

The power of wonder

Guests: Dr. Harville Hendrix and Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

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Meagen Gibson - [00:00:09]

Hello and welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of The Relationship Super Conference.

Today, I'm speaking with Dr. Harville Hendrix And Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt, internationally respected couples therapists, educators, speakers and *New York Times* bestselling authors.

Together, they've written over 10 books with more than 4 million copies sold, including the timeless classic *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples*.

They come by their expertise through both learning and experience. When their own relationship was in jeopardy, they co-created Imago Relationship Therapy to build a relational culture that supports universal equality.

Harville and Helen, thank you so much for being with me today.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Thank you very much, Meagen, for having us. We're delighted to be here.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Yes.

Meagen Gibson

So I think there might be a common misconception that people who work in the therapeutic fields or in personal development don't have problems. So I would love it if you could tell me about your marriage, any personal struggles you've had and how you've overcome them.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Before Helen is going to respond to that, but I just have a thought.

Most of us who go into the mental health field went into it because we had problems. But instead of going and getting our problems fixed, we decided that we would compensate by helping other people with their problems. But then, the turkey comes home to roost eventually.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Are you calling me a turkey?

Dr. Harville Hendrix - [00:01:38]

Or the chicken or the eagle.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

You're a turkey, too. Okay.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

So at some point, you have to face your denial. And the place that it shows up, will always show up, is in your marriage. You just can't get away from it there. Yes. So we know all about that and Helen is going to talk about it.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Yeah. We do big presentations and weekend workshops on Friday nights, all day Saturday, Sunday and Harville has given me permission to talk about our story in these workshops.

And basically, it's, well we've succeeded, and then we weren't succeeding. So when Harville and I met, both of us had divorced. And we were both deeply committed to family, and we were going, why are we divorced? And Harville, in particular, was struggling with that issue and beginning to come up with solutions. And I just fell in love with what Harville was wanting to do with his life.

He began to create stages of relationship. There's romance, and guess what? It feels great. And guess what? That's stage one. Because after romantic attraction, everyone goes into stage two, which is the power struggle. Ouch, I made a mistake. Guess what? It's a few simple things everyone can reach stage three, real love.

And so we began to, how do you get to stage three? Because we're dating and we're fighting a lot. And Harville said publicly, Helen and I were in a huge fight and she said, stop, one of us talk and listen. And then, of course, Harville went reliant about many things as we co-created the theory.

And so we did. I proposed. My first husband talked me into getting married, and I said, I'm going to propose to the next guy. So what was the year? We had dated for 5 years and then I proposed. What year did I propose?

Dr. Harville Hendrix

We married, so I think you proposed in 81 and we married a year later in 82.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Okay.

And we were dating for 5 years before that, working out the theory.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

With clear instructions to me to not even consider proposing. The answer would be no, if I did it. So I'm waiting for 5 years, and in separate cities as well, for her to make up her mind.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

We were thrilled after we married, we found the best agent. And she got us the best publisher and the best book 5 years later had been written. And when it came out, oh, my goodness, 6 weeks later, Harville wanted my name on the cover. And I said, there's some reason...

Dr. Harville Hendrix - [00:04:55]

Well, it belonged on the cover, we were co-creators of the book.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

He's a sharecropper son from South Georgia and I had a better known last name. I said, just your name, but I picked up the phone 6 weeks after the book came out. At the Oprah Winfrey studio. They wanted him on the show. The show Oprah it submitted it to the Emmy committee and that show won Oprah her first Emmy. So she had 14 times, a success.

So everything was so exciting as Imago Therapy was getting birthed. Except I was constantly trying to improve Harville. That was the skill of mine.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

And so she was good at it.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

I tell in our workshops, you know, I was just constantly, his wardrobe needed to be improved. Parenting needed to be improved. This needed to be improved and you know what? It was true.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Yeah, it was true.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

I didn't need to be the one to tell him. But anyway I told him, I would tell him and I asked him to go out on a date, and he didn't want to go on a date. Oh dear, we did not have a happy marriage. And there was chaos at home. And I dragged him to therapy. Now the therapist, we didn't like any of them because we were smarter than them and we kept firing them. And then the last one said we were the couple from hell and she fired us.

So we had no recourse but to go to a divorce lawyer.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

And at this point the book had become visible enough that I was the most visible couples therapist, probably at that time on the planet because of the Oprah shows. And we are in couples therapy. And the therapist says that she won't work with us. Y'all are just impossible. You're the couple from hell.

I think that's an amazing part of this story.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

She kicked us out of her office. So we announced to, we saw a divorce lawyer. We announced to our family we're divorcing, we announced to the whole Imago community we were divorcing. Oh, by the way, and then Harville his role, and what wasn't working, is when I would ask Harville if we could bring dialogue into, with our family and talk with them to use the process or use it between us. He said, Helen, I teach this stuff. I don't do it.

And so, we weren't doing it. And so, we were divorcing, but then we tinkered with the process, and when we added a little bit of more theory to what makes a healthy relationship. It worked. So we announced to the whole, everyone we knew that we were going to have a recommitment ceremony and have a banquet.

Dr. Harville Hendrix - [00:07:58]

That was 1999 and the end of the last, what do you call it? Century.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Yeah.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

New Year's Eve 1999, recommitment.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

What was the worst experience in my life, a second divorce, is really such a happy one now, because no relationship is hopeless. And that's what we get to tell people.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

We do say that if people say, is there a time when you should quit? The answer is yes. There are some things you should quit, but not your relationship. There's some things you need to start so that you can stay. And if you don't, and if you don't do those things, and we've worked on this now for, I think the refining process because we had some global things for about the first 10 years and then the last 20 years, we've refined, refined, refined, and we think that we've arrived at, this may sound arrogant, at some behaviors, not just abstract principles, but some behaviors.

But if you do them, you can't lose. And if you don't do them, you will lose. And so it's just that simple. So it's a question of whether you want it. Like I use the analogy of exercise. It's like, do I want a healthy body or not? Well, if you do, you don't have to go to the gym, but you have to exercise. And I will not go and have an exercise coach because I don't want anybody telling me what to do. So I'll go learn what to do and read the books and see the graphs and the charts and all that, but mainly you have to move. Walk 30 minutes a day and then do some muscle stretching and so forth and eat well, and you'll be fine. You don't have to become an athlete.

But there are some things you have to do to have a healthy body and you make a decision, and it will be unnatural for you to do that. And that means you're doing the right thing. If it feels unnatural, it's probably the right thing to do. And that's hard for people to take because they think relationships should be natural, that we kind of know how to be in relationship with another person.

And none of us do. Everything we do with another person has been learned at our mother and father's knees and they learned it from theirs, and they learned the wrong lessons. And they pass them down to us. And then we're adults, and we think that's reality and turns out, it is actually just the way you were trained. And therefore you're empowered by the awareness that you can actually reshape your life at its fundamental level. And that is really simple.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

I'm going to say something then we'll let you talk.

Meagen Gibson

No, of course.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Harville's genius is simplifying the complex.

Dr. Harville Hendrix - [00:11:03]

That's because I'm simple.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

So many people they're trying to figure out relationship. And I shared ideas with him, but then he puts it in a structure that creates safety between two people. So it's a simple thing to learn.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

And I want to talk about those practices in that structure. I want to loop back to something you said earlier, though, for just a second, which is that what you went through and experienced is so relatable.

I mean, how many people do I know that are in the healthcare profession, but that don't eat right or don't exercise right. A lot of us know the right things to do through experience or through education or through our practice professionally. But they struggle so much to apply those principles that we know work through our own lives.

And how brave and gracious of you too, and I guess you didn't have a choice at that point, but to do the self-experimentation and do the tough work of reflecting on the only thing that was left, which was your own work and figure out if it was really going to apply to your situation, if it's going to be able to salvage your relationship and how you could move forward with it and even strengthen all of those practices and principles, which I'd love to hear more about now.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Well, let me start with the problem that all couples have and which we discovered is the problem all human beings have. Couples are just a subset of the human family, of the human situation.

So after getting it wrong for about 10 years in our research on the question, why do couples fight? That was what started our conversation in 1977 when we first met was, why are we divorced? I'm a University Professor at that time, and I'm also a registered clinician, and I have a practice and I teach. And Helen had her own wonderful life and her wonderful career.

And we were wondering, I mean, is there something wrong with us? And why are we divorced? That led to, well, why does anybody get a divorce? And that led to why the couples fight? And that led ultimately to, why does anybody fight? And we finally arrived after years of throwing away wrong answers that didn't add up to one simple answer then so Helen says, my brain seems to have a filtering process and finally it says, here it is, and it's objection to difference.

We grow up and in our marriages we assume that, and we live all our lives assuming that we know what reality is. But we don't know. What we mean by that is our reality. But our reality is the reality. And so we marry somebody who has the same mental brain processes that we did, except they created a different world.

And so you get married, you kind of surrender that and interact with the things that, where they overlap. And you sort of don't notice some of the edges where you really are very different and see things differently or like to do different things. I like to travel. Helen likes to stay home, but we did a lot of moving around when we were dating and courting.

But what you discover at some point that this, and you discovered that when your partner talks, you have this reaction and you want to correct them. And then when you correct them, then they counter correct you, and then you counter correct them. And so when you look at all of that, it looks like you're just having a fight. You should learn how to fight better.

Well, yeah, but the problem is you can't accept difference. Your partner is different from your picture of your partner. Your partner's world is different from your world. They like different things and they see things differently.

Helen and I have a running thing about temperature. Helen likes warmer rooms. I like colder rooms. And so what do you do about that? Well, you sneak around and turn the temperature up or down to make yourself comfortable. Or you agree on, well, we can both live at 72 or 78 or something like that. So you have to otherwise move into a collaboration.

But the objection to difference, and when you see that now globally, it's the difference between the Republican and the Democrat, the difference between the Protestant and the Catholic. Everything's going on there is, you're not how I see the world. You don't see the world the way I see it. So therefore, I have to defend myself against you. And I have to convince you to see the world my way. Well, you can see how that's a source of conflict. And if you push hard enough, you will move into something intense, like violence. And internationally, you'll move into war.

So, the question is, what do you do about difference, since difference itself is not going to go away? Every flower is different. Every particle in the subatomic world is different from every other particle. Every woman is different from all other women. You're different from all of the men. And it's just difference is the nature of nature.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt - [00:16:49]

May I share a favorite quote of his?

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Sure.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Harville said, incompatibility is the grounds for marriage. And talking about difference just to say, nature, hot cold, light dark, sweet sour, up down. They're different. Like nature is dyadic and couplehood is dyadic.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

So that polarity of yes and no is built into nature, the particle wave duality in quantum physics, it's just there. And so that is not going away. And every human being on the planet is faced with that dilemma. What am I going to do with the fact that I'm not the center of reality? Well, you have to come to terms with that. And the way you come to terms with it is to become, rather than reactive and judgmental and critical, to become curious about what is your partner's world.

And when you get your partner's world and get what they think and feel and how they've suffered and so forth, you become curious and then empathic. You accept. So that's how it is for you. That's what it was like for you as a child. That must have really hurt. And you accept that this is your partner's world. And so when they behave in ways that make you go crazy, you have to be empathic with the fact that they're dealing with a memory that was triggered in your relationship.

You didn't intend to trigger it. You just were there. And the way you were there, like not being present to in some way triggered a memory of long ago. You can't even trace the memory. But long ago, your caretaker didn't look at you when you called them, and you couldn't get their attention, no matter

how loud you cried. So that's back there. You'd have to work really hard in therapy to get that memory back up there, but it's there. So, you know, you can just always assume that any reactivity is rooted in the activation of a painful memory. So you can be empathic about that.

So we developed a process we call it the Imago, the Imago dialogue process. And Helen, basically accidentally, I think it was accidentally, but nevertheless, it became a strategy, invented dialogue in the middle of one of our early fights in 1977 before we got married. Long before you proposed to me.

And so she yelled out, hey, why don't we stop and one of us talk and one of us listen, and then the other one and the other one listen. Well, I'm in practice at this time as a couples therapist, but I'm not doing that kind of therapy. I'm doing problem solving, conflict resolution. And what's it like for you? And can you all work on the temperature and negotiate, move from transaction to negotiation? Never worked with couples about 40% success rate.

But I started doing what Helen invited us to do, which worked in our relationship with the couples, you talk and George is going to listen, and I have to train him to listen and shut up and really hold what Mary said and then vice versa. And their relationships began to change in front of me, not because they solved the problem, but because they began to talk to each other differently.

Then we discover its process, for God's sakes, it's not content that matters. And it's the quality of the interactive space. And so that evolved into a full developed dialogue process and had mirroring and then validation and empathy as the things that you do with each other whenever you talk.

So difference doesn't go away, but you collaborate around your differences using the structure so that then you can create a way to live together that is good for both of you. But difference won't go away, instead you live now without judging difference, you begin to celebrate difference.

My goodness, the things I objected to in Helen are her strongest traits. She's so creative and entrepreneurial with her right brain sometimes I think I have no idea what you're talking about. You're all over the place, but something brilliant is going on. And most of the good ideas in Imago came from Helen's intuitions.

I'm the left brain, I say, hey, so say more about that. And all of a sudden, I'm aware she's found a block, a brick. And I take this brick and build it, and it becomes a whole structure in the theory. And so we then take that to the clinic and work with couples, and it works, and we do it in our own relationship.

So you become co-creative partners in the project of building your own marriage. And we became co-creators in the project of building an intellectual system, a therapy system that's now in what, 61 countries and 2700 people have been trained. And we have a faculty of 40 people teaching it. That's because we're working with this until the dialogue process became operational.

And it's the only thing that Imago therapists use in their therapy. They don't do problem solving and content focused stuff. Talk about anything you want to, but you talk about it this way, dialogically.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt - [00:22:38]

To each other as a couple. The therapist doesn't have the answer. The couple has the answer. So they put them together.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

And you sit like this and face each other rather than looking at the therapist, you face each other. And the therapist says, okay, talk. And here's a sentence stem. Start with the sentence stem. And appreciation I have for you is... Or a frustration I have with you is....

And then the therapist helps them use language in such a way that they don't hurt each other, but that they can connect with each other.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt - [00:23:12]

Well, and it's all about slowing down and listening. We are rewarded when we talk well.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

That's such a great sentence.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

But what about Meagen, do you have other questions?

Meagen Gibson

Oh, you guys are doing fantastic. I don't feel like you're running me over at all.

I love what you said about the memory triggers when we're listening to someone and that system that our brain develops to listen for those ways that our needs were not met, like that has a purpose in our life, to protect us. It's just that once we become adults and we're not under threat anymore that system is no longer useful in our intimate relationships where there is safety and there is trust and those things are all steady and secure.

So this process, and if I understand you correctly, that's what this therapist is doing is really setting the container for the process, not actually moderating the conversation between the two people. It's, here's how we're going to speak to one another and training people how to listen, I think would be a huge part of that as well.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Oh, yes.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Listen and also wonder. We're awarded when we know stuff.

And if I were to say one more thing about what we do is we develop. We help people develop healthy brains, which makes them feel good because in the structure of the Imago process there are sentence stems.

Well, first you take turns talking and you ask for an appointment. Is now a good time to talk about so and so? And if the person says I'm busy, but how about in an hour? And then I can give you my attention. And so ok let's visit this in an hour and there is structure to it. And someone then, that person is the sender, and the other person is the receiver. And then the receiver can set up another time to share with sender their thoughts.

But its structure, structure, structure, and the lower brain reacts if it doesn't, if something's dangerous. And it can react in a positive way, but it spontaneously reacts in a negative way that you can't control. It's just automatic.

The upper brain, the neocortex that you can go to when you have sentence stems, is a much more calming part of the brain and the definitive of the Imago dialogue process, we call it also the safe conversations dialogue process, takes you to the upper brain. Left brain knowing where you mirror someone back. Did I get it? And then is there more about that? It's sort of like, right brain, connect the dots or I imagine your feeling, and then is there more about that? Is sort of the center of the brain, the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex that releases the neurochemicals of calm.

Opposed to if you're scared, you don't feel safe being with someone, you get anxious and you want to leave or you want them to change. And you insist that they change. They have to. That kind of thing is cortisol and adrenaline, it's toxic neurochemicals, as opposed to the wondering like, tell me why you think that? I don't agree with you, but I want to understand more about why you vote for the political party that you're interested in.

Meagen Gibson - [00:27:16]

Right.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

And wondering is the healthiest part of the brain. Noted neuroscientists say it promotes neural integration. It's the Dalai Lama state. The umm when you're meditating and you don't know stuff and that, I love living in that part of the brain. I don't talk any more with Harville, not nearly as much as I used to. I have learned to wonder about him and it is fun. It's a great brain state. So we try to teach our couples to get a brain book and learn about having a healthy brain.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Now, Helen says this very casually. But this is an example of Helen saying something very casually, and at first I don't get it. What is this wonder business? That's for artists to wonder, or children?

But then she goes into these details about the brain. But behind what she's saying is a fundamentally profound reality which is, all of us do what we call predication. And predication is we have to label things. We have to put labels on them. And psychology is really bad at this. We now have 365 different ways you can be crazy. And 268 therapies to help you fix your craziness.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Well, you know, when you look at that field, it's a dysfunctional field.

The DSM-5, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Goes underneath those 365 quote "diagnoses", there's one problem, anxiety triggered by the lack of safety, with no skills to engage in positive social engagement. And all therapies, although they don't know they're doing it ultimately, intuitively, even no matter how elaborate the therapies are, are trying to get people to relate to each other with kindness or warmth, but they go through a long diagnostic process. Then let's explore your childhood.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

I used to do this and Helen used do this. Boy, those childhood memories are so interesting, got another one. We didn't notice that the people were not changing with what they remembered. They just remembered more trauma.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

But change came when their partner said something and they wanted to say, what in the hell are you talking about? They instead would say, let me see if I'm getting that. So you thought this about that? Am I getting it? So is there more about that? So there's no predication or judgment here, this curiosity.

And this is the thing Helen brought, the most recent thing that Helen's brought to the table, is this concept of not knowing, which is the only way you allow your partner to be free from the prison in which you put them by thinking you knew them. And that they go this way. Or they were that way. Or

you're a sort of narcissistic, or you're sort of a depressive affect or you're obsessive. All those words are abusive. Your partner is just doing something and you put it in boxes because you can control it that way.

Because if a person is obsessive, then you know what obsessive people do. So the brain likes to do that. But what our own brain doesn't know is we made it more dangerous now because we put her in a box. Now she's not behaving like she should in our box, even though it's a bad box. So we have to put her back in that box. Am I making sense?

Meagen Gibson - [00:31:20]

Absolutely.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

So not to know and to say, oh, so that's going on for you? Can you tell me more that's going on for you? Well, I can see how you're seeing it that way. And it's interesting that you are. And I really want to know how I can be helpful in your world with you.

Now, what is she going to do? She's going to stop defending. She's going to stop whatever it is she was doing that triggered me because she didn't have to anymore, because I'm not consulting that response in her. If I'm present to her and not judgmental about what I'm present to, then she has no reason to react or act out like the kids in the families.

If you're there with the kid, they don't have to rebel. But if you're not there with the kids, they're going to rebel, and they're going to go two ways, anger or depression. You can count on it. Nearly half the adolescents in the world are angry. The other half are depressed. The ones who get the anger stuff wind up, many of them in courts and prisons. The ones that are depressed wind up with therapies and in treatment centers, all because the parents are not available to the child's experience of itself.

They want to tell the child how to be. And the child knows that's not the way I am, that's not the way life is, life is something else. Life is free and full of aliveness. Life is fun. Life is blowing. Life is playing. You know, children know how to live, they play.

And you see that in the field of mental health. The recent research on all of this is that the single feature of a thriving couple is their capacity to engage in what? Spontaneous play. Which means like children.

And it was interesting, Helen and I've been watching Jesus movies recently, and so interesting how Jesus made it really clear that the little children know about the Kingdom of God. You adults miss it because you got all these rules, but the children live there, and that if we could all become, in fact, he even said that except you become as a little child. You cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. And we would say, unless you learn how to play together, you can't have a great marriage, but you have to learn how to do it spontaneously, because that means just enough to initiate the play.

You can structure play like, well, we're angry at each other but let's go play tennis. That's not it. That's making fun, the being there and then joining in that fun. Helen and I recently have been listening to music that has quite a beat and I'm not a dancer, but I find that the music is doing something to my body. So we find ourselves spontaneously dancing in the kitchen in the morning as we're getting breakfast or at dinner.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

And both.

Dr. Harville Hendrix - [00:34:22]

Yeah or both.

And those are the memories that go with me all day long.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

He's a great dancer.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

When she talks about work at breakfast, I don't remember much of what she said, but I do remember that we moved together and we had this little fun, and we hugged each other and then went off to the boring thing called work.

Meagen Gibson

Right.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Apart from talking to Meagen, that's not boring.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

No, no, no. Right. Right. No, this is not work.

Meagen Gibson

And that's such a wonderful, the dancing is such a wonderful example of a form of listening, right? Because there's such an exchange of I mean, that's body language that you're listening to, right?

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Right. And the word in psychology is resonance. You're resonant with each other, your energy and my energy are responding to each other.

And that's what happened in early childhood with the infant and the caretaker in the first few months, maybe a lucky kid for the first year until the parents stop being resonant because the parents were tired or busy or had another child or had to go to work, whatever reason, not even a pathological one. But they needed to come back so the kid could say, okay, mommy has to go do something, or daddy has to go do something, but they'll be back and the baby is fine.

But if the parents don't promise to be back and then come back when they promise, the baby goes anxious. Now it has to cry or go silent.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

And another word for resonance is presence.

Meagen Gibson

Right. Right.

Dr. Harville Hendrix - [00:36:08]

Presence, when Harville gets excited about, we're driving down the highway and there's an antique car, oh Helen there's a 57 mercedes.

No, no, no, no. 57 Chevy. You've got to get this right.

Meagen Gibson

Listen better Helen.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Listen better.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

And I'm on a cell phone and I'm going, I'm busy. First it's just a car, and number two, it's an old car. Why does he get excited? Or then if there's construction and it's getting higher, Helen, there's now a new floor there. But now I put down what I'm doing on the seat beside me. Oh, look at that car, isn't the color of the car great, because I want to be with him in his experience or get excited about the construction.

Meagen Gibson

The details.

Well, and it's such a trap, too, because we think of relationships based on compatibility, and sometimes we confuse compatibility with sameness. And there's not a couple on earth that is passionate about identical things. I mean, that would be very strange. And I don't think it has ever existed since the beginning of time.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

That is absolutely true.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

But you can practice being present as my partner's experiencing that.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

And see what you get out of that is when you stretch into being resonant with your partner's experience, you get that experience as a derivative. You don't have to go have the experience. You have it through your partner. So your brain has a new memory.

And every time listen without judging, you get a new memory. And guess what? Slowly that changes the configuration of your brain so that you get a better brain. And that's the power of a dynamic relationship is that it not only is fun to be together, but you get an integrated brain out of that, which makes it possible to live together.

So the paradox of stretching into each other's world without judgment is that you can stretch into the other person's world, and after all, it's not stretching. After a while, it becomes, wow, it's like exercise. This is not painful anymore. It's like I miss it. And when I don't exercise and now I don't have to stretch into your world, I'm curious about it. Tell me more about that.

And so, we call that, it could be, in the older vocabulary that would we call healing, but we don't think healing is the right word. That has to do, it came from medicine where you get a cut and it heals. This is way beyond that. This is transformation. The whole form of the relationship is changed from reactive interaction to resonate interaction, and the emotions about that are different.

So when you change this space between, which is another term, Helen brought into our work. She read Martin Buber, who talked about the I-Thou and the hyphen as the space between the I and the Thou. So she brought that in and Lord, behold, we're discovering that Buber had not read quantum field theory, but it's very, very, very resonant with quantum field theory. There's an energy field here, and if you manage this field with positive input, it will be coherent.

If you rupture it with negative input, it'll become chaotic, and then you will get the consequence of the chaos you created or the resonant that you created. So it's like you're the most powerful person in the world because you can choose how you're going to respond. So you choose chaos or cohesion. Well, that may mean you have to give up some bad habits.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt - [00:39:54]

And it's a positive input but it's also just being present. When the other person is saying something just put down what you are thinking of saying, oh, tell me more. And I love how you described the listening at the beginning of the importance of the sort of flow. I'm just functioning as a duo. The listening.

Meagen Gibson

And I definitely want to ask you a follow up question about something you said earlier, which was I'm putting my mind, or I'm putting my perspective in the mind of our conference attendee, and I imagine somebody at home, just totally it's all about them, not about me at all. I'm imagining somebody at home that might have a partner that they want to build this conversation style with but their partner, theoretically, is hesitant to this model.

It's something like, if you were to say to them what would be a good time? That invitation that you put the example of what will be a good time to discuss this? And you've got a partner with maybe an avoiding or dismissive safety mechanism that triggers even more avoidance for them.

But I imagine that you can do, as yourself, even if you don't have a partner that's engaged in that yet, can engage in great listening and wonder in a way that, as Helen said, is going to start changing your partner's brain in a way that starts to very slowly dismantle that avoidance and dismissal. That's not a word, by the way. I just made up a word.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

I've also talked with others that have said I really want to do this, and I don't think my partner will. And I suggest, when is your birthday? Your next birthday? Or is there a religious holiday you celebrate where you exchange gifts? And maybe this isn't ideal for a wedding anniversary, but on your birthday, the one thing I would like to do is do an Imago or a safe conversation training together where we learn to do dialogue and that we do it for six months. And then if we don't want to continue, that's okay. But could we just learn about it.

And ask it as a gift where it probably won't say no. And then last comment I'll share is when people are beginning the process, this is one of the things that we added to how we were practicing it ourselves. We take turns where at the end of the day we end up being connected. We have an on duty day that I'm on duty to make sure we're connected before we go to sleep.

And because typically one person in a couple will be interested in relationship books and the other may be interested, but they don't express their interest like the other one. And at that particle wave

duality, which we call it, every relationship has a turtle in the hailstorm. And I was the hailstorm in our relationship, and Harville was the turtle and teaching it not doing it. But anyway, now every day of the month, there's a monthly calendar. And on the first day of the month, the 3rd, the 5th, 7th it's my job to make sure when we go to bed we're connected.

Dr. Harville Hendrix - [00:44:03]

That's supposed to be a joke. The odd days.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

And every even day of the month, the 2nd, the 4th, the 6th, the 8th. It was my suggestion we do it that way because I am a little odd. So I did it.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

No, you're not.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

But anyway, it's his job no matter what has happened during the day, he has to, by the time we go to bed, make sure we're connected. And that's just a simple thing, offer to massage my feet, bring me a favorite beverage or chocolate, or say, I'm sorry.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Or ask you, what would you like?

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Yeah. Is there something I can do so that we feel connected?

So anyway, and that's a way two people can regulate the relationship.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

So I want to add a little bit, Helen, to the preceding thing about what do you do when there's this discrepancy and desire about working on the relationship?

I agree with you about that. You can ask for it. What I did, what makes it work is I want to learn how to be a better partner. And the only way I can do that is to get some training. And there's this workshop or this seminar or this webinar or this book, and I want to be a better partner so I can't do that by myself.

So I need a practice partner. So would you be willing to go and let me practice being a better partner in this workshop? You don't have to want to go and you don't have to do anything. Just let me practice with you. So you get them in the environment. You haven't judged them. You haven't said I'm interested. You're not. So you haven't shut them down.

And here's what you can count on happening 90% of the time. They will like the work at the workshop better than you will. Because what they'll learn at the workshop is they become empowered and then secondly, they learn it's not all their fault because you, the initiator, is saying it would be better if you would, which means you're the bad guy.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt - [00:46:45]

But at the workshop, we will say to him or her, now, those of you who are here by invitation or here to support your partner, we want you to know that you will enjoy this workshop better than your partner will, because what you will learn is it takes two to tango.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

So whatever is going on in your relationship, you both contributed to it. And we want you to know that that's what you'll learn. There's no such thing as a singular healer or herder of a relationship. Two people do it with their interactions.

So what you will learn is that you're not in this alone. You're not the bad guy. You are a participant in a process that's uncomfortable for you and your partner. And so we say that to them at the beginning, and inevitably, we call them drag-ees, inevitably, the drag-ees at the end of the workshop stand up and say glowing things about this workshop and the partner who dragged them there's not all that interest.

Because what they had learned was it wasn't their partner's fault. It was 50% their fault. Actually, it's nobody's fault because you just, you had to do positive social engagement.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Basically, you think that applying for a marriage license, people need, it should be like a driver's license, people need to read the manual, pass the test, and then they can get their marriage license. And if they fail the test, they need to read the manual again. Pass the test. They can get married.

Meagen Gibson

Don't we wish that were the way it was, right?

Go ahead.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

One day, maybe enough people will ask for that.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

It would be the law of the land. It's way more important than driving a car is getting married because the goodness of the marriage is great. So it could be the law of the land. You got to go to a class before you can get a marriage license.

Meagen Gibson

That would be delightful.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

I would support that.

And especially you got to go to class before you can have a kid because you create the future with this kid. And so you're responsible not for your life, but for the life of the future, the culture itself.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

So I see we are starting to run out of time. And was there a last thing you want us to respond to?

Meagen Gibson - [00:49:04]

No, you two have done a fantastic job. I just wanted to ask if people want to find out more about you, your work, and how they can get into one of these dialog process workshops. How can they do that?

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Well, there are two places to go. And what if you want a long workshop to go to harvilleandhelen.com and our schedule, our annual schedule is there.

There are shorter workshops called *Safe Conversation* workshops. And you go to safeconversations.com and you'll see, it's not us there, occasionally we're there. There are 4 hour workshops. The other workshops are 12 hours.

So either way, and then *Getting the Love You Want: A Guide for Couples* is its 30th anniversary, it came out last year I think. In the back of that will give you also some of those websites.

But harvilleandhelen.com and safeconversations.com

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Safe Conversations is a training institute where you can sign on and see workshops. But then if you want to learn to bring it more into your life, you can get coached. Two people, one or two people can get coached in it, like with someone else coaching them. And then if they want to teach it to others. They can teach it to others.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

And you don't have to be because we train you to do the dialogue process with anybody.

Meagen Gibson

Very exciting.

Thank you both so much for being with us today. It was wonderful.

Dr. Harville Hendrix

Thank you. Thank you for having us. We enjoyed meeting you and having this conversation. And I hope your conference goes well.

Dr. Helen LaKelly Hunt

Yes.

Meagen Gibson

Thank you.