to stressful situations by protecting themselves and their young through nurturing behaviors—the tend part of the model—and forming alliances with others, particularly women—the befriend part. Women bond around helping one another through troubled times. The more they talk about their troubles, the closer they feel.

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