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Communication and closeness versus sexual satisfaction of spouses[1]

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Abstract: The subject of the presented analyzes is communication and closeness versus sexual satisfaction among married people. The aim of the research was to check the connection between the independent variables–communication and closeness and the dependent variable – sexual satisfaction. 116 people were examined, aged from 20 to 63 years old, who have been married for between 1 month and 35 years. The Kaźmierczak and Plopa's *Communication in Marriage Questionnaire* has been used for the measurements (2008), Ryś's *Marital Intimacy Scale* (1998) and Plopa's *Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire* (2017). Communication in the areas of support and commitment shows a positive connection with sexual satisfaction in the areas of caressing, closeness and sex, while depreciation in the spouses' communication shows a negative connection with sexual satisfaction. Emotional, intellectual and action-based closeness are also positively related to sexual satisfaction. Additionally, emotional and action-based closeness turned out to be mediators of the connection between communication and sexual satisfaction. The research results allow us to conclude that the spouses' communication and closeness play an important role in their sexual satisfaction. The discussion on the mediating role of emotional and action-based closeness on the connection between communication and sexual satisfaction emphasizes the nonverbal nature of the above phenomena.
Keywords: marriage, communication, closeness, sexual satisfaction

1. Introduction

Many scientists have attempted examination of the psychological determinants making marriage last longer. These determinants include, most notably, factors comprising elements of the resilience of the marital subsystem. This is so as resilience allows good functioning of an individual or group also under unfavourable conditions (Gąsior, 2014).

The paper investigates three areas of functioning of the marital relationship – communication, closeness, and sexual satisfaction. It has been assumed that those spheres, which oftentimes overlap, are interrelated. Braun-Gałkowska (2003, p. 15-16) includes as success conditions for marriage "the capacity to express feelings, affection, and care for closeness, including sexual closeness", as well as "the capacity of correct communication". In turn, Rostowski (1987, p. 275, cf. also Komorowska-Pudło, 2014) claims that "sexuality cannot be separated from other aspects of marital life, and so the emotional, intellectual, and cultural". Żak-Łykus i Nawrat (2013) add that sexual functions only partially explain sexual satisfaction. The conducted studies checked whether there is a relationship between communication and sexual satisfaction and between closeness and sexual satisfaction in spouses. In addition, the mediating role of closeness in the relationship between communication and sexual satisfaction was being verified.

1.1. Communication and sexual satisfaction

1.1.1. Communication in marriage

The leading representative of the systemic approach in psychology, Satir (2002, p. 56) claims that "communication is the most powerful factor determining the type of relationships we have with others and our

1 Article in Polish language: https://stowarzyszeniefidesetratio.pl/fer/62P_wery.pdf

own development". As communication is the basic tool for the human being to establish relationships of all sorts (Weryszko, 2020a), it seems obvious that it also constitutes a fundamental set of elements comprising the family system, including marriage. The principles of effective expression, including marital expression, includes direct, immediate, clear, honest and supportive messages – those that allow closeness building (McKay et al., 2007). According to Eggerichs (2010), any negative factors leading to absence of satisfaction in marriage can be eliminated with high communication skills. Properly conducted communication is the tool fundamental for the marital relationship as it is a vehicle for the spouses' expression, serves them to resolve conflicts, creates the air of dialogue, and builds a bond between the spouses. Many studies show that proper communication is also a factor facilitating relationship strength and quality (Chmielewska, 2019; Jankowska, 2016; Kurowska, Nikel, 2023, Orłowski, 2018; Walęcka-Matyja, Szkudlarek, 2019; Weryszko, 2020b). Nyarks and Hope (2023) argue that effective marital communication is key for every marriage to be successful and lasting. In turn, Lachowska (2022) points out to communication as a factor included in many models and concepts of family strengths.

1.1.2. Communication and spouses' sexual satisfaction

McKay et al. (2007) discuss the myths that make it difficult for spouses to talk about sexual intercourse. The first one is the claim that the sexual act is so biological and natural that it should happen spontaneously. This leads to a conviction that this spontaneity is an expression of love and romance. As a result, the spouses cannot deal with difficulties appearing in their sex life. This is particularly true for spouses who have been together for a long time, who notice differences in their sexual needs. The spouses' frustration or sense that their relationship should not exist. Another myth is that the spouses expect their partner to know how to satisfy their sexual needs. This way, they abandon responsibility for communicating their own needs and require of their partner the improbable ability to read minds and feelings. Yet another trap is the conviction that the knowledge of the partner's sexual needs shows sensitivity and care. When the needs are not communicated, they are not satisfied and, in effect, the partner is labelled "insensitive" and "uncaring". Conversations about sexual needs are often avoided because of spouses' anxiety. They are afraid that they will be rejected or judged or that their partner will not be able to refuse, hence leading to compulsion. Another myth that blocks communication about sexual matters is the conviction that conflicts with the spouse are to be avoided. However, if problems are not brought to light, they will never be solved. Such anxiety may be related to negative experiences from the past and to the guilt of having needs. Absence of open communication about sex in the marital dyad increases the probability that the unsatisfied sexual needs will be expressed in indirect communication – blaming, withdrawal, or complaining. Repression of needs, thoughts, and feelings has a negative effect on the quality of, and ability to achieve, sexual satisfaction (ibidem).

MacNeil and Byers (2005, after: Liberacka-Dwojak, Izdebski, 2021) claim that communication about sex develops along two pathways – instrumental and expressive. The former involves informing of one's own sexual preferences, leading to better adaptation of the partner's sexual behaviours. This results in more pleasurable sexual experiences. The latter rests on the fact that sexual communication leads to the sense of deeper closeness between the partners, which results in better sex. The above researchers also point out that the effect of both pathways on sexual satisfaction is modified by many individual factors and relationship components.

In their Sexual Satisfaction Scale for Women, Meston and Trapnell (2005) include the sphere of communication, which includes communication between partners around sexual topics and disclosure of deep feelings or emotions. A survey conducted among Canadians has shown that "good sexual communication" is the best predictor for sexual satisfaction for all respondents except for men above the age of 60 (ibidem) .

According to Liberacka-Dwojak & Izdebski (2021, p. 1), "open communication about sexuality in the relationship is one of the main components of close partnership relations. It is the basic factor guaranteeing sexual health and sexual satisfaction, and it is the key element allowing achievement of

sexual goals and need satisfaction". The studies done by Komorowska-Pudło (2014) indicate that the level of sexual satisfaction rises as the quality of communication around support and involvement increases and depreciation decreases.

1.2. Closeness and sexual satisfaction

1.2.1. Definition of closeness

Ryś et al. (2019, p. 223) define closeness as two forces which balance out in every person's life – towards "individuality" and "togetherness". This is a type and manner of the spouses relating to each other, which changes dynamically. Chrost (2020, p. 64) claims that "the essence of closeness is authenticity, trust, and genuine feelings". "There are three types of closeness: emotional (emotional plane), intellectual (cognitive plane) and action-oriented (aspirational plane). They are in a feedback relationship with one another (Ryś et al., 2019). Emotional closeness involves mutual care, affection and interest of the spouses (ibidem). It is assumed to include sharing of emotions, happy and sad feelings, joint experience of those feelings, and the sense of being understood. McKay et al. (2007, p. 47) argue that "the feelings shared with another person are the building blocks of closeness". Emotional closeness also includes the spouses' shared orientation to some values or ideas. It is expressed by showing affection, sensitivity, and empathetic understanding towards the spouse. The closeness is developed by strengthening emotional ties between the spouses. Emotional closeness grants a sense of safety, acceptance, and support (Ryś et al., 2019).

The functioning of the spouses in the intellectual sphere is one of the factors by which they select their life partner – based on similarity (Ryś et al., 2019). Intellectual closeness involves exchange of thoughts insights, and experiences between the spouses, and becoming more and more like one another in the area of views and values. Deep intellectual closeness results in more efficient resolution of conflicts and treating the spouse as an equal. This type of closeness is possible only when the spouses resonate with each other, which in turn is an effect of proper communication, ability to listen, and acceptance of the other person (Chrost, 2020; Ryś et al., 2019).

The third type of closeness of aspirational closeness. It is important in achievement of the basic marital goals and tasks, but it is also vital in daily responsibilities and the spouses' personal development. It involves joint striving, responsibility for the spouses' actions, and facing difficulties (ibidem). The quality of their relationship improves when the spouses feel satisfaction from joint action, their expectations are concordant, they complement each other in their roles, and achieve joint goals (Szpakowski, 2016).

Close and intimate contact relies on openness, authentic feelings and mutual trust (Beisert, 2006). The feelings of closeness and understanding, as experienced by the spouses, show their experience of intimacy (Plopa, 2011). Therefore, it is deemed that closeness is a fundamental part of the marital relationship (Ryś et al., 2019). Based on studies into closeness in marriage (Krawiec, 2018), marriages with high quality of relationship, or deep closeness, have been identified. In moments of conflict, such marriages can separate the person from their behaviour; as a result, the value of a person (their own or their spouse's) is never negated. The other person is still treated as a friend even if there is disagreement. Conflicts happen around facts and current issues, are resolved together, right after they emerge, and with respect for the spouse's feelings and views, which builds stronger unity in the relationship (ibidem).

1.2.2. Sexual satisfaction

Sexuality is seen as a key aspect of human life affected by complex factors, and as an integral part of each human being's personality, which integral part must be developed for individual, interpersonal, and social well-being to happen (Kowalczyk, Lew-Starowicz, 2017). According to Komorowska-Pudło (2014), sexuality is a special sphere of marital life.

Sexual satisfaction is most frequently shown as the partners' subjective satisfaction with the quality of their sexual life (Freihart et al., 2020).

Beisert (2005) stresses the impact of biological determinants of sexual satisfaction. These are: (a) ability to experience sexual desires and striving for coitus; (b) ability to get sexually excited, which involves physiological reactions of the body (lubrication, erection, ejaculation); (c) ability to experience orgasm.

Davis i in. (2006) have described three components of sexual satisfaction:

- Physical satisfaction – subjective experience of satisfaction and pleasure from sexual activity, evaluation of the partner's sexual skill and physical satisfaction.
- Emotional satisfaction – feelings towards the partner, which may involve anxiety, dilemmas and sexual uncertainty, but also evaluation of the relational satisfaction overall.
- Control-derived satisfaction – evaluation of one's own influence on the decision regarding the time, manner and possibility of sexual contacts.

Advancements in studies into sexual satisfaction led to it being seen as an element of the quality of life (Nomejko et al., 2012). The most recent studies show that high sexual satisfaction brings about numerous psychological, relational and health benefits, is linked particularly with improved sexual performance, reduced depression components, and improved quality of life, and serves as a buffer against a range of health-related problems (Dundon and Rellini, 2010; Leavitt, Lefkowitz, Waterman, 2019; Stephenson and Meston, 2010).

Freihart i in. (2020) have noted that most studies into sexual satisfaction conducted so far fail to take into account its relational essence. It is only the most recent reflections on this topic that depict sexual satisfaction with consideration for its interpersonal nature.

This is so as satisfaction with sex life is linked with past sexual experiences as well current and future expectations related to close human relationships (Davis et al., 2006).

1.2.3. Sexual satisfaction in marriage

There is evidence showing that relational factors and the dynamic of the relationship explain the variance of sexual satisfaction to a high degree, which reinforces the conviction that this phenomenon needs to be considered in the context of a relationship (Davis et al., 2006).

There are studies showing that marital satisfaction underlies sexual satisfaction (Vowels, Mark, 2018) and studies looking at sexual satisfaction as a variable explaining marital satisfaction (Fallis et al., 2016). However, longitudinal data indicate a model where these variables act both ways and change together over time (Quinn-Nilas, 2020). The relationship between sexual and relational satisfaction is also affected by individual factors of the spouses and cultural conditioning (Freihart et al., 2020).

Satisfaction with sex life in the marital dyad positively correlates with the frequency of their sexual activity and their marital satisfaction (Adamski, 2015; Yucel, Gassanov, 2010).

Studies by Komorowska-Pudło (2014) show that the higher the level of marital bond and the stronger the level of the attitude of love towards the spouse, the higher the sexual satisfaction. Also, studies by Buss (2014) show that low levels of sexual satisfaction is a good predictor of divorce. Studies into sexual satisfaction in relationship of different status are ambiguous. Some of them demonstrate absence of difference in sexual satisfaction between different types of relationships; others, however, find a higher level of satisfaction with sex life in marital contexts. Others still show that this pertains only to women in marriage (Birnie-Porter, Hunt, 2015).

In a situation where the spouses have differing ideas of the sexual sphere in their relationship (frequency, duration, quality of sexual acts), they may feel dissatisfaction, anger, disappointment and weakening of closeness between each other (Beck, 1996).

Such a state of affairs may translate into lower interest in coitus and reduction in subjective sexual satisfaction. These add to the factors that move the couple away from each other. Thus, husband and wife fall into a circle of dependency, which results in marital conflicts (Beck, 1996). In addition to divergent expectations and sexual dysfunctions, the factors blocking sexual satisfaction in marriage include pornography consumption by one of the partners (Yucel, Gassanov, 2010).

1.2.4. Closeness and sexual satisfaction

Janicka (2006) counts psychological experiences, including closeness, into the goals of the spouses' sexual activity. She also points to the relationship between the level of integration between the spouses

and their subjective sexual satisfaction (ibidem). Sexual contact with the spouse is by definition an intimate act and may be a means by which to express emotional closeness. Partners may, however, confuse the physical aspect of coitus for intimacy, or treat sex as a means by which to escape from emotional closeness. Both these variants make coitus less satisfactory (Hajcak, Garwood, 2008). Physical love creates a sense of closeness, mutual dependency, and longing for unity between the spouses. Moreover, closeness promotes intensity of intercourse (Hajcak, Garwood, 2008).

In Plopa's Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire (2017), as many as 6 out of 10 items concerns closeness as he defines it. This aspect is also more reliable (shows higher internal consistency of measurement) for marriages compared to non-formal relationships. Studies by Żak-Łykus i Nawrat (2013) show that high sexual satisfaction is linked with higher levels of intimacy – understood as the need to build a relationship characterised by intimacy, among others.

2. Procedure and research methods

2.1. Object and goal of study

The object and goal of this independent study was to show a relationship between communication and closeness on one hand and sexual satisfaction of the spouses on the other. The study also aimed to check whether closeness mediates the relationship between communication and sexual satisfaction.

It has been assumed that there is a complex relationship between communication, closeness and sexual satisfaction of the spouses, implying that high levels of communication and closeness have a simultaneous and positive effect on satisfaction with sex life, where closeness plays a significant role of a mediator between communication and sexual satisfaction.

The detailed hypothesis posited that: 1) higher levels of support and involvement in communication leads to a heightened level of sexual satisfaction as regards caressing, closeness and sex between the spouses; 2) there is a connection between low levels of depreciation in communication and high levels of sexual satisfaction as regards caressing, closeness and sex between the spouses; 3) there is a relationship between high levels of intellectual, emotional, and aspirational closeness, and high levels of sexual satisfaction as regards caressing, closeness, and sex between the spouses; 4) closeness mediates the relationship between communication and sexual satisfaction of the spouses.

2.2. Study group

The study enrolled 116 individuals ($N = 116$): women ($n = 81$) and men ($n = 35$). The subjects' age ranged from 20 to 63 years ($M = 34.22$; $SD = 9.60$). The vast majority of the subjects lives in rural areas ($n = 64$). The rest lives in a city of up to 100 thousand ($n = 17$) or a city of 100 to 500 thousand ($n = 35$). The subjects have vocational ($n = 15$), secondary ($n = 44$), or higher ($n = 57$) education. The length of the subjects' marital relationships ranged from 1 month to 35 years ($M = 9$ years and 5 months; $SD = 9$ years and 9 months). 38 individuals declared no children, 27 subjects had one children, 31 had two, 12 had three, and 8 subjects had four or more children.

2.3. Research methods

Three methods were applied in this independent study: Communication in Marriage Questionnaire (CMQ) developed by Kaźmierczak and Plopa (2008), Spouse Closeness Scale made by Ryś (1998), and the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire (SSQ) prepared by Plopa (2017).

2.3.1. Communication in marriage questionnaire

The Communication in Marriage Questionnaire (CMQ) was developed by Kaźmierczak and Plopa in 2008. Studies and analyses gave birth to two versions of the Questionnaire – one for evaluation of one's own communication behaviours, and the other for evaluation of one's partner's behaviours. Each variant includes 30 statements to which the subject relates on a five-point Likert scale. This results in the pool of 30 to 150 points to be obtained in each variant. The score obtained for each dimension are

converted into sten scores. Cronbach's alpha for each variant and their scales ranges from 0.77 to 0.91. The Communication in Marriage Questionnaire (Kaźmierczak, Plopa, 2008) deals with three aspects of communication: support (10 items), involvement (9 items), and depreciation (11 items).

The first aspect – support – is understood by the authors as appreciation to the efforts made by the partner, which is expressed as the attitude of respect towards them, and showing interest in their needs and problems. The authors observe that support is expressed in communication by active participation in joint resolution of those problems. They stress the fact that this is a type of care shown to the partner in daily and common events, not only those difficult ones. The authors define this aspect as the need for social support, satisfaction of need for caring, giving resources to the spouse, the need for affirmation, and cooperation with the partner (ibidem).

The next aspect – involvement – is strictly linked with mutual support. The authors define it as openness and clarity in communication, an air of closeness, and active listening along with efforts made to understand the spouse's point of view. This aspect also includes adoration of the partner, adding variety to the daily living, and preventing conflicts. They stress the fact that mutual involvement modifies the message and receipt of information within marital communication. They claim that these are factors promoting strength and quality of marriage (Kaźmierczak, Plopa, 2008; Plopa, 2011).

The third aspect of the Communication in Marriage Questionnaire (Kaźmierczak, Plopa, 2008) – depreciation – belongs to the negative attitudes shown in communication. The authors define depreciation as signs of aggression towards the spouse, absence of equality and respect between the partners, absence of involvement in the relationship, absence of mutual understanding of needs, and absence of the sense of community in daily living. Intensification of this aspect in the marital dyad may lead to mutual exploitation (maximisation of one's own benefits) or mutual hostility (reciprocation of negative behaviours), which may result in depreciation of the partner, reduced quality of marriage, or even its breakdown. Depreciation also involves violating the partner's dignity and willingness to dominate and control in the relationship. Such behaviours of the spouses introduce emotional coldness, frustration and blaming the partner (Kaźmierczak, Plopa, 2008).

In an attempt to differentiate constructive communication behaviours of the spouses, the authors (Kaźmierczak, Plopa, 2008) detailed the aspects of support and involvement. This led to those four aspects: support oriented towards the partner's general wellbeing (5 items), support oriented towards the partner's specific needs (5 items), involvement oriented to the partner's general wellbeing (5 items), and involvement oriented towards expression of emotions towards the partner (4 items).

The aspect of support was divided into two factors: emotional and practical-informative. The former deals with orientation towards the partner's general wellbeing. It shows by way of expression of psychological support and interest in their matters. The latter is oriented towards the spouse's specific needs and entails the activity taken in response to the needs reported by them and in extraordinary situations, and supporting them in their views and actions.

The aspect of involvement was further specified into the aspects of communication related to emotions expressed towards the spouse – showing affection and closeness to them, signalling their physical attractiveness to them; and messages oriented towards the partner's general wellbeing – making time spent together more appealing and striving for mutual understanding, for instance by initiating actions promoting conflict resolution (ibidem).

2.3.2. Spouse Closeness Scale

The Spouse Closeness Scale was developed by Ryś in 1998. It is based on the tenet that closeness develops by interactions in the intellectual, emotional, and aspirational spheres. In this independent study, the latter version of the instrument was used, which serves to evaluate the current marital situation. The method involves 27 two-point statements selected by expert judges. The subjects answer them on a seven-point Likert scale. The values of individual aspects of closeness are means generated from the questionnaire statements assigned to those aspects. The accuracy of

this instrument was determined by testing marriages, out of which 60 relationships were selected – 30 deeming their marriage successful and 30 deeming it unsuccessful. Person's correlation coefficient for reliability, calculated by retest after two months, was 0.74 (Ryś, 1998).

2.3.3. Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire

Sexual satisfaction was evaluated with the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire (SSQ) developed by Plopa, published in 2017. The instrument contains 10 items resulting in an overall score, which is then converted into sten scores. These are then interpreted as intensification of a variable towards the desired and undesired direction. The subjects answer the provided statements on a six-point Likert scale, where zero means *absence of given activity,* and five – *maximum satisfaction.* As a result, the subjects could obtain 0 through 50 points as the overall score. The method was divided into three factors: closeness, caressing, and sex.

The author (Plopa, 2017) assumes that sexual satisfaction includes both the sexual aspect (biological component) and emotional aspect (sense of closeness). The first aspect in the questionnaire – closeness – defines the relation of intimacy and closeness of romantic nature, level of openness, confiding, and acceptance of the partner's smell and body. The aspect of caressing defines the evaluation of satisfaction with physical contact, unrelated to sexual intercourse, levels of satisfaction with foreplay, mutual touching. The last aspect, sex, relates to the evaluation of sexual intercourse and orgasmic satisfaction (ibidem).

2.4. Testing Procedure

The tests were conducted anonymously among married individuals. The responses were gathered electronically and with the pencil & paper method. To verify the hypotheses, statistical analyses were performed with IBM SPSS Statistics 28. Using the software, the basic descriptive statistics were analysed and the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test was performed. Spearman's rho test and mediation analysis were used for the analyses. The significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ was used to present the results.

3. Results

3.1. Relationships between marital communication and sexual satisfaction

Spearman's rho test was performed to verify the hypotheses that there is a relationship between the aspects of the Communication in Marriage Questionnaire (Kaźmierczak, Plopa, 2008) and the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire (Plopa, 2017). The results are presented in Table 1.

3.1.1. Support and involvement in communication between spouses and subjective sexual satisfaction

The results from Table 1 indicate that when the subject evaluated their partner's communication, support and involvement in communication showed a moderate positive correlation with the aspects of sexual satisfaction, at statistical significance of $p < 0.01$. The strongest correlation occurred between the following aspects: support with closeness ($r = 0.56$), support with caressing ($r = 0.55$), or support oriented towards the partner's specific needs with closeness ($r = 0.55$) and caressing ($r = 0.54$). The aspect of sex correlates with lesser strength, but still is statistically significant. For instance, the correlation of this variable with support is at $r = 0.35$, and with involvement oriented towards generation of emotions towards the spouse at $r = 0.29$. The overall score of the Communication in Marriage Questionnaire shows a positive moderate correlation with the overall score of the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire when the subject evaluated the quality of communication of their spouse ($r = 0.56$; $p < 0.01$).

Similar results were obtained for the subjects' answers about themselves. However, correlations between communication and sexual satisfaction seem weaker (poor and moderate). In addition, not all correlations for the aspect of sex are statistically significant. There is no significance in the case of involved communication, involved communication oriented towards the partner's overall wellbeing, and involved communication oriented towards generation of emotions towards the spouse ($p > 0.05$). That said, the overall score of the Communication in Marriage

Table 1. Statistical analysis. Spearman's Rho test for the dimensions of the Communication in Marriage Questionnaire (Kaźmierczak, Plopa, 2008) and the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire (Plopa, 2017)

Quality rating of spouse's communication	Closeness	Caresses	Sex	KSS overall result
Support	0.56**	0.55**	0.35**	0.57**
Focused on the partner's overall well-being	0.51**	0.51**	0.31**	0.52**
Oriented to the specific needs of the spouse	0.55**	0.54**	0.34**	0.55**
Quality rating of spouse's communication	**Closeness**	**Caresses**	**Sex**	**KSS overall result**
Committed communication	0.50**	0.47**	0.31**	0.49**
Focused on the partner's overall well-being	0.46**	0.38**	0.30**	0.45**
Oriented towards generating emotions towards the spouse	0.46**	0.49**	0.29**	0.47**
Depreciation	-0.36**	-0.26**	-0.28**	-0.36**
KKM overall result	0.57**	0.49**	0.36**	0.56**
Self-assessment of communication quality	**Closeness**	**Caresses**	**Sex**	**KSS overall result**
Support	0.45**	0.44**	0.21*	0.45**
Focused on the partner's overall well-being	0.41**	0.41**	0.20*	0.42**
Oriented to the specific needs of the spouse	0.45**	0.41**	0.21*	0.44**
Committed communication	0.42**	0.31**	0.18	0.38**
Focused on the partner's overall well-being	0.33**	0.19*	0.16	0.28**
Oriented to expressing emotions towards the spouse	0.41**	0.39**	0.17	0.41**
Depreciation	-0.25**	-0.18*	-0.10	-0.24*
KKM overall result	0.47**	0.39**	0.23*	0.45**

***–p < 0,001; **–p < 0,01; *–p < 0,05

Questionnaire shows a positive moderate correlation with the overall score of the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire when the subject evaluated the quality of their own communication ($r = 0.45$; $p < 0.01$).

The above results confirm the first detailed hypothesis, which goes that higher levels of support and involvement in communication are associated with higher levels of sexual satisfaction in the sphere of caressing, closeness, and sex in individuals in marriage.

3.1.2. Levels of depreciation and the spouses' subjective sexual satisfaction

Table 1 also shows that levels of depreciation has a negative correlation, at a weak, albeit statistically significant, level ($p < 0.01$), with the aspects of sexual satisfaction, that is closeness ($r = -0.36$), caressing ($r = -0.26$), and sex ($r = -0.28$) when the subjects evaluated their partner's communication. When evaluation of the quality of the spouse's communication indicates presence of depreciation, the overall perception of sexual satisfaction is at $r = -0.36$, $p < 0.01$.

When the subjects evaluated their own communication behaviours, the correlation with closeness was at $r = -0.25$, $p < 0.01$; with caressing at $r = -0.18$, $p < 0.05$, and with sex at $r = -0.10$, $p > 0.05$ (result without statistical significance).

When evaluation of the quality of one's own communication indicates presence of depreciation, the overall perception of sexual satisfaction is at $r = -0.24$, $p < 0.05$.

The collected data confirm the second of the detailed hypothesis: that there is a negative correlation between the levels of depreciation in communication the levels of sexual satisfaction in the sphere of caressing, closeness, and sex in partners.

3.2. Correlations between intellectual, emotional, and aspirational closeness, and levels of sexual satisfaction

Spearman's rho test was performed to verify the third of the detailed hypotheses: that there is a correlation between the aspects of the Spouse Closeness Scale (Ryś, 1998) and the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire (Plopa, 2017). The results are presented in Table 2.

The results presented in Table 2 indicates that all aspects of the Spouse Closeness Scale show a positive (weak or moderate) correlation with the aspects of the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire at a statistically significant level ($p < 0.01$). The relationship between emotional closeness and the overall SSQ score ($r = 0.56$), closeness ($r = 0.55$),

Table 2. Statistical analysis. Spearman's Rho test for the dimensions of the Marital Intimacy Scale (Ryś, 1998) and the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire (Plopa, 2017)

	Closeness	Caresses	Sex	KSS overall result
Emotional closeness	0.55**	0.53**	0.38**	0.56**
Intellectual closeness	0.40**	0.37**	0.26**	0.40**
Action-based closeness	0.46**	0.42**	0.29**	0.45**

***–p < 0,001; **–p < 0,01; *–p < 0,05

Table 3. Statistical analysis. Spearman's Rho test for the dimensions of the Spouses' Intimacy Scale (Ryś, 1998) and the Communication in Marriage Questionnaire (Kaźmierczak, Plopa, 2008)

Communication in Marriage Questionnaire	Emotional closeness	Intellectual closeness	Action-based closeness
Overall result for quality assessment Cof spouse's communication	0.69***	0.48***	0.52***
Total result for self-assessment of quality of communication	0.61***	0.38***	0.47***

***–p < 0,001; **–p < 0,01; *–p < 0,05

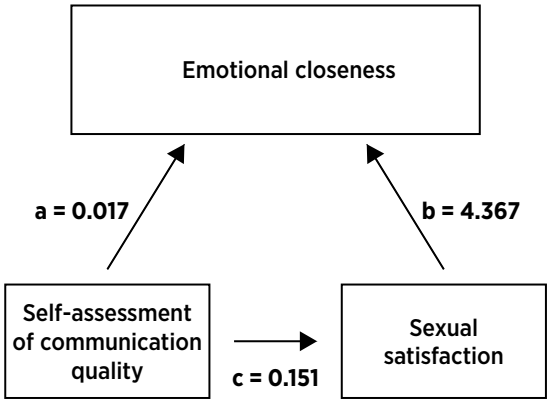


Figure 1. Mediation analysis. Emotional closeness as a mediator between the influence of self-assessment of communication quality on sexual satisfaction among spouses.

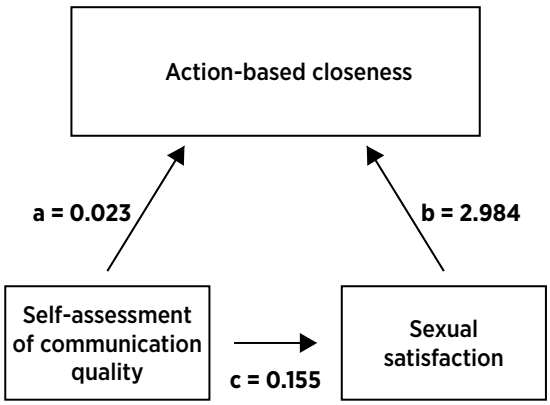


Figure 2. Mediation analysis. Functional closeness as a mediator between the influence of self-assessment of communication quality on sexual satisfaction among spouses.

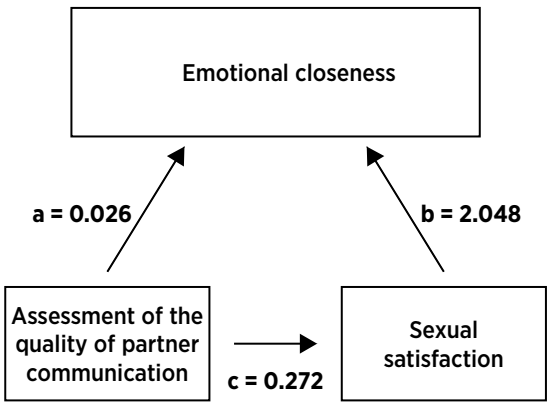


Figure 3. Mediation analysis. Emotional closeness as a mediator between the impact of the assessment of the quality of a partner's communication on sexual satisfaction among spouses.

and caressing ($r = 0.53$) is the strongest. A weaker, albeit still statistically significant, relationship occurs between intellectual closeness and sex ($r = 0.26$) or caressing ($r = 0.37$), and between aspirational closeness and sex ($r = 0.29$).

The presented data confirm the third of the detailed hypotheses, which states a relationship between high levels of intellectual, emotional, and aspirational closeness, and high levels of sexual satisfaction in terms of caressing, closeness, and sex.

3.3. Closeness as a variable mediating the relationship between communication and sexual satisfaction

In order to verify whether the variable defining levels of closeness in marriage mediates the relationship between quality of communication and sexual satisfaction of the partners, a mediation analysis was conducted and then complemented by Aroian test. Firstly, it was verified whether there is a relationship between an independent variable (quality of the partner's and one's own communication) and a dependent variable (sexual satisfaction). The results are

Table 4. Mediation analysis with the Aroian test (assessment of one's own communication)

	Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	Z	p		Z	SE	p
Mediator – emotional closeness	Indirect	a x b	0.07	0.03	2.74	<0.01	Aroian Test	2.70	0.03	<0.01
	Direct	c	0.15	0.05	2.86	<0.01				
	Total	c + a x b	0.23	0.06	4.10	< 0.001				
	Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	Z	p		Z	SE	p
Mediator – intellectual closeness	Indirect	a x b	0.04	0.02	1.99	<0.05	Aroian Test	1.95	0.02	0.051
	Direct	c	0.18	0.05	3.44	< 0.001				
	Total	c + a x b	0.23	0.06	4.10	< 0.001				
	Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	Z	p		Z	SE	p
Mediator – action-based closeness	Indirect	a x b	0.07	0.03	2.69	<0.01	Aroian Test	2.65	0.03	<0.01
	Direct	c	0.16	0.05	2.88	<0.01				
	Total	c + a x b	0.23	0.06	4.10	< 0.001				

Table 5. Mediation analysis with the Aroian test (assessment of partner's communication)

	Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	Z	p		Z	SE	p
Mediator – emotional closeness	Indirect	a x b	0.07	0.03	2.06	<0.01	Aroian Test	2.04	0.03	<0.05
	Direct	c	0.16	0.05	6.02	<0.01				
	Total	c + a x b	0.23	0.06	8.41	< 0.001				
	Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	Z	p		Z	SE	p
Mediator – intellectual closeness	Indirect	a x b	0.05	0.03	1.67	<0.05	Aroian Test	1.64	0.02	0.1
	Direct	c	0.27	0.05	6.68	< 0.001				
	Total	c + a x b	0.33	0.04	8.41	< 0.001				
	Effect	Label	Estimate	SE	Z	p		Z	SE	p
Mediator – action-based closeness	Indirect	a x b	0.04	0.02	1.85	0.06	Aroian Test	1.83	0.02	0.07
	Direct	c	0.28	0.04	6.41	< 0.001				
	Total	c + a x b	0.33	0.04	8.41	< 0.001				

presented in Table 1. A similar analysis was conducted on the independent variables: communication and closeness, the results of which are shown in Table 3.

When the subject evaluated themselves in terms of spousal communication, the mediation analysis showed that, having considered a third variable (closeness) as a mediator, it became an important variable in predicting the levels of sexual satisfaction. This happened in two cases: when the variables of emotional closeness and aspirational closeness were the mediator. Table 4 shows the obtained coefficients. The above mediations are presented in Figures 1 and 2.

The result indicating partial mediation of the levels of emotional closeness in the relationship was confirmed by Aroian test, which proved statistically significant ($Z = 2.70$; $p < 0.01$). A similar result was obtained when the aspirational closeness was the mediator ($Z = 2.65$; $p < 0.01$).

When the quality of the partner's communication was the predictor, as evaluated by the subject, closeness turned out to be an valid mediator only when emotional analysis was analysed ($Z = 2.04$; $p < 0.05$). Table 5 shows the obtained coefficients. The above mediation is presented in Figure 3.

4. Discussion

The conducted analyses allowed demonstration of relationships between support and involvement in communication between the spouses and their subjective sexual satisfaction. Given the overall scores obtained in the questionnaires, correlations occur both when the spouse evaluated both their partner's and their own communication.

The surveys also confirmed the second hypothesis, which stated a relationship between low levels of depreciation in communication and high levels of sexual satisfaction in spouses. The overall scores obtained in the questionnaires showed the expected correlation for both versions of the Communication in Marriage Questionnaire.

The results obtained for those two variables have been confirmed in studies (Meston, Trapnell, 2005; Plopa, 2017) which have been cited in the theoretical part above. The studies by Nomejko et al. (2017) demonstrate a relationship both between evaluation of quality of the partner's communication – and between evaluation of one's own communication – and sexual satisfaction. They also show that the significance of communication for sexual satisfaction goes up along with the length of the relationship; this is so because this variable starts to play the role of a buffer for decreased levels of satisfaction with sexual activity or routine (ibidem). The analysis of the independent surveys can, therefore, be enriched by the length of the subjects' marital relationship. The results of the surveys, contrary to Nomejko et al. (2017), showed that work with a couple should involve special attention to support in communication, not involvement and depreciation. It is worth verifying in further studies whether this difference is demonstrated in the events occurring between the above studies by Nomejko et al. (2017) and this independent study – COVID-19 pandemic, military conflicts, and economic crisis. Situations difficult to overcome on one's own may bring out to light the need for mutual spousal support in the marital context.

The relationship between communication and sexual satisfaction proves stronger in women compared to men (Komorowska-Pudło, 2014). In light of Plopa's (2017) considerations, these differences may result from the fact that women put more emphasis on the relational aspects of sexual satisfaction (closeness, intimacy, and openness), and for men, physical sensations are more important. This begs further analysis of independent studies – for sex differences.

Studies (Mallory, 2022) also confirm that verbal communication about sex in marriage is associated with the spouses' subjective sexual satisfaction. In turn, satisfaction with sexual communication predicts satisfaction with sex life (Blunt-Vinti et al., 2019). This puts forth a rationale for psychoeducation activities aiming to draw attention to the verbal and non-verbal communication during the intercourse itself, and not only before or after. This bears particular importance in light of cultural transmission, where conversations about sexuality-related topics cause embarrassment, and language still lacks neutral terms for the phenomena in this sphere (Rogodzińska, Obrębska, 2018).

From the clinical perspective, disordered mental health in one of the partners, resulting in deterioration in that partner's communication, leads to lowered sexual satisfaction (Scott et al., 2012). For this reason, it is good practice to advise patients that if one of the partners develops mental disorders, they both should communicate their expectations or fears related to the sexual sphere.

The relationship between the quality of spouses' communication and their satisfaction with sex life is highly applicable in life. This is so as promotion of communication and working on its quality during marital therapy leads to increased sexual satisfaction in spouses (Botlani et al., 2012).

Validation of the third hypothesis is a valuable source of knowledge, coming from the present study. The independent study has revealed relationships between individual aspects of closeness and sexual satisfaction, and between the overall scores of the Spouse Closeness Scale and the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire. These results correspond with the studies by Træen and Kvalem (2022), where it was sexual satisfaction that was the factor that affected the perceived closeness with the partner the most. This happens for both sexes and regardless of the length of the relationship (ibidem).

The results of studies by Nagy and Theiss (2013) show that the partners of men who take care of their children may feel deeper closeness with their partner. In light of such information, studies analogous to those presented in this paper may be considered, but enriched by accounting for the current phase of the subjects' marital relationship and the number of offspring. In addition, the above study from Norway has shown that the sense of closeness and sexual satisfaction correlate more strongly in men compared to women, and that remaining in a monogamous relationship promotes closeness between the spouses (ibidem). For this reason, the independent study may be expanded by comparing the relationship between closeness and sexual satisfaction for both sexes, and it may be compared to with the result obtained by individuals remaining in relationships other than marriage.

Please note that in the aspects of closeness, and in the overall score of the Sexual Satisfaction Questionnaire (Plopa, 2017), it is emotional closeness that has the strongest relationship with sexual satisfaction. This may be justified by studies conducted among young adults, who have expressed their expectation that sex with their partner will result in emotional closeness (Blumenstock, 2022). Interestingly enough, a study conducted among women with breast cancer and their partners has shown that the relationship between closeness and sexual satisfaction occurs not only in relation to the closeness felt by the subject (Rottmann et al., 2017). The results have demonstrated that sexual satisfaction of the women increased as emotional closeness experienced by their partner went up (ibidem). This confirms the feedbacks occurring in romantic relationships.

Moreover, the relationship between closeness and sexual satisfaction begs a question about the role of attachment style of each spouse. This is a basis for conducting studies into the impact of that sphere, as an effect of experiencing closeness in early childhood, on the observed relationship between closeness and sexual satisfaction in romantic relationships.

Asking questions and verifying relationships between closeness and other psychological phenomena may pave way to use this variable in practical contexts. Studies show that among the examined marriages where the spouses' age was at least 65 years, marital closeness dampened negative effects of the subjects' functional disability (Mancini, Bonanno, 2006). Closeness was strongly associated with reduced depression and anxiety, and increased the sense of self-worth in the subjects. It is, therefore, a vital resource for elderly people, also as a factor adapting to illness (ibidem).

When discussing closeness, it is worth looking at the relationship between it and communication. It has not been covered by a separate research hypothesis in this paper because it has been presented solely to examine the mediating role of closeness. Despite this, the results obtained within those variables may, without doubt, inspire further studies focusing on those two spheres. The studies cited when discussing the relationship between communication and sexual satisfaction show that communication about sex is related to the closeness between the spouses (Mallory, 2022).

The result of the independent study seem to partly confirm the last hypothesis. Emotional and aspirational closeness proved mediators of the relationship between communication and sexual satisfaction in the subjects where they evaluated the quality of their own communication. In turn, for the version of the Communication in Marriage Questionnaire where the subjects evaluated their spouse's communication, the mediating role between communication and sexual satisfaction was demonstrated only by emotional closeness. The mediating role of emotional closeness in both cases points to the fact that this aspect of closeness showed the strongest relationship with communication and sexual satisfaction alike.

The role of emotional closeness as a mediator for evaluation of one's own communication and of the quality of the partner's communication may be explained through the relationship of that type of closeness with communication and sexuality of the spouses. It is this aspect of closeness that is reinforced by non-verbal communication particularly strongly (Szopiński, 1973). Similarly, aspirational closeness involves components of non-verbal communication to a high degree. Spousal sex may be the platform for mutual exchange of experiences and sensations, which cannot be expressed verbally. In turn, Babin (2013) has discovered that non-verbal communication predicts levels of sexual satisfaction. This is so as it is the primordial means of communication during coitus – through touch, gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, and vocalics.

The above reasoning about the relationship between the said variables through the non-verbal aspect is also confirmed by the fact that intellectual closeness does not show up as a mediator between communication and sexual satisfaction. This may happen as intellectual closeness, as opposed to emotional and aspirational closeness, revolves around verbal communication. However, its share in the spouses' sexual acts is decidedly smaller. The subjects indicate that they avoid verbal communication during sex to keep the mood, protect their partner's feelings, or avoid negative emotions and judgment on the part of their partner (Séguin, 2024). Moreover, they believe that verbal communication is simpler for expression and clearer for interpretation by the partner, and so more effective (Lutmer, Walker, 2024). This is the reason for them to prefer verbal conversations about sexual matters to occur before or after the act (ibidem). This preference may also be related to the popularisation of pornography and the way sex is depicted in the media (Séguin, 2024). In line with the above arguments, the relationship between verbal and non-verbal communication and sexual satisfaction should be explored, taking the phenomenon of closeness between the partners into consideration.

A study by Lutmer and Walker (2024) shows one more regularity that may explain the mediating role of closeness. They specified a certain type of comfort as one of the main reasons explaining occurrence of communication during sexual activity. This type of comfort occurs in close friendship, trust and/or long history of the partners. One might therefore infer that the development of closeness between spouses, particularly that expressed non-verbally, leads to this type of freedom and peace, and – in turn – to sexual satisfaction.

5. Summary

The conducted analyses have shown that there is a complex relationship between communication and closeness of spouses on one hand and their sexual satisfaction on the other. High evaluation of the quality of one's own communication and that of the partner – and so high levels of support and involvement and low levels of depreciation shown in the relationship, and high levels of emotional, intellectual, and aspirational closeness – are positively associated with satisfaction with sex life. Moreover, emotional and aspirational closeness play a mediating role between communication and sexual satisfaction.

The results suggest that both communication and closeness are linked to the spouses' satisfaction with sex life. The examined variables form interconnected systems, which could be used practically, for instance in sexual counselling, couple therapy, or sexual health prevention. Psy-

chologists and therapists working with marriages can strengthen the inner locus of control in their patients/clients as each of the studied variables may change in level depending on mutual references or taken interventions. This is immensely important, particularly as more and more relationships are going down the path of breakdown. In addition, the practical application of the conclusions derived from the studies presented in this paper lies in the public interest as it may protect individuals from the negative complications of divorce, including psychological consequences.

The strong point of the conducted studies is that they are applicable in practice. More and more people, including couples, are reporting for sexual assistance, and so studies laying foundations for applied methods and techniques in this field are vital. A significant aspect of the above studies is that they allow building the sense in the population that they have influence over the studied variables – communication, closeness, and sexual satisfaction. This may prove highly important particularly for spouses struggling with problems in their relationships. For many years, psychology has also been dealing with examining the effects of sexuality on the individual's life in order to – in line with the tenets of positive psychology – garner information about striving for and achieving mental wellbeing. In addition, the conducted studies enrich the current scientific achievements around the topics tackled in this paper, particularly in the field of closeness and sexuality.

The weak point of this paper is the lack of a social approval scale in the employed tools. Studies into sexuality are particularly vulnerable to high declarativity in subjects' responses, which could be the cause of results deviating from normal distribution. The impact of this phenomenon was strived to be limited by not requiring both of the spouses to participate. Studies could also be expanded by subjects in romantic relationships structured differently to marriage.

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