

Couples who are satisfied in the marriage relationship are more likely to agree about expectations for their children. This provides consistent expectations to the children. In addition, children learn about attachment, love, and security from their early care givers. Parents who model positive relationship behavior contribute to their children's attitudes toward intimate relationships and long-term relationship stability.

Successful Marriages Handle Gratifications and Dilemmas Equally



I have been married a long time - forty-six years. And I have been married all this time to the same woman. Is this an accomplishment? Am I an authority on marriage? I think not. What I am an authority on is my marriage. Even so, I doubt I am aware of all the elements in our relationship, of the changes we have undergone, of the compromises we have made, and of our achievements as a married couple. It may seem strange to use the word "achievement." However, marriage is a relationship that can foster and facilitate growth in a number of areas personal developments, familial development, the development of a home. This is what I have in mind when I refer to the achievements of marriage.

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Love is an important aspect of marriage, but it ordinarily is not an achievement except in arranged marriages or marriages of convenience or financial gain. Love usually is, and certainly was for me, a condition for marriage. I won't try to define love. I know I was in love with my wife and she was in love with me. We still are in love with each other, although the form has changed. When we first fell in love, I had a difficult time restraining myself from kissing and fondling her whenever we were together, and we always wanted to be together. Indeed, that's why I married her-so we always could be together. These days the impulse to kiss and fondle her is more



In the USA there were approximately 2,230,000 marriages in 2005 -- down from 2,279,000 the previous year, despite a total population increase of 2.9 million over the same period. The divorce rate in 2005 (per 1,000 people) was 3.6 -- the lowest rate since 1970.

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restrainable, but it's still there. I suppose someone might say that it was not love in those early days, it was sexual attraction. There was a strong element of sexual attraction in our relationship. However, I have been sexually attracted to women without being in love with them.

We had a lot going for us when we got married. We shared a great many interests—some major, some minor, and all contributing to compatibility. We were both deeply interested in the same professional area. We enjoyed travel and sports. We both loved the theater and had similar reactions to movies, with my wife leaning a bit more to the refined and interpersonally sensitive and I leaning more to the shoot-tern-ups. Despite this bit of sex-typing, our tastes were (and remain) more often similar than different. Of course, we loved children and wanted to have a family.

A related compatibility that was not a factor in our courtship but was a positive factor in the marriage was my wife's interest and skill in cooking and my zest and delight in eating the meals she prepared. I had no idea my bride-to-be was such a wonderful cook. Today we both enjoy dining in fine restaurants, another factor undoubtedly contributing to the longevity of our marriage (although probably not to our individual longevities). However, this was not an initial element in our courtship, since we could

not afford fine restaurants. In addition, although I was aware of her beauty, intelligence, and sensitivity, I had little idea of (and, at the time, probably would not have been able to appreciate) the aesthetic sensibilities she would show in decorating our home and looking attractive in inexpensive clothes (all we could afford during the first ten years).

We also began our marriage with some impediments. Our respective families, although loving, were largely sources of problems rather than sources of support. A more fundamental difficulty was our youth and immaturity. I was unable to acknowledge that needs were not being satisfied because we lacked financial resources and my spouse was reluctant to express even modest wants. My view of life required behaving as a good soldier to overcome barriers and frustrations. This, coupled with my self-righteousness, defeated communication and led to spats, emotional outbursts, and a broken record of negative interactions played out in a variety of settings. We sought marriage counseling and individual therapy and finally separated after

almost thirty years of marriage. My wife initiated the separation. She took a particularly courageous step in leaving the house, in view of her attachment to home and discomfort with social isolation.

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The separation was a shock for me and for her and led to personal growth experiences for both of us. She became more conscious of her needs and better able to effectively articulate them. The impregnable steel shell that made me impervious to some messages, while not shattered, became at least porous. We reconciled after six months.

It took hard work and pain to break down barriers, deepen our understanding of each other, accept our respective failings, and broaden our consciousness. This personal development constitutes for me an important achievement of our marriage. One of the challenges of marriage is for spouses to develop a shared commitment and orientation without sacrificing each other's individuality. Also, for a marriage to work, one partner cannot grow while the other remains suspended in a never changing time warp of habits and biases.

The creation of a caring, interconnected family is another achievement of our marriage. We are fortunate in having thoughtful and accomplished children who are each creating their own families. A third achievement is a home we enjoy and that serves as a sanctuary and place of support as well as a place for entertaining family and friends. A fourth achievement is a network of friends whom we both care for and enjoy.

I think our marriage illustrates in many ways the gratifications afforded and dilemmas posed by the institution of marriage in our contemporary society. The betrothed are typically two individuals who have only superficial knowledge of each other (although they may believe otherwise) and who, while relatively young, make a lifetime commitment to share a home, raise a family, and remain together. They will have little control over most of the pressures, demands, and problems that life experiences inevitably pose.

In addition to coping with unpredictable events in the external world, the spouses need to adjust to each other's idiosyncrasies as they interact daily and as they change. Hopefully the partners will further develop, deepen, and expand their interests and sensibilities.

The marriage that allows for the gratification and support provided by sharing plus personal growth and development for each partner is the marriage we should all strive for. Reaching that goal takes constant work. And work on the part of the marital partners is what is required to make a marriage truly work.

