

## 6 Body + Soul

# Modern love Are you living

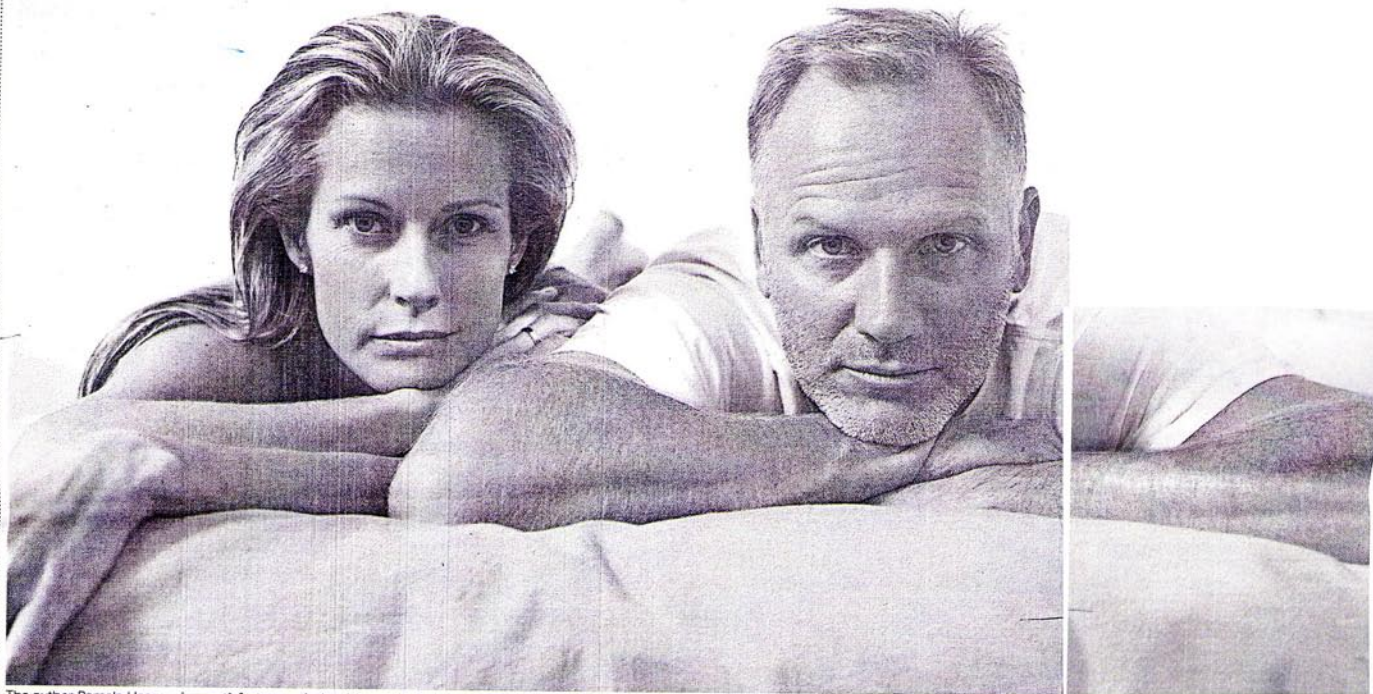
Barbara McMahon talks to the US author with radical ideas for the future of monogamy

When Pamela Haag began asking her friends about their marriages she found that most of them were secretly disenchanted: "They were basically happy — many of them described their spouse as being their best friend — but they were disappointed that they hadn't succeeded in having the fulfilling kind of marriage they had once dreamt of."

Haag had similar feelings about her own marriage and, as someone with a PhD in history from Yale, she wanted to dig deeper. The result is her provocative book, *Marriage Confidential: The Post-Romantic Age of Workhorse Wives, Royal Children, Undersexed Spouses & Rebel Couples who are Rewriting the Rules*. It's been described as revealing the "scandalous reality" of modern marriage — and columnists, bloggers and book groups are debating Haag's assertions that traditional marriage is dead.

Too many couples, she says, are living in "semi-happy marriages" — staying in affectionate but passionless partnerships because they are responsible and well-intentioned people who believe that they should not expect too much from marriage, that divorce is bad for the children or that the financial penalty of separation would be too painful.

Instead of leaving, many spouses are unfaithful or tolerate their partner's infidelity: Maria Shriver is the latest example of a spouse staying in an



The author Pamela Haag, below, believes that the modern marriage has to change

unsatisfactory relationship until finally being pushed over the edge — in this case by the discovery that her husband, Arnold Schwarzenegger, had fathered a child with the live-in help.

The choice, Haag asserts, isn't between rejecting marriage as obsolete, or trying to turn the clock back to more traditional times, but in recognising that marriage is an institution that has to evolve according to our 21st-century standards. It's time to consider other options, she says.

Haag, 45, the mother of a nine-year-old son, says that she first identified the "semi-happy" marriage in late-night heart-to-hearts with friends around her kitchen table. "I was curious why a generation with so many opportunities and advantages would feel so mediocre and lethargic about their marriages, and why they had so many complaints," she says. "Then some of my friends began to have experiences with infidelity and I noticed that, while they were outraged and hurt, they were more tolerant of infidelity than I might have expected." She notes that surveys show that roughly half of all husbands and 40 to 45 per cent of all wives have affairs.

The strength of marriage has always been its adaptability, Haag adds. In the 18th and 19th centuries people entered into marriage for social standing and practicality, while in the 20th century "romantic" marriages — choosing a spouse for reasons of love — flourished. Now we are in the "post-romantic" age, she believes, with people marrying and having children later in life, after they have had other serious romantic relationships.

"The facts, circumstances and shell of

marriage have changed, yet the soul of marriage — its dreams, conscience, ethics and rules — hasn't necessarily evolved to keep up," Haag writes in her book. "Instead we follow viscerally many of the same premises and orthodoxies as our parents, as if marriage is a Procrustean structure to which we must confine ourselves, rather than the other way around."

As part of her research Haag joined an online affair-finding site using the fake name of Miranda. "It was brutally efficient. I typed in my name and said that I was an attached female — there was no picture or any meaningful biographical details, just the zip code of my house — and within minutes had 250 hits."



She also put a personal advert in *The New York Review of Books*. "I got some fairly thoughtful replies from the personal ad," she says. "Men saying that their marriages were uninspiring, though essentially OK. But they were all looking for that extra spark missing from the relationships they had with their wives."

What should couples do if they recognise that they are trapped in semi-happy marriages? Haag says that in the coming decades married couples will talk more openly about monogamy instead of merely assuming it as the default state of marriage. "They might decide that monogamy makes sense at some points and for some amount of time but maybe not for ever. Or they might decide that it really is the bricks and mortar of marriage for both of them," she says. "Open non-monogamy — as opposed to cheating or lying — is an audacious idea for most of us, and many people say that it doesn't work. But there's a legitimate debate about whether expectations of lifelong marital fidelity have worked either."

Couples suffering from emotional cabin fever — expecting too much of each other in too-tight quarters — should also give each other physical and mental space. "The romantic ideal, which emphasised emotional intimacy and togetherness, placed unprecedented demands on marriage, so much so that, in marriages today, the need for friendship or even 'alone time' away from the spouse can feel almost like a betrayal or a marital issue, and bruises the feelings of the other spouse," she says.

Haag believes that more marriages will be customised, with spouses saying what

they expect from each other regarding other friends, interests, intimacies and hobbies. Couples may want separate spaces, even while cohabiting. Currently one couple in four sleeps apart by design, and homebuilders are designing more houses with dual master bedrooms. Commuter marriages, in which married couples do not routinely live together, will continue to grow. "Some marriages are also creating intermissions for themselves by having a marriage sabbatical, taking a break from each other as a way of trying to reconcile a lifelong commitment with the need for growth time," Haag says.

How did researching the book affect her own 13-year marriage to John, an engineer? In *Marriage Confidential* Haag writes: "There are some days, and moments, when I think that this could very well be the last year of our marriage."

She points out that the book is not a memoir. However, she confesses: "Both of us feel that there's too much shame attached to having mixed feelings about marriage: and, yes, we're semi-happy. Our marriage is in the grey zone, in that there are great parts to it, and parts that we need to work on."

Even though 40 per cent of people believe that marriage is obsolete, Haag believes that there is still a future for matrimony. "I don't think it's necessarily going to thrive in its old forms," she says, "but if we rethink it — change it to fit us, rather than the other way around — marriage will have a future. But maybe not the one we're imagining."

*Marriage Confidential* by Pamela Haag is published by HarperCollins, £16.99

## Urinary Health Misery Again and Again...?

Dr. Albert Rousaud, a well-respected Urologist at the Technology Medical Institute in Barcelona says:

"Antibiotics are often needed for chronic urinary health issues. However to promote long-term urinary health I also recommend Cysticlean 118mg PAC to help reduce the repeated incidence of this debilitating condition. This has produced excellent results — the recurrence has decreased dramatically and patients are very satisfied."

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