

DUCKLOW'S

THE GOOD MARRIAGE AND WHAT IT MEANS TO BE WELL- WED

IN SOME REALLY NICE MARRIAGE RESEARCH, JUDITH WALLERSTEIN AND SANDRA BLAKESLEE (THE GOOD MARRIAGE: HOW AND WHY LOVE LASTS)¹ OUTLINE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES IT IS TO HAVE A "GOOD" MARRIAGE. HERE ARE SOME OF THEIR THOUGHTS. AND HOPEFULLY IT WILL ENCOURAGE YOU TO BUY OR BORROW A COPY.

"A good marriage is built on a series of sequential psychological tasks that the man and the woman address together... the achievement of these goals is central to the success of the marriage... I have extended Erikson's classical concept of tasks that the individual must master. I suggest that the young married couple faces nine life challenges or psychological tasks... These tasks are not a set of instructions for achieving success, not a check list to be tacked up on the kitchen wall and marked off as each is completed. I have lifted these tasks out of the living experience of all marriages... they are inherent in the nature of marriage. They represent the essence of living together as man and wife and making it work." (p. 26)

"What is the work that builds a happy marriage? Here are nine psychological tasks that challenge men and women throughout their married life together. If the issues represented by each psychological task are not addressed the marriage is likely to fail, whether the couple divorces or remains legally married. The tasks begin at the start of the marital journey and are continually renegotiated. A good marriage is always being reshaped so that the couple can stay in step with each other and satisfy their changing needs and wishes." (p. 331ff)

¹ "The Good Marriage, How and Why Love Lasts" by Judith S. Wallerstein and Sandra Blakeslee, Houghton Mifflin, 1995.

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1. Detach emotionally from the families of childhood, commit to the relationship and build new connections with extended families.
2. Build togetherness through intimacy and expand the sense of self to include the other, while each individual carves out an area of autonomy. Without room for autonomy there is not true equality. Tasks # 1 and # 2 launch the marriage.
3. Expand the relational circle to include children, taking on the daunting roles of parenthood while maintaining the emotional richness of the marriage and balancing the raising of children and nurturing the marital relationship.
4. Confront the inevitable developmental challenges and unpredictable adversities of life (illness, death, natural disasters) in ways that enhance the relationship despite the suffering. Every crisis carries within it the seeds of destruction as well as the possibility of renewed strength for the marriage. Managing stress is key to having a marriage that can reinvent itself at each turning rather than one that becomes a shadow of its former self.
5. Make the relationship safe for expressing difference, anger, and conflict, which are inevitable in any marriage. All close relationships involve love and anger, connectedness and disruption. The task is to find ways to resolve the differences without exploiting each other, being violent, or giving away one's heart's desire. Conflict by itself does not wreck a marriage.
6. Establish an imaginative and pleasurable sex life that meets the needs and fantasies of both people requires time and love and sensitivity. Because a couple's sex life is vulnerable in interference by the stresses of work and by family life, and because sexual desire changes, often unpredictably, over the course of life, this aspect of the marriage requires special protection in order to flourish.
7. Share laughter and humor and to keep interest alive in the relationship. A good marriage is alternately playful and serious, sometimes flirtatious, sometimes difficult and cranky, but always full of life.
8. Provide emotional nurturance and encouragement that all adults need throughout their lives especially in modern isolating urban communities and high-pressure workplaces.
9. Draw sustenance and renewal from the images and fantasies of courtship and early marriage and maintaining that joyful glow over a lifetime. These images nourished by the partners' imaginations, must be combined with a realistic view of the changes wrought by time. It is this double image that keeps love alive in the real world.