

# The Pleasure Experiment

Reclaim Your Pleasure  
& Liberate Joy in 14 Days

Presented by



Created by Joli Hamilton, PhD.



This book was originally meant to be a pleasure challenge but...

I've changed my mind.

I don't want a challenge right now.

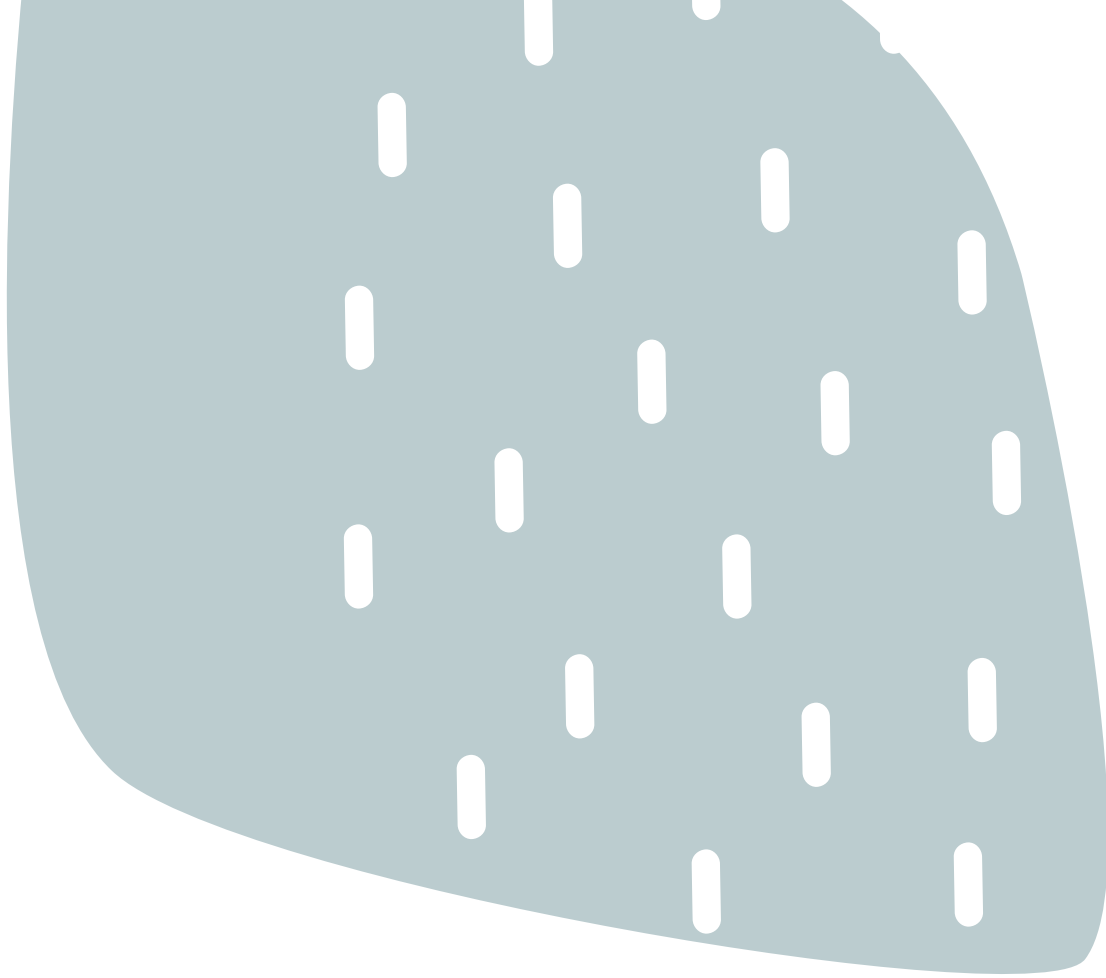
I've got challenges in my business, my teaching, with my family... not to mention a pandemic and a country in need of deep reckoning with its shadow.

I'm going to save my formidable challenge energy for that.

But I'm still digging the idea of following the thread of pleasure. I want more pleasure!!! How about you?

Instead of adding more challenge let's re-center the pleasure and let's do some pleasure EXPERIMENTS.

Let's get real about finding what works for OUR PLEASURE by playing and experimenting. After all, if we want to make a joy-filled life, we need to know what actually brings us joy.



# What is pleasure?

The dictionary defines it as “a feeling of happy satisfaction and enjoyment.” And, as a verb, one definition of pleasure is “to give sexual enjoyment or satisfaction to.”

In my work as a sex educator, I talk about pleasure a lot, so much that sometimes I forget about it in my own routines and habits. Is that weird? You know, it just becomes part of the fabric of my work but then life happens and sometimes I notice that I've lost track of my personal experience of pleasure.

But experience has taught me that I'm not the business owner, friend, partner, parent, or community member I want to be when I lose track of my pleasure.

I don't know about you, but even though I talk about pleasure every day, it can still wind up relegated to the margins of life.

My experience is that I get really good at treating myself once in a while. A lot of people in my practice talk about this kind of pleasure. The weekly walk in the park, the monthly massage or energy treatment, the bi-yearly weekend getaway for remembering how to have sex with abandon again. Maybe you even have a nice schedule of ways you indulge in something pleasurable... I love those things I schedule for my pleasure. But...

**The world is waiting for a revolution of pleasure and it happens one joy at a time.**

Pleasure is so much more than a treat. Pleasure is a full-body experience. A revelation. A renewal of our commitment to being in our bodies and enjoying this weird ride called life. Women are socialized in the dominant US culture to give, give, and then give some more. Then we hear about self-care and how important it is to "put our oxygen masks on first" so we add self-care to our endless to-do lists. I'm all for self-care, but when it becomes a treat to reward ourselves for all the giving pleasure loses its...uh...pleasure.

What if pleasure was an everyday experience, a practice?

Pleasure in all its forms is intensely personal.

Let's do an experiment to find the pleasures that work for you!

Over the next 14 days, your pleasure experiments will give you more insight into what really brings you pleasure.

This is no-pressure. This is an anti-challenge.

This is your invitation to play with pleasure the way a child does.

Lean into what feels good, give attention to the sensations of pleasure in your body, through every sense. Journal about your experiences or voice record your feelings and thoughts about it. These are also great potential speaking topics. The world is waiting for a revolution of pleasure and it happens one joy at a time.



## Day 1 Sound

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Our experiment kicks off with the pleasure of sound. We all enjoy different sounds, different volumes, different rhythms, different ways of taking sound into ourselves. Today, spend twenty minutes with sound playing to see where pleasure is for you right now. This is an experiment, there is no wrong answer. If John Cage's experimental music hits right for you, so be it. If you want to go outside and roar with your ancestors, go for it.

Play a Spotify playlist, play your favorite instrument, listen carefully to the sounds outside your door, sing in the shower, grab your kid's toy drum and stage an impromptu jam session. If you are sound averse or hearing impaired experiment with vibration. No matter how you are playing with sound through your ears is only one way to receive it. Feel the sound with your whole body, let it build, allow it to ebb and flow. Relax into your sound. If the sound you choose isn't bringing pleasure, shift to a new sound. Experiment with a variety and attend to your whole body's response. Breathe in the sound. Allow it to give you pleasure. Allow yourself to resonate with the sound.

## Day 2 Sight

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Beauty is one way to experience pleasure through our sense of sight but it's not the only way. You could also play with visual exuberance, the edge of overwhelm in viewing images that challenge you. In this space of exploration though, come back to the pleasurable sensation. Edgy sensations can feel pleasurable, but you don't need to push anything.

Indulge your eyes today. Maybe you are going to watch a sunrise, look through some photo albums that bring you joy, or haul out a batch of art and just gobble it up with your whole soul. Or maybe you want to play with the joy of sight by resting your eyes. If you are visually impaired, you might play with the imagination...the source of the greatest vision of all. Allow yourself to let go of what is supposed to be pleasurable. Today's experiment is a time for you to let go of your judgment about pretty and allow the deeper layers of color, pattern, and space to fill you with moments of joy.

## Day 3 Touch

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The human body is wired for touch. When we think about pleasure and touch we might instantly think about getting a massage or bringing ourselves to orgasm. Absolutely experiment with those if you can today and to bring touch into the foreground of pleasure today, let's try out some touch variety. This is an experiment you can do on your own and then bring to a partner if you want to.

Take twenty minutes to connect with pleasurable touch: scratchy touch, smooth silky back-of-your-hand touch, light touch, deep pressure, tingling tickling, soft caressing, tapping/percussive touch. A warm room and a bathrobe so you can really sink into this experiment is great but if you don't have all that try the time when you are showering. How do you like to shampoo your scalp? Fingernails, fingertips, a scalp massager? How does the water feel as it first hits your skin? Today is a time to play with being in your skin. All those nerve endings have the capacity to deliver pleasure from you to you. Happy pleasure day!



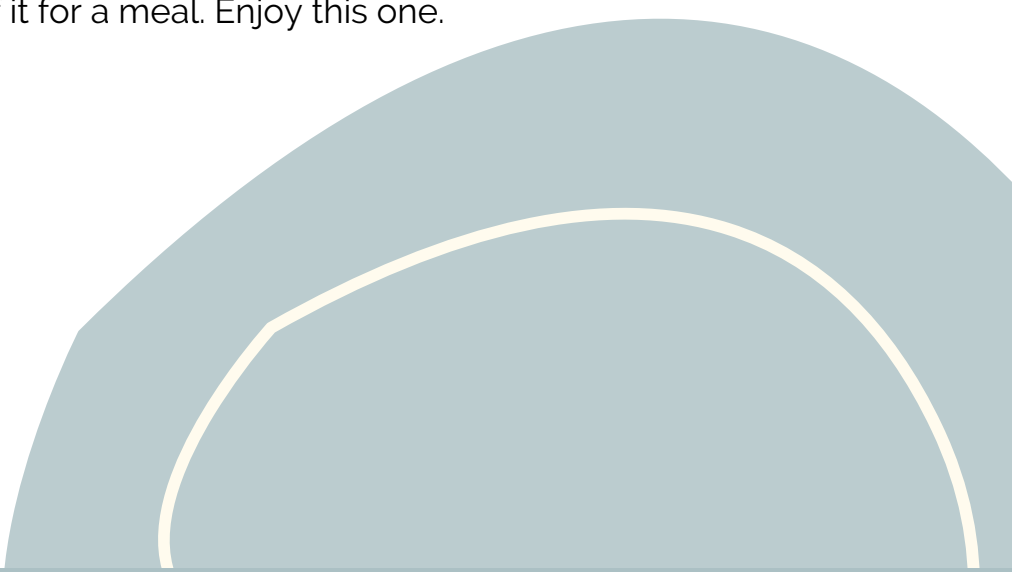


## Day 4 Taste

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Yum! Taste is one of the first ways we experience pleasure, right after touch. The taste of milk on a baby's tongue produces the blissed-out baby vibe better than anything. What tastes bring you pleasure? Experiment with this one in the realm of the less obvious. You probably know a bunch of your favorite tastes and a lot of them might be big, bold, and attention-grabbing.

Today, take a few minutes to slow down and let yourself really taste the subtle flavors of your coffee or tea all on its own, a raspberry, a bite of a crisp pepper, or a spoon of freshly cooked oatmeal. Taste is out the window when we are rushing so even if you are busy, experiment with the first bite of whatever food you eat today. Really taste it. Notice what you love about it. Enjoy it. Let yourself play with deliciousness. You might go even further with taste and cook something you've been meaning to try. Cooking can be pleasurable and playful if we step away from the chore-ness of it for a meal. Enjoy this one.







Once, there were Yankee Candle Stores everywhere I looked (I worked in a mall). You could watch people in there, opening jar after jar, sniffing in with lightly closed eyes. Cap after cap, they'd pop each one on a hunt to find something. Since the candles' primary feature is scent, of course they were selecting by smell not by color (most of the time... I did choose some vile-to-me smelling candle for a wedding shower favor once because it was sage green!) Those people were searching for a feeling... they were searching for pleasure.

Go on a smell-treasure hunt today! Around your house, outdoors, wherever you are, take a few moments to experience the smell of your coffee beans, your favorite soap, the scent of your sweetie's hair, hair, crack open your bottle of vanilla, the crisp air outside. Crush a few herbs between your fingers and inhale their goodness gently. Scents evoke memories easily. Where is there a pleasurable scent that takes you into a memory you love? What smell is so yummy you want to curl up with it right now? If you are scent-sitive (that pun is taking things too far, isn't it?) stick to scents found in the natural world and of course avoid your allergens.



## Day 6 Guilty(?)

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Today we are going to check into a shadow of pleasure: guilt. We have become so obsessed with productivity as the measure of our worth that we've lost touch with the purpose of pleasure. Its purpose is to feel good, to literally be pleasurable. In other words, all pleasure is tied to our joy. We've even created a little way to allow ourselves a pleasurable experience while still beating ourselves up: the "guilty" pleasure.

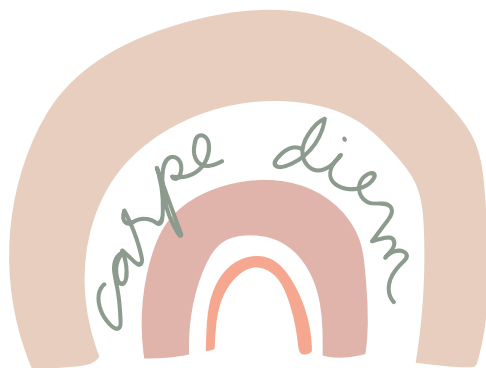
Today, experiment with something that you have called a "guilty pleasure". Perhaps this is something you have denied yourself not because it would harm you but because you feel judgement for enjoying it. Explore how it feels to take this pleasure in without guilt. Allow yourself to feel the pleasure in every cell. Breathe into the pleasure and follow it. Do you feel the pleasure it brings as a wave, a tingle, a shock, or a warm envelopment, something else?

## Day 7 Quirky

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We are all unique critters. What makes us different from each other is magic. Explore the pleasure you find in being yourself. Where do you find pleasure that you have believed was a little \*weird\*? Play with this pleasurable activity. Move into it. Is it weird? Whether you answer yes or no, so long as no one else is being harmed, isn't this part of your pleasure part of what makes you you? If you received a lot of social conditioning (and who didn't?) you might find that you don't want to be weird, you want to fit in, to feel a sense of belonging by being like "everyone."

But it's a gift to yourself and to your community to find your weird! Be more you and the details tend to take care of themselves. Celebrate your weird, quirky pleasure. Share it! Let's all embrace our \*weird\* because that is where our genius lives. Ancient traditions from Germanic and Greek cultures tied our wyrrd to our personal destiny. My own experience of leaning into my weird was the catalyst for finding a vocation that has me fired up and fulfilled. Experiment with a couple of your quirks and lean into your weirdness.



## Day 8 Altruistic

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I've heard it said that there is no such thing as an altruistic act. The premise of this argument is that doing good for others gives me joy and therefore I'm doing it for my own purposes, not the person I'm serving. But when we shift our focus to pleasure for pleasure's sake, we are inviting pleasure into our life and other's lives simultaneously. Women are conditioned to give selflessly, but what about giving with interdependence in mind? Joy for the one I am giving to and joy for myself in giving. Allowing ourselves to realize the interconnectedness of all beings is a powerful pleasure.


To experiment with altruism, focus on enjoying the sensation of giving with no expectation of return. This might be a compliment, a small gift, a letter of appreciation, or a hot cup of tea for someone. It could be a small donation, an errand run, or help with an online task (or maybe an outdoor task... we are still in need of social distancing, but we can creatively explore giving for giving's sake. Let yourself feel it. No need to post about it on social media, just dig into the sensation of pleasure. Did it show up in your body when you gave? Did you notice any resistance? Lean into the pleasure and feel where you can give and feel expansive.

## Day 9 Childlike

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This pleasure experiment is meant to wake up the parts of us that we have packed up or relegated to the attic of our life. Pull out an old pleasure... go way back... what was pleasurable when you were a child? If your childhood was traumatic or challenging and you don't wish to revisit it now, see if there is a childlike pleasure you wished you could try. Imagine what a three-year-old or eight-year-old would want to experience. A balloon to bat around, a rubber ball to bounce on the floor, dancing around the house without pants, smooshing their hands through dough. Maybe you'll paint your face, draw on your walls, do handstands in the grass.

Childlike pleasure isn't childish, it's fully-adult-you reveling in the sensations of a LIFE. Add some play to your day in little moments. Stick a note to your desk, your fridge, your T.V. with the word PLAY... then do it. Doodle in the margins of your notes today, grab a stick on your walk and twirl it in your fingers. Imagination is great play too, so allow yourself to daydream or fantasize!




## Day 10 Gentle

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Pleasure can feel like a big, overwhelming exuberance but it can also exist in the slow, drifting pauses where nothing intense is nearby. Today see how pleasure is waiting for you in a moment of gentleness. It might be an intentional moment: giving yourself ten extra minutes to get ready in the morning so you can move more slowly through your routines, choosing a softer music style to listen to today, or softly petting your cat in the waning sunlight.

Gentle pleasure might show up in a less expected place. Lean into pleasure by giving yourself a moment of grace when we make a mistake. Be gentle with yourself in the way you would a three-year-old child. Make a mistake? Notice your thought, if it is harsh, exhale that thought and allow your belly to soften. Talk to yourself-out loud if you are alone- just like you would a little one. This isn't about right and wrong at this moment. Move toward the feeling of pleasure, let go of the fear that you will fail if you aren't strict or harsh with yourself. Bring a few minutes of gentleness into your life at a time when you tend to tense up. Make gentle the word of the day and take three full deep breaths every time you go to look at your phone. Gentle. Pleasure is waiting for you.



## Day 11 Sexy & Erotic

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You didn't think I'd skip the sex aspect of pleasure, did you? Today we are going to experiment with pleasure in the erotic. That word covers a lot of territory. Anything that leads you toward a feeling of sensual or sexual pleasure is erotic. Playing with desire feels a little bit risky sometimes but remember this is an experiment! There is no right or wrong, just playing and noticing. Try tuning in to your body and asking it what it desires erotically. Does it want some time to fantasize, to masturbate, to dance, watch erotic videos, listen to Alicia Keys music? Maybe you are auditory, and you'd like to try listening to some consent-inclusive erotica at the app Dipsea (they have a free trial). Have you stumbled or struggled with orgasm in the past? You could check out the website OMGyes to learn more about orgasm for people with vulvas.

Maybe today's erotic pleasure is just about permission--the permission you give yourself to fully slip into the erotic space alone or with a partner with no guilt or shame, just gifting yourself some sexual liberation. One note: if you are asexual or in the asexual spectrum, erotic might mean something that looks different from what I'm suggesting. Finding pleasure might even feel like allowing yourself to learn more about what asexuality is and allowing yourself to authentically respond to your experience of sexual desire or absence of desire.

(I could talk about sex all day, and I have a ton of tips on how to connect the dots of your sexual selfhood. Hop over to my Instagram @drjoli\_hamilton to connect if you are struggling with today's pleasure experiment!)


## Day 12 Maker

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Humans \*make\* for lots of reasons: necessity, curiosity, security, legacy, and more. Making might look like art, craft, construction, invention, or what I call “smooshing”. Smooshing is what I’m doing when I’m making with no plan or purpose, no goal or desired outcome. I smoosh watercolor paint on paper, when I cobble together a thingamabob from wood and wire. I smoosh when I coalesce scraps of yarn into a Dr. Seussian thneed (you know, that thing everyone needs from The Lorax!), or when I make a mess just to feel myself making something.

The pleasure of making something is in the doing not in the finished product. Find a magazine to cut up or cook something you never even imagined out of whatever is in the back of the fridge. Make up a song about what you are doing or fold your gum wrapper paper into a tiny origami something-or-other. Today you will engage in the pleasure of making something with no expectations or necessity, just the joy of tinkering. This doesn’t have to be a big thing or take a long time. If you start making one thing and aren’t feeling pleasure, pause... check in with your body. Are you starting to imagine that this thing needs to be useful or needs to turn out “right”? Does your body long to feel another kind of making? Allow yourself to move with the recognition of pleasure or its absence.






## Day 13 Outdoors

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I'll take mine al fresco. Today let's find pleasure in the outdoors. It's pretty cold where I am right now but that cold is one of my great pleasures when I go for a long walk with the brisk wind whipping me into awareness of my body and then I get to warm up after. Pleasure double-team. Take a walk, sit on a park bench, find a corner of the yard, and look really closely at the details of a tree or leaf. What brings you into relationship with the outdoor world? What about water? I live near a river and even a few minutes of staring at the icy edge and the geese reminds my body that it is home here. Water can connect us to the more-than-human world even if we need to stay indoors. A bath, a foot soak, or a mindful shower could connect you to the pleasure of the outdoors while you remember that this water is the water of the ocean making its winding journey and stopping for a moment on your skin.

Wherever you are right now, chances are you are experiencing some restriction in your activities due to the COVID-19 virus. If this is a challenge blocking you from taking pleasure in the outdoors because you cannot get out with appropriate social distancing or you feel stressed when you are outside, try connecting with the outdoors in other ways. Maybe you can open a window and feel the air on your skin for a few minutes or watch a bird feeder or the pigeons and squirrels on the ground outside your home. Try a nature film, or some good old fashion Sir David Attenborough cinematography to bring the outdoors to you.




## Day 14 Flexible

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Movement is another path toward pleasure. It can happen on a physical, emotional, or spiritual level. Take some time today to experiment with flexibility in both mind and body. Gentle stretches, ambitious athletics, or playful cartwheels all remind us that we are dynamic systems. We flex and shift as the situation requires. We can be flexible in our ideas by listening to a new podcast or reading an author or poet we've never heard before. We can bring pleasurable flexibility into our bodies by improvising a dance (or a weird wiggle- your dance is yours alone) and see where your body wants to flex into and out of.

Take a 5-minute stretch break right now and see if you can find pleasure in a gentle opening of your arms and softening of your shoulders. When you lean, literally lean, in one direction or another, what do you feel? Does your body want to flex inward, curling up and enjoying the sensations of protective holding?

While we are wrapping up this pleasure experiment, enjoy the pleasure of knowing that you were flexible for many days now. You did things beyond your routine and took notice of where pleasure was within reach if you just noticed it.



You did it! Today marks two whole weeks of finding out what truly brings YOU pleasure. In an era where we are rewarded for doing more..more..more and selflessly giving until we drop, you decided to move toward pleasure. You are engaging in the process of reclaiming yourself.

**The world is waiting for a revolution of pleasure and  
it happens one joy at a time.**

Liberating your pleasure is revolutionary work. If you've been wondering if maybe two weeks is enough of this yumminess, I assure you that this is only the beginning. Pleasure will be a practice when you continue these experiments and take what you learned into your everyday life.

Did you find a few days particularly delicious? Make yourself some sticky notes and post the word from that day where you will see it again and again. Set a reminder in your phone to spend 5 or 10 minutes leaning into one of your favorite pleasures. FEEL it. Know, without a doubt in your mind, that PLEASURE is a worthy practice for its own sake. If anyone wants to argue about it, send them to me and you head back to your fun—I've got it.

Sharing this work is one of my great pleasures. I love hearing how you experimented, played, invented, and made stuff. How you got into your senses and noticed your yums. Thank you for spending time with yourself and for trusting me to guide you toward pleasure.



Dr. Joli Hamilton is a research psychologist, best-selling author, an AASECT certified sex educator, TEDx speaker, podcaster, and a sex & relationship coach. She holds a doctorate in depth psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute. She's spent years working directly with clients helping them improve their relationship skills and she's also a professor of human sexuality.

Her book *Project Relationship: The Entrepreneur's Action Plan for Passionate, Sustainable Love* is a concise guide to helping any busy person take their marriage from bored & disconnected to inspired & alive. Having relationship tools is great but putting them into action is key. This book makes it possible!

*Project Relationship* isn't just a set of ideas, it's the active process that Joli pieced together after some deeply challenging relationship history. If you'd like to hear more about what it all looks like in action, check out the *Project Relationship Podcast*, hosted by Joli and her husband Ken.

Joli has felt those wild highs and terrible lows that come with business ownership, marriage, divorce, and reinventing love from the bottom up. She is committed to helping people create sustainable, soul-nourishing relationships without sacrificing their career dreams.



You can find out how to work with Joli at  
[www.JoliHamilton.com](http://www.JoliHamilton.com)

Follow her on Instagram & Clubhouse @drjoli\_hamilton