



ANDREAS KIHMBERG

How you as a woman
living abroad get your
dream relationship with
the man you already have

FROM
FUNCTIONAL TO
F♥CKING
FANTASTIC!

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INTRODUCTION

Disclaimer

Don't believe a word I say or write, until you have tried it yourself!

If you are like most of the individuals that I've met in life, you have by now read many books and listened to plenty of people that claim "they have got the solution for the problems you want solved". I don't claim that. In this book I share my truth, my experiences and, in many aspects, my life. The greatest experts in human relating have passed away a long time ago; this book is simply my interpretation of what others have found, combined with my own personal experiences of the same.

I love my life and am very proud of how it's continuously turning out, but my ways aren't necessarily your ways. So, if what you read resonates with you, try it out and make your own version of it. If it doesn't resonate with you, just leave it, my truth might very well not be yours in that instance. There is plenty of science going around regarding human behavior and relationships, but this science relies on statistics, and we

are humans—not numbers. So, what you feel is right for you, *is* right for you, regardless of what I, science, or anyone else might say!

I have but one wish when you read this book: that you trust yourself and connect to your own deep wisdom. I'm delighted if you find inspiration in parts of what I write, but again; make your own truth out of it!

Last but not least, I mean well. I've written this book to support people like yourself to live a full life that includes fantastic relationships. My bluntness and sometimes provocative claims might be triggering, but I mean well. If you do feel triggered by my writing it might just be me lovingly poking you a bit, checking if you are sure about the path you are walking and the choices you make in life.

Who is this book for?

This book is dedicated to women in relationships who are living abroad, far away from their home country, relatives, childhood friends, and the culture they were brought up in. I am a part-time expat myself, dividing my time between two countries and committed to supporting women who desire a deeper understanding of their male partner, yearning for a fuller and more rewarding relationship. If you feel you have an okay relationship but want more in life than just “okay,” if you dream of a vibrant, exciting, and thriving relationship, this book might be part of your journey.

Professionally I tend to work predominantly with heterosexual women in relationships with a high level of drive and ability, and the reason is very simple. Women seem to be much better in holding together relationships; in general, I

find them much more committed to the growth and development of relationships, hence I find it more enjoyable to work with women—we share the same passion. I think the reason why most of my clients are heterosexual is because it's the most common in our society and I myself am heterosexual; thus it's easier to relate to each other and hence breakthroughs and results are reached faster and in a more enjoyable way. Of course, individuals outside of this group might very well benefit from reading this book, but I want to be clear that this is the reason for this book's focus.

It's a well-established fact that those who expose their relationships to a life abroad exploring other places to live, invite challenges into their relationships. To be perfectly correct these challenges aren't unique, they are in essence the same as those that sooner or later surface when staying at home. But they come faster, and they sometimes come with an intensity so powerful they floor us. And for a couple living abroad there is more skin in the game. A relationship falling apart when living abroad has massive impact on not just our overall wellbeing, it often leads to a logistic nightmare. When kids, multiple careers, and so on are added to the equation, the complexity rises exponentially.

To handle these challenges and make life fantastic it helps greatly if we understand why things develop the way they do and have a toolbox supporting us in coping with them. I refer to them as challenges, not hardships or problems. According to me, a challenge, when mastered, leads to something good! So far in my life, I haven't come across one single relationship-related issue that I haven't been able to extract something good out of. I'm observing the same potential in all relationships that cross my way. Last but certainly not least, you are not alone facing these challenges in your relation-

ship. They are a natural consequence of relating and most importantly a vast majority can be resolved and transformed without separation.

Who am I and what is my purpose?

I love my life to an extent where I'm quite often lost for words describing the feeling within me and I'm gifted with a superpower regarding human relationships.

It all started with me coming to this world as a baby with a, maybe unusually, big need for unconditional love. Despite wonderfully loving parents, it wasn't enough for me. To get even more, I adapted my personality and behavior to get even more love from my surroundings. It turns out that the better I felt and "understood" relations, the more I could fine-tune how I was perceived, and that way maximize love and appreciation from others.

So, from one perspective, I've been working with relationships all my life. A seemingly smart strategy maximizing love turned out to have unexpected consequences. I manipulated both myself and my surroundings with this strategy. It made me lose contact with my own unique core, sending me in directions that I today find quite amusing. My first real job, for example, was continuing working within the military after the Swedish mandatory service. I mean, what makes a young man in his late teens, loving connection and relationships, choose to focus on hardcore elite warfare?!

My second choice was no less interesting given my inclination towards loving relationships. Leaving the military, I pushed myself to get a Master of Engineering. You would think that the fact that I scored ZERO points on my first

exam would make me wake up and reassess my choice. Today I feel an immense gratitude for all the choices I have made in life, as all of them play a part in the life I so utterly enjoy today. It took life almost another twenty years to find a cudgel powerful enough to knock some sense into me. It started in early 2016 when everything I held dear started imploding: my successful career as a serial entrepreneur as well as my private life as a proud husband and father of two boys. A person close to me put it bluntly: “Andreas, you have been living a fake life in denial!”

After a period of self-doubt, I decided to make a massive makeover of myself and with extensive energy I turned my life upside down. I sometimes, in a slightly joking way, refer to myself as Andreas 2.0 nowadays, as I adjusted all parts of my life including how I relate to life within myself and how I relate to life surrounding myself. Most of what I had built around my ego had to go, it simply wasn't serving me anymore. The relationships I kept had to be redefined, including—and most importantly—the relationship with my two boys. Deciding to become a parent comes with a sacred contract, I simply hadn't honored that in how I had lived my life up until then.

Today I live a life I couldn't in my wildest dreams imagine before 2016 and it keeps evolving, becoming increasingly satisfying and interesting. Interestingly I nowadays understand that relationships have been a common thread throughout my life, despite for decades living an unauthentic life. Everything that has happened is serving a purpose enabling me to successfully live and work in line with my purpose.

I believe relationships are a core fundament of humanity; when we are truly and authentically content with both the relationship with ourselves and others, we thrive as individu-

als. Thriving individuals create great families for kids to grow up in, great families create healthy societies, and healthy societies take care of the planet that feeds us and make our lives possible. This belief of mine is the background to me dedicating myself to working with relationships. I love every moment doing it, and thanks to my unique background paired with my logical and often scientifically supported approach, I deliver fantastic results together with the individuals that I choose to work with.

How is this book meant to be read?

Read this book in whatever way you want, but I recommend using it like an owner's manual. You got this book in your hands because you want better relationships, you want more. So, I assume you have questions or challenges that you feel are in the way of having that thriving relationship we all desire. The book is based on common questions that I have encountered over and over again from individuals like yourself. These questions are divided into three different areas: Communication, Connection, and Passion. So, browse the table of contents, read what spurs your interest, longing, or desire. Leave anything that doesn't resonate with you; life is too short to invest time into things that don't appeal to us!

Initial thoughts worthwhile reading before you dive in

The book has three main sections: Communication, Connection, and Passion. The topics in this introductory part are perspectives of mine that might come in handy when reading the other sections. They are standalone topics and it's not necessary to read them, but they might be helpful for understanding the rest of the book. I suggest that you just browse through the headings and focus on what stirs your curiosity in that moment.

Is there a heck YES in your relationship, or at least a YES?

A yes can come on many levels; a friend of mine even has a system of seven levels of different yeses. When I ask couples about their yes to each other and their joint relationship, I sometimes get a puzzled look and a shy answer like: "Well, we are here and we are in a relationship, so I guess there's a yes..." And that is true, as a yes is a yes and as long as we choose to stay in the relationship with our partner there is a yes in the relationship. My point is that it's worthwhile knowing the quality of the commitment that comes with this yes. How deep is it? The more profound the commitment is between partners, the bigger the yes is, and consequently the safer we feel in our relationship. And the safer we feel, the more we dare to be ourselves and challenge the status quo, inviting growth into our relationships.

So, in a loving way and preferably on your own, ask yourself: How deep is the yes between me and my partner? It's a vital component before we can challenge the status quo and embark on a path of growth.

If you find that the yes is weak and fragile, an ambitious growth plan can potentially ruin what is between the two of you. And if the yes is a heck yes, you can probably be very ambitious in what you want to bring into your relationship with your partner. In life nothing is static, so to regularly ask yourself, “How is the yes right now in this moment of our life?” is a vital component in a relationship. I am allowing myself a slightly masculine metaphor by claiming it’s like driving a car; even if we find ourselves in a high-performance sports car, if the road is full of sharp turns we can’t give full throttle—even the most finely tuned race car will tumble into the grass if we don’t mind how hard we push the gas pedal.

How awareness of our choices changes the game

Somehow scientists have concluded that we are aware of about 10 to 15 % of the choices we make as we go through a normal day. Let us for the sake of argument accept that for a moment. That means that for a majority of all the choices we make daily, we are not aware of them. I believe that that is the way it’s supposed to be. In my view, evolution favored the ability to allow some kind of autopilot to make a lot of the decisions we need to make without us being conscious about them. This means that if we are able to decrease the amount of so-called “autopilot decisions” by just a few per cent, we also have a chance to realize how much our upbringing and our society is governing our daily life and the choices we make in it.

A telling example that shows this mechanism is when we look at most relationships around us. In most relationships our partners are very much involved in how we as individ-

uals feel. For example, if my partner does something that upsets my feelings and makes me feel bad, the “normal” way is to challenge her and tell her to stop doing it because it does not make me feel good.

Let’s pause here ... what on earth can be wrong about telling the partner he or she hurt our feelings? Isn’t that what a relationship is all about—helping each other to feel good? Well, yes—it can be, but consider this scenario: Go back to that moment when you decided together with your partner that the two of you would enter a committed relationship. Imagine that you told your partner: “From now on I am making you responsible for how I feel and how I am doing.” And then your partner says exactly the same thing to you. Looking into your eyes, your partner smiles and says, “Yes, I agree, I also want you to be responsible for how I am feeling and doing.”

Being responsible for someone else’s happiness is a daunting challenge. So far, I haven’t met one single individual who has managed that over time.

I use this example to shed some light on what I call non-verbalized agreements between partners, and the subconscious choices we often make. There is nothing wrong with having an agreement like the one described above, as long as we are aware that we made that choice. If we are not aware of that choice, it creates internal discomfort over time.

Our life is created by our choices

We have a choice—we always have a choice. And I think one of the biggest choices we have in life is how we look at our own responsibility for exactly that: our choices. Regardless

of whether we are aware of the choices we make or not, we make them. And with those choices we also design the reality we are experiencing. This book was written during the COVID-19 pandemic, and I might argue that a virus was governing what my life looked like and that there was nothing I could do about it. That is one perspective; a different perspective is, “What do I make out of my life considering the circumstances?” The same thing goes for our relationships. There is always a choice regarding how we view things, and to take responsibility for our part in how things look like is a very healthy starting point. We are continuously creating the reality we experience, moment by moment through our choices. The beautiful thing about this perspective is that we can change our reality, we are the creators, and if we change our behavior, our reality changes and adapts. It might not change overnight but in time things will change if you change. If we instead expect others to change, we have no idea what our reality will turn out to be, and it’s quite possible that the reality we are longing for is not materializing if we depend on others to change.

Meaningful endurance, a key component needed when our partner struggles in getting their act together

Endurance is a vital component in any relationship. Without endurance we don’t have any patience and give up at the first sign of resistance. But it’s important to make sure that we exercise meaningful endurance, as opposed to meaningless endurance. The latter is quite common and very often leads to a point where we explode because we have been so patient for such a long time waiting for our partner to grow and

evolve into what we want—and then one day we find that we can't take it anymore. Meaningful endurance is quite different. It's us being aware that we are in a tight spot and that we communicate with our partner that we are experiencing a tough period. But we are also experiencing movement. The change might be slow but there is change and the relationship is evolving. As long as we can register a change towards the better, we won't drain our batteries and the energy that it takes to endure will likely not run out for a long time.

Emotional integration

I wouldn't say that Freud is the father of therapy. I think humans have talked to each other about their emotions since the beginning of time. But Freud did shape it into a somewhat structured process. To talk about our emotions, what has happened to us and what is upsetting us, is efficient, but if you ask me it's only efficient if the event that upset us happened recently. If instead the situation that is upsetting us happened a long time ago, just talking about it doesn't cut it. There are plenty of reasons for this, but I claim that our inability to remember correctly is a major factor. Another perspective of this is; if talking about an issue that happened a long time ago was so efficient, why can't therapists that rely primarily on talking leave a money back guarantee regarding the efficiency of this method? I know it sounds controversial, but the fact is that a lot of people stay in this kind of therapy for years without really transforming their lives.

There was a movement around the 1970's that recognized that talking about our issues wasn't the sole solution, and an alternative was created called *primal therapy*. Simply put, it's

about connecting to suppressed emotions and letting them out through wild screaming, intense crying, and so on. Just as with talking, primal therapy offers a temporary relief from our issues a short time after we have experienced them, but about a week later the same issues that are holding us back and bugging us are likely back.

The cultures in the East have a radically different approach to strong emotions emanating from experiences that have happened to us long ago. There are many different terms for this approach in these cultures, but I like the term *emotional integration*. It's the simplest of all strategies regarding overcoming unpleasant memories and emotions; you simply sit with the emotion, for example when meditating. When the emotion arises in your system and you notice it, you just allow it to be there, you don't push it away, you don't enhance it by telling a story of why this emotion is occurring, you just observe it with curiosity. After a while the feelings subside and dissolve. It takes some practice and patience, but this method has proven itself useful for far longer than both psychoanalysis and primal therapy. This approach has successfully been used for thousands of years in cultures that are in one way or another connected to Buddhism.

The trick here is to find the sweet spot in each of the methods, all have their specific benefits and applications areas. Personally, I believe in mixing all three methods—talking, primal therapy, and emotional integration—to maximize speedy results regarding personal growth.

Interesting things happen when we integrate our emotions, they transform and evolve into new personal traits. In the table to the right you find what some different feelings evolve into if emotional integration is practiced.

ORIGINAL EMOTION		ONCE FULLY INTEGRATED
Jealousy	→	Generosity
Sorrow	→	Thankfulness and care
Anger	→	Clarity
Arrogance	→	Contentment and ease
Fear	→	Vigilance
Insecurity	→	Healthy surrender
Doubt	→	Curiosity
Rage	→	Ability to overcome obstacles
Love	→	Overflowing love

Multitasking is a myth, even when it comes to women

I am bringing up the subject of multitasking for a very good reason. Almost all women that I talk to are masters in what is called multitasking. The problem is that when we want to bring about a change in our lives and in our relationships, multitasking is not necessarily to our benefit. To begin with: Multitasking is a myth. Our brain can do only one thing at a time, neurologists are in total agreement regarding this. What you're experiencing if you feel you can juggle multiple things at the same time, is something different. Instead, you are good at switching between different tasks, you are not doing them simultaneously even if it feels like it. This switching requires a great amount of energy, and your brain is working a lot on a very high frequency to shift between all the things that you juggle at the same time. If you are one of those individuals that are "good at multitasking," you probably also

experience that you get tired. And I would assume that you feel more tired compared to, for example, your male partner not being so “good at multitasking.” When we want to bring about change in our relationship, we need resources and if we are depleting ourselves and our resources by extensive multitasking, this process of growth will strip the best out of you. In short, life will be perceived as exhausting, or even more exhausting than what it already feels like.

It might feel provoking to be told not to multitask—because there is a reason why we multitask, right? If we don’t multitask things don’t get done, things spin out of control . . . But what if—just what if—the control we uphold with our multitasking isn’t really taking us to a place we most of all desire?

DO YOU KNOW what it is like to leave the life you know, to head out for a life far away from the safety of our home country? Leaving family, friends, culture, and perhaps even language behind, to step into the promise of something fantastic. If you are one of these brave souls, you probably also desire a life that is more than just functional. You want it to be F♥cking Fantastic! Right?

THIS BOOK IS written for you. Because the truth is that leaving the old familiar is also a crash course in personal growth. Taking that step together with a partner or finding a partner abroad invites for an even deeper reward, but it also brings challenges powerful enough to sometimes knock the wind out of you. Women and men have different mechanisms for coping with these challenges. This book is a manual for women, written by a man, addressing common challenges and providing powerful strategies on how to get your dream relationship with the man you already have.

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