



doi:10.5559/di.23.1.05

PERCEIVED SPOUSE'S AFFECTIONATE AND ANTAGONISTIC BEHAVIOURS AND MARITAL SATISFACTION

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UDK: 159.942-058.833

Izvorni znanstveni rad

Primljeno: 12. 2. 2014.

The aim of the study was to examine how perceived spouse's affectionate and antagonistic behaviours contribute to one's marital satisfaction. Firstly, we explored whether perception of partner's affectionate and antagonistic behaviours vary with gender, age, length of marriage and family structure. Secondly, we examined the relation between perceived partner's behaviour and marital satisfaction, while controlling for contextual variables. Questionnaire assessing love, marital satisfaction, perceived partners' affectionate and antagonistic behaviours and demographic data was administered to a heterogeneous sample of 302 married couples from Croatia with the average marriage length of 18 years and age span of 20–82 years. Results indicate that perceived spouse's affectionate and antagonistic behaviours both contribute to marital satisfaction with the impact of antagonistic behaviours being buffered when it appears in affectionate relationship. These effects are not moderated by age, gender, marriage duration or family structure. Finally, the perception of partner's affectionate and antagonistic behaviours had significant incremental power over feelings of love and other contextual variables when predicting marital satisfaction.

Keywords: marital satisfaction, emotional marital climate, perceived spouse's behaviour, love



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INTRODUCTION

Marital satisfaction is long ago recognised as a highly relevant topic among researchers. Thus, much research has been looking at predictors of marital satisfaction in order to understand the underlying processes that lead to higher vs. lower satisfaction with one's marriage, help couples enhance their marriages, but also to prevent divorce that is labelled as costly for children, families, and communities (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Cacioppo, Cacioppo, Gonzaga, Ogburn, & VanderWeele, 2013). Marital satisfaction is typically reflected in the way spouses behave toward each other in their day-to-day interactions. In the present study we shall concentrate on specific behaviours and determine the relation between perceived partners' positive and negative behaviours and marital satisfaction, while taking into account the role of love. Additionally we shall explore how these patterns of interaction vary with gender, age, length of marriage and family structure.

Marital satisfaction is usually defined as a subjective perception and assessment of one's marriage. When identifying key domains of marriage and marital satisfaction, Vangelisti and Huston (1994) emphasized the importance of partners' interaction with each other. This is hardly surprising as marital relationships can be described in terms of recurring behavioural processes that take place during interaction between two partners (i.e. how often spouses criticize each other, how much they disclose, and how consistently they validate each other). In other words, spouses' satisfaction is reflected in the way they treat each other which in turn defines their satisfaction with their relationship thus creating an interdependent system (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991). With time, marital satisfaction of each spouse, and the warm or hostile behaviour they express, come to mirror those of the partner. All relevant theories in the field of intimate relationships assume such cyclical relationship between behaviour and relationship satisfaction and thus confirm the importance of specific behaviours as determinants of marital satisfaction. Specifically, the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), as well as social exchange theory (Homans, 1961; Huesmann & Levinger, 1976; Huston & Burgess, 1979), social learning theory and modelling theory (Bandura, 1977), and interdependence theory (Kelley, 1979; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991) suggest that desirable behaviours on the part of one partner are likely to elicit desirable behaviours on the part of the other, and that partners' satisfaction is reflected in the way they treat each other, with more satisfied spouses tending to express more warmth and less hostility than spouses who are less satisfied in their marriages.

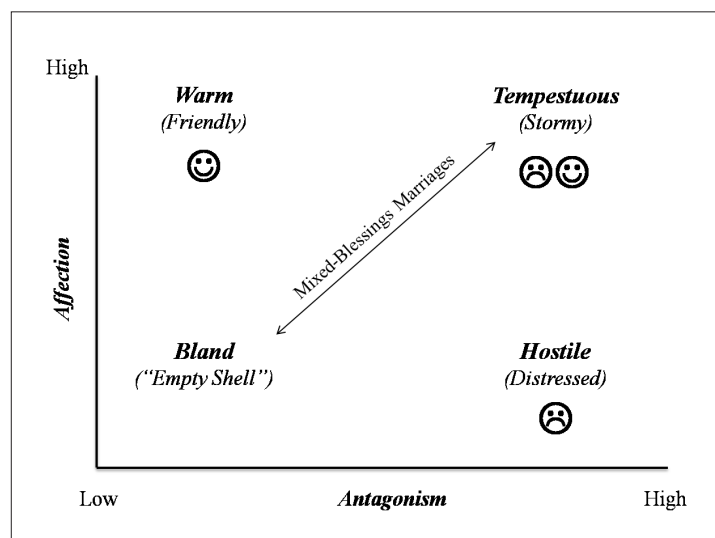
To sum up, this interdependent system is exactly why behaviours are central to studying marital satisfaction. Exchanging behaviour is practically the only observable way partners can affect each other directly. Therefore exchanging rewarding or positive behaviours during interactions between partners contributes to the quality of marriage, and exchanging punishing or negative behaviours does harm. Even though partner's personality, values and experiences doubtlessly matter, they are reflected through their behaviours towards one another. As work in this area developed, theorists broadened their definition of behaviour, and suggested that it is observable behaviours that count. Namely, implications of certain behaviour depend on how each partner interprets that particular behaviour. Relationships may encounter problems when partners begin to interpret each other's behaviours negatively. Research (systematically presented in Huston & Vangelisti, 1991) has given a lot of support to the notion that it is negative rather than positive partner's behaviour that serves as a barometer of marital satisfaction, especially for distressed couples (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997; Gottman & Levenson, 1986; Noller, 1985; Notarius, Lashley, & Sullivan, 1997). In line with these findings, longitudinal studies have confirmed that the expression of negative affect predicts satisfaction at a later time (e.g., Kelley, Huston, & Cate, 1985; Markman, 1979, 1981) and that, when controlling for initial satisfaction, negativity predicts declines in satisfaction over time (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Levenson & Gottman, 1985).

Most research dealing with behaviour focused on the role of negative behaviours and conflict between partners. However, as Caughlin and Huston (2006) point out "enduringly happy relationships involve more than just the absence of antagonism and strife" (p. 132). In the last decades a salient trend in the literature is to pay greater attention to the positive elements and there is growing recognition that affectionate and supportive behaviours are also important for a marriage to be successful (Bradbury, Cohan, & Karney, 1998; Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Huston & Houts, 1998; Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George, 2001; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991; Reis & Gable, 2003; Vangelisti, 2002). For instance, positive behaviours have been found to covary with daily satisfaction ratings more strongly for happy than for distressed couples (Wills, Weiss, & Patterson, 1974). Moreover, declines from high to moderate levels of satisfaction are associated with low levels of positive behaviour (Filsinger & Thoma, 1988). Finally, day-to-day ratings of satisfaction for couples who are generally happy are more strongly associated with positive than with negative behaviours (Jacobson, Waldron, & Moore, 1980). Thus, research sup-

ports the idea that patterns of both positive and negative behaviour should be assessed to predict changes in marital satisfaction.

Emotional climate of a marriage is a broad umbrella term that can be summarized in the context of two core constructs, affection and antagonism. Combinations of spouses' affectionate and antagonistic behaviours in couple's everyday life differentiate marriages from one another (Caughlin & Huston, 2006). Affection and antagonism seem to be different dimensions, as confirmed by factor analyses and low correlation between the two (Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2003; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991; Smith, Vivian, & O'Leary, 1990). In other words, lack of antagonism in marriage still does not make it affectionate and happy, just as lack of loving behaviours does not necessarily make it hostile. In fact, affectionate and antagonistic behaviours often interact and antagonistic behaviours can be interpreted differently depending on the level of affection they are embedded in (Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Gottman, 1994; Huston & Chorost, 1994). Therefore, Caughlin and Huston (2006) suggest four archetypal emotional climates defined by the affection and antagonism dimensions: 1. high affection and low antagonism indicate *warm* marital climate, 2. high affection and high antagonism are typical of *tempestuous or stormy* emotional climate, 3. low affection and high antagonism represent *hostile* emotional climate in marriage, and 4. low affection and low antagonism characterise *bland* marriages (see Figure 1). Marriages that fall somewhere between bland and tempestuous marriages are named *mixed blessings* in terms of emotional climate (equal ratio of positive and negative elements).

➤ FIGURE 1
A two-dimensional space for describing the emotional climate of marriage (from: *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*, Ch. 8: *The Affective Structure of Marriage* (Caughlin & Huston, 2006, p. 132))



Emotional climate of marriage is strongly linked to marital satisfaction, but is operationalized differently – by perceived spouse's behaviour patterns. Even though it is subjective as it refers to perception of a spouse's behaviours, it is less prone to bias because each spouse is typically asked to recollect if and how often his/her spouse has behaved in a certain way or demonstrated specific behaviour during the last week. This is an important distinction from marital satisfaction. As stated earlier, marital satisfaction is a subjective measure and as such is prone to bias. Those who are happier or more in love, perceive their relationship in a more positive manner. Therefore, when assessing marital satisfaction, it should be differentiated from similar constructs such as love, and researchers should avoid situations where potential predictors of marital satisfaction are also biased and overlap with the construct of marital satisfaction. Namely, sometimes measures of marital satisfaction are operationalized through specific spouses' behaviours (i.e. Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale; Locke & Wallace, 1959) and therefore correlations obtained when such measure is associated with the same or similar partners' behaviours is just the side-effect of the operationalisation. Furthermore, research on married couples has already confirmed that love is the first significant predictor of marital satisfaction (EL-Mageed, Elwan, & Sree, 2012; Hefazi Torqabeh, Firouz Abadi, & Haqshenas, 2006), and that passionate love contributes to marital satisfaction of wives (Aron & Henkemeyer, 1995). Longitudinal data on married couples also showed (Huston, Neihuis, & Smith, 2001) that marital happiness can be predicted by love partner feel for each other as newlyweds. We argue that the true measure of marital satisfaction should be assessed with items that make no reference to marital behaviour patterns.

Both marital satisfaction and marital behaviour are affected by various contextual factors such as gender and age as well as by certain aspects of relationship like marriage length, parenthood etc. Longitudinal research has repeatedly confirmed that marital satisfaction declines with the length of marriage (Hirschberger, Srivastava, Marsh, Cowan, & Cowan, 2009) for both husbands and wives. Another line of research shows that couples are typically more affectionate toward each other and also more satisfied as newlyweds than they are 2 years into marriage (MacDermid, Huston, & McHale, 1990), confirming the effect of marriage length on marital satisfaction but also suggesting a strong connection between affective behaviour and satisfaction with relationship. In the same vein, couples involved in long-term marriages vary considerably in the amount of affection they express and the conflict they experience in their day-to-day life together (Braiker & Kelley, 1979; Orden & Bradburn, 1968).

Looking into predictors of the decline in marital satisfaction, researchers focused on the role of parenthood (Huston & Vangelisti, 1995). However, there are contradictory findings in this area. Namely, some researchers found declines in both satisfaction and love equally for parents and non-parents (MacDermid, Huston, & McHale, 1990), while others found greater declines in marital functioning among parents than among non-parents (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009), particularly for wives (Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Glenn & McLanahan, 1982). A meta-analysis (Twenge, Campbell, & Foster, 2003) found lower levels of marital satisfaction among parents compared to non-parents, and among those with more children (although the effect sizes were small: $d = -0.19$ and $d = -0.13$ respectively). The effects of parenthood on marital satisfaction were more negative for women, people with higher SES and younger cohorts, confirming the importance of contextual factors when studying marital satisfaction.

Gender differences are often emphasized in the scientific and lay literature on intimate relationships. It is a well-known fact that differences in marital satisfaction exist between women and men, with husbands being more satisfied than wives (Bartolac, Kamenov, & Petrak, 2011; Heyn, 1997; Johnson & Lebow, 2000; Kamenov, Jelić, Tadinac, & Hromatko, 2007; McRae & Brody, 1989; Schumm, Webb, & Bollman, 1998; Tadinac et al., 2012; Walker, 1999). In addition, research has indicated that women derive psychological benefits when they are in satisfying marriages, while men benefit from marriage regardless of its quality (Hess & Soldo, 1985). Nevertheless, when it comes to marital interactions, these differences are often relatively small. For example, in three studies conducted on 375 students, only one stable and robust gender difference emerged regarding desired relationship support and even that difference could be attributed to gender-identity (Perrin et al., 2011). Furthermore, research shows that, when it comes to specific behaviours associated with love, both genders are equally likely to show love through affection (Huić, Kamenov, & Jelić, 2012). At the same time, wives (but not husbands) also expressed love by enacting less negative or antagonistic behaviour (Schoenfeld, Bredow, & Huston, 2012). Furthermore, longitudinal data of newly married couples followed over two years revealed a gender-differentiated relationship between satisfaction and marital behaviour: Negative behaviour, regardless of whether it was expressed by the husband or the wife, was associated with declines in wives' (but not husbands') satisfaction (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991). As already stated earlier, Gottman and Krokoff (1989) argued that husbands' negativity, rather than wives' negativity, predicted declines in partners' satisfaction. Taken together, all these find-

ings suggest that gender differences exist, if not in specific behaviours, then in the interpretation of positive and negative spouse's behaviour as some research has already confirmed (Gaelick, Bodenhausen, & Wyer, 1985).

The present study, even though cross-sectional, expands on the previous literature in several ways. Firstly, we included a large sample of Croatian couples from various backgrounds and impressive marriage duration span (instead of focusing on newlyweds). Even though the field of intimate relationships is promising and relevant, most studies are conducted in the USA and there is a need for cross-cultural validation of these findings. Research on close relationships in our country is scarce even though Croatia has a lot to offer in this context. As a country in transition from collectivistic to individualistic society, it offers the possibility to study different patterns of spouses' behaviours between various birth cohorts and explore their potential moderating role on the previous findings. Secondly, we assessed marital climate via perception of partners' specific socio-emotional behaviours in everyday life. Even though perception is always biased, our measure is biased to a lesser extent by focusing on the role of specific spouse's behaviours on marital satisfaction. Furthermore, this study examines the interplay between two types of socio-emotional behaviour (affection and antagonism) and marital satisfaction instead of focusing on just negative behaviours. Thirdly, we employed a measure of marital satisfaction that does not confound spouses' evaluations of their marriage with characterizations of their interaction patterns. Finally, we took special care to statistically control for love partners' feel for each other, so that spouses' evaluations of marital satisfaction were not confounded by their love for their partner.

Our study examined how perceived spouse's affectionate and antagonistic behaviours contribute to one's marital satisfaction. Firstly, we explored whether perception of partner's affectionate and antagonistic behaviours vary with gender, age, length of marriage and family structure. We expected wives to report more antagonistic behaviours performed by their husbands than vice versa, and we expected both partners to perceive less affectionate and more antagonistic behaviours in their marriage if they were older, if they were married for a longer time and if they had children. Secondly, we examined the relation between perceived partner's behaviour and marital satisfaction, while controlling for relevant contextual variables and level of love for one's partner. Although we expected perceived affectionate behaviours to be positive predictors and perceived antagonistic behaviours to be negative predictors of marital satisfaction, the interaction effect of both types of behaviours on marital satisfaction was also expected.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 302 married couples from Croatia. The length of marriage varied from 1 month to 57 years ($M = 17.87$ years, $SD = 12.93$). Age span was 20 – 77 years for wives and 21 – 82 years for husbands ($M = 43.68$, $SD = 12.89$). About 80% of participants have at least one child, while others are childless. Participants come from various regions of Croatia and the sample is heterogeneous regarding education level and city size/population. A little over a third of the sample (38.4%) lives in a large city (over 500.000 citizens), 8.3% live in a city (up to 500.000 citizens), 22.1% come from big towns (up to 100.000 citizens), 14.5% come from small towns (up to 10.000 citizens) and 16,8% live in a village/in the country. Most of the participants estimated their socio-economic status as average.

Procedure

The sample was gathered using a snowball technique. Participants were recruited if they were legally married and if the age difference between the spouses was not greater than 10 years. Those who spent more than three months apart prior to the study were not eligible for this study. All participants were approached in their homes and filled in the questionnaire alone (without the presence of spouse) to minimize any influences that a conversation between spouses might have on their reports. After completing the questionnaire, they were instructed to seal it in an envelope provided by the researcher, without showing it to their spouse.

Measures

Love Scale

We used Braiker and Kelley's (1979) Love Scale, a short, 9- item, unidimensional (one factor explains 69.92% of the variance) measure of love (e.g. "To what extent do you love your partner at this stage?", "To what extent do you have a sense of "belonging" with your partner?"). Participants indicated their response on a 9-point scale: 1 (not at all) – 9 (extremely). Internal consistency is high ($\alpha = 0.95$).

Marital climate/Socio-emotional behaviour

Inventory of Affection and Antagonism in Marriage (Huston, Kamenov, & Huić, 2010) was used in order to assess perceived marital climate. The inventory was compiled for the purpose of this study. The behaviours were drawn from a list of affectionate and antagonistic behaviours from the PAIR project study (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991). Each partner read statements

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describing 17 specific socio-emotional behaviours and had to indicate how often their spouse exhibited each of the behaviours during the last week (1 – not once; 2 – once; 3 – twice; 4 – almost every other day; 5 – every day; 6 – twice a day; 7 – more than twice a day). Affectionate (positive) behaviours were assessed by ten items (an example item "Your H/W did something nice for you that you didn't expect") and antagonism (negative behaviours) by seven items (example item "Your H/W showed anger or impatience by yelling, snapping, or raising his/her voice at you"). Principal factor analysis showed a clear two-factor solution explaining 50.78% of husbands' score variance, and 50.60% of the wives' score variance. Affectionate behaviours explained 31.59% (husbands) / 31.09% (wives) of variance, while antagonistic behaviours explained 19.19% (husbands) / 19.51% (wives) of variance. Alpha coefficients of the subscales for both husbands and wives were high, ranging from 0.76 for antagonism to 0.90 for affection.

Marital satisfaction

Marital satisfaction was assessed by a single-item, 9-point global assessment of respondents' overall satisfaction with their marriage.¹

Demographic characteristics

Additionally, we asked for information about the age of participants, length of marriage and whether they have children.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results suggest that the average scores for marital satisfaction ($M = 7.31$, $SD = 1.767$) and for love ($M = 7.73$, $SD = 1.337$) are above the midpoint of the scale, indicating that the participants in our study are, on average, satisfied with their marriages and love their partners. This is not surprising, because couples who decide to participate in studies on marital satisfaction usually are the ones that are satisfied. In line with this, average scores for antagonistic spouse's behaviour are very low ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.871$). On the other hand, average scores for perceived spouse's affectionate behaviours are just below the midpoint of the scale ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 1.144$), which indicates that even in satisfying marriages partners don't display affectionate behaviours very often. However, participants in this study perceive more affection than antagonism from their spouses. In other words, on average, participants report their spouses showing affection a couple of times a week, and being antagonistic once a week. This ratio is far to be desired. According to Gottman's criterion (1999) obtained on American couples, only a ratio of 5:1 (in favour of positive behaviours) guarantees a happy marriage. Our couples exhibit, on

average, a ratio of 1.63:1, but still report relatively high marital satisfaction. We can only speculate whether this difference is due to a different culture or different methodology, but it is certainly a finding worth looking into in future research.

The effect of gender, age, marriage duration and family structure on perceived spouse's affection and antagonism

Our first aim was to determine whether the patterns of behavioural interaction vary with gender, age, length of marriage and family structure. We conducted several ANOVAs to determine the effects of aforementioned demographic variables on the perception of spouse's affection and antagonism (Table 1).

		Affection				Antagonism			
		M	SD	F	p	M	SD	F	p
Gender	M	3.61	1.130	3.310	0.069	2.17	0.870	0.055	0.814
	F	3.44	1.152			2.15	0.874		
Marriage duration	<10 y.	3.91	1.041	19.919	0.001	2.09	0.868	3.437	0.033
	10-25 y.	3.33	1.131			2.13	0.778		
	>25 y.	3.28	1.160			2.31	0.969		
Age	<35 y.	3.89	1.070	15.826	0.001	2.13	0.869	0.897	0.409
	36-54 y.	3.31	1.137			2.15	0.819		
	>55 y.	3.39	1.143			2.26	0.988		
Having children	Yes	3.39	1.133	16.264	0.001	2.23	0.889	8.007	0.001
	No	4.06	1.027			1.87	0.729		

TABLE 1
Results of the ANOVAs showing effects of gender, age, marriage duration and family structure on perceived spouse's affection and antagonism

Gender. Findings suggest that gender does not play an important role in the socio-emotional climate of marriage. Both men and women (husbands and wives) in this study perceive more positive than negative behaviours from their spouses, but no gender differences in the average scores on perceived spouse's affectionate and antagonistic behaviours were found.

Age. Participants were divided into three age groups: up to 35 years of age, 36-54 years of age, and 55 and above. Post-hoc analyses showed that participants from the youngest age group (up to 35 years) tend to perceive more affectionate behaviours from their partners than participants from the two other age cohorts. Interestingly, no differences were found between the three groups for the perception of antagonism.

Marriage duration. Results obtained for marriage duration and age of participants are relatively similar as these two variables overlap significantly ($r = 0.91, p = 0.001$). Participants were divided into three equally large groups depending of their marriage duration: married up to 10 years, married 10-25 years, and married 25-57 years. Despite the serious overlap, results are somewhat different. Namely, unlike the age factor, the

factor of marriage duration yielded significant effects for both affectionate as well as antagonistic partner's behaviours. Again, Scheffe post-hoc test confirmed that participants who are married less than 10 years (and also younger) tend to perceive more affectionate behaviours from their partners than those married for more than 10 years. Furthermore, participants who are married more than 25 years tend to perceive more antagonism from their partners.

Family structure. Participants who have children exhibit less affection and more antagonism towards their partners than those without children. However, before jumping to hasty conclusions, we should take into account that those who don't have children in our sample are also typically younger and have been married for a shorter period of time (5 years vs. 21 years married; $t = 13.621$, $p = 0.001$). Hence, this finding might represent just another reflection of the marriage duration finding. Therefore, we repeated the analysis with marriage duration as a covariate. Findings confirm that family structure (i.e. having children vs. not having children) still has a significant effect on the perception of spouse's affection and antagonism ($F_{\text{affection}} = 6.876$, $p = 0.001$; $F_{\text{antagonism}} = 5.596$, $p = 0.004$).

In line with our expectations, the results show that contextual factors such as age, length of marriage and having children modify, to some extent, the way partners behave in their marriage and have some significant effects on emotional climate in a relationship.

The effect of perceived partner's behaviour on marital satisfaction

Our main goal was to determine the effects of both antagonistic and affectionate partner's behaviours on marital satisfaction, which is a salient trend in the literature as the impact of antagonism on satisfaction is often buffered by high affection (Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Gottman, 1994). Furthermore, because love and marital satisfaction are usually highly correlated, we wanted to ensure that spouses' evaluations of marital satisfaction were not confounded by their feelings of love towards the spouse. Thus, in regression analyses we controlled for participant's love score, as well as for relevant contextual variables – marriage duration and whether couples have children.

Correlations between variables for husbands and wives are presented in Table 2. In line with expectations, the correlation between perceived affectionate and antagonistic marital behaviours in our sample is quite low for wives, and nonexistent for husbands, which confirms the empirical distinction between positive and negative aspects of marriage. Marital

TABLE 2
Correlation coefficients of predictors and criterion for husbands (regular) and wives (italic)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Length of marriage						
2. Age	0.92**					
3. Having children	-0.90**					
4. Love for partner	-0.48**	-0.40**				
5. Affection	-0.49**	-0.46**				
6. Antagonism	-0.15*	-0.13*	0.12*			
7. Marital satisfaction	-0.13*	-0.08	0.11			
	-0.16**	-0.15*	0.21**	0.53**		
	-0.25**	-0.24**	0.25**	0.60**		
	0.09	0.05	-0.18**	-0.22**	-0.04	
	0.09	0.09	-0.14*	-0.25**	-0.22**	
	-0.15*	-0.12*	0.11	0.75**	0.52**	-0.31**
	-0.20**	-0.18**	0.17**	0.74**	0.64**	-0.43**

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

satisfaction is correlated to all potential predictors except with having children for husbands. However, as this variable shows meaningful correlations to other predictors and is significantly correlated with marital satisfaction for wives, we decided to include it in the regression analyses.

We conducted hierarchical regression analysis separate for husbands and wives. Contextual variables and love were entered in the first step of the regression analysis. However, as age and marriage duration are highly correlated in our sample ($r = 0.91$, $p = 0.001$), introducing them both into regression analysis would present the problem of multicollinearity ($VIF = 5.372$). Therefore, only marriage duration was entered as a predictor of marital satisfaction. Perceived spouse's affectionate and antagonistic behaviours were entered in the next step after centering the variables, and their interaction in the final step. Results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

TABLE 3
Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting marital satisfaction for husbands

Marital satisfaction	β when entered	β in last step	R ²	ΔR^2
Having children	n.s.	n.s.		
Marriage duration	n.s.	n.s.	0.546**	0.552**
Love	0.740**	0.586**		
Affectionate behaviours	0.199**	0.187**	0.595**	0.052**
Antagonistic behaviours	-0.192**	-0.209**		
Affection x Antagonism		0.116**	0.607**	0.013**

β – standardised Beta coefficients;

R² – coefficient of determination (adjusted);

ΔR^2 – change in R²

*p < 0.05, **p < 0.01.

Marital satisfaction	β when entered	β in last step	R^2	ΔR^2
Having children	n.s.	n.s.		
Marriage duration	-0.120**	-0.089*	0.584**	0.588**
Love	0.737**	0.532**		
Affectionate behaviours	0.256**	0.252**	0.676**	0.094**
Antagonistic behaviours	-0.226**	-0.213**		
Affection x Antagonism		0.096**	0.683**	0.009*

TABLE 4
Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for variables predicting marital satisfaction for wives

β – standardised Beta coefficients;
 R^2 – coefficient of determination (adjusted);
 ΔR^2 – change in R^2
 * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

Results are similar for both husbands and wives. In both cases our predictors explained above 60% of the criterion.

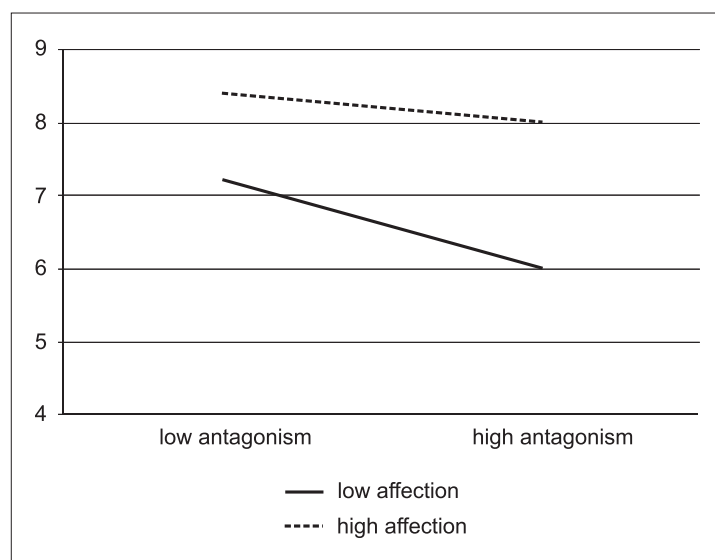
If we look at predictors more closely, we can see that having children, although correlated with criterion, proved to be irrelevant for marital satisfaction of both husbands and wives when the larger context is taken into account. Also, gender differences were found when it comes to the relationship of marriage duration and marital satisfaction. It seems that the duration of marriage leads to declines in wives' marital satisfaction, but not husbands'.

In line with our expectations, love for one's spouse was the most significant single predictor of both husbands and wives marital satisfaction. Spouses' perceived affectionate and antagonistic behaviours had significant incremental power when predicting marital satisfaction ($\Delta R^2 = 5.2\%/9.4\%$), even when contextual factors and love spouses feel for one another is controlled for. The effects of perceived partner's affection and antagonism on marital satisfaction are in line with previous research (Caughlin & Huston, 2006; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991). Replication of this finding in Croatia serves as further cross-cultural validation of this effect, and the fact that these effects are present even after controlling for duration of marriage and whether participants have children, testifies to the robustness of the relationship between emotional climate behaviours and marital satisfaction.

However, it should be noted that, contrary to the popular notion that antagonism is the key predictor of marital satisfaction (Christensen & Walczynski, 1997; Notarius, Lashley, & Sullivan, 1997), our results show that perceived affectionate spouse's behaviours have an equally strong impact on marital satisfaction. Our findings corroborate the growing recognition that marital satisfaction is not just about the absence of antagonism between partners, but also, or even more so, a-

bout affectionate behaviours (Bradbury, Cohan, & Karney, 1998; Caughlin & Huston, 2006; Gottman & Levenson, 2000; Huston & Houts, 1998; Huston & Vangelisti, 1991; Reis & Gable, 2003; Vangelisti, 2002). Furthermore, significant interaction ($F = 94.39, p = 0.001$) confirmed previous findings (Caughlin & Huston, 2006; Huston & Chorost, 1994) that the impact of antagonistic interactions is heightened when it occurs in a context of low affection and buffered when it appears in an affectionate relationship (see Figure 2). In other words, it seems that antagonistic behaviours are not taken as seriously or are not as damaging to a marriage when they are embedded in an affectionate relationship than when they take place in a marriage with low levels of affectionate interaction between spouses.

➤ FIGURE 2
Differences between categories of emotional marital climate (defined by perceived affectionate vs. antagonistic spouse's behaviours) in satisfaction with marriage



It seems that our perception of a spouse showing love by behaving affectionately can increase our satisfaction with our relationship. Of course, just the opposite should hold for spouse's antagonistic behaviours, as they could easily be interpreted as the absence of love. As both types of partner's behaviours equally contribute to marital satisfaction, we argue that future research should focus on the mediating role of their interpretation for explaining one's satisfaction in a relationship. It is possible, for example, that in an affectionate marriage spouses attribute partner's antagonistic behaviour to personality traits but do not question his or her love, whereas in a marriage that is lacking affection spouses interpret the same antagonistic partner's behaviour as a sign that he or she does not love them.

CONCLUSION

Findings obtained from 302 Croatian married couples suggest that men and women do not differ in their perception of emotional climate in their marriage. However, older participants that have been married for a longer period of time perceived less affectionate behaviour from their spouses, with those married longer also perceiving more antagonistic behaviour. Parenthood had a negative effect on the emotional climate of marriage by both lowering affectionate and increasing antagonistic behaviour.

Taken together, our findings on determinants of marital satisfaction suggest that people who perceive more partner's affection, people who perceive less partner's antagonism, those who love more, and wives who are married for a shorter period of time are more satisfied with their marriage. In line with expectations, feelings of love for one's partner are the most significant predictor of one's marital satisfaction. However, perception of both partner's affectionate and antagonistic behaviours, as well as their interaction, had significant incremental power over feelings of love and other contextual variables when predicting marital satisfaction.

We can conclude that our study confirms the importance of specific partners' behaviours as determinants of marital satisfaction. Perceiving rewarding or positive behaviours during interactions between partners contributes to the satisfaction with marriage, and exchanging punishing or negative behaviours diminishes it. More specifically, our findings are in line with the notion that antagonistic behaviours can be interpreted differently depending on the level of affection they are embedded in (Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Gottman, 1994; Huston & Chorost, 1994). We confirmed the robustness of this effect in a different culture and when controlling for the relevant contextual variables. However, we believe that, in order to truly understand the relationship between spouses' behaviours and marital satisfaction, certain contextual factors have to be taken into account (see also Fincham, 2003; Huston, 2000). Firstly, our study showed that factors such as age, length of marriage and parenthood affect emotional climate in marriage. Secondly, the finding that the marriage duration affects wives marital satisfaction but not husbands' also supports the importance of the context. Therefore, further research should focus on the ways partners interpret perceived spouse's behaviours in different contexts and the implications of these interpretations for marital satisfaction.

NOTES

¹ Even though only a single-item measure, this is a valid measure of marital satisfaction which does not conflate reported satisfaction with marital behaviours and interaction patterns (see Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000). Furthermore, it is a widely used measure of marital satisfaction and research confirms that correlations between

such global item and multidimensional scales of marital satisfaction are usually quite high (Levinger, 1976; Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986; Fowers & Olson, 1993).

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Percipirana partnerova pozitivna i negativna ponašanja i zadovoljstvo brakom

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Cilj istraživanja bio je ispitati kakav efekt percepcija partnerova ponašanja, točnije iskazivanja naklonosti i neprijateljstva, ima na zadovoljstvo brakom. Istražili smo razlike u percipiranom partnerovom iskazivanju naklonosti i

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antagonizma s obzirom na rod, dob, trajanje braka i roditeljstvo. Osim toga, ispitali smo odnos između percepcije partnerova ponašanja i zadovoljstva brakom, kontrolirajući pritom kontekstualne varijable. Upitnik s pitanjima o intenzitetu ljubavi, zadovoljstvu brakom, iskazivanju naklonosti i neprijateljstva primijenjen je na heterogenom uzorku od 302 bračna para iz Hrvatske s prosječnim trajanjem braka od 18 godina te dobnim rasponom od 20 do 82 godine. Partnerovo iskazivanje naklonosti i neprijateljstva značajno su povezani s bračnim zadovoljstvom, pri čemu visoka razina iskazivanja naklonosti predstavlja zaštitni faktor u brakovima s visokom razinom neprijateljskoga ponašanja. Ovaj odnos ne ovisi o rodu, dobi, trajanju braka ili strukturi obitelji. Uz važnu ulogu konteksta i intenziteta ljubavi u predviđanju bračnoga zadovoljstva, dobivena je značajna inkrementalna valjanost percepcije iskazivanja naklonosti i neprijateljstva supružnika u predviđanju bračnoga zadovoljstva.

Ključne riječi: zadovoljstvo brakom, emocionalna bračna klima, percipirana partnerova ponašanja, ljubav