

In chapter one she talks about **the lack of a working definition of love** and how our general confusion of what we mean when we use the word love is one source of our difficulty in loving. She comments on the lack of an ongoing public discussion and public policy about the practice of love in our culture and in our lives, which means that we still look to books as a primary source of guidance and direction. She examines the difference between **love as a noun and love as a verb** and examines the flawed ideas about love that society has created. She writes: ‘To truly love we must learn to mix various ingredients— **care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication**’. She says that most of us learn early on to think of love as a feeling only, and also, for most people it is too threatening to embrace a definition of love that would no longer enable them to see sustained love as present in their families and social contexts. Her working definition of love is influenced by M. Scott Peck and Erich Fromm’s definition of love as “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” Fromm continues: “**Love is as love does**. Love is an act of will— namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love.”

In the second chapter bell hooks discusses **early less than optimal attachments and trauma** and how we have often learned to think about love in relation to good feelings in the context of reward and punishment. She writes about how abuse and neglect, and shame and fear, compromise our capacity to give or / and receive love. This chapter ends: ‘Love is as love does, and it is our responsibility to give children love. When we love children we acknowledge by our every action that they are not property, that they have rights— that we respect and uphold their rights. **Without justice there can be no love.**’

In chapter three she talks about the importance of honesty and how **lying gets in the way of love and respect** and brings attention to the grave extent to which lying has become accepted and commonplace in our daily interactions. She writes that from early on often children are punished in circumstances where they respond with honesty to a question posed by an adult authority figure. However, trust and justice are important elements of healthy love connections between people. She discusses how lying and withholding the truth are means of **obtaining power over** someone or others. And that ‘to understand, for instance, why male lying is more accepted in our lives we have to understand the way in which power and privilege are accorded to men simply because they are males within a patriarchal culture. She supports that estrangement from feelings makes it easier for men to lie because they are often in a trance state, utilizing survival strategies of asserting manhood that they learned as boys, but this inability to connect with others carries with it an inability to assume responsibility for causing pain. She quotes Victor Seidler who stresses: “When we learn to use language as boys, we very quickly learn how to conceal ourselves through language. We learn to **‘master’ language so that we can control the world around us**. . . . we also know at some unspoken level how our masculinity has been limited and injured as we touch the hurt and pain of realizing how little we seem to feel about anything.” She ends the chapter saying that **the wounded child** inside many males is a boy who, when he first spoke his truths, was silenced by a patriarchal world that did not want him to claim his true feelings and the wounded child inside many females is a girl who was taught from early childhood on that she must become something other than herself and please others.

Chapter four discusses **commitment and constancy** as important prerequisites for sustained love. The focus is on our learning how we acquire feelings of unworthiness and the process of **developing deep self-love and self esteem**. She makes reference to Nathaniel Branden who highlights important dimensions of self-esteem as the practice of living consciously, self-acceptance, self-assertiveness, living purposefully, the practice of personal integrity and self-responsibility, which he defines as the willingness to take responsibility for one's actions and the attainment of one's goals and well-being. bell hooks expands on this and says that taking responsibility does not mean that we deny the reality of institutionalized injustice, but we can choose how we respond to acts of injustice and that in the face of barriers we still have the capacity to shape our destinies in ways that maximize our well-being. She also talks about how often the work place can be dehumanizing and the concept of **right livelihood**, money and the importance of conscious homemaking.

The fifth chapter evolves around the themes of **spiritual awakening, excessive consumerism** and people being motivated by mass suggestion to produce more and consume more, **spiritual emptiness** and prevailing tendencies to remove from those who are privileged the burden of **accountability** by disseminating ideas that suggest that the poor have chosen to be poor, have chosen their suffering, and so on. She refers to the teachings about love offered by Erich Fromm, Martin Luther King, and Thomas Merton that she believes differ from much of today's writing in that there is an **emphasis on love as an active force that should lead us into greater communion with the world**. She says: 'In their work, loving practice is not aimed at simply giving an individual greater life satisfaction; it is extolled as the primary way we end domination and oppression. This important politicization of love is often absent from today's writing.'

Chapter six is about building societies committed to a **love ethic** for living. hooks writes: '**A love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well**. To bring a love ethic to every dimension of our lives, our society would need to embrace change' and that 'refusal to stand up for what you believe in weakens individual morality and ethics as well as those of the culture.' We will only collectively regain **faith in the transformative power of love by cultivating courage to stand up for what we believe by being accountable in word and deed**. In this chapter she discusses fear because fear walls love off. She writes: 'In our society we make much of love and say little about fear. Yet we are all terribly afraid most of the time..... Yet we do not question why we live in states of extreme anxiety and dread. **Fear is the primary force upholding structures of domination. It promotes the desire for separation, the desire not to be known**. When we are taught that safety lies always with sameness, then difference, of any kind, will appear as a threat. When we choose to love we choose to move against fear— against alienation and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect— to find ourselves in the other.' She also provides a critical evaluation of the mass media and the images they provide, and supports that as consumers we have a choice over what we consume

In chapter seven the central theme is **greed** and how as a society we have reached the point of excessive greed been normalized, the societal ills that come with it like addiction, dehumanization, loneliness and an overwhelming sense of cultural brokenheartedness. She writes: '**Greed violates the spirit of connectedness and**

**community that is natural to human survival.** It wipes out individual recognition of the needs and concerns of everyone, replacing this awareness with harmful self-centeredness.'

Chapter eight is dedicated on **community and the role of patriarchy in undermining and destroying the larger unit of extended kin undermining the bigger family community.** hooks claims that by segregating the nuclear family from the extended family women became more dependent on an individual man. She writes about the importance of transparent communication in our interactions, of learning to love in friendships and the devaluation of friendships and that the foundation of sustained love in all relationships is the same. This chapter discusses how unhealed early attachment wounds tend to perpetuate the dysfunctional patterns, the process of forgiveness, the importance of solitude, generosity and service.

In the next chapter she continues on **how healing and individuation are necessary in order to relate and love consciously.** She makes references to Dan Kiley's work *The Peter Pan Syndrome: Men Who Have Never Grown Up*: "Though they have reached adult age, they are unable to face adult feelings with responsibilities. Out of touch with their true emotions, afraid to depend on even those closest to them, self-centered and narcissistic, they hide behind masks of normalcy while feeling empty and lonely inside." She discusses how **the struggle for power in relationships gets in the way of listening, compassion and love** because it is difficult for love to prevail in any situation where one party, either female or male, wants to maintain control.

Chapter ten is on **romantic love** and the false notions around total lack of choice. However, in order to be capable of critically evaluating a partner we would need to be able to stand back and look critically at ourselves, at our needs, desires, and longings and this is often difficult for reasons discussed throughout this narrative. It is suggested that the notion that we come to love with no will and no capacity to choose can prove destructive and stands in the way of our learning how to love. Also, a useful distinction seems to be made by John Welwood, whom she quotes, between what he calls "**heart connection,**" and "**soul connection.**" "A soul connection is a resonance between two people who respond to the essential beauty of each other's individual natures, behind their facades, and who connect on a deeper level. This kind of mutual recognition provides the catalyst for a potent alchemy. It is a sacred alliance whose purpose is to **help both partners discover and realize their deepest potentials.** While a heart connection lets us appreciate those we love just as they are, a soul connection opens up a further dimension— seeing and loving them for who they could be, and for who we could become under their influence."

Chapter eleven is an interesting chapter that discusses how in order to live fully we would need to **let go of our fear of dying through the love of living,** and in teaching our children and ourselves how to celebrate and love life; otherwise death will operate in the midst of life and not as the end of life. Loving empowers us to live well and die well and 'love is the only force that allows us to hold one another close beyond the grave.' There is mention in Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's insights from her work with the dying.

Chapter twelve is also of how **hope, independence and interdependency assist us in our healing journeys**. hooks discusses the importance of healing old wounds and shame, which breaks and weakens, and of releasing old baggage to reach wholeness, which comes with more responsibility

The last chapter also makes reference to **the politics of shame** and how in our culture we hear a lot about guilt but not enough about the politics of shame. Most of us are socialized to believe it is a virtue to be silent about pain. She refers to Alice Miller, the psychoanalyst who said: “Not to take one’s own suffering seriously, to make light of it or even to laugh at it, is considered good manners in our culture. This attitude is even called a virtue and many people (at one time including myself) are proud of their lack of sensitivity toward their own fate and above all toward their own childhood.” hooks continues that ‘As more people have found the courage to break through shame and speak about woundedness in their lives, we are now subjected to a mean-spirited cultural response, where all talk of woundedness is mocked. **The belittling of anyone’s attempt to name a context within which they were wounded**, were made a victim, is a form of shaming. It is psychological terrorism. Shaming breaks our hearts.’