

**Connecting
Rewire Your Relationship-Culture**

**Victoria Lorient-Faibish, RP, MEd, CCC, BCPP, RPE
Registered Psychotherapist, Holistic Psychotherapist,
Life Coach and Speaker**

Foreword by Dini Petty

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Author's note: The case studies in this book are amalgams of several people and do not pertain to any one person. In addition, all names are fictitious, and other features, such as sex and occupation, have been changed to protect the subjects' identities.

I dedicate this book to my husband, Kevin, who is my partner, lover, best friend and unconditional supporter. Life is much sweeter with you. Thank you for your love and care. I love all of you –
always.

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Foreword

Connecting: Rewire Your Relationship-Culture is a book I wish had existed when I was starting my journey, way back then. Like many of us, I come from a dysfunctional family background, and as Victoria points out, “If you do not analyze and process the family-culture in which you grew up, you are doomed to repeat old patterns.” So I stumbled about repeating losing patterns, wondering why it wasn’t working. Eventually, while working on third-world aid, I realized that the real miracle would be if I could save myself, and I began the long journey of introspection to free myself and end the cycle of dysfunction in my family.

This book would have made my journey shorter and easier. It will guide you through your family matrix, into dating in the modern world, how to spot relationship dysfunction from the start and finally lead you into healthy relationships and enduring marriages.

Unraveling your life thorough an introspective journey requires a lot of work, time and commitment: “There is no way around the mountain,” but if you wish to transform your life and your relationships, the path lies within these pages. With Victoria Lorient-Faibish as your guide, these treasures are within your reach.

Dini Petty

Introduction The Power of Relating

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”
~ John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, “Meditation XVII”

Knowing oneself fully is paramount to a balanced and healthy life. To achieve this involves an introspective journey—diving into the deep waters of self-knowing and self-awareness, which I covered in depth in my first book, *Find Your “Self-Culture”*: *Moving from Depression and Anxiety to Monumental Self-Acceptance*. As a holistic psychotherapist who works with people every day as they wander through their dating, relationship, marriage and family lives, I am compelled to write this book based on my clinical experience over the last nearly twenty years. In it, I provide case studies and effective, simple tools for people to improve and rewire the way they enter the dance of relating to others in a healthy way. It is through relating that I feel the richest lessons in life can occur. It is through connection that the deepest understanding of self and intimacy can be attained. But if we do not look at what we inherited from our families of origin—our “family-culture,” we will project this onto our adult relationships. Our lack of awareness and our neural pathways associated with our unconscious patterns will lead us to repeat exactly what we saw, and if what we saw was dysfunctional, we will repeat this in our adult lives, perpetuating the cycle of dysfunction into oblivion. In this book, I speak in depth about how we can rewire our neural pathways and our patterns of behavior so that we can have relationships that are more conscious and healthy and lives that are of our own choosing. Through this process you can, if you choose, rewire your “relationship-culture.”

What Is “Relationship-Culture”?

Our relationship-culture lurks in every single one of us. It is the very matrix of how you react to your dates, relationships, partners or spouses and is reflected in your neural pathways, your reactions, your patterns and your ways of being. Your relationship-culture is your external expression of your family-culture. If you do not analyze and process the family-culture in which you grew up, you are doomed to repeat old patterns unconsciously. If you do nothing about any dysfunction carried with you from your family-culture, you have no choice but to play that matrix out in your life and foist it onto the next generation. Left unanalyzed, your patterns will repeat. How your emotions play out in your relationships, how you behave in your relationships and how your relationships evolve are all a part of your relationship-culture. The key is to know exactly what your relationship-culture is—the collection of repetitive relationship patterns that may or may not be dysfunctional. Awareness is the key. Yet awareness alone can do nothing. More needs to happen for change to occur if change is needed. If the patterns that you inherited from your family-culture are dysfunctional and negatively impact your relationship-culture, then real change needs to happen lest you perpetuate the cycle of dysfunction in yourself and for generations to come. In this book, I discuss many ways for a person to do something concrete to effect change in response to any awareness that may arise. To effect real change and to create a new normal, a “rewiring” of the neural pathways associated with the relationship-culture needs to evolve. To be clear, this is not about throwing everything away that you learned from your family-culture. Please keep whatever is working and is functional and healthy. *This book is about becoming aware of what is not working with regard to what you inherited from your family-culture so that you can create a new, fully unique, personalized, choice-filled, healthy, mindful*

relationship-culture that you now, completely and consciously, bring into your adult relationships.

Where It All Starts: Family-Culture

Your family-culture is all you know in the beginning. It influences all aspects of your life. This is something you engage in without thinking. It is something that gives you a sense of community, belonging and family—when it is working for you. When it is not, it may cause you to feel unhappy. It can exert undue pressure on you to conform and fit into what your family knows and has done for generations. Family-culture includes the emotional baggage handed down through generations that profoundly affects the life of any given family. The relationships, such as between parents and children, brothers and sisters, grandparents and grandchildren, are the real meat of the issue, and from where a family-culture derives. These relationships influence how a person turns out and how they interact in their own adult relationships. The family-culture has a profound effect on your relationship-culture.

What you experienced in your family dynamics growing up is largely what you will replay in your adult relationships. On the whole, we come from tribes, our families, with unique ways of doing things, and these patterns, habits and ways of communicating and relating are what you have metabolized as your family-culture, and it lives deep within your consciousness. The unresolved issues, hurts, traumas, family patterns, secrets, shames, triumphs, jealousies, abandonments and fears are all part of your particular family-culture that profoundly inform how you interact in your adult relationships and that infiltrate your relationship-culture.

The Attachment Trauma

Simply put, much of what you play out in your adult relationship patterns that is not healthy and happy often stems from an attachment wound or trauma early in life that was never fully processed and resolved. The event or the series of events you metabolized as a trauma still lives in your body and in your consciousness. However, an unconscious drive to understand what happened lies within your psyche. This drive becomes a pattern that you repeat unconsciously in a bid to shed awareness on it so that you can fully understand what occurred.

This wound or trauma could have happened in your family of origin during your early life experiences. You may have felt abandoned, possibly by your dad or your mom or your siblings, which then may have translated into neediness, overcontrol, codependency, anxiety, defensiveness, overprotectiveness and so much more. What occurred in your young years outside of your family-culture also impacts you profoundly. You may have been bullied as a child at school, and this turned into a maladjustment in the way you relate to other people and social anxiety that creates overself-criticism and an internal self-bullying dialogue. Or it caused you to become overprotective of yourself so that your walls are too big to allow intimacy and deep connection. I have observed people who had the unfortunate experience of having acne when they were teenagers, and this became a trauma that haunted them into their adulthood, even though their skin had cleared up completely. They always felt as though they had to hide, and it impacted how they related to others, especially as they were trying to date and form connections in that realm.

Healing the Attachment Trauma

Healing the attachment trauma requires looking at the trauma quite directly. Remembering the events, talking about the events and sharing the events with a trusted and safe person all

contribute to a person's being able to reframe the events that occurred during childhood. When we look gently yet directly at the trauma and set up an environment, through visualization, in which the "hurt child" within is made to feel safe, seen and honored, we are able to promote healing. I encourage clients to visualize their bringing forth an aspect of their adult selves that feels confident, and to see themselves protecting the hurt child, while at the same time remembering the traumatic event or events. Sometimes I ask clients to also imagine a protective being or animal to be part of this visualization. For example, they visualize a very strong and powerful tiger or bear to accompany them. This visualization is a therapeutic process and is part of the reframing of the trauma, where the child felt completely powerless. With this kind of visualization and support, we are able to diminish the power that the trauma has had over them. And since the brain responds very well to visualization because it does not distinguish between what is real and what is imagined, this therapeutic process helps to heal the attachment trauma. The visualization and the reframing process encourage the brain to set up new neural pathways and encourage the biochemistry of ease and calm versus fear and trauma. Thus, where once a person felt victimized by the events, reframing them now helps the person to see them with new eyes from the perspective of the adult, where they now feel they have more power and more choice. They no longer need to be at the mercy of the past, and the trauma no longer needs to dominate them. Yes, the trauma did occur and the attachment trauma did have an impact, but the person is able to leave it firmly in the past so that it isn't constantly informing the present and the future. Feeling supported and relaxed while recounting the events that were traumatic in the past goes a long way toward removing the power and the charge that the trauma once had. The sharing process also helps diminish the fear and the shame. The process of reframing the past gives a person the opportunity to make new choices and to develop a new experience regarding connections, attachments and relationships in general. This helps a person to rewire their relationship-culture quite significantly. Without reframing the trauma, without this kind of awareness, a person often allows the fear and anxiety that the event or events created to color their relationships into adulthood, and possibly forever.

One thing I do want to mention is that we are doomed to repeat what we do not adequately and completely understand and process. People tend to attract toward themselves the same types of people they encountered in their family of origin that created the original attachment trauma. So it is very important that, when you bring people into your life to date and have relationships with, you make sure you are not constantly retriggering the attachment trauma, scratching the attachment trauma "scab" as it were, that you are trying to heal. For example, I recommend not allowing a person who is constantly elusive, moody, aloof and unreliable into your life if you don't want to constantly retrigger the abandonment trauma. Similarly, I encourage people who came from violent and abusive environments to work diligently to not bring more of the same into their relationships, even though it may feel normal—and even attractive—at times.

Neural Pathways: Doing Things Over and Over

Doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result is a funny definition of madness that I love and often use because it speaks to the core of why, in my opinion, people suffer through painful, repetitive patterns in their lives and relationships. But like the frog that doesn't know it will boil to death when placed in a pot of cold water that is put atop a hot burner, people don't know they are in a kind of self-destructive madness when they blindly repeat the same actions and travel the same emotional and relationship trajectories as they go through their

lives in a semi-autopilot way. And to make matters more challenging, accompanying these repetitive actions is the biology of neural pathways in our brain matrix that reinforces this repetition, unless we consciously interrupt the duplication. In his book *The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science*, Norman Doidge explains that our brains reinforce the neural pathways with each repetitive behavior and belief. The more we do the same thing, the more the neural pathway associated with that repetition strengthens. The longer that belief remains in place or action continues, the more that neural pathway is reinforced. But this process also works brilliantly in our favor if change is desired. Our brains are elegantly adaptable. If you decide to behave differently in your dating experiences or in a relationship, although it will feel uncomfortable and strange at first, your brain will collaborate and support the new behavior by creating new neural pathways. If you consciously repeat the new behavior often, these new neural pathways will be reinforced, thus allowing your biology to help you to stay the course with the new choices. This is the way to change the patterns that no longer work for you. The key is to identify what you are doing and where it all started, and then determine if it is working for you. If it is not, then find a new pattern of behavior and repeat, repeat, repeat!

In this book I share information about what it means to repeat patterns that are dysfunctional, unhealthy and unconscious. Through this awareness I share information as to the process of rewiring the way a person relates to others in the realms of dating, relationships, marriage and divorce. If you no longer want to repeat dysfunctional cycles, then this is the book for you! If you want to create new neural pathways that correspond with new behaviors with respect to the way you relate in your adult relationships, you are essentially saying you would like to rewire your relationship-culture, which will positively impact your future generations. This is an opportunity for you to become truly aware of what no longer works for you so that you can then proceed to rewiring your relationship-culture!

Part I
Dating in the Modern World

Chapter 1 Know Yourself

When you decide to enter the dating world in a healthy way, it is most important to make sure you first get in touch with your innate, authentic self. The more conscious you are of who you are, the more likely you are to attract someone who is best suited to you. Watch out for living in your “false self.” Making decisions from your false self leads to poor decisions. This planet needs your authenticity. Know yourself. Avoid going down the rabbit hole of denial. If you got messaging from your family of origin that you are not a good enough person, or that relationships and people are dangerous, that is what you will bring to your world—your dating world, and that may actually not be your real self, but simply a personality that evolved as a result of your upbringing! Ask yourself deep questions. Keep a journal. Before you enter the dating pool, mine your feelings profoundly. Ask the key questions of yourself: Why do I react the way I do? What do I want? What don’t I want? In what kind of situation do I feel most safe? And why? How do I thrive in a relationship? What are my triggers? What is my go-to pattern of behavior when I am in a relationship?

Get to know yourself. Get to know your self-culture. My first book, *Find Your “Self-Culture,”* explores this subject in depth. I feel that finding your self-culture is most important as you navigate through your relationship experiences to live from the viewpoint of a clear self-knowing, in which the loudest voice in your head, guiding your every move and decision, comes from a strong self-culture. The more conscious you are of who you are, the more likely you are to attract someone toward you who suits you best.

Living from the False Self

We cannot change what we are not aware of. We are doomed to repeat over and over anything we are unconscious of. I feel that meditation and introspection are crucial to one’s relationship to one’s self as it encourages deep self-awareness. If you are living in deep lack of awareness of why you engage in relationships the way you do, you need to go about the business of navigating in depth who you are so that when you enter the dating world and an eventual relationship, you are not simply repeating dysfunctional patterns you learned from your family-culture or your childhood experiences.

The false self usually develops as a way of surviving and coping with what was observed and experienced in the family-culture. This is the self that evolved quite naturally and unconsciously to fit in with the tribe you came from, whether it was healthy or not. This is what you observed early on and took on as part of the matrix of your personality style. To be clear, this is not your authentic self—your self-culture. This is the false self. There are many versions of what the false self may be, but all of them contribute to how you interact in your adult relationships, and, over time, it is largely an untenable way to conduct a happy, healthy and mature life. For example (and this is just one example of what you might unconsciously be bringing forth), your family-culture might have taught you that it’s important to please everybody. This is not your real self; it is the self that evolved in order to cope. Feeling that pleasing everyone is the only way to keep the peace is what you were taught. I call this the “disease-to-please.” If you were taught this pattern of behavior, it is likely that you are largely unconscious of it as it would have become an instinctual way of being. When a person lives with the disease-to-please, and because it is so difficult to maintain, the pattern will surely land the

person in deep resentment and depression, and, over time, this trait is not sustainable. And if this is what you bring to the dating scene or a relationship, you are sure to choose people whom you are looking to take care of and to please as you have normalized this patterning. This creates an imbalance in the dynamic and will land you feeling trapped in an unhealthy relationship-culture dynamic.