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PERSONALITY TRAITS AS PREDICTORS OF MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG OLDER COUPLES

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Summary

The aim of the research. The issue of predictors of marital satisfaction arouses great interest among psychologists. Current research that has been carried out in this area primarily relates to spouses in early and middle adulthood, while there are few studies on the determinants of success in the late phase of marital adulthood. Meanwhile, it is the elderly age that can be the “golden age” of married life. It has been assumed that personality traits may be significant predictors of marital satisfaction in the elderly. The purpose of this article is to answer the question if there is any relation between personality traits and marital satisfaction in late adulthood. To achieve this goal, a study was conducted on 120 people (60 couples) aged 60 to 75.

Methods. Two psychological methods were applied to the discussed project. The quality of marriage relationship was examined by means of the M. Plopa Good Marriage Questionnaire (KDM-2). P. T. Costa and R. R. McCrae’s Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R), adapted by J. Siuta, was used to characterize the personalities of the questioned couples.

Results. As expected, personality remained in a statistically significant relation to marital satisfaction. Significant correlations were noted in the case of Neuroticism, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The only predictor of satisfaction with marriage was Agreeableness.

Conclusions. The results obtained in the research may be a significant back-up for psychologists and psychotherapists in defining ways to aid efforts taken to help elderly couples.

Introduction

Among determinants (predictors) of satisfaction with marriage, next to similar values shared by partners, the willingness to have children, empathy skills, and temporal factors, personality traits, which shape i.a. the way to react to external difficulties, are also an important predictor of marital happiness [1-3]. Despite the fact that personality traits remain a relatively permanent element of personality, they can change over a person’s lifetime and thus remain connected to satisfaction in marriage [4, 5]. These changes are usually accompanied by a reorganization of previously established life goals and the desire to meet the needs of late adulthood [6, 7].

The issue of marital satisfaction is regarded as particularly important in source literature. The quality of a relationship largely affects a person’s functioning in other social roles [8, 9],

and is one of the strongest correlates of the sense of happiness, including physical and mental well-being [10-12]. The relationship between marriage and well-being mainly results from the positive effects of marital life. Marriage can contribute to happiness because it can put a person into the role of a spouse and parent. In addition, married people have a better chance to enjoy a lasting, supportive and intimate relationship, and as a result, they are less likely to suffer from loneliness [13].

Satisfaction with marriage can be described as the good quality of a matrimonial dyad which constitutes an essential subsystem of a larger unity, the family system. This quality is related to the functioning of other subsystems, i.e. it depends on them and influences them [14, 15]. Marriage in systemic terms is not a simple sum of two elements, but a new whole, in which both spouses interact on the basis of feedback. Marriage is successful if spouses have a sense of community in carrying out their tasks, which is expressed in general satisfaction with the relationship and does not exclude periodic difficulties and conflicts [1]. This relationship is intended to last a lifetime, fulfilling the common good and being pleasing; it is a dynamic relationship that constantly changes. Hence, marriages, in general, cannot be divided dichotomically into successful and unsuccessful ones. Rather, they should be ranked on a continuum from the most disintegrated, approaching complete dissolution, to those that are characterized by the highest quality of the marital relationship [1, 16]. Marital happiness must, therefore, be understood more as a process and not as a state achieved in reality [17-19]. Wishing to derive pleasure in their relationship, partners choose a spouse who potentially meets their expectations and satisfies their needs. It is not uncommon that spouses become convinced of their partner's true qualities and their previously highlighted qualities or skills not until they are married [16].

Based on the above findings, the concept of marital satisfaction by J. Rostowski [20, 21] and M. Plopa [22] was considered essential for the presented project. According to this concept, satisfaction in a relationship has a multidimensional structure, which consists of intimacy, self-fulfillment, similarity, and disappointment.

The first dimension, *i n t i m a c y*, is associated with a high level of satisfaction resulting from a close relationship between the spouses and assumes that a union's partners want to build their relationship based on full openness, mutual trust, closeness, and honesty. Intimacy thus reflects the extent to which spouses are convinced that their love unites them, allowing them to fully accept their partner. Another aspect of marital satisfaction is *s e l f - f u l f i l l m e n t*. This dimension means that partners, thanks to a satisfying marital relationship, gain the opportunity to fulfill themselves, their personal value system, as well as specific life tasks. The third element

of marriage satisfaction is similarity, which is an indicator of partners' compliance in implementing important marital and family goals. The last dimension of marital satisfaction concerns disappointment, which indicates a sense of failure in life caused by the fact of being married. As a result, marriage is perceived and experienced as a factor that threatens the independence and autonomy of the partners [23, 24].

Satisfaction with marriage is subject to numerous transformations throughout its duration. The dynamics of satisfaction with marriage takes on a curvilinear form and is associated with the life cycle stage [25-27]. Therefore, it is fully reasonable to search for the conditions of the marital relationship quality among people in late adulthood, i.e. between 60 and 75 years of age. However, this fairly arbitrary age turning point usually means experiencing many transformations related to the previously fulfilled occupational duties, a new daily schedule and changes in one's social and family roles. Hence, it is a period when the somatic and mental functions of the body become weaker. The risk of new, previously unexpected illnesses also increases, and on the interpersonal contact level, the experience of the death of one of the spouses enters into the picture [6, 28].

Changes in late adulthood also lead to the reorganization of previously established life goals. There is a greater ability to abandon goals which, in fact, turn out to be of little importance [7, 29]. In addition, aging causes changes in personality traits [4, 30, 31]. However, it should be emphasized that in the field of psychology, the issue of transformations in the field of specific personality traits has not been unequivocally resolved. It is indicated that the basic personality structure is constant, but acquired traits undergo changes [7, 28]. Due to different ways of personality development and differences in life experiences, it is difficult to point to characteristics which are typical of older people [6, 32].

Perceptible changes in the aging process can be treated not only as threats or sources of various crises but also as new developmental opportunities that change the shape of the mutual relationship between spouses [33, 34]. On the one hand, retirement can have negative consequences on the relationship when the end of their professional activity and their children leaving home create new conflicts. Dissatisfaction is more often declared by women who, after their husband's retirement, have to reorganize their home territory to give their husbands space and share household duties with them [35, 36]. The time which was previously devoted to work or children now needs to be managed together. Transferring accents from the role of a married couple to parents at an earlier stage of life can cause parents to focus on their children while neglecting their marital relationship. If this happens, spouses, after their children leave home, notice that nothing unites them anymore. The children's well-being, which was the cause of the

relationship's existence, becomes less important in this period of marriage. After children become independent, spouses must re-organize their lives [8].

On the other hand, if children were not the only and the most important factor connecting spouses, and they were united by similar attitudes, e.g. religious, then this period is easier. Spouses get closer to each other, experiencing their marriage as if anew, but enriched with their shared experiences. They are also united by the fact that they are parents of common children and grandparents for their grandchildren. They have more time for each other, they can enjoy their presence more fully, and express mutual respect and joy of their life together [6, 17]. From this point of view, retirement is a period that gives partners the opportunity to get closer and strengthen their relationship [26, 37]. The limitations in social contacts and roles played in connection with retirement or health problems cause that ties with their closest family members have a special meaning [38, 39]. According to the socio-emotional selectivity theory, with age, people reduce the number of social contacts and strengthen ties with a small group of people closest to them (friends, family members), and especially with their life partner [40-42]. This is a period in which a close partner is particularly needed, not only as a caretaker in the time of illness but also as the main source of social support [26, 33]. Therefore, with care for maintaining mutual love and attractiveness, the last stage of the married life (after 25 years of its duration) can be the happiest time. According to Vinick and Ekerdt, 60% of married couples declare an increase in satisfaction from the relationship after the retirement of one of the spouses [26].

Therefore, the rich area of the determinants of a successful marital life is worth exploring, followed by finding issues that are most strongly associated with the success of marriage in the period of late adulthood. It should be emphasized here that the sense of happiness has a subjective nature and therefore, what provides fulfillment for one couple may not have much significance for another pair [1, 23, 43].

The issue of the conditions of satisfaction with marriage is widely described in the source literature [1, 23, 37]. Personality traits are often included among the key predictors of marital satisfaction [43-45]. In the light of current research results, neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experiences are associated with a sense of happiness, although with unequal strength [37, 46]. Neuroticism has the strongest relation (negative correlation) to marital satisfaction and means emotional variability, the tendency to worry, suffer anxiety and depression, which is accompanied by reduced self-esteem. People with neurotic tendencies are clearly less happy, including in close relationships. They show more negative behaviors, which reduces their marital satisfaction and negatively affects their

partner's satisfaction [47-49]. A personality trait that is positively associated with the sense of happiness is extroversion, expressed by activity, energy, and openness to people [1, 49].

The results of the research carried out among couples in a long-term marriage revealed that extraversion in contrast to neuroticism is significantly more often associated with satisfaction in marriage. This correlation is positive. The authors explain this phenomenon by stating that people with a high level of neuroticism are getting divorced during the first few years of married life or adapt to the weaknesses of their spouse during marriage [50, 51]. Two further characteristics have a slightly weaker association with marital happiness: conscientiousness and agreeableness. People who are characterized by reliability, responsibility, a friendly attitude towards other people or a tendency to avoid conflicts declared happiness in marriage [32]. Finally, the weakest (and also positive) association with happiness is openness to experiences [31].

The scientific discussion on changes in personality traits over a lifetime is still open [7, 52]. Researchers agree, however, that small changes in the area of personality traits that appear with age are "mild trends" [7, p. 96], which can significantly relate to the functioning of an individual in various areas of life, including marital life [33]. According to Pervin and John [53], the aging process implies small but distinct changes in an individual's personality structure dimensions. These changes become more apparent when comparing older adults with people from other age groups. Adolescents are often heavily absorbed in fears of social acceptance or self-esteem (higher N index) and are willing to spend a significant part of their time in the company of friends or acquaintances (higher E index). In addition, they are characterized by a great readiness to open up to what is new (higher O index), they are critical and demanding towards others (lower A index) and also less responsible and conscientious in performing the tasks entrusted to them (lower C index). Meanwhile, people entering their aging stage are less afraid of the social evaluation and are more willing to defend their beliefs, even when they are contrary to the expectations of others (lower N index) [8, 32]. On the level of contacts with others, they are less willing to seek and make new friends. They devote energy and time to deepening bonds they already have (lower E index). In addition, seniors are less interested in all kinds of novelties. They rather refer to things related to the past (lower O index) [41]. They are also more accepting and less evaluative towards themselves and others, as well as more perseverant in implementing objectives and related tasks (higher A and C indexes) [54].

The research review presented above proves that the period of late adulthood is characterized by many changes occurring in all areas of a person's functioning, including those

that refer to the sphere of personality [4, 6, 7]. This fact may have a significant meaning, i.a. concerning the quality of the marital relationship.

The issue of satisfaction with marriage is currently very popular among psychologists [43, 55]. The research conducted in this area mainly covers spouses in early and middle adulthood and focuses on identifying factors conducive to a happy life "for just the two of them." As a consequence, there are few studies devoted to the determinants of marital success in the late stage of adulthood [18, 37, 56]. The aim of the presented article is to identify factors that condition satisfaction of marriage among seniors in the area of personality traits.

Research method

Stating the Problem

The problem of this work has been formulated in the research question, if and to what extent personality traits (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness) explain the variability of results in the area of satisfaction with the marriage of people in late adulthood.

Study Group and Measurement Methods

In order to verify the question formulated above, a study was conducted in which 60 couples (120 people) took part. In the men's group, the average age was $M = 67.04$ ($SD = 4.83$), while in the women's group it was $M = 64.90$ ($SD = 4.37$). The respondents differed in their level of education. The most numerous groups were people with secondary education (38.3%) and higher education (38.3%), while the least numerous group were people with basic education and basic vocational training (10.0%).

The measurement of the response variable (marriage satisfaction) was made using Good Marriage Questionnaire (KDM-2) by J. Rostowski [20] and M. Plopa [22]. The theoretical foundations of the KDM-2 construction are based on the concept of a systemic understanding of the family. The questionnaire consists of 32 questions that allow measuring the global satisfaction in the perception of each spouse and also four dimensions of marital satisfaction: intimacy, self-fulfillment, similarity, and disappointment. The KDM-2 questionnaire is considered to be a psychometric tool with satisfactory psychometric qualities.

To measure the explanatory variable (personality traits), the NEO-PI-R Personality Inventory by P. T. Costa and R. R. McCrae was used in the adaptation of J. Siuta [54]. The tool consists of 240 items. The task of a person is to assess the truthfulness of those items according to their own conviction based on a five-point scale. Items included in the questionnaire referred to five main personality factors (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience,

agreeableness, conscientiousness), and there are up to six detailed components (subscales) within each of them. The NEO-PI-R Personality Inventory benefits from satisfactory psychometric values. Reliability indicators referring to the five basic scales range from 0.81 to 0.86. This tool is willingly used by many researchers for research purposes. Therefore, it has been used in the research presented in this study.

Results of personal research

At the first stage of the statistical analyses, the average and standard deviations were calculated from the results obtained by the Good Marriage Questionnaire (KDM-2). Based on this, the level of relationship satisfaction in the sample was estimated. The total number of respondents ($N = 120$) concerning average marital satisfaction, measured on a five-point scale, was $M = 3.94$ ($SD = 0.56$). In the group of men ($n = 60$), the average result of marital satisfaction was $M = 3.99$ ($SD = 0.51$). The situation was similar for women ($n = 60$). Their average marital satisfaction was $M = 3.89$, with a standard deviation of $SD = 0.60$. The analysis of cross-gender comparisons (Student's t-test for independent samples) in the scope of individual dimensions and the general KDM-2 index revealed no statistically significant differences ($t \leq 1.04$, $p \geq 0.302$). More precise data is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Average results and standard deviations from the KDM-2

Variables		Whole sample		Women		Men		Student's t-test
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Good Marriage Questionnaire	Intimacy	3.84	3.92	3.76	0.86	3.92	0.59	0.33 ^{n.s.}
	Disappointment	2.10	2.07	2.13	0.69	2.07	0.70	0.38 ^{n.s.}
	Self-fulfillment	4.08	4.10	4.06	0.56	4.10	0.61	0.31 ^{n.s.}
	Similarity	3.97	4.06	3.89	0.73	4.06	0.57	1.04 ^{n.s.}
	Global satisfaction	3.94	3.99	3.89	0.60	3.99	0.51	0.30 ^{n.s.}

^{n.s.} $p > 0.05$

Then, results of mean and standard deviations in the NEO-PI-R Personality Inventory were checked. Among the whole group of subjects ($N = 120$), the mean severity of the main personality factors, measured on a five-point scale, was respectively: neuroticism $M = 1.08$ ($SD = 0.38$); extraversion $M = 2.00$ ($SD = 0.29$); openness to experience $M = 1.94$ ($SD = 0.25$); agreeableness $M = 2.55$ ($SD = 0.40$), conscientiousness $M = 2.50$ ($SD = 0.41$). In the group of men ($n = 60$), the highest average result was noted in relation to the dimensions: agreeableness ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.37$) and conscientiousness ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.39$). The situation is similar for women ($n = 60$). The median agreeableness score they achieved was $M = 2.65$ with a standard deviation of $SD = 0.39$, while in the range of conscientiousness it was $M = 2.56$ ($SD = 0.43$). The only feature that statistically significantly differentiated women and men was

agreeableness. The magnitude effect, estimated using Cohen's *d*, was at an average level ($d = 0.56$). More detailed data are included in Table 2.

Table 2. Average results and standard deviations from the NEO-PI-R

Variables		Whole sample		Women		Men		Student's t-test
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
NEO-PI-R Personality Inventory	Neuroticism	1.80	0.38	1.86	0.39	1.74	0.37	- 1.71 ^{n.s.}
	Extraversion	2.00	0.29	2.00	0.29	2.00	0.28	- 0.07 ^{n.s.}
	Openness to experience	1.94	0.25	1.96	0.23	1.92	0.28	- 0.92 ^{n.s.}
	Agreeableness	2.55	0.40	2.65	0.39	2.44	0.37	- 3.06 ^{**}
	Conscientiousness	2.50	0.41	2.56	0.43	2.44	0.39	- 1.61 ^{n.s.}

^{n.s.} $p > 0.05$; ^{**} $p < 0.01$

In order to show whether there are relations between personality structure and marriage satisfaction among the studied sample, correlation analyses were performed. Pearson's correlations between personality traits and dimensions of satisfaction with marriage were examined. Statistical analyses carried out in relation to the whole sample showed that personality, taking into account both the main as well as specific factors, remains in numerous statistically significant positive and negative relationships concerning global satisfaction with marriage and its individual dimensions.¹ More detailed data are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Results of Pearson's correlation among the analyzed variables for the entire group (N=120)

Variables		KDM-2 Questionnaire				
		Intimacy	Disappointment	Self-fulfillment	Similarity	Global satisfaction
NEO-PI-R	Neuroticism	- 0.11	0.15 [*]	- 0.08	- 0.18 [*]	- 0.16 [*]
	Extraversion	0.18 [*]	- 0.05	0.11	0.12	0.14
	Openness to experience	0.10	- 0.02	0.12	0.14	0.10
	Agreeableness	0.21 ^{**}	- 0.25 ^{**}	0.14	0.20 [*]	0.25 ^{**}
	Conscientiousness	0.27 [*]	- 0.23 ^{**}	0.08	0.22 ^{**}	0.23 ^{**}

^{**} $p \leq 0.01$; ^{*} $p \leq 0.05$

The results of correlation analyses revealed the existence of statistically significant interdependencies between global marriage satisfaction and neuroticism ($r = -0.16$, $p \leq 0.05$), agreeableness ($r = 0.25$, $p \leq 0.01$) and conscientiousness ($r = 0.23$, $p \leq 0.01$). Significant correlations were also demonstrated between detailed indicators of the quality of marital relationship and neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (see Table 3). On the basis of the obtained results, it can be concluded that high levels of agreeableness and

¹Due to the limited scope of the article and the intention to maintain clarity of the arguments in Table 3, the results of the correlation analyses are provided for only five main NEO-PI-R factors and five KDM-2 indicators. Therefore, first we presented the data on the basis of which it is possible to verify the formulated hypotheses. The effects of more detailed analyses, which refer to the five personality factors (on scales), and the up to six components (subscales) contained by each of them, are available from the authors upon request.

conscientiousness promote marriage satisfaction during old age. In turn, higher results in the area of neuroticism in the case of seniors significantly reduce global satisfaction with their relationship.

Subsequently, in order to estimate the relationship between the structural elements of personality and marriage satisfaction in groups separated by gender, correlation analyses were performed separately for men and women. The obtained results are presented in Table 4 and Table 5. It is worth noting that in the correlations between personality traits and marriage satisfaction, more pronounced tendencies among all of the respondents are revealed in men. The highest values of correlation coefficients were recorded within this group for extraversion and conscientiousness, associated with global marriage satisfaction. In turn, the strongest negative relationships were identified in the area of connections between neuroticism and global marriage satisfaction. It should also be emphasized that in comparison to the group of women, there were definitely more statistically significant interdependencies in terms of personality traits and the detailed dimensions of KDM-2. In the group of women, no statistically significant interdependencies were found (on the level of the global results of the KDM-2), apart from a positive relation between agreeableness and global marriage satisfaction.

Table 4. Results of Pearson’s correlation among the analyzed variables for the group of women (n=60)

Variables		KDM-2 Questionnaire				
		Intimacy	Disappointment	Self-fulfillment	Similarity	Global satisfaction
NEO-PI-R	Neuroticism	0.12	0.01	0.06	0.04	0.07
	Extraversion	0.03	0.11	- 0.12	- 0.08	- 0.08
	Openness to experience	0.02	0.08	- 0.05	- 0.07	- 0.05
	Agreeableness	0.21*	- 0.33**	0.18	0.27*	0.31**
	Conscientiousness	0.15	- 0.22*	0.07	0.13	0.18

** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$

Table 5. Results of Pearson’s correlation among the analyzed variables for the group of men (n=60)

Variables		KDM-2 Questionnaire				
		Intimacy	Disappointment	Self-fulfillment	Similarity	Global satisfaction
NEO-PI-R	Neuroticism	- 0.36**	0.31**	- 0.22*	- 0.40**	- 0.39***
	Extraversion	0.35**	- 0.20	0.34**	0.35**	0.36**
	Openness to experience	0.19	- 0.08	0.26*	0.35**	0.24*
	Agreeableness	0.25*	- 0.18	0.12	0.21	0.23*
	Conscientiousness	0.29**	- 0.23*	0.11	0.39***	0.30**

*** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$

The next stage of the statistical analyses was to search for the conditions of marriage satisfaction (dependent variable) within personality traits (independent variable). For this

purpose, a multi-step stepwise regression analysis was performed for the global and detailed results of the KDM-2 in regard to the main factors (scales) on the NEO-PI-R. Analyses were carried out in relation to the entire group of respondents. Detailed data are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Summary of the regression of the dependent variable

Variables	β	t	p
Global satisfaction with marriage: $R=0.25$; $R^2=0.06$; $F_{(1,118)}=8.11$; $p<0.01$			
Agreeableness	0.25	2.85	0.005
Intimacy: $R=0.21$; $R^2=0.05$; $F_{(1,118)}=5.58$; $p<0.05$			
Agreeableness	0.21	2.36	0.020
Disappointment: $R=0.25$; $R^2=0.06$; $F_{(1,118)}=7.99$; $p<0.01$			
Agreeableness	-0.25	-2.83	0.006
Similarity: $R=0.22$; $R^2=0.05$; $F_{(1,118)}=6.24$; $p<0.05$			
Conscientiousness	0.22	2.50	0.014

Among the five personality traits, only one - agreeableness - turned out to be a significant predictor of global marriage satisfaction among the elderly. It explains 6% of the variability of the results in the area of global satisfaction with the relationship. Analyzing the obtained results, it can be concluded that, among seniors, a greater willingness to help other people and enter into social relations results in greater marriage satisfaction.

The effects obtained from the stepwise regression analysis for intimacy and disappointment showed that agreeableness has the strongest connection with these dimensions of marriage satisfaction, just as stated above. This variable explains 5% of the variance of the results in the area of intimacy and 6% in the area of disappointment. The obtained pattern of the results suggests that the more a person is characterized by altruistic attitudes, the greater their marriage satisfaction and the lower their disappointment with marriage. The next dimension of the KDM-2, similarity, is explained in 5% of the group by only one trait - conscientiousness. This means that the more organized, persistent and motivated in goal-oriented activities one spouse among older people is, the greater their satisfaction with their relationship.

Discussion of the results

The results of the analyses showed that personality structure remains in numerous statistically significant relationships with global marriage satisfaction and its individual dimensions. Relationships are present at low and moderate levels. A number of interesting

trends can be observed. The most significant traits for both the global and specific dimensions of marriage satisfaction were agreeableness and conscientiousness.

Making an attempt to psychologically interpret the obtained research results, it is worth referring to the theory of gerotranscendence by L. Tornstam, which researchers currently show a growing interest in [6, 41]. According to this concept, the period of late adulthood is a time of intense changes that are reflected in three main dimensions of an individual's psychosocial functioning: the spiritual, personality, and relationships dimension [42]. An in-depth analysis of transformations that emerge in the process of gerotranscendence suggests that the severity and clarity of some personality traits may change with age.

When referring to the personality model proposed by Costa and McCrae [48, 49], while at the same time keeping in mind the still open scientific debate regarding the issue of constancy versus personality change [4, 7], it can be assumed that the change reported by Tornstam [41, 42] in the area of relationships with other people, expressed in deepening intimate connections, also shows an intensification of agreeableness which "(...) is a dimension related to interpersonal tendencies. The conciliatory person receives another's kindness and is ready to help others" [54, p. 28]. In turn, characteristic of gerotranscendence is the reduction in interest in superficial relationships with other people in favor of strengthening and deepening relationships with the closest family members (spouse, children, grandchildren), and this may signal a decline in extraversion, a dimension that determines the quality and quantity of social interactions. Following this line of thinking, it can be expected that recognition and acceptance by an individual of its positive and negative aspects, which is a sign of the gerotranscendence process, is an effect of lowered neuroticism [54].

Keeping in mind the above findings, the fact of the key significance of conciliation for marriage satisfaction among seniors and the minor role of neuroticism or extraversion in building a happy marginal life "for two" during its last stage becomes more understandable. Worth recalling are the research results of O'Rourke and colleagues [50] who, when examining older spouses (average life together of 34 years) showed, among others, that neuroticism does not remain statistically significant with the quality of the marital relationship. This correctness referred to both sexes. In addition, data can be found which convince that extraversion and openness to experience are poorly linked to the quality of the marital relationship, while agreeableness and conscientiousness reveal significant interdependencies [cf. 55].

When attempting to determine why extraversion and openness to experience failed to reach the level of statistical significance in predicting marriage satisfaction at an older age, cognitively inspiring seems to be the reference to empirical findings concerning wisdom among

older people [6, 29]. In the psychological literature, it is emphasized that wisdom appearing with age is not a simple effect of the accumulation (gaining) of knowledge, experiences or competency, but a new developmental quality [6, 28]. Wisdom understood in this way is complex and can be perceived as a property of personality, constituting an integral combination of cognitive, reflective and affective components [53]. Features of an individual's personality structure, such as extraversion or openness to experience, seem to be only some aspects (features) of wisdom [cf. 7, 37, 42]. Indeed, the literature points out that the features mentioned above, especially openness to experience, characterize wise people. Nevertheless, they remain only components of wisdom which influences the psychosocial functioning of seniors and is mainly due to its comprehensive (not partial) character. The results of previous research on wisdom show that wisdom is one of the key predictors of life satisfaction among seniors [41, 53], also in the area that concerns marriage [6]. It seems, therefore, that to build a happy relationship, more important is wisdom which includes an attitude of openness to people and the world [6, 28], rather than individual personality structure features such as extraversion or openness to experience [cf. 37].

Analyzing these research results, it is worth pointing to numerous intersexual differences in the relationships between personality traits and the dimensions of marriage satisfaction (see Table 4 and 5). In men, connections between personality traits and marriage satisfaction are more numerous and their intensity is greater. A special difference is observed in neuroticism and conscientiousness. These features are significantly associated with marital satisfaction in men. In turn, there were no significant correlations in women except agreeableness and conscientiousness. The obtained pattern of results suggests that in the period of late adulthood, personality traits play a significantly greater role in building marital happiness in the case of men rather than women. These results correspond to other authors' research results [cf. 37, 50, 51, 55].

In the source literature which undertakes the issue of marital relationship quality, it is indicated that one important factor associated with a satisfying life of two people is emotional intelligence. Studies by Ciarrochi, Chan, and Caputi [56] on a group of Australian students indicate the existence of a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and the quality of interpersonal relationships. The relationship between emotional intelligence and the perceived quality of marriage was stated by Kriegerlewicz [57] in a study conducted on spouses (147 married couples) aged 24 to 63. In the light of the results of these mentioned studies, high emotional intelligence among men is positively associated with their assessment of the

relationship's success. Emotional intelligence in women was also positively associated with marital satisfaction, however, this relationship was weaker.

A research project carried out by Jankowska and Rys [58], which included 225 married couples aged 21 to 70, made it possible to obtain data showing that the level of emotional intelligence positively correlates with marital happiness. Higher emotional intelligence is favourable to achieving greater happiness in marriage for both women and men, however, the significance of this relationship is much more important in the case of husbands.

Similarly, studies by Brudek and colleagues [59] lead to similar conclusions for spouses aged 60 to 75. The obtained results revealed significant correlations between the ability to recognize emotions and satisfaction in marriage only in the group of men. This allows to suppose, as Jaworowska and Matczak's research [60] also suggest, that emotional intelligence in men is one of the key factors determining the success of a marriage, while in women it is of importance, as well, but with the participation of other equally important determinants of a satisfying marital relationship.

In the context of the reported literature, the identified negative relationship of neuroticism with marital satisfaction only in the group of men in the presented studies seems to be more understandable. People with higher neuroticism are more prone to experience such feelings as anxiety, anger, jealousy, sadness or guilt. In addition, they react more acutely to everyday stress and cope less skillfully with it [54]. The conscious use of emotions as a source of information about oneself and the world and skillfully "managing" them is one of the basic elements of emotional intelligence. Accurate recognition and reading signals flowing from emotions enables a person to make proper decisions in life and effectively resolve conflicts [61]. A lack of these skills in the case of men relates to the quality of their relationships with others, including marital relationship. This causes the retention of "neurotic emotions," which makes it difficult to build and maintain intimate bonds [22, 23].

Implications of the Research Results for Psychotherapy

The results of the implemented project allow to draw the following practical conclusions for broadly understood aid interactions addressed to spouses aged 60+.

Firstly, by providing psychological and psychotherapeutic assistance to married couples, particular attention should be paid to the organization of their personality structure and traits. In a special way, this postulate should be taken into account in the case of men.

Secondly, during the course of the aiding process, it is worth appreciating and making use of the role of behaviors, actions, and attitudes that are associated with the intensification of

such personality traits as agreeableness and conscientiousness. This will allow to "capture" and consolidate attitudes that serve to nurture and improve the quality of the marital relationship.

Thirdly, when working with elderly people, actions should be taken to support the process of maturation to gerotranscendence. It may be helpful to encourage spouses to discover the spiritual dimension of their own and common lives and to redefine the moments, situations and events they have experienced together. Adopting such a direction to help in their interactions is conducive to achieving wisdom and positively balance everything that has made up their years of living together.

Limitations of the Study

In addition to its cognitive value, the presented research project has also some limitations. The awareness of these limitations leads to the preservation of an appropriate dose of caution when generalizing the obtained results (on the population of Polish spouses aged 60+) and enables outlining further research perspectives. First of all, it should be emphasized that the research was carried out in a correlation plan, which does not entitle us to cause-and-effect reasoning in the area of the identified dependencies. Therefore, in the perspective of further research about the determinants of marriage satisfaction among people in their late adulthood, a project based on longitudinal studies is worth considering.

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