

Further praise for *Contented Couples*

“We all need models, and in *Contented Couples*, you will find them. The book is filled with inspiration and practical tips illustrated by a wide range of true stories. The strength of Power’s work is the diversity of the population she’s interviewed. With the multiple racial, ethnic, economic and lifestyles represented, she delivers on her commitment to illustrating how couples can arrive at contentment. This book is a guide for couples that desire to deepen and expand the fulfilment of their partnerships.”

Linda Bloom, LCSW, co-author of *101 Things I Wish I Knew When I Got Married: Simple Lessons to Make Love Last*

“Anne Power is a sensitive and respectful guide in enabling eighteen couples to describe how they navigated the ordinary challenges of coming together and making a success of their relationships. Through the wisdom accrued as a therapist, she distils their stories into a treatise on the nature of love. This is a valuable resource for anyone considering commitment, anyone in a committed relationship wishing to understand more about their experience, and anyone whose role is to try and help them to do so.”

Christopher Clulow, Ph.D, Consultant Couple Psychotherapist and Senior Fellow of the Tavistock Institute of Medical Psychology

“Listening in to couples that thrive, who enjoy, trust and continue to develop is rare. Therapists tend to write about what needs changing, not what works. It is warming to hear these accounts of closeness in which obstacles are managed and which bring growth to both people.”

Susie Orbach, psychoanalyst and writer, author of *The Impossibility of Sex*

“Anne Power provides a diverse cross-cultural perspective on the elusive mixture of magic, logic and luck that is involved in the making of a happy marriage. She is a sympathetic writer, who lets the couples’ voices shine through as they reflect on their marriage decisions. Covering a range of marriage styles – from random romance to self-arranged marriages – this book shows how an initial spark of attraction can be transformed into an ever-glowing cosy fire that sustains a long-term relationship. A ‘must read’ for anyone who has ever wondered what makes a marriage work!”

Raksha Pande, author of *Learning to Love: Arranged Marriages and the British Indian Diaspora*

“Anne Power has written an elegant, comprehensive book about coupling. Absorb it to feel warm. Sit with it to evolve and deepen. Anne’s writing is captivating and so easy to fall into, just like some (but not all) relationships. The experiences of real-life couples and Anne’s compassion take you on a lovely journey of imaginative possibilities, while grounding you in the science of how and why love works. The confluence of magic, logic and luck come alive! Read this book to grow yourself and your relationship.”

**Dr. Kathryn Rheem, Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT)
Trainer and Co-founder of the EFT Cafe**

**To the couples who shared their stories,
my client couples who gave me a role in their
relationships, and to my husband and our
joint project of marriage.**

When I reflect, I find I am so dogmatic in my ways, at times
I stop experiencing life. She is that portal for me that allows
me to grow and mature and become
who I am, just because of who she is.

Faisal, The Tailor-made Couple

*Contented
Couples*

Magic, Logic or Luck?

Anne Power



KARNAC
firing the mind

CONTENTS

THE COUPLES	ix
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	xv
INTRODUCTION	xix
1. What makes a ‘Good-enough’ marriage?	1
2. Attachment and the couple bond	13
3. Random romance – looks like magic but may have logic	43
4. Arranged marriage – looks like logic but could be magic	67
5. Self-arranged marriage – can lay claim to magic and logic	95
6. Selection	125
7. Staying power	145
8. Support and challenge	181

Contents

9.	Fights, money and sex	221
10.	Conclusion	263
APPENDICES		
<i>I</i>	How this study was conducted	289
<i>II</i>	What have we learned that could be helpful to single people?	299
GLOSSARY		
REFERENCES		305
REFERENCES		311
FURTHER READING		314
RESOURCES		316
INDEX		317

THE COUPLES

Complete introductions for each couple are given in chapters three, four and five.

Random romance

Chance meetings

The Cold Car Park Couple ∞ USA

Dennis and Beatrice met when they were both living briefly in a small coastal town and worked in the same restaurant. When they finished their shift, they would linger in the car park, talking late into the night. They are both white Americans. When they met, Dennis was 26 and Beatrice was 20; they had been together 35 years when we spoke.

The Married in a Month Couple ∞ UK

Kosta and Anais met when he was backpacking in Latin America where she lived. After they spotted each other in the restaurant where Anais had a holiday job, their romance moved with speed. Kosta is white British and Anais is white Hispanic British. They were 31 and 30 when they met and I spoke to them 17 years later.

The Recovery Couple ∞ UK

Will and Olivia met in a pub where she was working behind the bar. A few years into their relationship, Will's drinking became a problem between them until their first child was born and he realized he wanted to tackle his addiction. The couple are white British. Will was 31 and Olivia was 24 when they met and I spoke with them 21 years on.

The Couples

The Commuter Couple ∞ UK

James and Rosemary met on a stationary train when a broken signal kept them together for two hours. They are white British and were both 19 when they met. When I spoke with them, they were both 70 and about to celebrate 50 years of marriage, making them the ‘oldest’ relationship in the sample.

Met through a friendship network

The Chip Shop Couple ∞ UK

Tim and Cathy were in a friendship group for three years before becoming a romantic couple. They are both white British. Cathy’s memory of a visit to a crowded chip shop illustrates how secure she has always felt with Tim. Tim and Cathy were 26 and 21 when they met and I spoke with them 37 years later.

The Helped by Therapy Couple ∞ USA

Diana and Kate were 22 and 23 when they met through a friendship group and had their first romance. They broke up and had a ten-year gap before becoming a committed couple in their mid-thirties. I spoke to them 20 years after that. They are clear that their relationship has needed effort, that they have benefited from therapy and that their bond is worth every bit of that investment. Diana is Eastern European Jewish (practising), Kate is Mexican American.

The Tandem Bicycle Couple ∞ USA

Stefan and Jennifer were introduced through a friend but without any thought that they would become romantic. They love riding their tandem together but josh each other about how fast or slow they should go. They are white Americans; Stefan’s parents migrated from Europe to the USA before he was born. Stefan and Jennifer met when he was 45 and she was 37 and they had been together 13 years when we spoke.

The Couples

Arranged marriages

Couple initiated

The Happy Scientists ∞ USA

Arash and Nazgol were introduced online by a mutual acquaintance, with the intention that Arash could give Nazgol advice on applying to postgraduate university courses in the USA. This intellectual bond remains important and they take great pleasure in lively debates over their professional interests. Arash and Nazgol are Turkish Americans; they were 27 and 25 when they met and they had been married for 10 years when we spoke.

The Favourite Cousin Couple ∞ UK

Kareem and Malika knew each other through occasional family visits. They are first cousins who developed very warm feelings for each other. At the ages of 24 and 19, their families were ready to suggest marriage partners but were happy with the couple's own plan. They are British Pakistani and Muslim and they had been married 19 years when we spoke.

Family initiated

The Tailor-made Couple ∞ USA

In **Faisal and Bisma's** families their mothers led the marriage process by lining up suitable partners for their children to consider. Faisal and Bisma each came to the table with some very particular criteria. They have been able to meet these by tailoring a marriage that incorporates a unique combination of individualistic and collectivist values. They are both Pakistani Americans and were 31 and 26 when they met. They had been married 17 years when we spoke.

The Suitable Couple ∞ UK

Bhavya referred to herself as a 'suitable girl' as she was describing an amusing confusion at the tea party where she **and Radhesh** were introduced. Radhesh was more intent on marriage than

The Couples

Bhavya and he courted her for eight months before they became engaged and then married a few months later. Radhesh and Bhavya were 23 and 20 when they met and had been married for 36 years when we spoke. They are British Indian Hindus.

The Young Ones ∞ UK

Moshe and Yael are by some margin the youngest couple I interviewed. They are ultra-orthodox Jewish British. They were 21 when they met and had been married for 7 years when we spoke. Their moniker references a British 1962 pop song from before their time and outside of their culture, but they were happy with this and I think felt recognized in the warmth and hope of the song.

Self-arranged relationships

Introduced by a mutual friend

The Grateful Survivors ∞ USA

Jane and Frank were 37 and 31 when they were invited on a blind date by a mutual friend. I met them 42 years later. They identify as white American protestants. They have faced severe health challenges, for themselves and in their family. They tell how their shared Christian faith has underpinned their commitment to their marriage and their readiness to count their blessings.

The Insistent Matchmaker Couple ∞ UK

Eric and Angela were brought together by a mutual friend and when their first meeting did not go too well, she kept persuading them to try again until after four tries they began dating by themselves. Ten years into their marriage they completed a questionnaire about their relationship and they both credit that with helping them immensely. This couple are both white British. They were 30 and 26 when they met and I spoke to them 39 years later.

The Couples

Introduced by technology

The Precision Couple ∞ USA

Thomas and Nora found each other on a dating website aimed at people seeking a long-term relationship. They were 29 and 31 when they met and I spoke to them 14 years later. Thomas is Hispanic and Nora is white. They share a meticulous style of communication, which was clear from their first online exchanges.

The Telepersonals Couple ∞ USA

Patrick and Nicole chose each other through the voice messages they had placed with the Telepersonals company and their moniker reflects this pre-internet dating technology. Patrick's first message to Nicole got lost in the system, so their meeting might never have happened. Patrick is African-American and Haitian, Nicole is Black Jamaican. When they met they were 25 and 24 and I spoke with them 27 years later.

Introduced by a marriage bureau

The Kitchen Drawer Couple ∞ UK

Steve and Lucy met through a careful agency introduction after each had had a painful earlier experience. They paid a fee to the agency, which made a psychological assessment and put them in touch with each other. For both this was the first date set up by the agency. This couple are both white British. They were 33 and 35 when they met and I spoke to them 22 years later.

Introduced through a special interest group

The Dads' Club Couple ∞ USA

David and Jacob met at a group for gay dads, or those hoping to become dads, which they had both attended with the specific aim of meeting a like-minded partner. They are white American, both born Jewish, and David is still practising. David and Jacob were 39 and 46 when they met and they had been together 18 years when we spoke.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I spent over three years searching for the couples in this book. When I found each couple, I felt eager to meet them, but my gratitude was even greater than my excitement. Their generosity has created this book and helped me grow as a therapist. These couples must remain anonymous, as must some of the friends and colleagues who offered their time and imagination in enabling introductions, whether directly to a couple or to an intermediary. I hope that the generous sharing by these couples will help readers who are seeking to deepen and sustain their relationships. There is one couple I can name, and that is Tori and Yvonne Settle, who agreed to be my pilot interviewees. I am hugely grateful for their faith in a project which at the time was embryonic.

My family, Jonathan, Ed and Ricky, have lived with me through the years of research and writing, patiently listening with interest and, when asked, making helpful reflections. Many colleagues and friends have listened to me dreaming about the book and their encouraging responses have sustained me.

Jenny Riddell was my supervisor through my first decade of working with couples and her combination of sharp insight, realism and exceptional kindness enabled me to grow in this work that I love. My colleague Sabah Kahn has shown respect and interest in the project from its conception. Her thoughtfulness and ability to stay with uncertainty, and her enthusiasm and encouragement throughout the years of research and writing have been crucial to my progress. In the USA, the contribution of my colleague Sandy Jardine has been essential to the challenging task of finding American couples to participate. Her belief in me and in the project has been sustaining, her introduction to people who might know people who could help has been crucial.

Acknowledgements

She modelled the go-getting for which my British upbringing has not equipped me.

Orit Badouk Epstein is the editor who published my first article on this subject and gave me a base to take the project further. Christina Wipf Perry, Emily Wootton and the team at Confer have made the process of writing a great pleasure. It is customary to thank the publishers, but I do so not out of duty but because Christina and Emily's warm encouragement and clear thinking have meant so much.

I would particularly like to thank these colleagues. Conversations with you have provided crucial insights and encouragement for the development of the book: Helene Igwebuike, Linda Cundy, Isabel Bristowe, Brett Kahr, Christopher Clulow, Raksha Pande, Fleur Brennan, Rosa Khorshidi, Luli Harvey, Cynthia Ransley.

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Although there are no clients in this book, they have been present in my mind throughout the writing. All of the couples with whom I have worked have helped me to learn. Like other therapists I wonder sometimes about my former clients, so if any are reading this book, I particularly hope it may be helpful to them.

I have not wanted to promote any one brand of counselling or therapy as I believe that almost all can be helpful when well delivered, but I would like to give particular acknowledgement to emotionally focused couple therapy (EFT) developed by Susan Johnson. Her recognition and description of the Pursuer-Withdrawer cycles informs my work with clients and thus how I have approached this research. Most importantly I wish to underline my debt to John Bowlby, who is referenced only once in the text but whose influence is evident on every page of the book.

INTRODUCTION

When the rail signal outside Clapham Junction malfunctioned on a June day in 1967, two young commuters used the time of enforced proximity to get to know each other better. More than 50 years on, they are sitting in my therapy room, not as clients but as interviewees and, like all the couples whose stories make up this book, they generously shared their experience with me. Both aged 20 when they married, they are a fascinating example of mate selection through romance which came good. Rosemary makes no bones about the risk they were running.

Rosemary: [*Her speech is fast, warm and mildly theatrical*] When we met we were both children really. When I look back it was appalling, we got married so young, I would *never* recommend it to anyone.

Annie: [*Speaking to James*] How did Rosemary fall in love with you?

James: It was the 1967 collapse of the signal box across the line at Clapham Junction that caused us to get married. [*Rosemary laughing*] Because we commuted daily and, on this particular day, we happened to be on the train together and there was complete chaos.

Rosemary: You're being avoidant, Annie's question was ...

James: But I'm enjoying the story.

Rosemary: All the trains going into Waterloo had to be diverted. You couldn't get off the train.

Introduction

James: You were trapped into it.

Rosemary: I was trapped ...

Most of the couples who come to see me for therapy found each other by falling in love. I am convinced that loving is essential for the journey of marriage, but my questions about love as a method of partner choice have multiplied as each year passes and so I have become very interested in other means by which people select a mate. In recent years I have occasionally seen those who met through family arrangement and have frequently worked with couples who met online. These last two groups, whom I think of as ‘arranged marriage’ and ‘self-arranged marriage’, are interesting because these people have used a different ratio of magic and logic compared with the more purely ‘romantic’ couples. The romancers usually make some use of their reason, but they place great trust in their experience of being in love – a feeling so overwhelming and convincing as to seem magical.

In this book we listen in on conversations from 18 contented couples. I interviewed these couples to hear their stories of how they met, how they ‘converted’ that spark to a commitment and how they sustained that commitment. These couples include those who met through random romance, arranged marriage and self-arranged marriage. They live in either the USA or the UK and they come from different ethnic groups and different faiths. I speak about *random* romance because we will see that romance was often, perhaps always, working in the other couples, but it was a *guided* romance. We will hear from some very different couples – heterosexual, gay and at different stages in their marriages. All professed to be contented – and appeared so. I say more about the sample in the Appendix, which outlines the dilemmas that I needed to address as I structured the study. In the course of the book, we will sift through the evidence and try to identify the ways in which magic, logic and luck each contribute to sound partner choice and lasting affection. By giving us an opportunity to see into their lives, the couples

Introduction

help us to reflect on our own attempts to form and maintain relationships.

My intention is not to pitch these courtship methods against each other but rather to hear what each method has to offer. At its simplest we might say that random romance has excitement and chemistry on its side, arranged marriage can have wisdom and caution, whereas self-arranged relationships may have a combination of both. The romantic view of relationships can encourage us to believe that there is one special person out there for us, the unique soulmate whom we will find if we search long enough. This book takes a different view: there are a vast number of potentially fulfilling matches for us; the specialness will hang on how we jointly build the relationship.

In the West we have come to see the romance marriage as normal, but it is of course a new phenomenon which arose from our deprioritizing community and from the primacy we have given to individual autonomy. With each successive generation we are expecting marriage to provide more of our needs, but this is beginning to look like a recipe for disappointment. The commercialization of weddings has pushed expectations to a new high with the implication, and even claim, that a wedding should be the happiest day of our life – which would mean that what follows is less satisfying.

Occasionally people in the West view the benefits of arranged marriage as so promising, they wonder whether that could be an option for them. More than one reality TV show has based itself on this principle and recruited participants willing to get married on the show. In an actual arranged marriage, the selection would be largely about making a connection between two families. On screen there may be lip service to creating a happy couple, but participants will have been chosen essentially for their dramatic potential. A few of these TV couples looked hopeful for a while, but the experiment does not seem to be working in the longer run. It seems to me that the missing link in that process is that the participants have grown up expecting to make a love match and it must be very hard to switch to the idea that marriage is a

Introduction

slow build. 'Falling in love' is a hackneyed expression. It is easy to overlook how aptly this describes gravity taking control – the loss of one's footing. For those embarking on an arranged marriage, the start is usually calmer and more sedate, more like entering a building carefully in the company of a surveyor, but later there may be a falling.

If falling in love can come *before* a romantic marriage but *after* an arranged one, how does that impact a couple's sexual connection? For the romance couples, sex will naturally arise out of passion, and this seems so 'normal' to western couples that, when the first intense passion dies, they can be quite lost. These couples need to find a new way of doing sex that is not wholly reliant on both being spontaneously breathless at the same moment. In arranged marriages sex is permissible from the marriage night but couples will negotiate their sex life very differently, and much will depend on how able the couple are to speak to each other about sex. In self-arranged couples any pattern might apply, including starting off with sex as a recreational exchange. In Chapter 9 couples give us insights into how sex can work in the different traditions.

Random romance and marriage by family arrangement have been used for centuries but self-arranged relationships are newer and, thanks to the sudden availability of online dating sites, have swiftly become normalized (Rosenfeld et al., 2019). We might think of them as a middle group who make use of magic, which they take from the romance tradition, and logical reckoning, which they have in common with arranged marriages. We will hear about the agency process that was operating in the late twentieth century and offered western couples some of the benefits of arranged marriage. In both systems we see the practical exchange of information enabling expectations to be matched, whereas the shared, deliberate goal of seeking a life partner recognizes that love may take time – selection need not be based on an instant 'hit'. We hear from two couples who accepted the offer of a friend to set them up on a date. Partners who met on the internet are slightly underrepresented because I wanted

Introduction

to interview couples who had stood the test of time. Of the two couples who met virtually, one pair met deliberately through an online dating site and the other couple met incidentally when an online academic connection blossomed into a long-distance romance, which was then formalized as an arranged marriage.

In this book I am not looking at forced marriages. I will only be speaking about couples who had freedom in making their partner choice. However, I recognize that freedom can be deceptive. All our internal worlds are silently ruled by implicit injunctions which were woven into us with our infant feeds. Whether we are the person who likes to please our parents or the one who rebels against them, there is a sense in which we are acting 'under the influence'. Many people marry through what we might see as 'naive consent' and this happens in all three traditions. Many make a commitment while under the influence of 'love chemicals' (which change our brain chemistry), others are cruelly seduced by online relationship scammers. In all traditions people may marry to escape the loneliness, or the stigma, of a single life.

In order to help the reader to get to know the 18 couples, and to recognize them as they crop up throughout the book, I have given each couple a moniker that reflects something distinct about their story. An overview of each couple is given in chapters three, four and five. Names and identifying details have been disguised and I say more about this in the Appendix. Some couples chose their own names and some were allocated by me. Every single one of these couples was a huge pleasure and privilege to meet and they have all contributed to my understanding. My decisions about how much to quote from each couple were based on a number of factors, including the degree to which their story could be safely anonymized.

Throughout this book the couples' stories provide a catalyst for our own reflections. For readers who would find it helpful, each chapter ends with questions intended to support curiosity. At points in the book where I give an opinion about a couple's dynamic, this will be purely conjecture and hypothesis. Neither

Introduction

I nor the reader is in a position to judge these couples, but we thank them for their great generosity in lending their stories to help us with our journeys.

One of the most recurring themes I heard was how much these contented couples enjoyed talking. We will come back to this many times, but here are the Happy Scientists conveying the pleasure they get from conversation.

Nazgol: [*laughing*] He's very good at finding a proof/reference for what he's saying, like let's say – it's just an example – Covid vaccination. If I say, 'Oh I think Covid vaccination is not for this, for this reason,' he's gonna bring you a whole lot of papers!

Arash: Evidence! [*smiling*]

Nazgol: And he's gonna convince you that this is this. So since we both have a science background, we trust science a lot.

Arash: Yeah.

Nazgol: For lots of things – parenting, relationship, everything, we go back to science. It kinda looks clichéd but we use science a lot in our everyday life. One of our friends was here and she was 'Whoa, whoa, what is this conversation? You're talking about physics in your everyday life? You have a discussion about physics?' I was like, 'Yeah? Sometimes we talk about math, physics, biology.' [*both laughing*].

The identity and assumptions I bring as researcher

When we lay out material or tell a story, the writer is inevitably directing the reader's gaze – I may leave you to join up the dots, but I have arranged them on the page according to my beliefs

Introduction

and priorities. A different interviewer would have garnered different stories as well as presenting them differently. What are the ingredients in my internal world that have influenced me in this task? I will answer that by saying a little about myself as an individual, as one half of a couple and as a couple counsellor. All of these contribute to my own ideas about what is appropriate in a couple and what 'contented' feels like.

I grew up in a white, socially privileged British family. In common with most therapists, my early emotional life was not so privileged and the consequent need for repair has driven me to understand relationships. In addition to the unconscious assumptions I may carry from my own family, I have been embedded and therefore shaped by a WEIRD (western educated industrialized rich democratic) culture and there will be many ways in which my writing reflects this. Of the three routes into relationships, arranged marriages are the least familiar to me and so these may be the stories where I am most at risk of either over- or understating a case.

As one half of a couple I have an investment in relationships being 'a good thing'; as a married person I want to believe that my own long-term heterosexual marriage, with its contentment and its struggles, has meaning. My husband is mixed race, and we met through random romance and selected each other by falling in love. Having married into a culturally diverse family four decades ago I have had many years to absorb and reflect on a different ethic of marriage which I have witnessed in the extended family. At around the time that my husband and I were married, several of his cousins were also getting engaged and wed through family arrangement. This was a new concept to me then but I saw it working well. If part of me was surprised at the idea of parental involvement and of love being something that comes after marriage, this was countered by what I saw. These highly educated and successful cousins, well able to think for themselves, found it appropriate to marry with parental guidance and they seemed to go on to have a range of relationships, some happier than others, just like the marriages of my WEIRD contemporaries.

Introduction

Finally, I am a therapist who is heavily invested in helping people repair relationships or occasionally decide to call it a day. I 'believe' in couples, and I believe in the opportunity these relationships give us to grow up. During the years I worked on this study, my day job continued. In my therapy room or by video call. I see clients who have come to doubt their relationship, who may be stung by an affair, saddened by their loss of sexual intimacy or just exhausted by arguing round the clock. Whatever brings them to me, a significant factor is how the unconscious of one person fits with the other – how their two vessels are connected beneath the water line. All relationships, if they have any depth, will have some darkness. The contributing couples were all able, and generously willing, to let me see some of that.

The research sample

I had two reasons for seeking couples who regarded themselves as content. First, I was interested in what makes a marriage work and what such couples are doing right. Second, I knew that the process of being interviewed and written about in a book could be unhelpful to a couple whose relationship was not in a steady place. Although it was very important to me that couples were content, my ways of assessing this were rule of thumb. When people kindly stepped forward to contribute, I did not want to bombard them with an intrusive questionnaire.

The reader may wonder, 'Would any couple in their right mind give away their story to a nosy psychotherapist?' It is true that many couples would not volunteer for this, but, for people who enjoy an opportunity for thinking aloud, it was an interesting project. Most people appreciate having a listening witness, whether for their experience of having survived through a struggle or for their experience of feeling fortunate, even blessed.

The self-selecting nature of the research gave rise to the most atypical aspects of the sample – 11 of the 36 partners who speak in this book are therapists or counsellors. The benefit of this was

Introduction

a group of people who are used to reflecting on their emotional process and putting it into words. I felt that this willingness and capacity to reflect was the quality that has helped them be both successful couples and great interviewees.

The sample is diverse in terms of faith groups because I was specifically seeking couples from different traditions. In other demographic variables the contributors were more homogeneous, with most belonging to the professional classes and with cross-cultural marriages and stepfamilies being underrepresented.

Because I invited couples to describe themselves in their own terms for social, ethnic and other identities, the words they use do not always correlate and the American and British couples have different ways of describing social class. In Britain the term 'middle class' may denote higher status and earning than it might in the USA. All except one of the couples was married and I will use the following terms almost interchangeably:

- marriage and long-term relationship
- partner and spouse.

The couples who kindly took part in this study have never been my clients. I found these couples via my professional and personal networks and met each couple for a single two-hour interview. Couples interviewed before the pandemic chose between my visiting their home or their coming to my therapy room. The later interviews were all on Zoom.

My thanks to these couples is profound – between them they have brought this book into being.

1.

What makes a 'Good-enough' marriage?



- ◆ If there were a formula for a contented relationship
- ◆ 'Good Enough'
- ◆ 'What about ...?'
- ◆ If a marriage is hard work, how much effort is too much?
- ◆ Rounding up
- ◆ Questions



Research confirms what common knowledge holds, that a long-term loving bond provides a platform for individuals to flourish and is perhaps the best way we know to meet our key needs for security and intimacy. In therapy rooms, marriage counsellors witness the extraordinary hard work that couples are prepared to do to enable their relationship to thrive – and for good reason: in seeking a mate we are hoping to find the security that we either had or longed for as children.

Jacob: [*Speaking initially with anguish*] It's the gift ... which is beyond anything I ever expected. I mean 18 years is ... it's the most wonderful thing that's ever happened [*now relaxed, speaking through tears*] and um, I feel that ... almost every day – just grateful that I found him and that he stuck with me, and we worked it out and he could see who I really was, despite a lot of rough edges and ... you know, things that were difficult. I just feel so blessed and er ... that's part of why those things didn't matter any more.

David: I feel fortunate as Jacob described, that I have been able ... it took me three tries [three previous serious relationships], but it's now been 18 years and we have this incredible family with our kids and their mothers. So I feel very blessed.

Annie: I think you are both describing marriage as a kind of healing?

David: And work – you have to work at it.

The Dads' Club Couple

What makes a 'Good-enough' marriage?

If there were a formula for a contented relationship

In my experience the most fulfilling marriages are ones where both people are growing and developing or healing. The essential test is thus: Does the relationship support growth and development in both partners as well as allowing them to be at times close and at times separate? How do couples achieve this? There seem to be three factors involved:

1. The individual element, the emotional health of the two potential partners.
2. The compound these two create when put together.
3. The environment that is impacting them.

We could say, first, take two individuals who each have enough belief that they are loveable and that they can love others. Second, let their underground connection form a new joint emotional landscape that allows growth and development in each partner. Third, let them be lucky. I will use this formula to help us understand what the couples in this book have been doing right.

The first element relates to the inner wellbeing and the attachment security of each of the two partners. Attachment is explained more fully in Chapter 2, but in essence we can say that people with secure enough attachment feel at home in themselves and treat themselves with respect and kindness. They are able to think about their feelings and thus retain some balance – even when in love. This capacity for rational thought, to think about

“People with secure enough attachment feel at home in themselves.”

feelings rather than be ruled by them, enables a secure person to have access to logic. Their clarity about who they are and their respect for themselves means that they maintain healthy boundaries in

relationships. Our earliest infant connections to our caregivers lay down the pattern for our relationship with ourselves and thus for our future relationships. This kind of early secure attachment is an immense blessing, but, even when we don't have that, a