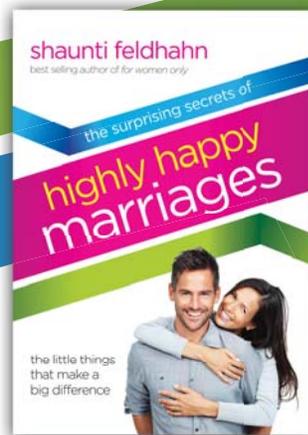


Suprising Secrets

National Survey of Couples
Survey Data as of: 4/2/2012
[Survey Methodology](#)
[About the Book](#)



by Shaunti Feldhahn

[Click Here: Survey Methodology Summary](#)

[Click Here: Chuck Cowan Methodology Chapter](#)

[Click Here: View Surveys from Other Books](#)

A nationally-representative sample of married couples in the U.S. completed this anonymous survey. Spouses took the survey independently, so they were not aware of each other's answers. Based on comparing their independent answers to a question about their happiness and enjoyment of marriage (see [methodology section](#) for more) each couple was categorized as either:

- Highly Happy
- Mostly Happy, or
- So-so or Struggling

Below are the results of the national survey for The Surprising Secrets of Highly Happy Marriages.

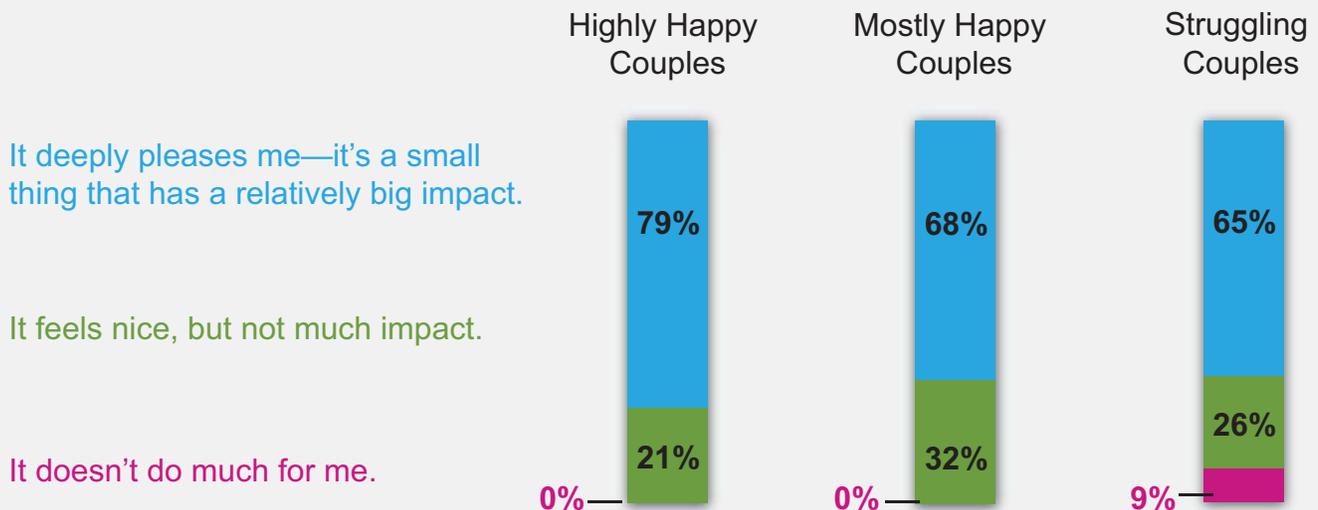
1

for Him

Below are the survey results of five scenarios presented to the men about their wives' actions. In each example, the husband was asked to indicate how happy or filled up it makes him when (or if) his wife did each of the things indicated. In every category of marriage—highly happy, mostly happy, and struggling—the outsized positive impact is noticeably large.

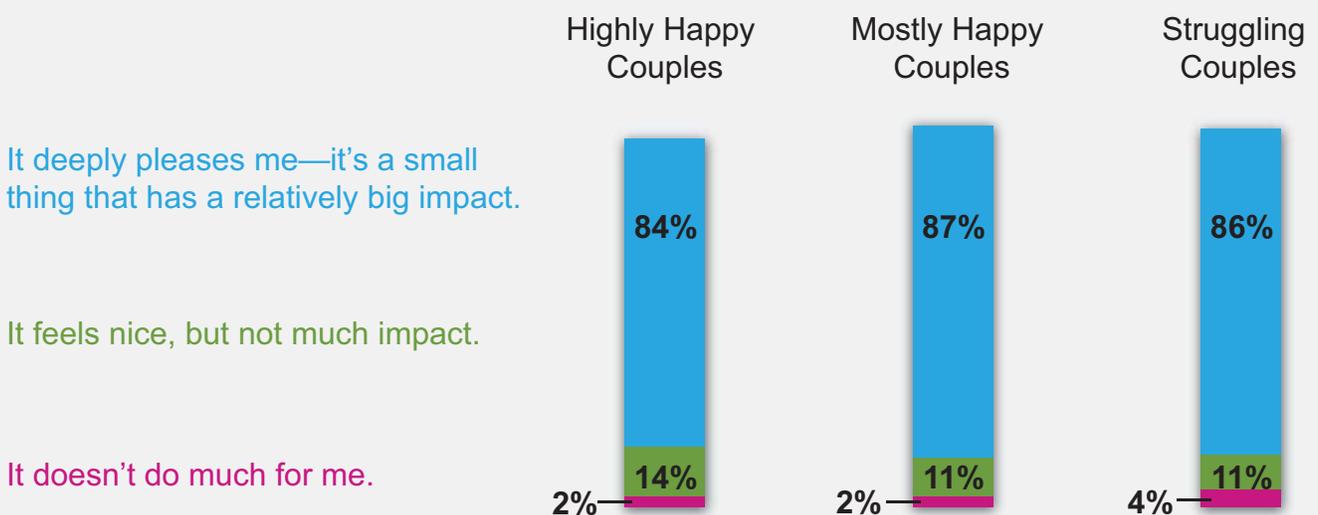
1a

She notices when I do something and sincerely thanks me for it. (For example: “Thank you for mowing the lawn even though it was so hot outside” or “Thanks for playing with the kids, even when you were so tired from work.”)



1b

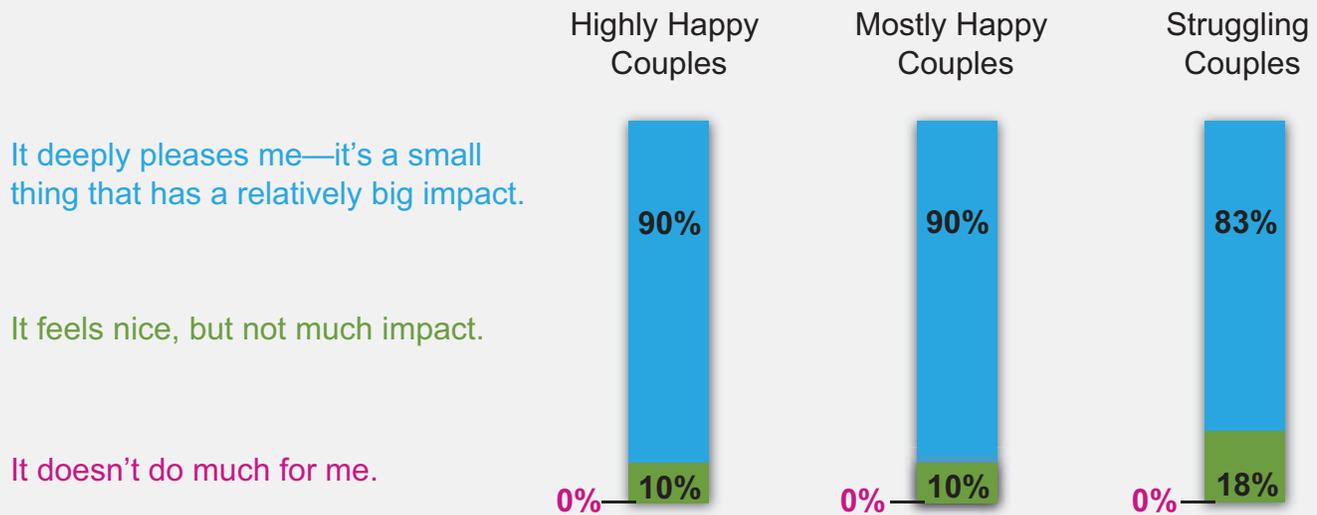
She makes it clear that she desires me sexually (she initiates physical intimacy at times and is not just willing but enthusiastic), and/or that I please her sexually.



Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

1c

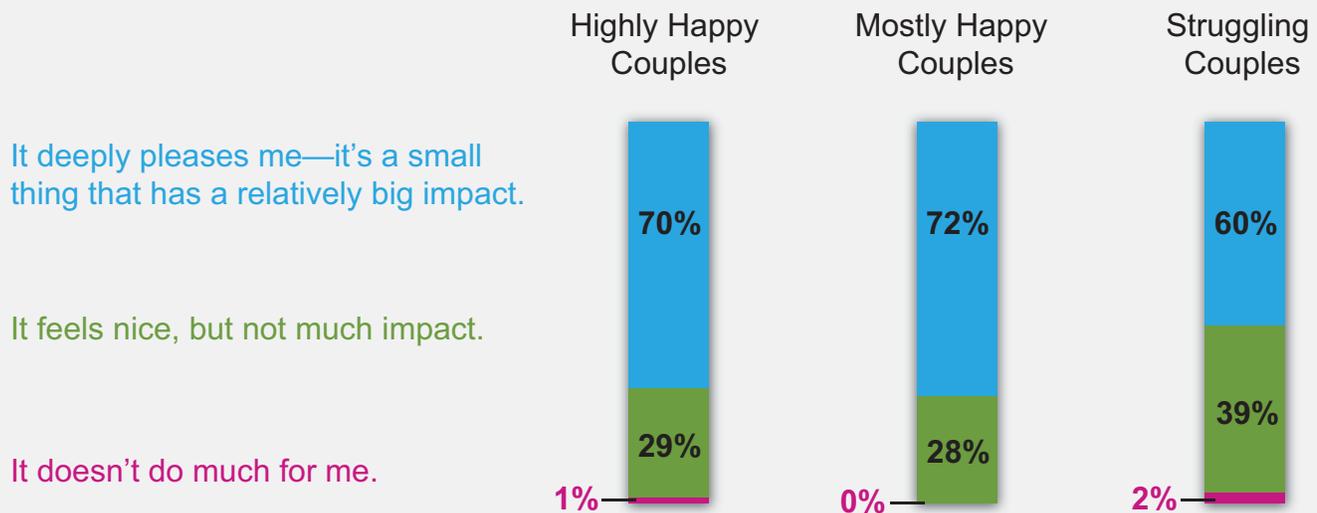
She makes it clear that I make her happy (appreciates something I did for her, smiles, etc.).



Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

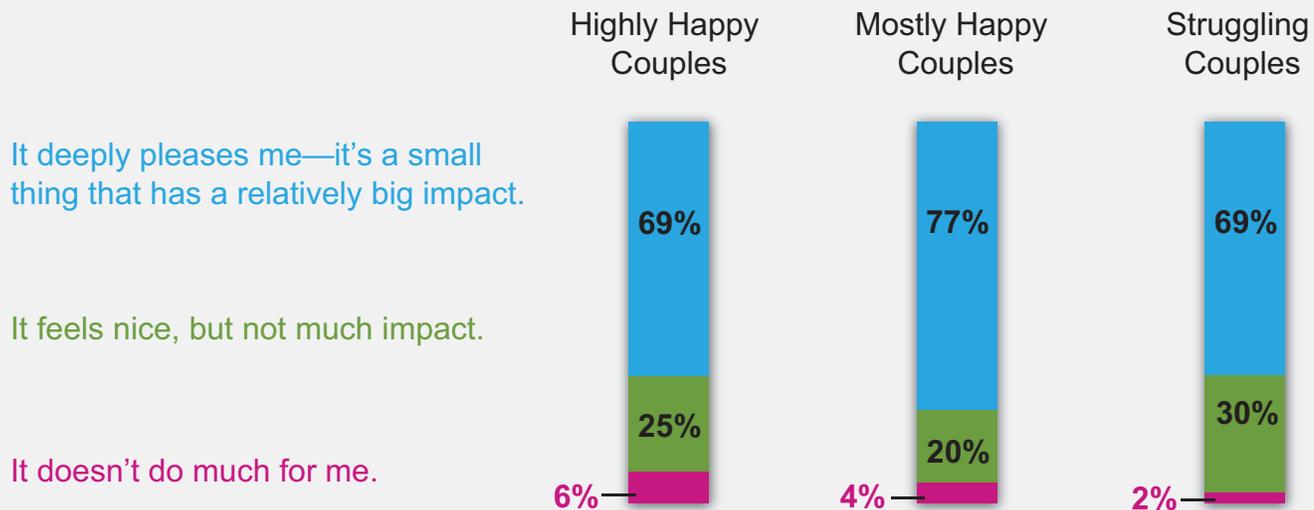
1d

Saying, "You did a great job at ____." (Choose one answer.)



Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

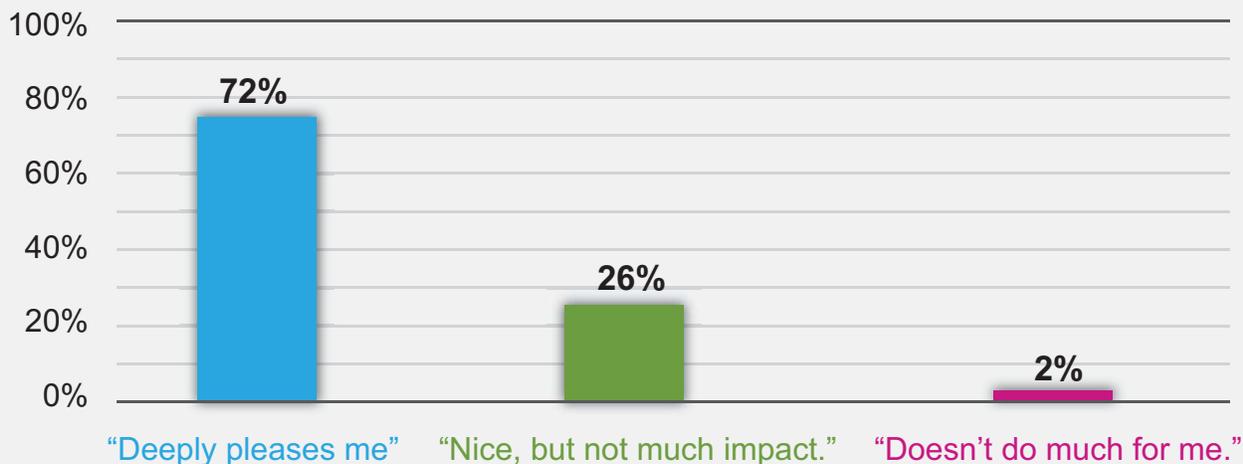
1e Mentioning something I did well, in front of others. (Choose one answer.)



Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

Highlighted results, as shown in the book

How much hearing "thank you" matters to men



Average of all men, regardless of happiness category.

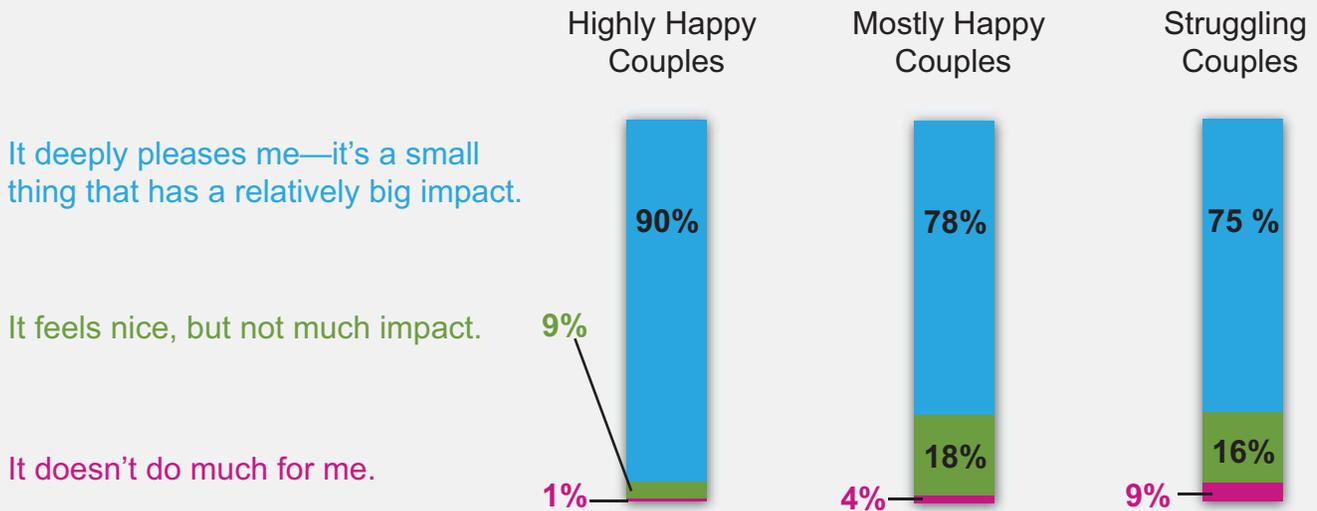
2

for Her

Next are the survey results of five scenarios given to the wife about her husband's actions. In each example, the wife was asked to indicate how happy or filled up it makes her when (or if) her husband did each of the things indicated. Each of these actions mattered a lot, regardless of how happy their marriage was.

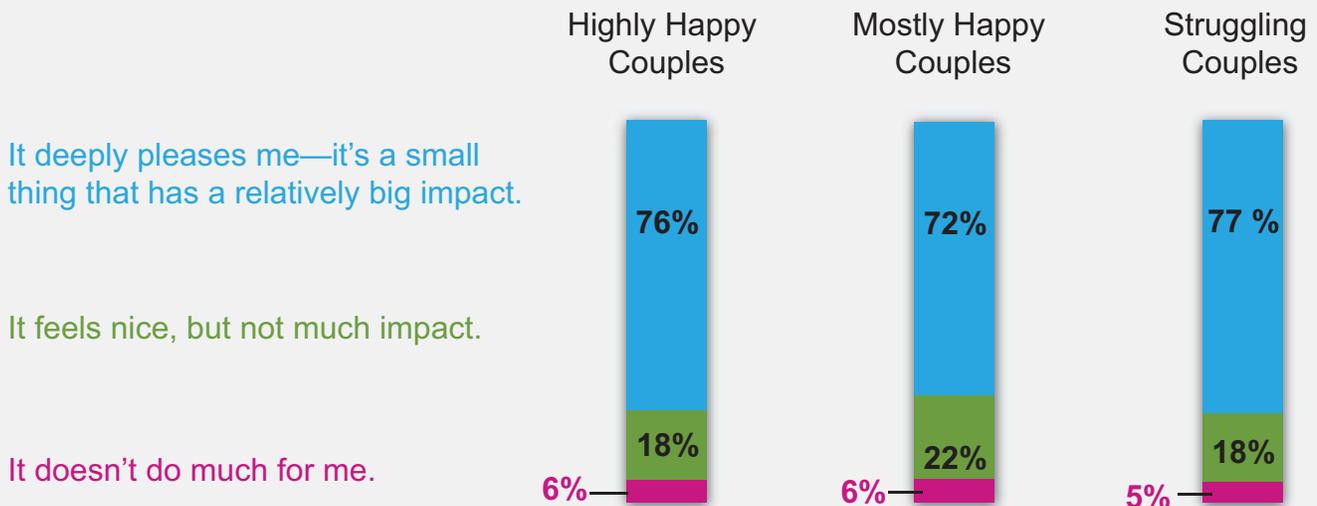
2a

He reaches out and takes my hand. (For example, when we are walking through a parking lot or sitting together at the movies.)



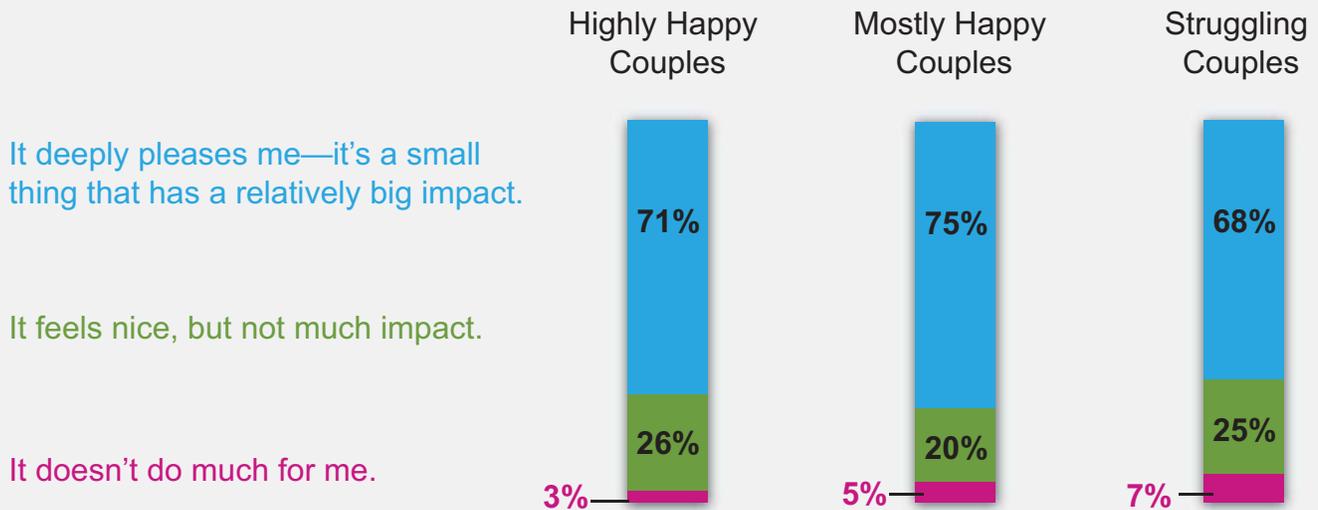
2b

He leaves me a quick voice mail or text message during the day to say he's thinking about me.



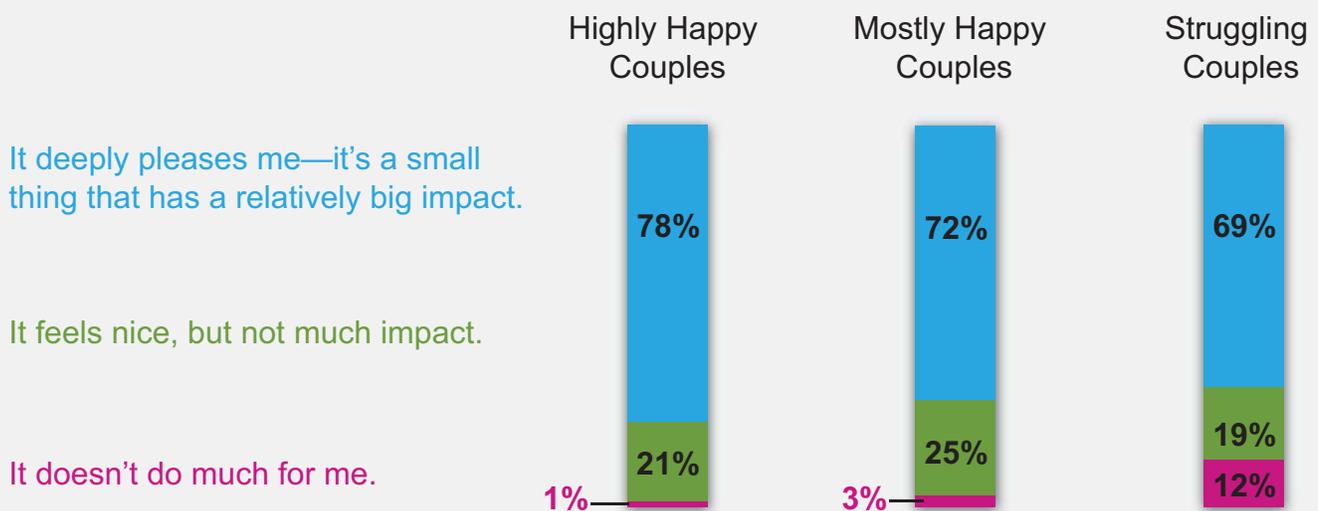
2c

He pulls himself out of a “funk” when he’s in a bad mood or upset about something, instead of withdrawing.



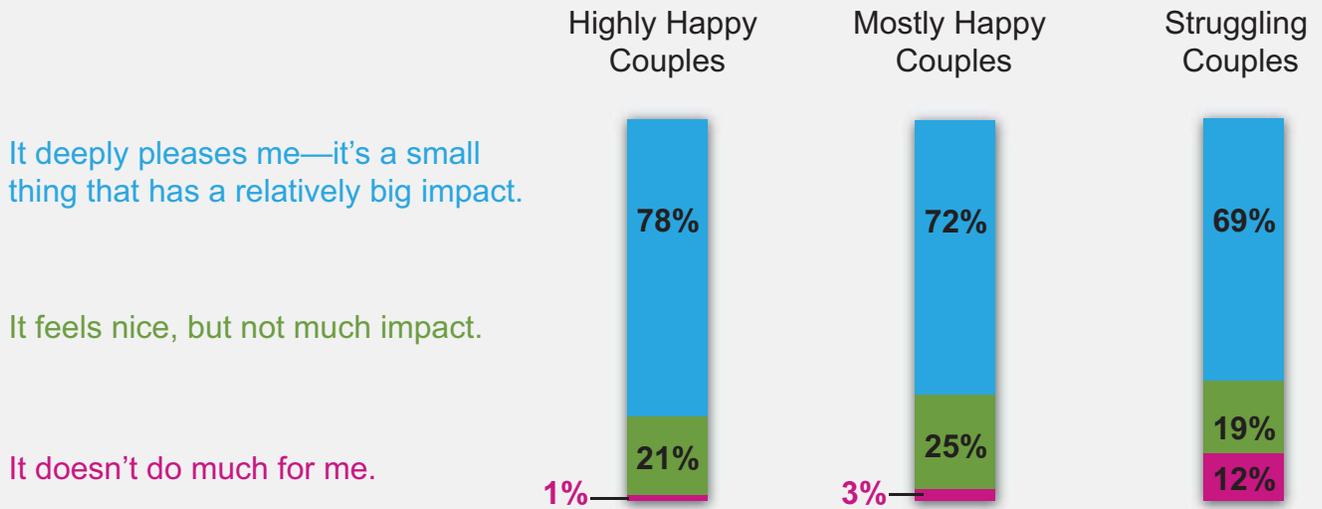
2d

He puts his arm around me when we are sitting next to each other in public (sitting at church, at a restaurant with friends, etc.) (Choose one answer.)

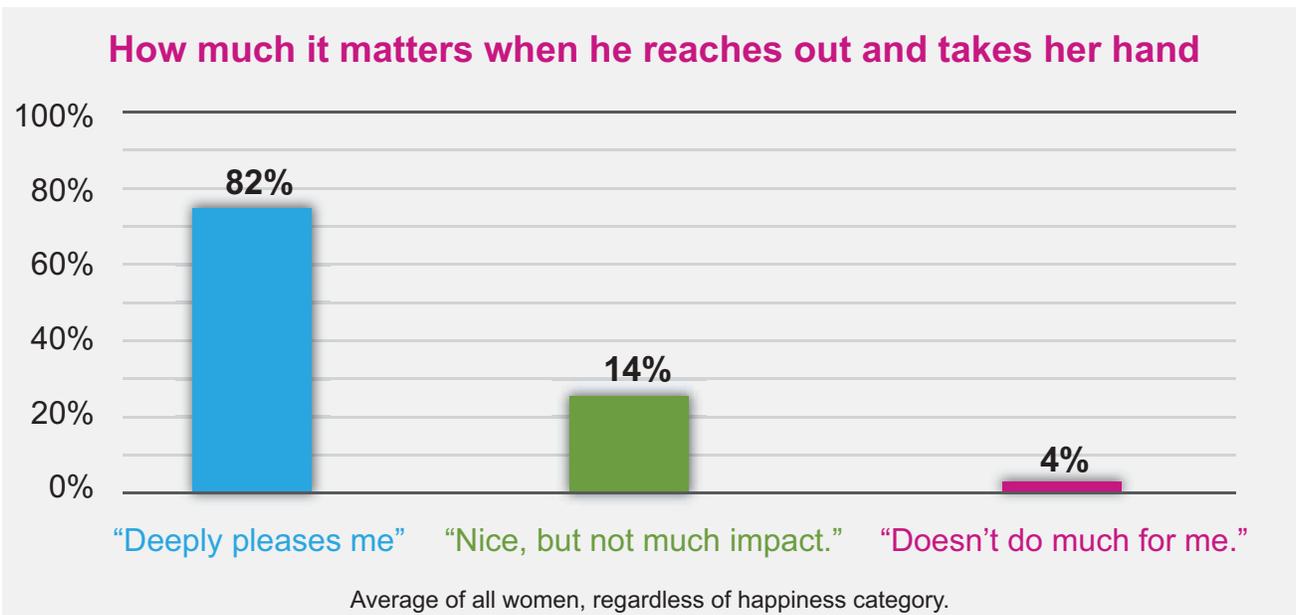


2e

He tells me, sincerely, "You are beautiful." (Choose one answer.)



Highlighted results, as shown in the book



3

Do you care about your spouse and want the best for them, even during painful times?

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
Yes, absolutely.	99%	97%	80%
Yes, sometimes.	1%	3%	17%
These days, not really.	0%	0%	3%

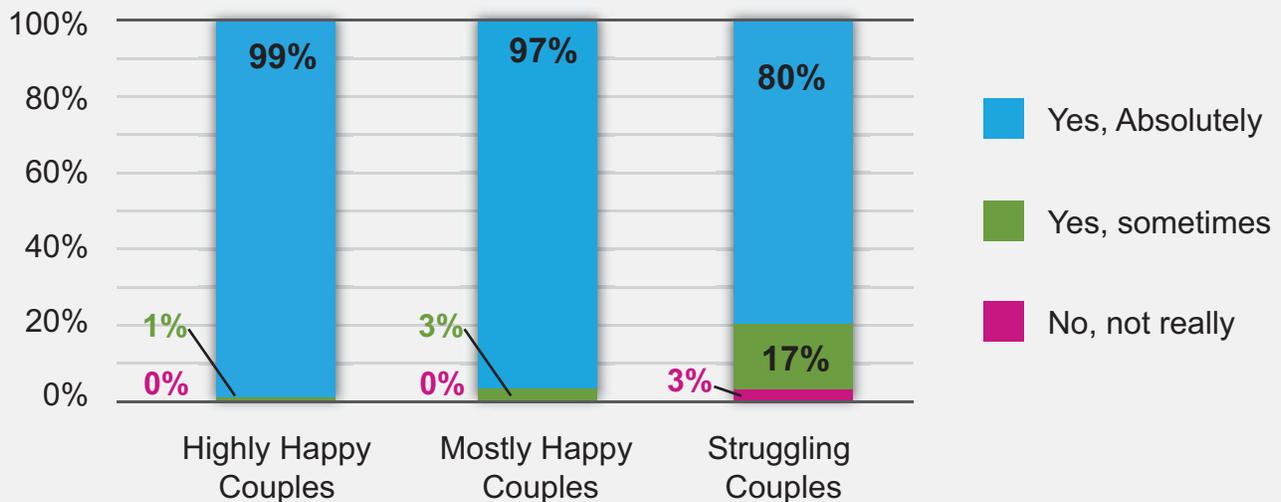
4

Is the following statement true or false? "Even in the middle of a painful argument, I know that my spouse is fully 'for me' and deeply cares about me."

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
Yes, that is mostly true.	96%	87%	59%
No, that isn't really true for me.	4%	13%	41%

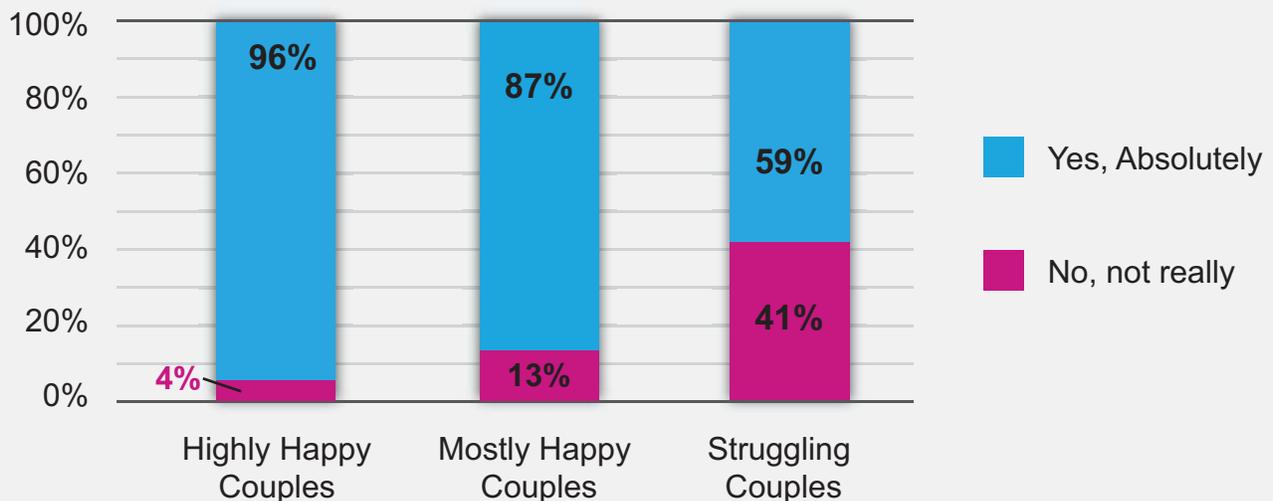
Highlighted results, as shown in the book

Percent who care about their spouses and want the best for them, even during painful times



Highlighted results, as shown in the book

Percent who know their spouses do care about them, even during an argument



5

Many couples have heard that it's important to not go to bed mad. When you and your spouse get into an emotional conflict and at bedtime it is still unresolved, how do you actually handle it?

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
We keep working to resolve it; we always resolve our disagreements before we actually go to sleep.	20%	10%	4%
Although we think that resolving it before bed is a good idea, it doesn't always work out that way; we sometimes resolve it later- or it ends up not being as important in the morning.	60%	68%	52%
Once we go to bed with it unresolved, we tend to just not deal with it later, and it remains unresolved.	5%	15%	41%
This doesn't really apply to us; we rarely have this type of emotional conflict.	5%	15%	41%

Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

Highlighted results, as shown in the book



6

Does your spouse notice and respond when you have given more than your spouse has for a period of time? For example, if you did all the chores your spouse usually does—for a week or two while he or she was extra busy at work—would your spouse notice and compensate for that in some way? (By being extra nice and thankful, taking you out for dinner, giving you a break in turn, etc.?)

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
Yes, if that happens, my spouse will generally notice and compensate for it in some way.	64%	52%	33%
My spouse may not notice, but if I mention it, he or she will generally do something to compensate for it in some way.	22%	23%	16%
My spouse may notice but won't generally compensate for it.	13%	20%	34%
My spouse generally won't notice, and thus won't compensate.	2%	6%	17%

Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

7

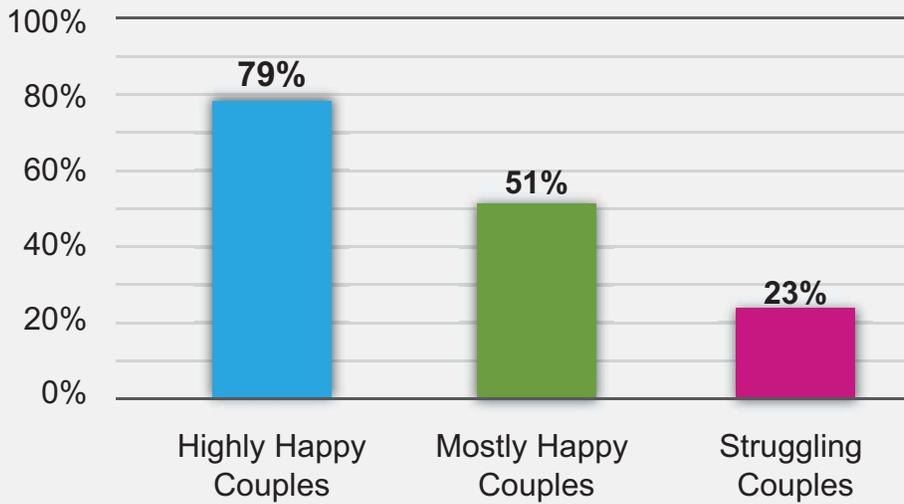
In this survey, "daily generosity" was measured by whether spouses did various small acts for each other. *

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
High daily generosity.	79%	51%	23%
Low daily generosity.	21%	49%	77%

* Source: Dr. Brad Wilcox, "Survey of Marital Generosity 2010-2011." Note: On this survey, answers were separate for husbands and wives. The wives' answers are shown here. (Husbands' numbers were similar.)

Highlighted results, as shown in the book

Percent of couples with high daily generosity



8

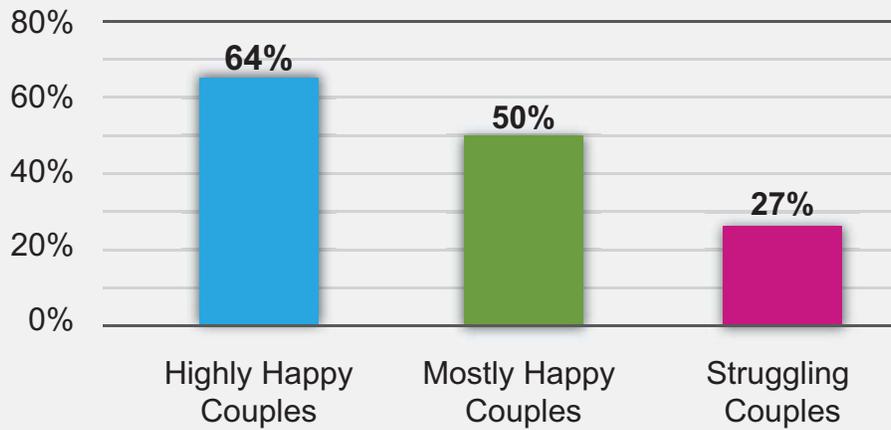
If you were to find yourself thinking that your spouse is doing less or “getting more” than you, which choice best describes what would most often happen in your mind?

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
I stop that train of thought before I get too bothered to begin with.	64%	50%	26%
It bothers me, but instead of thinking about it, I try to stop that train of thought.	29%	35%	40%
It bothers me and I can't help but keep thinking about my annoyance over a period of time.	7%	16%	34%

Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

Highlighted results, as shown in the book

Percent who stop a negative train of thought to keep from getting upset



9

Most spouses have times when they feel frustration or disappointment because their husband or wife did not meet their expectations. When that happens to you, how much does it bother you?

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
It bothers me quite a bit.	7%	18%	40%
It bothers me some.	39%	48%	35%
It really doesn't bother me at all.	12%	9%	7%
It starts to bother me—but I get a grip, so that it doesn't end up bothering me much.	20%	14%	16%
I don't really have expectations that my spouse doesn't meet, so this doesn't apply to me.	23%	11%	2%

Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

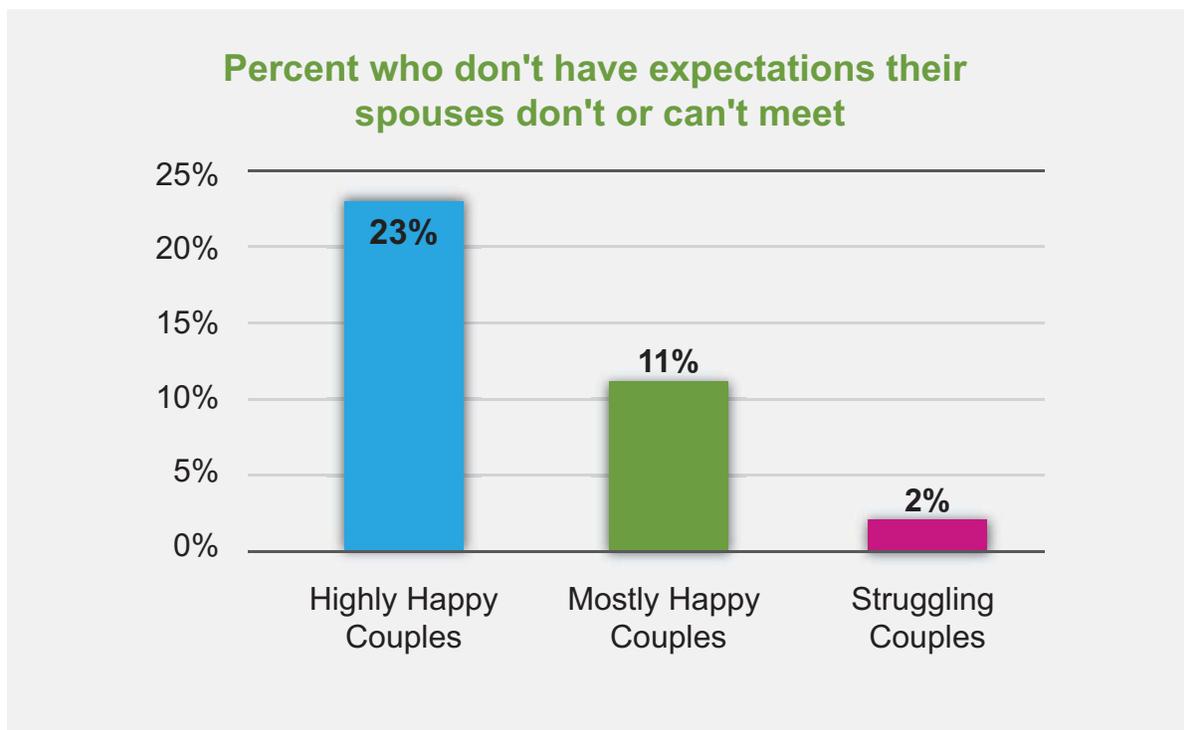
10

Do you think your spouse expects some things from you that you feel are difficult or impossible to deliver?

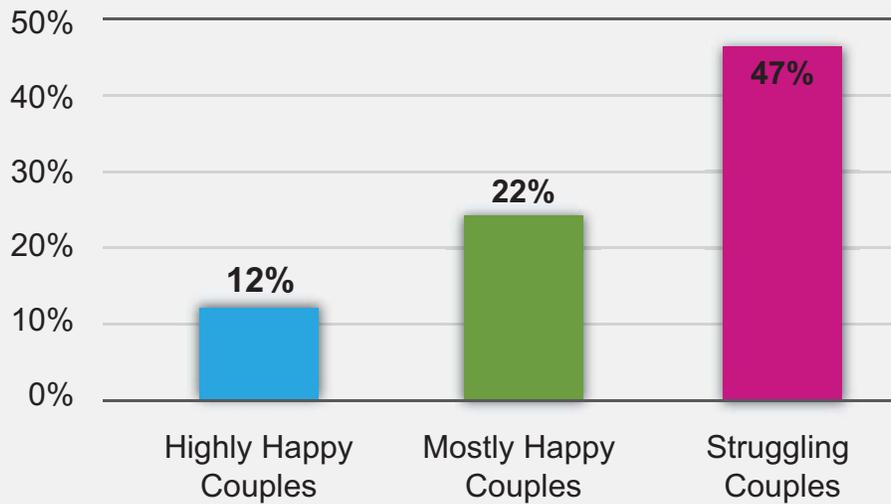
	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
Yes, I do feel that my spouse has some unrealistic expectations of me.	12%	22%	47%
My spouse probably wishes some things were different, but doesn't generally expect things I cannot deliver.	57%	59%	40%
No, my spouse doesn't wish for or expect things I cannot deliver.	31%	19%	14%

Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

Highlighted results, as shown in the book



Percent who think their spouses have unrealistic expectations



11

This question isn't about resolving the substance of a conflict, but about reconnecting after tension or a fight. Some couples have a way of mutually signaling that they have reconnected at some point after tension has occurred, while other couples do not do that. Which best describes you?

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
We nearly always find a way to purposefully signal or confirm that we have both reconnected. (For example, "Are we okay?" "We're okay." Or a private signal you share with each other that makes sense to the two of you, such as calling each other a pet name, sharing a silly gesture or voice, etc.)	70%	48%	22%
We don't always share a mutual signal that we have reconnected - sometimes we just move on.	30%	52%	78%

Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

12

Most spouses have times when they feel frustration or disappointment because their husband or wife did not meet their expectations. When that happens to you, how much does it bother you?

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
Yes, in those times that I take the initiative first, my spouse generally responds very well—either right then or shortly thereafter.	69%	47%	34%
When I take the initiative first, there's no pattern in my spouse's response—sometimes they respond well, sometimes they don't.	18%	32%	35%
No, in those times when I take the initiative first, my spouse doesn't generally respond in the way I was hoping for.	3%	12%	24%
This doesn't apply, since my spouse is usually the one trying to apologize or make up first.	6%	6%	4%
This doesn't apply, since we don't generally resolve things by apologizing or trying to make up.	4%	4%	4%

Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

Highlighted results, as shown in the book



13

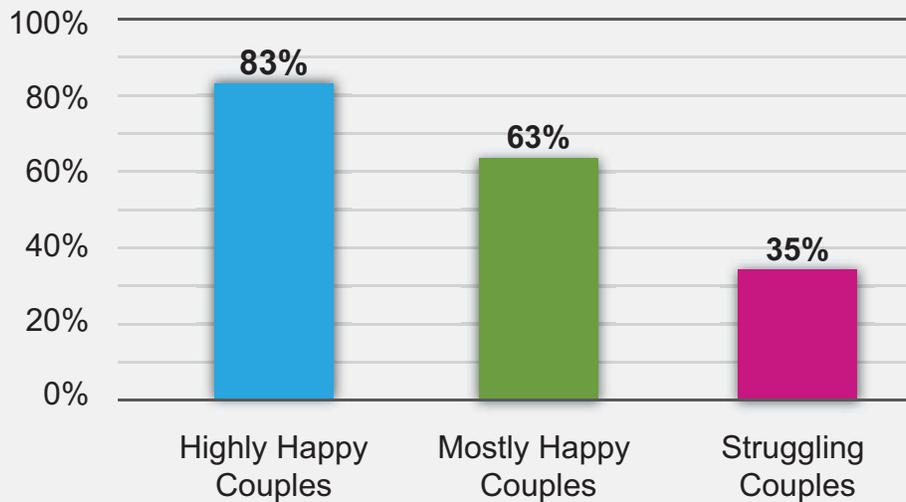
During the past month, about how often did you and your husband/wife spend time alone with each other, talking, or sharing an activity? *

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
At least weekly.	83%	63%	35%
Less than weekly.	17%	37%	65%

* Source: Dr. Brad Wilcox, Survey of Marital Generosity, 2010–2011

Highlighted results, as shown in the book

Percent who hang out with their spouses at least weekly



14

When most of us are with friends or acquaintances, we put forward effort to be on our best behavior. When you are alone with your spouse, do you think your spouse puts in as much effort to be considerate with you as he or she does in public with other people?

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
Yes, my spouse puts in more effort than he/she does with others.	34%	20%	14%
Yes, my spouse puts in a similar effort as with others.	37%	35%	14%
Sometimes yes, sometimes no	26%	37%	49%
Not really, my spouse generally puts in less effort than with others.	4%	9%	23%

Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

15

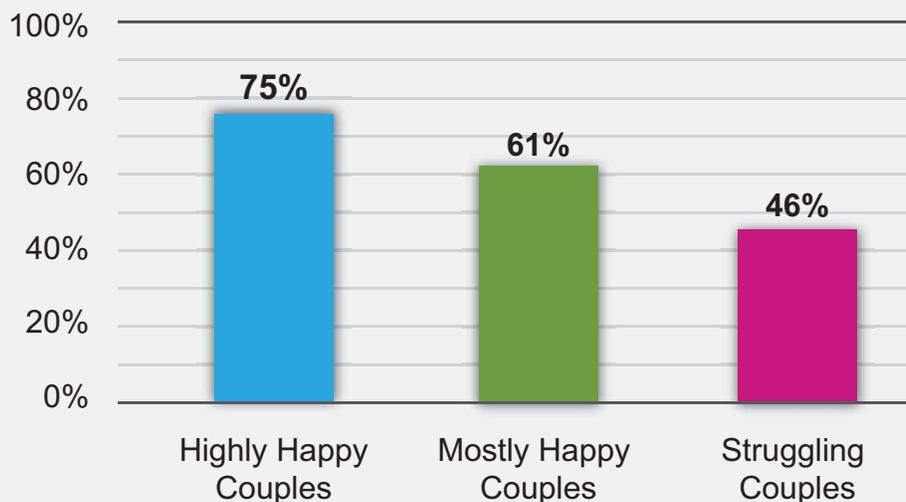
When you are alone with your spouse, do you generally put in the same effort to be considerate of your spouse as you do with others?

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
Yes, I make even more effort to treat my spouse well than I do with others.	45%	22%	21%
Yes, I make the same type of effort with my spouse as I do with others.	30%	39%	25%
Sometimes I do that; sometimes I don't.	20%	29%	47%
Not really; I let my guard down with my spouse, so I just don't think about it.	6%	10%	7%

Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

Highlighted results, as shown in the book

Percent who try to be as considerate of their spouses in private as they are with friends in public



16

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement:
"God is at the center of our marriage. *

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
Both agree. ("Somewhat" to "Strongly")	53%	40%	7%
Both disagree. ("Somewhat" to "Strongly")	26%	44%	30%
One spouse agrees; one disagrees.	30%	44%	26%

*Source: Dr. Brad Wilcox, Survey of Marital Generosity, 2010–2011.

Highlighted results, as shown in the book



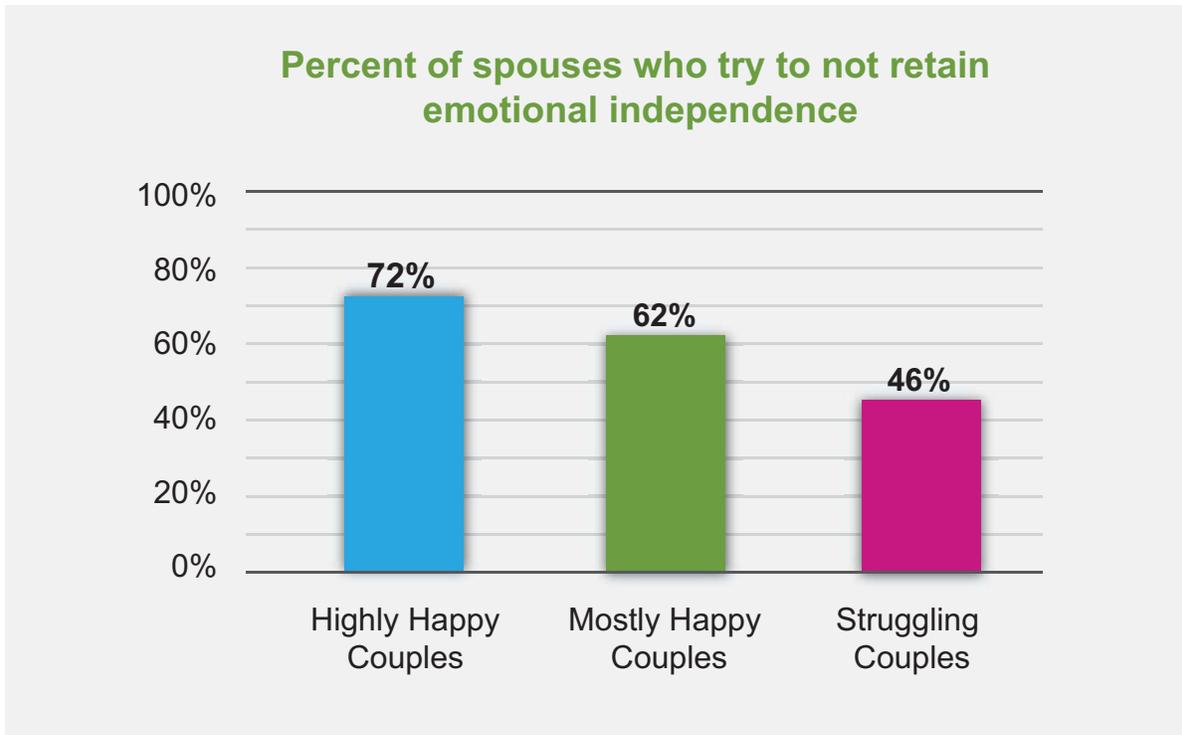
17

Some spouses feel that since so many relationships encounter problems, it is important to maintain a bit of emotional independence or retain your own life in some way. That way, if everything falls apart, you still retain a piece of yourself. Is that true of you, or not true of you?

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
Yes, I do feel that way.	34%	20%	14%
No, I do not feel that way.	37%	35%	14%

Note: Due to rounding, some percentages do not total 100 percent.

Highlighted results, as shown in the book



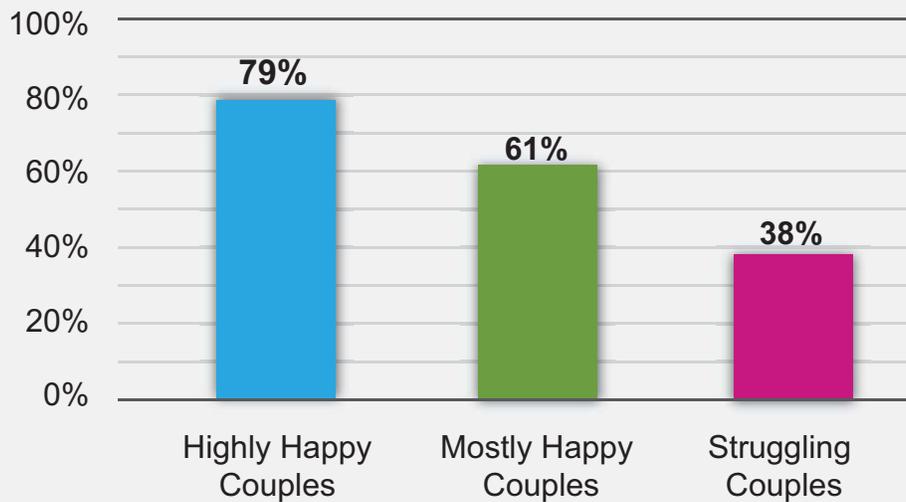
18 If you had to pick either you or your spouse as the primary reason why your marriage is happy and you enjoy being married, who would you pick?

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	So-so Couples*
Me.	21%	39%	55%
My spouse.	79%	61%	38%
We are not that happy, so this doesn't apply to me.	0%	0%	77%

Asked of those survey takers who responded in one of the first three categories of happiness ("Yes!" "Yes, mostly," or "Sometimes yes, sometimes no") when asked, "Are you generally happy in your marriage?"

*This question was not asked of those who answered "Not really" or "No!"

Percent of those who say their spouses are the reason their marriages are happy



Asked of those survey takers who responded in one of the first three categories of happiness (“Yes!” “Yes, mostly,” or “Sometimes yes, sometimes no”) when asked, “Are you generally happy in your marriage?”

This question was not asked of those who answered “Not really” or “No!”

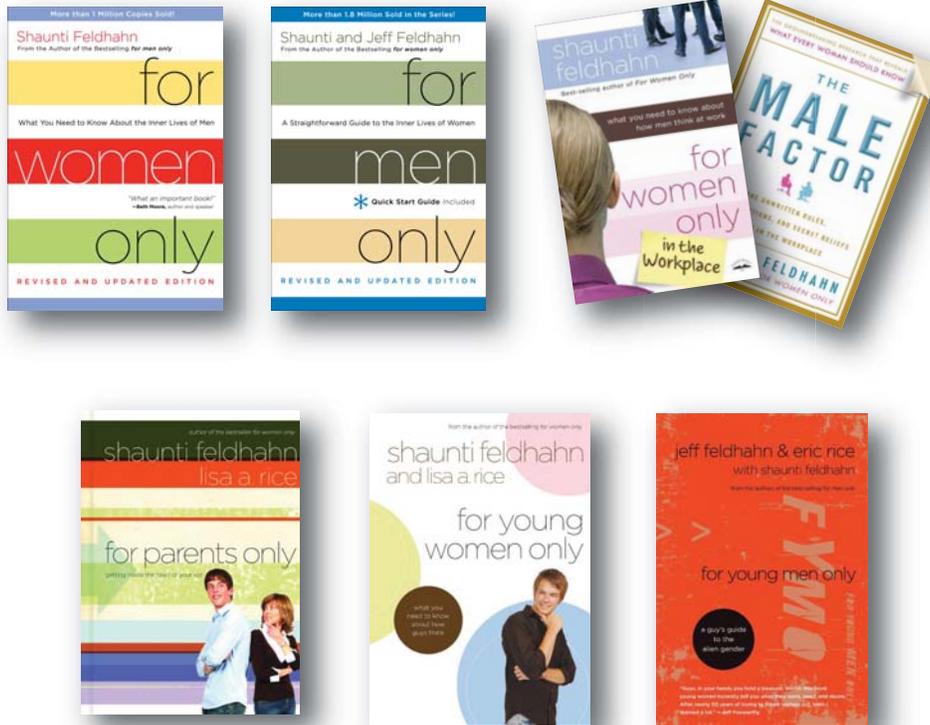
19

This question was used to group married couples in happiness categories: Are you, personally, generally happy in your marriage these days, and enjoying being married? Answer choices: Yes!; Yes, most of the time; Sometimes yes, sometimes no; Not really; No! I am really unhappy. Percent in each category were as follows:

	Highly Happy Couples	Mostly Happy Couples	Struggling Couples
National survey*	39%	38%	22%
Internal (churchgoer) surveys*	34%	37%	29%

*Neither the national survey or the internal surveys are likely to be quite nationally representative for happiness categories. As noted in the book, the happiness groups in the nationally-representative survey were engineered to provide a large enough sample of “Struggling” couples to analyze. The internal surveys were primarily conducted in marriage venues; these were highly composed of churchgoers and also likely attracted a higher-than-normal number of struggling couples. (Please see the survey methodology chapter written by Chuck Cowan for more detail.) However, based on other surveys, including one by Dr. Brad Wilcox, we can estimate that although these numbers are not nationally-representative they are not dramatically skewed, either: the “real” happiness categories across a representative population are likely to be in the ballpark.

View Surveys From Other Books



If you are a print publication or media representative, and would like to ask Shaunti about the methodology of the survey (beyond what is available [here](#)) or other aspects of the research, please contact the Multnomah Publicity Department at 719-590-4999.