

TIME

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The View

LONGEVITY RISK CAN ALSO COME INTO PLAY DURING YOUR WORKING YEARS.' —PAGE 20

HAPPINESS

Where even the best marriages are hard: in the middle

By Belinda Luscombe

EVERYONE WHO JUST GOT MARRIED is psyched about it. It's a new adventure with their best friend. Everyone who has been married for 50 years or more is psyched about it. They're living with their closest companion—it's been a trip, totally worth it.

But the people in the middle? They're, you know, they're *fine*. They perhaps didn't expect marriage to be quite as much work as it is. Not just the child care and the housekeeping and the paying of the bills but the parts that are supposed to be fun—the talking, the planning, the throwing a leg over. They had been led to believe it would feel easier, more natural. The thing about walking off into the sunset together is that then it gets dark and people stumble over each other.

Two new books seek to solve just this midlife marital ennui: *The Rough Patch*, by San Francisco clinical psychologist Daphne de Marneffe, and *Happy Together*, by husband-and-wife marital educators Suzann Pileggi Pawelski and James Pawelski.

The midlife crisis is an old cliché, with little support in research, but when we dismiss the happiness dip that people experience in their middle years, “we are actually trying to disarm the intensity of the forces we are grappling with,” de Marneffe writes. “The midpoint of life represents the moment of maximal conflict between our drive to seek external solutions to our emotional dilemmas and our recognition that ultimately they don’t work.” It’s also often the point where our tenacity falters and the neat selvages of our certainties about who we are and whom we chose start to fray.



GETTY IMAGES

PHOTOGRAPH BY HENRIK SORENSEN

Being married, as Ben Affleck memorably implied while accepting an Oscar for *Argo*, can be like pretending to make a film in a hostile land. There's a lot of negotiation, a lot of compromise and, sometimes, a hasty exit. And yet a 2017 analysis of tens of thousands of Britons found that marriage really keeps people happier, especially if they're best friends. So how do couples find a way through?

Happy Together's co-authors, who claim theirs is the first book to apply the principles of positive psychology to romance, advise "building and broadening"—expanding the life you have together—and "lengthening and strengthening," which sounds like a shampoo commercial but is about savoring the good things you have, a sort of slow-food movement for feelings. It's an old marital chestnut that couples in it for the long haul should find new things to do together and new things to do apart. Perhaps positive psychology might propel couples to try.

De Marneffe's book is situated in the highly therapized air of San Francisco. She too offers a two-pronged approach, which she calls "feeling with and thinking about." The response spouses need from each other, she claims, is one that is empathetic and then helpful. When a child comes home with a scrape, good parents don't just coo sympathetically. Nor do they just turn away and reach for antiseptic. They do one, then the other. Similarly, relationships thrive when partners can acknowledge each other's existence and feelings and troubles, then improve them. This also means that saying to your spouse, "I just want you to listen, not help," is actually depriving them of half the ways they can show love.

Ultimately, both books agree, the best way to right a marriage is everybody's least favorite: hold up your end of the couch. The Pawelskis spend half their book on cultivating character, becoming someone to whom another might like to be married. De Marneffe offers specifics: you become such a person by "facing authentic emotion and vulnerability." She encourages her patients not to settle, to have unflinching conversations about sex, money, drinking, bodies, desires, the whole mess.

If the only advantage of growing older is greater self-knowledge, then it follows that growing older with another offers a still richer source of feedback. (Presented, one hopes, with compassion.) And yet self-knowledge is not the point of spending life as a twosome. Marriage's chief promise is another-knowledge, a decades-long exploration, as de Marneffe says, of "a distinct being whose contour and interior you have yet to truly know." Like so many things, marriage is better when it's between good friends. □

DIGIT \$560 million

Money won by a Powerball player in New Hampshire, who has since sued the state to keep her name secret so that, according to her lawyer, she can have "the freedom to walk into a grocery store or attend public events without being known or targeted as the winner of a half-billion dollars"



GOOD POINT

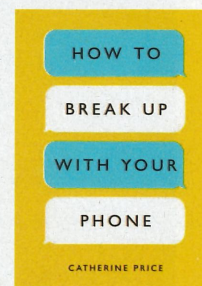
How to break up with your phone

ON AVERAGE, AMERICANS SPEND about a quarter of their waking hours staring at their phones. It's a love-hate relationship: many of us would like to reduce our screen time—but phones are so useful and enjoyable that we also don't want to just cut them out of our lives.

My book *How to Break Up With Your Phone* is an evidence-backed plan for finding a middle ground. One of the first steps? Install a time-tracking app like Moment or (OFFTIME) to gather data on your habits and track your progress.

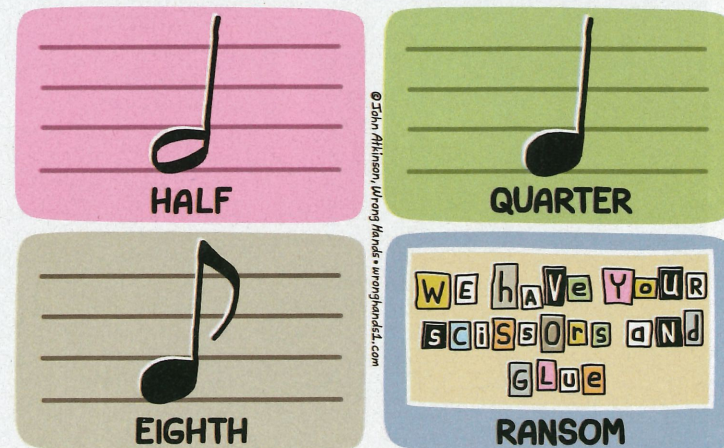
Another important step is to choose some phone-free activities that you enjoy—and set up your environment to help make them happen. Want to read more? Put a book on your coffee table. Want to play music? Take your instrument out of its case. Want to spend more time with a friend? Make real plans. Phones can be time-sucking temptations or tools for finding deeper fulfillment—it all depends on how we use them.

—CATHERINE PRICE



CHARTOON

Note identification



JOHN ATKINSON, WRONG HANDS