

More than One Way to be Happy: A Typology of Marital Happiness

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This study utilized observational and self-report data from 57 happily married couples to explore assumptions regarding marital happiness. Suggesting that happily married couples are not a homogeneous group, cluster analyses revealed the existence of three types of couples based on their observed behaviors in a problem-solving task: (1) mutually engaged couples (characterized by both spouses' higher negative and positive problem-solving); (2) mutually supportive couples (characterized by both spouses' higher positivity and support); and (3) wife compensation couples (characterized by high wife positivity). Although couples in all three clusters were equally happy with and committed to their marriages, these clusters were differentially associated with spouses' evaluations of their marriage. Spouses in the mutually supportive cluster reported greater intimacy and maintenance and less conflict and ambivalence, although this was more consistently the case in comparison to the wife compensation cluster, as opposed to the mutually engaged cluster. The implications of these typologies are discussed as they pertain to efforts on the part of both practitioners to promote marital happiness and repair marital relations when couples are faced with difficulties.

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The question that has dominated marital research since it was first posed by Terman, Butterweiser, Ferguson, Johnson, and Wilson (1938) is what distinguishes happily married couples from their unhappily married counterparts (Gottman & Notarius, 2002). To answer this question, researchers have invested an enormous amount of time and effort trying to understand various forms of dysfunctional behaviors found to characterize unhappily married couples (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The overarching goal of these efforts was to identify what made couples unhappy, as it was believed that this could help focus our interventions on these maladaptive behaviors to improve relationship outcomes. The overwhelming consensus from these efforts appears to be that couples' ability to manage conflict greatly impacts both the quality and the stability of their relationship (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Although the importance of these findings are bolstered by a considerable literature documenting the implications of marital conflict and functioning for individual, couple, and family well-being (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Karney & Bradbury,

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1995; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001), this line of reasoning reveals two underlying assumptions within the current literature about the nature of marital happiness.

First, it suggests that to understand marital happiness, we should focus our attention on distressed or unhappily married couples and compare them with nondistressed couples (Beach, Fincham, Amir, & Leonard, 2005). Defining marital happiness based on what distinguishes the 20% of marital couples experiencing marital distress from the remaining 80% of nondistressed couples can lead to the erroneous conclusion that the absence of distress is in fact marital satisfaction (Weiss & Heyman, 1997). The factors that lead to a happy relationship may not be the simple inverse of those factors identified as contributing to distress (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). The reason as to why an understanding of marital happiness remains unclear may have to do with the literature's second assumption. Namely, happily married couples are happily married for the same reasons. Qualitative work on happily married couples, however, suggests that this argument may not only be specious, but patently false (Bachand & Caron, 2001).

Therefore, in a plea to researchers to move the marital literature away from this focus on "marital (un)happiness" (Madhyastha, Hamaker, & Gottman, 2011, p. 292), Heyman (2001) suggested that we need to next focus on what happily married couples actually do when faced with conflict. Accordingly, this study sought to capture marital problem-solving in its many forms within a sample of happily married couples. The premise of this study is that there is likely variability among happily married couples, such that happy couples may respond differently to conflict when it arises. Understanding this variability can inform therapeutic efforts by building on the multiple strengths couples employ in their daily interactions. We used a typology approach to explore the heterogeneity of happily married couples' conflict behaviors, which we validated using a set of well-established relationship correlates. This approach allows for the possibility that the features of marital happiness may be connected in different ways for different couples, which can be obscured by methods focused on aggregate-level associations (Zarrett et al., 2009). Furthermore, it enables us to explore marital happiness at the level of the dyad rather than at the level of the individual. Uncovering couple-level differences may provide information about relationship dynamics that can inform our efforts to foster happiness.

What Do We Know About Marital Happiness?

Although there are a variety of approaches that have been used to capture marital happiness and its determinants, Gottman and Notarius (2002) suggest that focusing on observations of marital processes is especially critical for uncovering complex relationship dynamics that may lie beyond the usual awareness of even the most sensitive spouse. This focus is well supported by Thibault and Kelley's (1959) behavioral theory, which suggests that we should focus on couples' interactions to understand the quality of the relationship and its eventual stability. As further explicated by Weiss (1984), behavioral theory proposes that spouses' positive behaviors enhance their global evaluations of the marriage, whereas spouses' negative behaviors lead to their diminished evaluations of the marital relationship. Over time, these evaluations of their marriage affect the marital relationship through their influence on subsequent interaction behaviors (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Thus, behavioral theory would suggest that in a happy marriage, each satisfying interaction justifies continued satisfaction, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of further satisfying interactions.

We focus in this study on the behaviors that have been most consistently linked to marital happiness: more positive and fewer negative conflict responses and support. Conflict responses refer to the range of methods couples employ to maintain, escalate, or resolve conflicts when they arise (Ridley, Wilhelm, & Surra, 2001). The most commonly cited

difference between happily married and unhappily married couples is that the former display more positivity and less negativity during conflicts. Happier couples utilize positive conflict responses that help resolve the conflict and encourage more productive communication, whereas distressed couples utilize negative conflict responses that shut down the lines of communication (Fincham, 2004). Cohen, Geron, and Farchi (2010) found conflict resolution best differentiated among three types of enduring couples, suggesting that even among stable couples, conflict resolution is likely to take different forms across marriages. Finally, individuals with supportive spouses are more maritally satisfied than those who lack spousal support (Acitelli & Antonucci, 1994). Theorists suggest that support may be critical for marital happiness, as it promotes intimacy, an essential component of close relationships (Cutrona, 1996; Prager, 1995). Although there may be common threads within happily married couples, there is still likely to be variability in the reasons for couples' marital happiness that warrant further exploration (Timmer, Veroff, & Hatchett, 1996).

Although no studies have sought to examine variability within happily married couples, a study of 51 couples in long-term marriages (at least 40 years) by Cohen and colleagues (2010) revealed three types of enduring marriages. Based on couples' responses on the ENRICH, Cohen and colleagues found evidence of: (1) *vitalized marriages*—characterized by strengths in both the intrinsic (e.g., conflict resolution) and extrinsic (e.g., relations with family) aspects of marriages; (2) *satisfactory marriages*—characterized by strengths in the extrinsic, but not the intrinsic aspects; and (3) *conflictual marriages*—characterized by difficulties in both aspects. Showing remarkable convergence with these findings is a set of studies that looked at variability in couples across the full range of marital satisfaction. Fitzpatrick (1988), Gottman (1993), and Kamp-Dush and Taylor (2012) all found evidence for three types of married couples: (1) *traditional or validator couples*—characterized by a willingness to engage in conflict combined with a strong emphasis on the importance of their relationship; (2) *separate or avoider couples*—characterized by a high amount of conflict avoidance and very low relationship enthusiasm; and (3) *independent or volatile couples*—characterized by high amounts of conflict and passion. Both Gottman (1993) and Kamp-Dush and Taylor (2012) found that these three types of couples had stable marriages, which is not surprising in light of Cohen et al.'s (2010) work on enduring couples. Given this stability, Gottman speculated that these couples were likely satisfied with their marriages, as different people tend to be drawn to and enjoy different kinds of relationships.

Although these findings certainly reveal that there are multiple types of stable marriages, we know that marital happiness and marital stability are not always linked (Hawkins & Booth, 2005). To understand what types of marriages couples can thrive in, we need to focus on identifying different types of *happy*, stable marriages. A study of 15 couples in happy, long-term marriages (e.g., over 35 years) by Bachand and Caron (2001) suggests that we have good reason to suspect that happy marriages should be just as diverse as stable ones. The authors stated that there were as many, if not more, factors contributing to the satisfaction and stability of the marriages as there were couples in the study. Furthermore, not only may the elements of a happy marriage differ across couples but they may also differ within the same couple. It may be shortsighted to assume that what contributes to one partner's satisfaction contributes to the other's, especially considering the literature on gender differences in the meaning of marriage (Frank & Kupfer, 1976). Ridley and colleagues (2001) found evidence of asymmetry between a number of husbands and wives in their conflict responses. Husbands and wives with asymmetric conflict responses had lower marital satisfaction than couples in which both spouses utilized positive conflict responses. It thus appears that to understand what might explain couples' marital happiness, we need to utilize an analytical approach that addresses the heterogeneity both across and within happy marriages.

The Current Study

In light of previous work acknowledging the variability across marital relationships, this study recruited happily married couples to explore different configurations of marital happiness and their marital functioning correlates. This focus on happy marriages is novel, as scholars have suggested that 90% of the extant literature on marriage and couple relationships has been examined through the filter of problems or divorce (Olson, Olson-Sigg, & Larson, 2008). This filter obscures our understanding of happy marriages and makes it difficult to understand how couples thrive despite challenges (Tulane, Skogrand, & DeFrain, 2011). To address this gap in the literature, we sampled happily married couples raising young children. Research has found that the presence of young children can lead to declines in marital satisfaction (Bradbury et al., 2000), and thus by examining a stressful situation that is normative for most couples, we can begin to understand the different forms that happy marriages can take even when the relationship may be tested. Furthermore, given the interest of policymakers in promoting stable, happy marriages to facilitate children's development (Horn, 2004), taking a typological approach offers a succinct way to summarize the most salient characteristics of a happy marriage to promote well-being and development (Miller & Olson, 1990).

Given the novelty of this research, we had no hypotheses regarding how many types of couples to expect, although research on stable marriages has found three types of couples (Cohen et al., 2010; Gottman, 1993). To validate the typologies that emerged from observing couples' problem-solving and support during a conflict task, we focused on spouses' self-reported marital quality (happiness, love, conflict, ambivalence, maintenance, intimacy, commitment) as potential correlates, as these have been identified as critical markers of marital health (Moore et al., 2004). Although we expect the couples to be uniformly satisfied, spouses may vary on the other correlates both across and within different couple types. Using the couple as the unit of analysis and exploring the correlates of these typologies, we can address the larger question of whether there are different, but equally beneficial, ways to be happily married, and whether our efforts to promote marital happiness may need to be more flexible to accommodate this variability.

METHOD

Participants

Fifty-nine married heterosexual couples were recruited as part of a study examining marital relationships and children's development. Families were recruited from birth records, newspaper advertisements, and bulletins at churches, day cares, and preschools. To be eligible, spouses had to meet three criteria: (1) self-identify as happily married; (2) have a child who was 2 years of age; and (3) have an older child in preschool or early-elementary school. Husbands and wives were predominantly white ($n = 54$ and 56 , respectively). Husbands' and wives' modal income was \$70,000 to \$80,000 and \$10,000 or less, and 57% of the couples were dual-earner. Husbands and wives were, on average, approximately 37 years old ($SD = 4.6$) and 35 years old ($SD = 4.5$), respectively, and all had at least some college education. Couples were married for an average of 8.7 years ($SD = 3.4$) and had 2 children ($SD = .6$, range = 2–5). Complete data were available from 57 couples, as two couples were excluded due to incomplete data.

Procedure

Families participated in two laboratory visits, each lasting around 3 hours, occurring about a month apart from one another. The first visit was devoted to marital interaction

and the second to family interactions (e.g., parent-child, sibling). At the end of the first visit, spouses received a packet of questionnaires that assessed individual, marital, and family functioning. Couples were given \$50 as compensation and each of the participating children received a toy.

Measures

Observed marital clustering variables

During the first visit, couples participated in a 15-minute marital-problem-solving discussion that was coded using the Interactional Dimensions Coding System (ICDS; Kline et al., 2005). Six dimensions were used to assess each spouse's verbal and nonverbal behaviors during the discussion: problem-solving skills, communication, denial, dominance, conflict, and support. Each spouse's behavior was coded on a 9-point scale ranging from 1 (extremely uncharacteristic) to 9 (extremely characteristic). Ratings across three 5-minute intervals were averaged to create a single score for each dimension. Coders were trained until inter-observer agreement was 80% or higher. Correlations between independent coders' ratings on a subsample of the tapes were good ($r_s = .68-.90$). Problem-solving and communication were highly correlated for husbands, $r = .80$, $p < .001$, and for wives, $r = .74$, $p < .001$. A *positive problem-solving* score was created and reflected couples' ability to convey their thoughts and feelings in a constructive manner while trying to define a problem and work toward a mutually satisfactory solution ($\alpha = .84$ for wives; $.89$ for husbands). Ratings for conflict, denial, and dominance were correlated for husbands, $r_s .58$ to $.78$, $p < .001$, and wives, $r_s .43$ to $.74$, $p < .001$. A composite, referred to as *negative problem-solving* score, was created by averaging husbands' and wives' scores on conflict, denial, and dominance and reflected couples' engagement in conflict, as indicated by high levels of dominance, denial of the problem, and antagonism ($\alpha = .77$ for wives; $.86$ for husbands).

Marital correlates

To assess marital happiness, couples were asked to evaluate how happy they were with their marriage on a 7-point scale from "perfectly unhappy" to "perfectly happy." To assess marital quality, spouses completed Braiker and Kelley's (1979) 25-item Intimate Relations Questionnaire. Using a 9-point scale, couples evaluated their marriage on four dimensions: love (e.g., "How close do you feel to your partner?"); conflict (e.g., "How often do you and your partner argue with one another?"); ambivalence (e.g., "How confused are you about your feelings toward your partner?"); and maintenance (e.g., "How much time do you and your partner spend discussing and trying to work out problems between you?"). Alphas ranged from $.62$ to $.84$ for wives and $.66$ to $.82$ for husbands. To assess intimacy, couples completed Lemieux and Hale's (1999) 6-item intimacy scale. Using a 7-point scale, couples were asked to evaluate how much intimacy they had (e.g., "My spouse and I self-disclose private thoughts and information to each other"; $\alpha = .81$ for wives; $.86$ for husbands). To assess commitment, spouses completed the 15-item commitment to spouse scale from the Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DCI; Adams & Jones, 1997). Spouses rated on a 7-point scale assessing their personal dedication to their spouse (e.g., "I am completely devoted to my spouse"; $\alpha = .87$ for wives; $.79$ for husbands).

RESULTS

Types of Happily Married Couples

Intercorrelations and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1. Although there is no generally accepted rule regarding minimum sample sizes for cluster analyses, our final

TABLE 1
Correlations and Distributional and Scale Properties of Independent and Dependent Variables (N = 59 Couples)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Positive Problem-Solving (C)	.10	-.20	.61**	-.05	-.03	-.23†	-.09	.13	.08	-.00
2. Negative Problem-Solving (C)	-.27*	.12	-.43**	-.37*	-.33*	.34*	.38**	-.05	-.30*	-.23†
3. Support (C)	.57**	-.40**	.35**	.25†	.20	-.33*	-.33*	.18	.30*	.13
4. Marital happiness	-.05	.00	.08	.58**	.64**	-.36**	-.56**	.16	.51**	.51**
5. Love	-.10	-.07	.11	.77**	.39**	-.50**	-.69**	.19	.60**	.73**
6. Conflict	-.09	-.14	-.08	-.53**	-.48**	.38**	.63**	.38**	-.35**	-.44**
7. Ambivalence	.41	-.09	-.06	-.73**	-.71**	.43**	.43**	-.03	-.43-	-.62**
8. Maintenance	-.31*	-.02	-.15	.21	.40**	.20	-.15	-.05	.34**	.05
9. Intimacy	-.16	.10	-.09	.33*	.45	-.24†	-.45	.42**	.49	.39**
10. Commitment to spouse	-.08	-.14	.04	.37**	.68**	-.28**	-.62**	.27*	.45**	.37**
M(SD) husband measures	4.88 (1.13)	2.19 (0.95)	4.01 (1.00)	5.55 (1.09)	7.45 (0.93)	3.69 (1.27)	2.49 (1.22)	5.83 (1.12)	5.78 (0.87)	6.06 (0.59)
M(SD) wife measures	5.23 (0.85)	2.49 (1.04)	4.05 (0.90)	5.51 (1.05)	7.73 (0.85)	3.59 (1.27)	2.05 (1.18)	5.90 (1.17)	5.90 (0.85)	6.15 (0.69)

Note. C = Clustering variable. Correlations above the diagonal are for the husband and correlations below the diagonal are for the wives. Correlations across spouses are underscored and in the diagonal.

† $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

sample size is within the recommended range for studies examining six dimensions. Guidelines suggest having around 10 cases per clustering dimension or 2 m cases, where m equals the number of clustering variables (Mooi & Sarstedt, 2010). Given that our sample size was appropriate, we used a combination of hierarchical and nonhierarchical clustering, based on recommendations by Henry, Tolan, and Gorman-Smith (2005). Hierarchical methods (Ward’s (1963) minimum-variance method) determined how many clusters to expect and where to place the initial clusters. Nonhierarchical clustering methods then used the predetermined number of clusters and the hierarchically determined cluster centers to assign observations to the clusters. Using the specified number of clusters and the starting points, the K-means algorithm was performed to assign each case to the cluster to which it was most similar based on the distance from the cluster mean. After all cases were assigned to a cluster, means for each variable in the cluster were then recomputed. Cases were then reassigned again based on these new means to the newest cluster. This iterative process was repeated until no cases changed their cluster membership. Finally, with theoretically and empirically related variables not used to form the clusters, the discriminant validity of the cluster solution was examined with analyses of variance (ANOVA). These analyses were undertaken to bolster confidence that meaningful clusters of happily married couples can be empirically derived from observations of couples’ conflict interactions.

Using Sarle’s cubic clustering criterion (CCC), the pseudo-F statistic, and the pseudo-T² statistic, we identified three distinct types of happily married couples: mutually engaged couples, mutually supportive couples, and wife compensation couples (see Figure 1). Couples in the “mutually engaged” cluster (n = 17; 29.8%) were distinguished from the other clusters by their mutual expression of both positive and negative behaviors. Although both spouses expressed equal levels of positive problem-solving and, to a lesser extent, support, these couples also expressed more negative problem-solving than did the other couples. Couples in the “mutually supportive” cluster (n = 24; 42.1%) were characterized by both spouses engaging in high levels of positive problem-solving and support and a relative

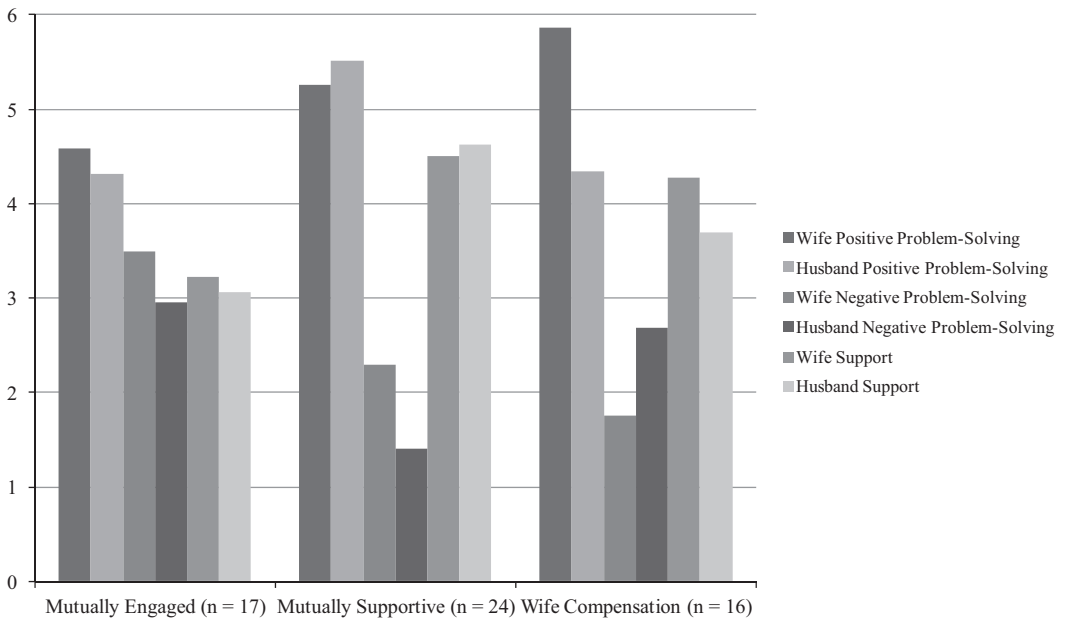


FIGURE 1. Happily married couple typologies

absence of negative problem-solving. The final cluster ($n = 16$; 28.1%) was characterized by spousal discrepancies in both positive and negative problem-solving, with wives more likely to engage in positive problem-solving and less likely to demonstrate negative problem-solving than their husbands. Based on these differences and the fact that the wife positive problem-solving and support was in the face of the husband's lack thereof, the final cluster was labeled the "wife compensation" cluster.

A series of 2 (spouse) by 3 (cluster) repeated measures MANOVA with spouse as a repeated factor and cluster as a between-group factor confirmed that the three couples differed on the clustering variables (see Table 2). For positive problem-solving, post-hoc analyses revealed that the mutually engaged couple demonstrated less positive problem-solving than the other two couples, which did not differ from each other. Post-hoc analyses on the cluster \times spouse interaction revealed that these differences were most pronounced when comparing the wives. These analyses showed that spouses in the wife compensation cluster differed in their positive problem-solving, with wives demonstrating more than husbands. There were no within-couple differences in the other clusters. Looking next at negative problem-solving, those in the mutually engaged couple demonstrated the most and those in the mutually supportive demonstrated the least, with those in the wife compensation cluster in the middle. Again, post-hoc analyses on the cluster \times spouse interaction revealed that this pattern was driven by the wives. In contrast with the findings for positive problem-solving, these analyses revealed significant within-spouse differences in all three clusters. In the mutually engaged and mutually supportive clusters, wives were observed to engage in more negative problem-solving than did their husbands, whereas the opposite pattern characterized those in the wife compensation cluster. Finally, for support, we found no evidence for a spouse \times cluster interaction. Post-hoc analyses only revealed cluster level differences, with the mutually supportive cluster spouses demonstrating the most support and the mutually engaged couple demonstrating the least, and the wife compensation cluster again in the middle.

Different Types of Happily Married Couples: Meaningful Differences?

To validate the cluster solution, variables not used to form the clusters but likely to vary across the clusters, here self-reports of marital functioning, were examined using a series of 2 (spouse: husband/wife) by 3 (cluster) multivariate repeated measures ANOVAs, with spouse as a repeated factor and cluster as the between-group factor (see Table 3). In line with the preliminary analyses, there were significant main effects for spouse for marital love and ambivalence, with husbands more likely to report ambivalence and less likely to report love than were wives. Surprisingly, there were no spouse \times cluster interactions for any of the correlates.

Analyses revealed no differences based on cluster membership for marital happiness or love, providing further confirmation that the sample was indeed happily married. Although all couples were happily married, comparing the interaction-based clusters on self-reported marital quality indicated that these marriages were different. Analyses revealed significant differences in conflict, with the mutually supportive couples reporting the least conflict. Spouses in the wife compensation cluster reported significantly higher levels of ambivalence and lower levels of maintenance and intimacy than did the spouses in the mutually supportive cluster. The mutually engaged couple fell in between the other two clusters on these marital indices. Finally, there were no differences based on cluster membership for commitment, suggesting that all couples were committed to and happy with their marriages, whatever form they may have taken. To note, clusters did not significantly differ on the number of years couples were married, the number of children they had, education, income, or whether the couples were dual-earner or single-earner.

TABLE 2
Means (and Standard Errors) of Self-Reported Marital Correlates as a Function of Cluster Membership and Spouse

Correlate	Cluster Membership			Spouse		Cluster × Spouse	
	Mutually Engaged (n = 17)	Mutually Supportive (n = 24)	Wife Compensation (n = 16)	Wife	Husband	F(1, 54)	
Positive problem-solving	4.45 (.16)	5.39 (.13)	5.10 (.16)	5.24 (.10)	4.73 (.14)	10.66**	11.24**
Negative problem-solving	3.22 (.12)	1.85 (.10)	2.22 (.12)	2.51 (.11)	2.35 (.09)	41.67**	14.12**
Support	3.14 (.13)	4.57 (.11)	3.98 (.13)	4.00 (.10)	3.80 (.11)	35.49**	ns

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$.

TABLE 3

Means (and Standard Errors) of Self-Reported Marital Correlates as a Function of Cluster Membership and Spouse

Correlate	Cluster Membership				Spouse		
	Mutually Engaged	Mutually Supportive	Wife Compensation	<i>F</i> (2, 54)	Wife	Husband	<i>F</i> (1, 54)
Marital happiness	5.38 (.24)	5.75 (.20)	5.28 (.24)	ns	5.43 (.14)	5.51 (.15)	ns
Love	7.43 (.18)	7.80 (.15)	7.39 (.18)	ns	7.67 (.11)	7.41 (.13)	3.64 [†]
Conflict	4.02 (.25) _a	3.37 (.21) _b	4.24 (.25) _a	4.10 [*]	3.98 (.17)	3.78 (.17)	ns
Ambivalence	2.46 (.25)	1.91 (.20) _a	2.67 (.25) _b	3.31 [*]	2.13 (.16)	2.56 (.16)	6.11 [*]
Maintenance	5.78 (.19)	6.07 (.15) _a	5.54 (.19) _b	2.36 [†]	5.82 (.16)	5.77 (.15)	ns
Intimacy	5.76 (.17)	6.11 (.14) _a	5.43 (.17) _b	4.64 [*]	5.82 (.11)	5.72 (.12)	ns
Commitment	5.98 (.13)	6.22 (.11)	6.01 (.13)	ns	6.11 (.09)	6.03 (.08)	ns

Note. [†] $p \leq .10$, ^{*} $p \leq .05$, ^{**} $p \leq .01$.

Bolded values represent distinguishing features of the cluster. Means with different subscripts differ significantly ($p \leq .05$) as tested with a Tukey's post-hoc comparison.

DISCUSSION

Over a century ago, Leo Tolstoy began *Anna Karenina* with the famous statement that “[a]ll happy families are the same, but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” Although it appears that the literature on marital and couple relationships has largely embraced Tolstoy’s observation about the homogeneity of happy families (Olson et al., 2008; Tulane et al., 2011), we found that happy couples may also be happy in their own unique ways. Drawing upon behavioral theory, we found evidence of three different types of couples emerging based on their problem-solving behaviors. Two of the types of couples were more symmetrical in their problem-solving (mutually engaged, mutually supportive) and one was more asymmetrical (wife compensation). When looking at the marital correlates, it was the asymmetrical couple, but not the more negatively inclined mutually engaged couple, that reported more conflict and ambivalence and less maintenance and intimacy. This suggests that efforts to isolate the predictors of marital success are remiss in separating couples into happily married versus unhappily married, given that neither may represent a cohesive group in terms of marital behaviors or processes.

Before discussing these findings, it is important to reiterate that even though different clusters were identified in these analyses with different levels of marital functioning, spouses in *all* clusters reported equally high levels of marital happiness, love, and commitment. This suggests that we may need to move beyond marital satisfaction as a primary indicator of marital functioning, as it may be obscuring important and potentially meaningful differences between couples. It should be noted that given the size and demographic composition of our sample, the following discussion is not intended to offer an exhaustive definition of marital happiness. If different typologies could be identified within this relatively small, homogenous sample, then clearly more research is needed to uncover the heterogeneity that exists in larger, more diverse samples. Furthermore, it is important to consider that these couples are at a particular intersection of individual (mid-30s), relationship (around a decade of marriage), and family development (families with preschool children). Although the cross-sectional nature of this study prevents an empirical examination of the developmental stage of these happily married couples, these marriages need to be considered within their particular constellation of developmental factors to better understand the happiness of these specific marital unions.

The Mutually Supportive Cluster: The Exemplar of a Happy Marriage?

Although no cluster emerged as the uniformly positive or optimal marital cluster, the mutually supportive cluster was associated with greater marital quality, whereas this was more consistently the case in comparison with the wife compensation cluster, as opposed to the mutually engaged cluster. The question then is what features might set the mutually supportive cluster apart from the other clusters? The distinguishing characteristic of the mutually supportive cluster appears to be that both spouses were highly supportive of each other during the conflict task. According to Cutrona (1996), this support may have contributed to their marital happiness through its promotion of intimacy, which leads to increased closeness, understanding, and a sense of connectedness in the relationship (Prager, 1995). Support behaviors appear to be vitally important to facilitating intimate communication, because they allow the individual to feel appreciated by their spouse, who responds in a positive, understanding, or self-revealing way to self-disclosures (Cutrona, 1996). Indeed, given that both spouses demonstrated equal levels of support in this couple, it appears to have encouraged reciprocity in their conflict interactions.

Providing more support may have also enhanced their marriage through the reduction in conflict intensity. Many of the behaviors that happy couples exhibit and distressed couples fail to demonstrate fall under the rubric of support. For example, partner responsiveness, encouragement, and effective problem-solving are all part of the definition of support offered by Gardner and Cutrona (2004). Spouses in the mutually supportive cluster should thus by definition have less intense conflicts, because they are more likely to demonstrate behaviors that contribute to conflict resolution, as opposed to conflict escalation. Given that the mutually supportive couple had the most positive problem-solving as well as the lowest levels of negative problem-solving, it could be that their support for each other was driving this pattern and in turn their happiness, as high positivity coupled with the simultaneous absence of negativity predicts marital success (Gottman, 1994). All couples will have disagreements (Ridley et al., 2001), but how they treat each other during these discussions has important implications. Couples who approach conflict with sensitivity and empathy for their spouse's feelings and concerns stand out even in a sample of similarly happily married couples. Thus, working to reduce the amount of couples' negativity in conflict may be one route that practitioners can take, but it may be more effective to focus on promoting couples' support as it would not only benefit their marriage, but spouses' mental and physical health as well (Dehle, Larsen, & Landers, 2001; Uchino, 2009). These findings may explain why research has found emotion-focused therapy to be more effective at improving marital outcomes than cognitive-behavioral interventions (Johnson & Greenberg, 1985). Although working to enhance couples' problem-solving behaviors can effectively reduce their conflict, it is when these behaviors are coupled with an increased sensitivity to partner's feelings and emotions that therapists see substantial improvements. In effect, practitioners are helping partners learn how to better activate their support systems, which as we found here, has implications for the happiness of their relationship.

The Mutually Engaged and Wife Compensation Clusters: Surprisingly Happy?

The existence of the mutually engaged couples characterized by almost equal levels of negative problem-solving as support was notable, as it calls into question the assertion that happy couples are different from unhappy couples as a result of their better conflict resolution skills (Fincham, 2004). These couples were engaging in some dominance, denial, and conflict during their discussion, yet they had just as satisfying marriages as the mutually supportive couples. It is worth noting that, relying solely on self-reported marital love and conflict, the marriages of mutually engaged spouses could not be

distinguished from the marriages of mutually supportive couples in which negative conflict responses were not present in their interactions. The literature would suggest that a couple in which the balance of negative and positive behaviors was more heavily in favor of the former would be less satisfied than couples in which the reverse was true (Fincham, 2004; Gottman, 1994). However, these findings lend support to the proposal from Bradbury, Rogge, and Lawrence (2001) that conflict within the problem-solving setting may not be as uniformly negative for the long-term well-being of marriage as previously believed. In fact, given that two of Gottman's (1993) stable couple types were willing to engage in conflict, it may be that engaging in some mutual negativity is beneficial in the long run as it ensures that couples are dealing with their problems rather than avoiding them (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989). Thus, in the presence of other positive relationship dimensions, such as love and commitment, some negativity may not significantly detract from a couple's overall happiness with their marriage.

What might explain why the mutually supportive and mutually engaged couples did not differ on the marital correlates was that in both clusters, husbands took as active a role in the discussion as their wives. This is in contrast to the wife compensation cluster, where husbands engaged in less positive problem-solving than their wives. Perhaps more importantly, when spouses in these clusters did differ, it was because the husbands engaged in less negative problem-solving than their wives. These findings are similar to those from Gottman, Coan, Carrere, and Swanson (1998), who found that husband's negativity was the best predictor of marital instability. Given the importance of men's role in the discussion coupled with the historical difficulty men have often experienced in expressing emotional intimacy, it lends support to Garfield's (2010) call for devoting additional resources to therapeutic men's groups that can help facilitate the development of men's emotional intimacy skills. Furthermore, this finding may lend support to the importance of husbands' role not only in promoting marital happiness through support and intimacy but also in helping to repair the marriage during times of distress. For example, Garfield (2004) suggested that therapists focus most strongly on engaging the male partner at the beginning of therapy to ensure a positive therapeutic alliance and thus eventually a positive marital outcome. This study suggests that ensuring both partners are working on their relationship may be the best way to promote and protect the marriage in the long term.

Perhaps more interesting than the existence of the mutually engaged cluster in a sample of happily married couples was that the wife compensation cluster was more consistently linked to lower self-reports of marital functioning. In this cluster, the wife demonstrated very high levels of positive problem-solving and support in the face of her husband's negative conflict responses. Furthermore, spouses in the wife compensation cluster demonstrated less negative conflict responses overall than did spouses in the mutually engaged cluster. Given the less negative conflict responses overall, one might expect that these spouses would feel more confident about their marriages than spouses in the mutually engaged cluster. Yet, this was not the case, which is consistent with work from Ridley et al. (2001) linking the asymmetry in couples' conflict responses to their lower marital satisfaction. Our study suggests that even in happy marriages, couples in which one spouse is doing more of the heavy lifting, both spouses may also express some ambivalence, although perhaps for different reasons.

Social exchange theory suggests that wives may be ambivalent if they feel that they are investing more in their relationship than they are receiving, the ratio of benefits to costs may be compromised (Huston & Burgess, 1979). As for the husbands, his relative absence of positivity in addition to his elevated levels of negative conflict responses suggests that other factors not measured here may have contributed to his behavior and feelings (e.g., personality, work difficulties). Perhaps then, what we are capturing for these couples was

a particularly stressful time in which the women were rising to the challenge of supporting their husbands. These findings are in line with the previous work documenting the benefits of harnessing the power of the couple to help individuals overcome challenges. For example, O'Farrell and Fals-Stewart (2000) found numerous benefits of couples therapy for helping individuals overcome addictions to alcohol and drug abuse, including happier marriages. Thus, although imbalanced relationships may not be ideal for all couples (Clark, Graham, & Grote, 2002), couples in great marriages will sometimes experience challenges that may temporarily diminish some but not all aspects of their marital functioning (Tulane et al., 2011). On the other hand, recent clinical work suggests that relationships where there is a gendered power imbalance may be vulnerable (Dickerson, 2013; Fishbane, 2011). Even among couples who desire more mutual relationships, like those seen here in the mutually supportive and mutually engaged couples, cultural models of mutual support are relatively underdeveloped (Knudson-Martin, 2013), which may be why spouses in the wife compensation cluster default to more traditional gender stereotypes about relational power and work. Only by following these couples over time, we could begin to determine whether couples in the wife compensation cluster would in fact begin to look more like the mutually supportive or engaged couples or whether the current pattern of dealing with stress and conflict would lead to long-term difficulties and power struggles.

Considerations and Conclusions

Certain limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study. First, given that cluster analysis is sample dependent, the three clusters would not necessarily emerge in other samples that differ with respect to ethnicity, SES, or developmental stage of the couple. Generalizing to couples in other constellations (e.g., couples with no children or older children, remarried partners) or from more diverse backgrounds (e.g., minority or lower SES couples) would be remiss, given the growing evidence to suggest that these differences have important implications for marital functioning (Karney, Garvan, & Thomas, 2003; Smock, 2003). However, the variability found even within this constrained sample underscores the fact that happily married couples are not a homogeneous group. Future research should examine variability within more diverse samples to determine if the current findings are limited to lower risk samples, and if so, what constitutes a happy marriage in higher risk samples.

Second, it is important to note that although these couples may have been happily married at this particular developmental intersection, only follow-up assessments would indicate if the spouses in these clusters would continue to enjoy happiness over time. For example, are wives in the wife compensation couples able to maintain their positivity or might they begin to experience distress as a result of a decline in her positive problem-solving behaviors? Future longitudinal work on happy marriages is warranted, as the findings from this study represent only a snapshot of happy marriages for this particular sample of couples at this point in their lives. It has been well documented that marital quality changes across the duration of the marital relationship (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001), meaning that couples may move from cluster to cluster as their personal and environmental circumstances fluctuate. Therefore, understanding the developmental course of these clusters is necessary to achieve a better understanding of the nature and consequences of marital happiness across the lifespan.

Finally, our reliance on a single-item measure of marital happiness is a limitation, although our assessment was used primarily to bolster confidence that couples correctly self-identified as happily married. Several larger survey studies have also relied on single-item assessments of marital happiness (e.g., General Social Survey, Corra, Carter, Carter,

& Knox, 2009; National Survey of Families and Households, Waite, Luo, & Lewin, 2009), although more refined measures have been developed (e.g., Amato & Booth, 1991). Furthermore, our reliance on self-reported measures of marital happiness and quality may be obscuring our understanding of the determinants of marital success for some couples. Although we attribute a significant portion of their marital happiness to the behaviors we observed in the problem-solving task, it is conceivable that at least for some couples, their marital happiness may be more affected by other factors. For example, work on sentiment override suggests that couples' preinteraction expectations may greatly shape the extent to which their interaction impacts their marital satisfaction (Fincham, Garnier, Gano-Phillips, & Osborne, 1995). Thus, the high marital quality of the mutual engagement cluster despite their observed negativity may reflect a reluctance to regard their marriage as anything other than happy even if there are problems. Capturing these types of cognitions in future research will yield a more complete picture of marital happiness. Relatedly, future work should also consider an examination of other problem-solving dynamics that may be important for the quality of couples' relationship. For example, Fruzzetti and Iverson (2004) found that an important component of couples' intimacy during their interactions is the extent to which they demonstrate awareness, understanding, and support of their spouse, which they term validation. Not only may this process play an integral part in the alleviation of couples' distress, as the authors discuss, it may also play a critical role in fostering couples' happiness.

Courtesy of Terman and colleagues' (1938) groundbreaking work on marriage, the marital literature over the past century has been focused on distinguishing happily married couples from unhappily married couples to understand the roots of marital success. The results of this study suggest that the next step may be to focus our attention on what distinguishes happily married couples from other happily married couples, as we found evidence of three different types of couples who all self-identified as happily married and who were all found to be highly satisfied with their relationships. If there are different kinds of happy marriages, as this study suggests, this is especially important for informing both practice and policy. If the goal of therapists and policymakers is to promote happy, healthy marriages, we must understand the different forms these relationships can take and the critical components of marital happiness for different couples. For example, it appears that the husband plays a critical role in shaping the interactions and marital evaluations of many happy couples, thus underscoring the importance of involving him in efforts to promote and repair their marriage (Garfield, 2004, 2010). Being able to design programs that can be tailored to meet the needs of different types of couples will enhance the efficacy of these efforts (Fals-Stewart, Schafer, & Birchler, 1993), thus making marital happiness both achievable and sustainable for a wider range of couples.

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