



## Pamela Haag

Five questions for the author of 'Marriage Confidential.' Interview by Laura Wexler

**W**ith a title like "Marriage Confidential," you might expect Pamela Haag's new book to be a steamy boudoir tale. It's not. But Haag, who grew up in Mount Washington and lives in Tuscany-Canterbury with her husband and son, does commit a major taboo: She dares to question—and lovingly criticize—the sacred institution of marriage. (The subtitle of her book is "The Post-Romantic Age of Workhouse Wives, Royal Children, Undersexed Spouses and Rebel Couples Who are Rewriting the Rules.") In the two-plus years she spent surveying the state of marriage in America, Haag, who has a doctorate in history from Yale University and a master's degree in nonfiction writing from Goucher College, forayed into an online dating site for married people, checked out a local swingers club and asked nosy questions about other people's marriages. On the eve of her book's publication, Haag talked with *Style* about the hidden institution of marriage, and how "there's a lot that's happening in the marriage next door that's of interest."

>We have more freedom to marry who we want, when we want, than ever. And yet many Americans, you write, "end up as melancholy, and as orthodox in our views of marriage" as our parents and grandparents. Why is that? Marriage in our country is like apple pie. It's hard to speak a word against it. That makes it difficult to say something about changing it. It's easier to break the rules, it seems, than to condone changing them.

>Is it possible that marriage is simply defunct?

Recent research shows nearly 40 percent of Americans think marriage is "obsolete." I'm not one of them. Instead, I'm arguing that marriage needs to evolve to keep up with us.

>You say that it used to be when you got married you were following a script but that these days, the trend is toward writing a script. What are some ways couples are creating—or re-creating—their marriages?

Some couples are rethinking lifelong monogamy as the basis of marriage and are trying to live honestly non-monogamous lives. Some are trying to embed their marriage and family life in new co-housing communities that have sprung up. Perhaps of greatest interest to



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me—although it's not yet a common thing—are the couples who are improvising ways to be divorced cohabitators: to maintain a household for the sake of their children, but to enjoy the freedoms of divorced people. I predict that, in the future, architecture and home design might change to accommodate a third way between marriage and divorce. Already, the National Association of Home Builders predicts that by 2015, 60 percent of new homes will have "dual master bedrooms."

>What characteristics are shared by the happiest marriages you observed during your research?

The partners seemed to have a sense of fun and spirit about marriage, and a sense of adventure. They seemed willing to "buck the system" and have marriages that worked for them, even if they weren't just like the marriage next door. In other words, they were willing to stay true to what they wanted, rather than give in to what others think is better.

And one very practical thing: happy marriages seemed to have good "dreadiness quotients," by which I mean, both husband and wife genuinely feel that they are doing about the same amount of necessary but unpleasant work to keep the household running without feeling resentment or anger toward the other partner.

>You start your book admitting that you're in a semi-happy marriage. As a result of your research, were you inspired to change your marriage in any pioneering ways?

No, not at all! I continue to inhabit the semi-happy state I began in. And that's fine with me. □

For more information and local book signings, visit [pamelahaag.com](http://pamelahaag.com).