

## **Joli Hamilton Project Relationship Audio**

Okay, Joli, welcome to the show. Thank you so much for joining me today. Thanks for having me, Emily.

It's always a pleasure to talk to somebody about love and relationships. I know. And you know, when we were chatting before we officially started recording, I was saying like, after reading through all your material, we could probably do like 10 different episodes on all of the work that you do because you cover such a wide range of topics, but you have a new book out and it definitely caught my attention because I think it's a topic that so many people can relate to.

And so I thought that that would be a really good place to start today. It is. And thank you for, for noticing that it's what I love about Project Relationship, which is the first book that I wrote and got published.

I'm working on two more right now, but that first one I wrote it out of the, my inspiration was that I have seven children and I woke up in a cold sweat one morning, realizing that I, something could happen to me before they are out having relationships. And I learned how to do love better the hard way. And I don't want them to have to learn it that way.

I would like them to have some actual wisdom past if they choose to pick it up. So wrote that down. And it, it is, it does make it a book that I really feel like even though it's specifically aimed at the woman entrepreneur, it's really for anyone who wants more out of life, anyone who like takes charge of their life and wants to do that with their relationships too.

Yeah, totally. And I love how you just described the inspiration for the book, because I think that's something we all want as parents is to find some way of making our children's lives better or easier or more meaningful than our own. And what a gift to be able to have something to pass down to them.

Exactly. Exactly. My own mother passed before she imparted some, some wisdom that I really wish I had now.

I, and it's funny to have that as the inspiration, but here we are. It's all relationships, right? Like totally all love is all love, parental love, all the other kinds. Yeah.

So before we dive into the book and what that's about, you said you have seven children. And as I was preparing for the episode and you have done a million different things. So it's no wonder you wrote a book on, you know, that's geared towards the entrepreneurial woman, because you definitely are one.

So could you talk a little bit about your backstory and how you got into the field? Yeah. So I got into sex education. So I'm a certified sex educator and I got into that sort of

through a back door.

I didn't realize I was doing it for years. I've been an entrepreneur since I was a teenager. I've really actually, since I was a kid, but I don't count those.

I start when I, when I got my first, you know, EIN, but I have done everything from own two different CrossFit boxes to be a fashion designer to being a child labor and postpartum doula. I've run some small cooperative school environments. And throughout all of that, one of the things, one of the themes was that frequently I was the person that people would bring intimacy questions to.

So sometimes that was in my doula work. And that's very specific. People have just given birth and it becomes an issue like, Oh, what do we do? But there were other times running a CrossFit.

So many people were dealing with issues of relationship and intimacy and struggles around their sexuality or around how to have more of what they wanted in bed. Straight up, just that. And I didn't, I hadn't realized I'd been preparing for that, but actually by having a first marriage that didn't go the way I wanted it to sexually and having married my high school sweetheart and then having that go that way. I educated myself out of it.

I didn't know who to turn to. So I read everything, got all the degrees and just kept studying. And so then I became that person who in every business I opened, brides and mothers and exercisers, they would ask, what do I do about this or that? And the common theme was, how do I get what I want? Just that simply, how do I get what I want? And I realized that more often than not, I understood what they really needed because I understood that the question behind that was, how do I know what I want? And if they, once they knew that now we could talk about, okay, now how do you ask for it? How do you create an ideal environment for it? How do you make sure that you're relating to your person or persons in a way that will endear them to you and help you co-create that, what do you want? And yeah, I, and then when I found out that my ideal target was entrepreneurs, it was because I realized, yeah, you've run 13 businesses.

Yeah. You might be able to speak to the woman or human. It really doesn't matter what gender you are, who is juggling so many things and still wants it to be juicy at home.

One who doesn't want to sacrifice that. Yes. And I think, you know, this day and age, we want it all, especially us, like we women, we want, you know, a lot of women, I shouldn't, I can't speak for everyone, but you know, it's wonderful that we have the option to have a family, to have a loving relationship, to have a successful career, but finding a balance between those things.

And like you said, keeping it juicy at home can be a real struggle. And I'm sure this is the case for you. It's certainly the case for a lot of my clients, you know, when they're

struggling with issues around sexual desire.

And I asked them when things took a turn, oftentimes it's after they had kids. And I think as we more deeply unpack that for a lot of women in particular, it's when they maybe left a career that was really meaningful to them and gave them a sense of purpose. And so I always encourage my moms who are not pursuing a career who have chosen to stay home to at least find something that is just theirs, whether it's a painting class or, you know, just something that is totally theirs that gives them a sense of meaning and purpose, because I don't think a lot of people realize how much of our identity is tied to the work that we do and how, you know, we cannot separate our sexuality from our individuality.

And so anything that we give up that defines us is going to have an effect on our sexuality. And I think that a lot of people end up finding that when they cut too many things out, the sex can kind of feel lackluster, you know, on the other hand, there are of course, people who are busting their butt at work and are just too tired and stressed out to create time for sex. And so it's like, where's the happy medium? Like, how can we have it all? Um, so let me just turn it over to you.

What is some of the advice that people will find in the book? Yeah. So I start people off with, um, looking back, looking back at, I, you know, with the presumption that you're currently with a partner, um, that's the book was written for people who are partnered right now and are like almost getting enough, but not quite though. I'd gotten plenty of feedback from people were like, Ooh, as a, as a look back over my last relationship, this is also a good reminder of what I need to look for going forward.

But I asked people to look back at how they felt when they first fell in love. And instead of asking them to kindle that desire, because I don't think that that is actually realistic, nor do I think it's helpful to be looking over our shoulders. I asked them to look very clearly at all of the qualities that they saw in their partner.

Um, often there, I hear people report things like, Oh, they were just so funny. They were so smart. They were so accomplished.

They could just carry a room. They could walk in and everybody would look at them or, Oh, you know what? They were just so tender and available. And I have the name, these qualities.

And then I introduced to them the idea of the golden shadow. So I studied Jungian psychology specifically. Um, and so the, the golden shadow is simply all of those qualities that we discarded early on because they weren't a good fit in our family of origin for whatever reason.

And a lot of them are great qualities. They're things that we do want to have in our life.

They're not... shadow isn't just things that we're ashamed of. It's also things we think we don't deserve. So I asked them to look back into their early relationship days and simply note what those qualities were that they fell in love with.

And then hold the mirror up. Those are the qualities they have within themselves, that if they nurture them, they fall in love with themselves as well. And then they can see the other.

And that we get this, this I vow relationship going again, we get the tension of the two separate individuals. And that is often what is missing when people feel like, yeah, it's just not working. It's because they've actually become too enmeshed in an idea of who each other are instead of letting ourselves be really separate and different.

Yeah. I love that. And I think there's, you know, this whole idea that opposites attract, and I don't really buy into that because I think a lot of times what we see as opposite of who we are in another person is actually just a quality that we have ourselves, but maybe we're not totally tapped into, or we feel like we can't express for some reason.

And so I really liked that idea of holding up the mirror and starting by looking within yourself to see what are you missing? Like not just about what your partner can do to attract you, but what can you do to make yourself attractive to yourself. Exactly. Exactly.

So like an example from my own life was when I met my, when I fell in love with my current anchor partner, I'd known him my whole life. But when I, when I saw him in that, in that romantic way, I thought he was just the smartest, most intellectually capable human in the world. I had like, I was raising him up on this pillar of intellect.

And yeah, he's bright and he's shiny. And over the last 13 years, as I've been with him, I have reclaimed my own intellect and I did it really literally. I went and got my doctorate and did the things that I meant to do, but never thought I was capable of because I was introduced to this idea that what I saw in him, I wanted to see in myself too.

And it's not about him not having them. It's, it's the both and he is intelligent. And I was only able to tolerate the idea of brilliant intellect out there.

And when I reclaimed it, honestly, it was like rebirthing myself. It was like having a whole experience of coming to know myself again. And yeah, did it make the sex better? Of course it did because I was in love with myself again.

Yes. Or maybe for the first time. Yes.

It's funny. As I'm hearing you talk about that, I feel like I have a very similar story in my marriage, you know, same kind of thing. I, you know, talk to my now husband about some of the dreams and aspirations that I had for myself.

I've always wanted to write a book. And, and he's like, well, just do it. Like as if it was no big deal.

I'm like, I can't just do it. I mean, like, what does that even mean? He's like, well, start thinking about what steps you need to take to like, just do it. And like, I'm here for you and I will support you.

And so, I mean, it's not out yet, but you know, so far I feel like I've make it, I've made really good headway and kind of like you, I went back and got my PhD and he has been a wonderful source of inspiration and support. But I agree with you. A lot of it is stuff I was probably fully capable of doing on my own.

But so much can be said for having an anchor partner or really, I think what it comes down to is like a person with whom we have a really secure attachment to only then do we, you know, have the confidence to take risks and explore the world. So talk a little bit about how we can turn to our partner, maybe even how to have an initial conversation with our partner about how they can support us or how we can use our relationship as a springboard from which we can achieve our dreams. Cause I think there is a way to have it all.

If you know how to go about it. Right. So I have a lot of children and so...

Seven of them to be exact.

Yeah. So, and I got some of them through my marriage, my current marriage but I've had them all altogether for 13 years. And it's, it is quite the full house. And when you say, how can we have it all, you know, or maybe we can, I think I got the best piece of advice when my first baby was just an infant and I was 23 years old.

And someone said, you can have it all. Absolutely. Just do it in sequence.

Just don't worry about having it all at once. And it was so freeing because what I realized is, oh, I'm 23. There's time.

And I mean, yes and no, cause Memento mori; remember you will die, but, but it freed me to actually be present to being a young parent. And I dove into that and I dove into that in, in such a way that I actually lost some of my partnership. I did exactly what you were describing.

I, I was mom, capital M and it became really hard to see my partner, really, really hard to see over this beautiful baby's head. Like I just, I couldn't. So how to start that discussion? I think there are a million ways.

One of them is to set yourself up for some decent success. So many times I hear people say, we talk about this all the time, but what they mean is they talk when they're in the

car and they're, they've gotten a late start to an event that they need to go to. And they all need to be happy, big air quotes around it.

And so in that 30 minutes that they're already stressed because they left late and now they're going to go be happy together. They try to have a conversation. That's not the moment.

That is not the moment. And we know that intellectually, but then, but then there we are. I still do it.

I'm like, oh, dang it. That's not the moment. So there are some really practical things, you know, check for halts, make sure nobody's hungry, angry, lonely, or tired before we have these big conversations.

And then the number one tip I give people is know what it is you want to talk about. Yeah. Often people come in with a complaint or a problem, but they don't have any idea what the fix is, nor do they have any idea what they want.

So your partner just receives that as complaining and yeah. I mean, just flip that script around. Is that how you want to be approached? So if you know what it is you want, and you might want to problem solve this with a therapist or a coach, how can I approach this, this specific thing so that the first two to three sentences I say are about building a bridge together and creating something we actually want and not just another complaint.

Because even in the throes of those early parenting days, my kids are much older now they're between 15 and 22, wildly enough. I can believe that. But even now there... there's so much going on.

There's so much happening at any one moment that it's so easy to lose track of, oh, if I'm not getting what I want, have I asked for it? Have I actually asked for it? And have I co-created a space for us to figure out how we do it? How do we make this thing happen? So let's just say we're talking about having more interesting sex, just something more interesting. It doesn't even need to be more, but we just want it to be more interesting. Okay, cool.

Do I know what interesting is? What do I want? And you know, that there starts this enormous unfolding of a conversation that can be juicy and erotic and really get us going. Or it can sound like, oh, it's just so boring. Nobody wants to hear that.

You just named the problem without really, like you said, identify... tapping in and identifying what it is ultimately that you want, because yeah, so many couples talk about wanting a more exciting sex life, but I think most of them don't really know what that means.

You know, it's hard. Sometimes you don't know what you don't know. And you might not have the vocabulary for it.

I do a lot of work with people in my coaching practice about growing their sexual vocabulary and understanding what their partner's sexual vocabulary is so that you're choosing words. There's an exercise in my book specifically about this, like go through the exercise and it's in chapter eight and you just cross off the words that you do not want to hear in the bedroom, circle the ones that are okay and put stars next to the ones that are going to get you charged up. Awesome.

It's so simple because most of us don't actually know what our partners want to hear, like the specifics. So then we clam up, we get quiet. We don't ask for what we want ahead of time, but then we don't know how to talk when it would be really a good moment to talk.

Yes. And I think that is the case for sex. And it's probably also the case for just about any other problem that we might have.

We don't really know how to talk about it with our partner. So a lot of people end up just shutting down. And in the book Project Marriage, you talk about how a lot of times the problems that you're having in your marriage aren't issues that are happening to you and your partner, but rather they are you and your partner.

And I think that, you know, that's, you know, just that little shift in language can totally change the way you see your problems. Number one, and shed some light on how you guys can start working together to solve the problems. You know, I think there's a lot of utility in externalizing the problem.

You know, yes, there may be a, an inter relational problem that is happening, but, you know, a lot of times once you look out and say, okay, this isn't just you versus me, it's us against this problem. What can we do as a couple to try to solve it? Right. And, and how can we make meaning out of it? Because I, I think I found almost all of my work on the idea that if I can make meaning out of something, that's a problem, something I'm not enjoying, it literally is not a problem anymore.

It is now functional in my life. And with my first husband, I really didn't understand how to do that. So problems would become about pointing our fingers at each other more often than not, even when we were really trying not to.

And I didn't want to do that the second time, but it took so much effort to get clear on the fact that relationships are systems, systems respond to change. I am the system. Great.

So start with me and start by, for instance, growing my vocabulary, naming the problem differently. Maybe I write this, this quote unquote problem down several ways to try to

wrap my head around. What is it that I'm actually saying and preparing myself to have a conversation that's different from what I had before.

I like to tell people, if you're ready to have a really life-changing conversation and you get into it and it's super awkward. Great. Awesome.

Because if it's awkward, you're doing something new. I love that. So lean into that awkward and say, well, at least we're not in pattern.

And now let's see where it goes. And there's lots of ways we can move from there. I love that.

Awkward is a good sign in this moment. Totally. And I think that's been a theme.

I feel like in several of these episodes that I've done, how, you know, people need to totally trash the idea of getting rid of this idea of awkward. Awkward is good. And I love what you said about that. Awkward means we're doing something that is not our pattern.

And obviously if there's a problem that you keep circling back to it's because you're in an unhealthy pattern. And so if you're doing something then that feels awkward, it's a good sign that hopefully you're breaking the pattern. If you shy away from it, you're just going to slip back into your same pattern and the same problem that you've always had.

If you have the courage to push through the awkwardness, I think you can see things in a whole new light.

Totally. And you have a chance to also create space for your partner to meet you in a new way. Yeah. Like it's often, and I'm guessing you see this all the time. Often one person is ready to change and the other either doesn't have any idea that a change is being requested or just isn't on board yet.

But if you can create that little bit of awkward without being in pattern, without getting stuck and just bear the tension of that weird, oh, we don't know what we're doing. I find that it opens up space for our partner to be different. And in that moment, I like to ask myself the question, what's my partner really doing right now? Look past what I think they're doing or the story I have in my head about what they're doing.

What are they really doing? And just sit with it for a minute while we're in this awkward space. Like, oh, I see them fiddling with their hands or I see them twisting their hair or they've gotten really quiet. They're uncomfortable too.

Okay. Maybe we're uncomfortable together. And again, that puts you back on.

We're on the same side. We're literally on the same side together. We both feel uncomfortable.

It's not such a bad place to be. If you want something new, you're going to get uncomfortable a little bit. Exactly.

So let's circle back to this idea of women, in particular, broaching this topic with their partner, having the conversation about maybe getting back into the workforce or reestablishing their careers. Maybe they have children at home. Can you talk a little bit and maybe a good way to do that would just be to talk about how you did it, balance marriage, career, children.

And the second part of that question, of course, is how do you maintain a juicy sex life when you've got all of those things happening? So you could just get into all of that. I think my listeners would be very happy. Yeah.

It's, you know, it's only in retrospect that I realized, Whoa, that was a lot of chainsaws to juggle at one time. Um, and it still is. I mean, I'm actually currently remodeling my home while these children all launch for college.

It's wild. It's just completely wild. But, um, my experience has been that the more complicated I let life be, and I just, I just allow it to be complicated.

And every morning and every night I anchor into my partner. Um, that's why I call him my anchor partner. We are technically married. Um, but more importantly, we are each other's anchor points and we've decided to... We're non-monogamous actually, but the important part is we anchor to each other.

So in the morning, we say something simple. Like I choose you. I choose me.

Let's do this together. Every morning. There's choice. So we've got that.

Then we go through this wild, complicated day. And again, at the end of the day, we anchor into each other with gratitude and wow, that was a lot. And just having those anchor points is a lot like when I had young children and I would anchor to the meals and I would, cause I was a stay at home mom, or at least I thought I was, I was running businesses the whole time.

I didn't even know I was an entrepreneur. Cause I was just like, what, doesn't everybody just run a couple of businesses while they're raising their kids? I just, yeah. Um, so I anchored to the meals in those moments I would get up and people would always say, oh, you have your hands full.

I'm like, well, I get up and I make breakfast. That's it. I get up, I make breakfast.

And as soon as the kids are seven years old, I get up and I teach them to make breakfast. Um, and I, I anchored them to these points in the day that were connective. You mentioned attachment earlier.

I was, I was so interested in having my kids be attached and have a secure attachment. Cause I didn't have one when I was growing up. Um, that I wanted to create these moments throughout the day where even though things were going to get chaotic, cause we had a lot of kids and it was pretty wild.

They knew that in these times when say food was sat on the table, like there you go. Now we're together. And in this moment of togetherness, everything's safe and everything's calm.

And so when we head back into, oh gosh, it's pre-nap time rush and mom now needs to meet two deadlines. And what do we do? The answer is we figure it out together. It's not one thing.

It's going to be, we just went through a pandemic. We're still in it to some degree. It's not going to be one answer, but I found that if I accepted the fact that that, that I was going to be in these big title waves and then anchored back in, it really was all doable.

I often, after I had my fourth child, I went back to doing overnight doula care. So I would stay up and take care of other people's babies at night. Then I would come home and take care of my own.

You were a unicorn.

So I don't think that was like the best case scenario for my, for my physical health. Um, when I trans... when I transferred from that to prospect work, it was actually easier.

But, um, what it showed me was that if I did have these, this acceptance present and my partner could also accept the waves, it really was an exciting time to be alive. So then there's the question of, so yeah, but how do you have the good sex? Like how really, especially when there's always somebody knocking at the door and there's always another thing to do. And I will say that the reason I have such a good sex life this time around is because the first time it didn't work. I tried everything I could. Um, and my partner didn't know how to meet me and I didn't have the vocabulary. This is literally why I decided to formally study sexuality. It's because no matter how much I tried, I couldn't seem to cross the bridge.

And when I started studying and applying it at home, I realized it was because we never actually created safety combined with excitement. And Esther Perel says it all the time, right? Like that tension of novelty and security. So that's what we nurture in our house all the time.

How do we close the door? I actively will put signs on my door that say we are snuggling. I mean, now, honestly, I can just use a sock. They're old enough.

It doesn't matter. Do not knock. But even when they were younger, once they were old

enough to be safely in the house, watching cartoons, absolutely, absolutely.

I believe it is a, a healthy thing for them to know we are taking our time together. This is what adults do. Same with showers, shower with my husband.

Why? Because it gives us close intimate time. We are going to have to spend anyways. And just the other day I realized, Oh, my kids are going to think it's completely, absolutely normal to just have that moment of intimacy with their partner bath or shower.

Yeah. They're not going to think two thoughts about it. And then that keeps the sex flowing.

Not because we have sex in the shower every day. Who has time? I don't every day. It's a way though, to keep the embers burning just a little bit, because it's still, it's still sexual without having sex necessarily the way that people traditionally think about it.

And I just love everything that you're saying. I love this idea of anchoring back to your relationship. I love the idea of these rituals, these daily rituals as also being an anchor within the relationship.

I love the idea of the family anchor because you're right. Life is going to be chaotic, but as long as you have something to pull you back down and ground you, that's when you can take a breath of air and remember who you are and remember what your relationship stands for, and then have the freedom and flexibility to go tackle all the life's crazy things and to pursue and chase your own dreams potentially. And I think what you're saying, it's also reflected in a lot of research.

You know, when we look at couples who maintain really high levels of sexual satisfaction over the course of long-term relationships, a lot of them talk about how they do these little daily rituals, exactly like what you described. And I always encourage all of my clients to have like a daily ritual, a weekly ritual, ideally like some kind of quarterly or annual ritual. That's even a little bit bigger than that because it reminds you who you are and what you want out of your relationship.

And to circle the whole conversation back, it reminds you why you fell in love with that person to begin with, because it is so easy to let the chaos of life disconnect you from one another. I have so many couples who are living like two ships passing in the night. So I definitely encourage anyone listening to talk with your partner about what you need to anchor yourself back down and what you need from your relationship to anchor your relationship back down as well.

I think that's super key. And I also love what you're saying just about valuing sex and intimacy. I mean, I always tell my couples, like what model do you want to be for your children on sex and love? Do you want them to grow up like you did maybe where you

grew up in a home that there just wasn't much love or intimacy expressed? Of course, a lot of kids are going to be like, ew, that's gross when they see their parents like kissing and hugging and stuff like that. But a lot of the people who I treat who did grow up in those kinds of families are so appreciative of it. And I think it always serves as a reminder that when your parents are happy and in love, it makes the rest of, it just makes everything else feel easier and it makes you feel so much more secure as an individual. And I think that's so much emphasis I think is placed on what we're doing as parents for our children and not enough on what we're doing as a couple to model healthy relationships and even sex for our children.

So I think that's something really important to think about. Yeah. And I find myself because people often do turn to me as a bit of a model for like, okay, how do you, how do you have all the kids? And, and I mean, I homeschooled my kids, like it was hard.

I get it. It's hard. I homeschooled them before those any pandemic.

It is hard. And when I think of my connection to my partner as the investment for my kids, well, it's really easy to make it the same way. It's easy to get up and drive them to Taekwondo.

Like I may not want to, but because it's for them, you do it. And when I remind myself that, and now my kids are old enough to give me the feedback that my second marriage is their model. It is how they have framed what caring for each other can look like.

Not what it has to, it's not like a strict rule, but we're now modeling that. And as, as I watched these children turn into adults and they can say that, I think, Oh, that was, that was a wise investment. Yes.

I love that. I'm going to say that again. When you see the connection you have with your partner as an investment you're making for your children, it's easy.

Yeah. Yeah. I think that, yeah, I think that's a perfect place to end our conversation.

Joli, thank you so much for joining me today. Where can people learn more about you and find your book? Oh, I am thrilled to have been here. Thank you so much for having me.

If people would like to learn more, well, you can listen to me a little bit on my own podcast Project Relationship. And that's actually me and my husband talking about how we do relationships. So if you haven't had a good model, what I hear most from listeners is I've never heard anybody have these conversations with their partner live.

And so if you've never heard them, let us be one model among many that... of what you might try when you do that awkward dance into something new. So you can find us anywhere at [projectrelationship.com](http://projectrelationship.com). You'll find all the links to that. And if you want to

find out more from me, you can go to [listentojoli.com](http://listentojoli.com) and get on my email list. Awesome. Thank you. And I'll be sure to link everything in the show notes.

So you don't miss a thing. All right. Until next time.