

Sex differences in predictors of relationship satisfaction: The effects of dyadic coping, love, sexual motivation and having children

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Statement of authors' contribution

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Ethical Approval

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Abstract

The present study explored sex differences in the predictors of relationship satisfaction (dyadic coping, love, sexual motivation, having children). A total of 465 Hungarian participants (319 women and 146 men) with a mean age of 33.6 years completed an online test battery comprising four self-report measures. The results revealed that women's relationship satisfaction had more significant predictors than men's, and half of the common predictors showed significant sex differences. Men's satisfaction was positively predicted by the Intimacy and Passion components of love, while it was negatively predicted by Negative Dyadic Coping and by having at least one child. Besides Intimacy and Passion, two common predictors across sexes, women's satisfaction was also positively predicted by the Commitment component of love, and also by successful coping with dyadic stress. By contrast, negative predictors were having sex as a means of coping with emotional problems (Sex as Coping), the individual aspect of dyadic coping (One's Own Dyadic Coping), and Negative Dyadic coping. The findings are discussed in both bio-psychological and social constructionist approaches.

Keywords

Relationship satisfaction; dyadic coping; love; sexual motivation; sex differences.

1. Theoretical Background

1.1. Relationship Satisfaction, Children, Sex Differences

Marital relationship satisfaction became a central subject of psychological research following the publication of a research report authored by Terman and colleagues (1938). Certain aspects of intimate partner relationships such as communication, commitment, love, and intimacy potentially influence partners' perceptions of the quality of their relationship (Diener

& Lucas, 2000). Those partners who are satisfied with their romantic relationship report positive experiences in other domains of their lives (Molero et al., 2017).

At the same time, several studies found a negative association between relationship satisfaction and the number of children (for a review, see Kowal et al., 2021). The researchers point out various factors possibly underlying this observation such as a conflict between parental and marital roles, a sense of restricted personal autonomy, unsatisfactory sex life compared to previous experiences, and increased financial burdens associated with parenting. The relationship between parenting and marital relationship satisfaction is not unequivocal, however. Nelson and colleagues (2013) found that partners who had children reported higher levels of happiness and satisfaction with life and more positive emotional experiences compared to childless couples. By contrast, Dobrowolska and colleagues (2020) revealed no relationship between the number of children and relationship satisfaction in a cross-cultural study involving 33 countries with predominantly individualistic versus collectivistic values.

Relationship satisfaction shows predictable sex differences. There are certain studies revealed that male participants were more satisfied with their marriage than their female counterparts (Bernard, 1982; Rostami et al., 2014). This observation was subsequently corroborated in both Western (e.g., Fowers, 1991; Jackson et al., 2014) and non-Western societies (e.g., Al-Darmaki et al., 2016). This sex-related asymmetry may be due to biological differences as well as cultural factors such as gender roles, patriarchal values, or social inequalities (e.g., Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2014). Recently, a study involving participants from 33 countries confirmed the marked sex difference in relationship satisfaction (Dobrowolska et al., 2020). The consistency of the observation sharply raises the question why men report higher satisfaction than women. Despite the existing cultural differences in intimate partner relationships, it is generally true that women are primarily responsible for household chores. These burdens in turn probably affect women's quality of life and relationship experiences (Grote & Clark, 2001). This is a plausible explanation particularly because women who share

the chores with their partners and those responsible for tasks associated with higher social status report higher satisfaction than other women (e.g., Fankhauser et al., 2018).

By contrast, biological/evolutionary explanations focus on sex differences in human reproductive biology (Eagly & Wood, 2009; Naftolin, 1981), which are manifested in differences in mating preferences (Buss & Schmitt, 2019; Walter et al., 2020, 2021), parental investment (Trivers, 1972), sexual drive (Lippa, 2009), intimate relationships (Palchykov et al., 2012; Pearce et al., 2019) and generally in reproduction-related behavioral and psychological factors (Conroy-Beam et al., 2019). In this approach, sex differences in partner relationship functioning are closely associated with those in mating strategies.

1.2. Dyadic stress and dyadic coping

Bodenmann (1997) defines dyadic stress as a result of an event involving both partners either directly (the stressor has a direct impact on each partner) or indirectly (one partner is directly involved with the stressor, which has an impact on the other partner and on their relationship due to their closeness). Couples encounter various stressors during their everyday life, which influence family communication and relationship satisfaction (Bodenmann et al., 2006; Bodenmann et al., 2017). When facing dyadic stressors, mutually committed partners mobilize their shared psychological resources to cope with threat. Successful coping requires both partners to adequately communicate and understand their own and each other's feelings and mental states.

Dyadic coping is aimed at restoring relationship satisfaction and maintaining a functional dyad. Dysfunctional dyadic coping (characterized by maladaptive cognitive and behavioral strategies) usually generates severe anxiety in family members, and it may in extreme cases result in divorce or separation and dissolution of the family (Tesser & Beach, 1998).

Dyadic coping has both positive and negative forms, the former including common, supportive, and delegated coping, while the latter comprised hostile, ambivalent, and superficial coping. Research found a positive association between the overall quality of

dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction, that is, those partners who reported more positive dyadic coping were more satisfied with their relationships than others (Bodenmann, 1997; Bodenmann et al., 2017). Furthermore, the quality of dyadic coping is one of the most important predictors of separation. Several studies revealed a negative association between negative dyadic coping and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Falconier & Kuhn, 2019; Hilpert et al., 2016). Successful dyadic coping associates positively also with life satisfaction (Gabriel et al., 2016).

Martos and colleagues (2012, 2016, 2019) found that relationship satisfaction was positively associated with each positive form of dyadic coping and negatively associated with negative forms. The authors also found a marked sex difference in dyadic coping: both female and male participants rated stress communication as more characteristic to women than to men. Furthermore, women's relationship satisfaction was significantly associated with more factors than men's. Factors such as stress communication, the partner's supportive, delegated and negative coping, and common coping and its perceived quality were associated with women's but not men's relationship satisfaction.

1.3. The Triangular Theory of Love

Sternberg (1986, 1997) describes love by the relative importance of three components including intimacy, passion and commitment. Intimacy is the experience of closeness, connectedness and attachment in a love relationship (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2019). Intimacy enables partners to extend their selves to the dyad, to reach emotional, cognitive or spiritual self-transcendence (Aron & Tomlinson, 2019). In terms of emotionality, intimacy is the warmth experienced in a love relationship. Passion is a sensually intense state of mind, which provides the primary drive for romantic love. In this state of intense excitement, two individuals experience irresistible attraction towards each other (Feybesse & Hatfield, 2019). Passion is often experienced as physical attraction or sexual gratification (Hatfield & Rapson, 2006; Sorokowski et al., 2021). In intimate partner relationships, passion is predominantly manifested in a desire for sexual union. Commitment means the choice of a specific partner

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in the short term and sustaining the relationship in the long term (Sternberg, 1986). Partner choice and commitment do not necessarily take place simultaneously. For example, one may decide to love someone without committing oneself to the partner at the same time, and vice versa, one may commit oneself to someone without experiencing love (Sorokowski et al., 2021). Commitment provides a basis for an intimate partner relationship even when the partners are facing difficulties and question whether their relationship is worth continuing. Empirical findings on satisfying relationships suggest that commitment may increase over time (Cassepp-Borges, 2021).

Studies assessing the three components of love with self-report measures revealed mixed findings on sex differences. Fernández-Carrasco and colleagues (2019) obtained significantly higher intimacy and commitment scores for women than for men at the beginning of the pregnancy and at the third trimester. Debrot and colleagues (2021) investigated Black undergraduate South African students self-reported notions of love. They found significant differences between sexes: females were somewhat to significantly above average as compared to males on all three components of love. ~~In a subsequent study,~~ however In a study conducted more than twenty years ago, the authors found significantly higher intimacy scores for men in a sample of 213 married participants (Lemieux & Hale, 2000). These studies confirm the theoretical expectation that all three love components are significant predictors of relationship satisfaction. The picture of the hypothetical sex differences appears even more complicated when considering the findings of a large-sample study involving 7332 participants from 25 countries, which found no sex difference on any of the three love components (Sorokowski et al., 2021). A correlation between relationship satisfaction and the Sternberg Triangular Love Scale has been found in several recent studies (Andrade et al., 2015; Cassepp-Borges, 2021; Kochar & Sharma, 2015). One important outcome of this research is that love (commitment, passion and intimacy) is a reliable predictor of relationship satisfaction.

1.4. Sexual motivation

One's specific motives for engaging in sexual activity have important implications both for one's relationship with the partner and for one's mental health (e.g., Hatfield et al., 2010). In the context of romantic relationships, the frequency of sexual activity and the level of the partners' satisfaction with their sex life are important indicators of the general quality of their relationship (Fallis et al., 2016). The close association observed between the quality of sex life and relationship satisfaction suggests that rewarding sex offers a means of improving relationship quality. The ability to maintain an intimate sexual relationship in the long term is likely to reinforce couple satisfaction (Rehman et al., 2011; Yoo et al., 2014). However, Schoenfeld and colleagues (2017) point out that there are couples generally satisfied with their relationship but not with their sex life, and vice versa. That is, the degree of interdependence between sexual and relationship satisfaction probably shows considerable variation across couples (Dewitte & Mayer, 2018).

Previous studies on sexual motivation revealed characteristic sex differences. Klusmann (2002) revealed that while both women's and men's sexual activity and satisfaction decreased with time, sexual desire decreased in women but not in men. Furthermore, the motivation for sexual intimacy increased in women, while it decreased in men. Findings reported by Meston and Buss (2007) suggest that men are more motivated for unemotional sex than women are.

Using the same methodology as that employed by Meston and Buss (2007), Meskó, Szatmári and colleagues (2021) conducted three studies with a Hungarian sample, whose results corroborated previous findings on the universal diversity of sexual motivation. In addition to similarities and differences between the American and Hungarian samples in the composition and relative importance of sexual motives, Meskó, Szatmári and colleagues (2021) found that various reasons for having sex had important links with age, sex, personality, and mating strategy. These findings are in line with previously revealed associations between individual differences in sexual motivation and age- and sex-related

variations in biological and psychological factors of reproductive behavior (e.g., Meston & Buss, 2007; Kennair et al., 2015).

2. Research Aim

In line with previous findings on the sex-related psychological characteristics of intimate partner relationships, marked sex differences were expected in relationship satisfaction (e.g., Dillon, 2012; Dillon et al., 2015; Sorokowski et al., 2017), dyadic coping (e.g., Bodenmann et al., 2017; Hilpert et al. 2016), love components (e.g., Sorokowski et al., 2017), and sexual motivation (e.g., Meskó, Szatmári et al., 2021; Kennair et al., 2015). Furthermore, the present study explored the possible impact of having children on relationship satisfaction in a Hungarian sample, since the related previous findings for Western couples are marked by inconsistencies (e.g., Dobrowolska et al., 2020; Nelson et al., 2013). More specifically, the various components of dyadic coping (i.e., one's own dyadic coping, partner's dyadic coping, negative dyadic coping, positive dyadic coping) the three love components (intimacy, passion, commitment) the major types of sexual motives (personal goal attainment, relational motives, sex as coping) and having children were expected to have sex-dependent effects on relationship satisfaction. Since this part of the study fulfilled exploratory objectives, no specific predictions were made.

3. Method

3.1. Sample and Procedure

A total of 465 Hungarian adults participated in the study, including 319 women (68.6%) and 146 men (31.4%), who were aged 18 to 72 years ($M = 30.4$, $SD = 10.9$). On average, the female participants were significantly younger (aged 18 to 64 years, $M = 28.9$, $SD = 9.5$) than the male participants (aged 18 to 72 years, $M = 33.6$, $SD = 12.9$, $t(463) = 4.40$, $p < .001$). Of all participants, 63.0% completed tertiary education, 35.3% completed secondary education, and 1.7% completed primary education. As many as 94% reported to be currently involved in

a stable intimate partner relationship. Of these participants, 161 (35%) were dating their partners, 152 (33%) cohabited with their partners, and 120 (26%) were married. 6% reported that they are currently single, have casual sexual relationships or it is difficult to define what type of relationship they are in. The further analysis includes all participants, regardless of the fact that some were not in a committed relationship at the time of the study. Of all participants, 456 (98%) reported to have previously engaged in sexual intercourse, while only 126 (27%) had had one or more children at the time of data collection.

The participants were recruited via social media (e.g., Facebook), and they completed an online form containing four self-report measures. Each participant gave informed consent at the top of the form, while they provided demographic data at the end, including sex, age, level of education, previous sexual experience, current relationship status, and number of children. The study received ethical approval as part of a larger research project on mating strategies from the Hungarian United Ethical Review Committee for Research in Psychology (Ref. No. 2018/115).

3.2. Statistical Data Analysis

We used linear regression modelling (enter method) to explore which of the measured factors determine participants' perceived relationship satisfaction. In the model, the combined score of the relationship satisfaction (RAS-H) served as the dependent variable, while love (subscales of STLS-H), sexual motivation (subscales of YSEX?-HSF), dyadic coping (four subscales of DCI), and whether the participant had any children were the independent variables. We tested this model separately for males and females and then used Fisher r-to-z transformation to compare the differences in the predictors across sexes. The Durbin-Watson tests of autocorrelation were nonsignificant (DW=2.28, $p = .13$ for males and DW = 1.89, $p = .33$ for females) and VIF values were smaller than 10.

3.3. Measures

3.3.1. Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS; Hendrick, 1988; adapted to Hungarian by Martos et al., 2014). The Hungarian version of the RAS (RAS-H) is an eight-item Likert-type scale that provides a measure of overall relationship satisfaction. The RAS-H contains one item not included in the seven-item original version (How satisfactory do you find your sexual relationship?). The participants rated each item on a five-point scale ranging from 1 indicating extreme dissatisfaction (e.g., Not at all satisfied) to 5 indicating extreme satisfaction (e.g., Very satisfied). In the present study, the RAS-H showed adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$).

3.3.2. Dyadic Coping

The 37-item Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI, Bodenmann, 2008; adapted to Hungarian by Martos et al., 2012) that measures several forms of one's own dyadic coping (i.e., what the respondent does when her/his partner is stressed) and of one's partner's perceived dyadic coping (i.e., what the respondent thinks her/his partner does when the respondent is stressed). The participants rated each Likert item on a five-point scale ranging from Very rarely (1) to Very often (5). In the present study, the following four aggregated dyadic coping subscales were used. One's Own Dyadic Coping (DCO) comprises one's own behavioral responses to stressful dyadic situations (e.g., I show my partner through my behavior when I am not doing well or when I have problems). Partner's Dyadic Coping (DCP) includes one's partner's perceived behaviors in stressful situations such as engaging in a joint response to the stressor or taking over a burdensome task or activity from the partner (e.g., My partner tells me openly how he/she feels and that he/she would appreciate my support). Negative Dyadic Coping (NDC) is any supportive endeavor that involves hostile, ambivalent or stereotypical behavior such as simultaneously supporting and criticizing the partner (e.g., I provide support but do it so unwillingly and unmotivated because I think that he/she should cope with his/her problems on his/her own). Positive Dyadic Coping (PDC) includes various

emotion- and problem-oriented responses specifically aimed at supporting the partner's coping capacity such as empathic understanding or joint problem analysis (e.g., I try to analyze the situation together with my partner in an objective manner and help him/her to understand and change the problem). All four subscales showed adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .803, .878, .795, \text{ and } .911$, respectively).

3.3.3. Love

Sternberg Triangular Love Scale (STLS; 1986, 1997; adapted to Hungarian by Sorokowski et al., 2021). The STLS consists of 45 items, 15 of which measure the three love components each, including intimacy (e.g., I receive considerable emotional support from ____), passion (e.g., There is nothing more important to me than my relationship with ____), and commitment (e.g., I view my relationship with ____ as permanent). The participants rated each Likert item on a nine-point scale ranging from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (9). All three subscales showed adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .951, .956, \text{ and } .968$, respectively).

3.3.4. Sexual Motivation

Reasons for Having Sex Questionnaire, Hungarian Short Form (YSEX?-HSF; Meskó, Szatmári, et al., 2021). The YSEX?-HSF is a self-report instrument that consists of three summary scales assessing three major types of sexual motives including Personal Goal Attainment (e.g., *I wanted a new experience; It was a seduction / I was seduced*), Relational Reasons (e.g., *I was in love; I wanted to spiritually merge with the other person*), and Sex as Coping (e.g., *I wanted to decrease sadness; I wanted to save the relationship*). Each item is rated on a 5-point scale offering the following options: 1 = *None of my sexual experiences*; 2 = *Few (...)*; 3 = *Some (...)*; 4 = *Many (...)*; 5 = *All of my sexual experiences*. Thus, higher scores reflect higher levels on each measure of sexual motives. All three subscales showed adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .903, .923, \text{ and } .893$, respectively).

4. Results

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In males, the linear regression model ($F(11,114) = 24.1$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .671$) showed that the factors that positively predicted relationship satisfaction scores were STLS Intimacy ($\beta = .40$, 95% CI: .21 to .59, $p < .001$) and STLS Passion ($\beta = .28$, 95% CI: .09 to .47, $p = .005$). While the factors that negatively predicted the score were DCI Negative Dyadic Coping ($\beta = -.18$, 95% CI: -.35 to -.02, $p = .033$) and having at least one child ($\beta = -.24$, 95% CI: -.46 to -.02, $p = .031$). See Table 1 for the exact values.

In females, the linear regression model ($F(11,293) = 60.0$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .681$) showed that the factors that positively predicted relationship satisfaction scores were STLS Intimacy ($\beta = .15$, 95% CI: .01 to .28, $p = .034$), STLS Passion ($\beta = .19$, 95% CI: .06 to .31, $p = .003$), STLS Commitment ($\beta = .27$, 95% CI: .15 to .39, $p < .001$), and DCI Positive Dyadic Coping ($\beta = .32$, 95% CI: .15 to .49, $p < .001$). In contrast, the factors that negatively predicted the score were YSEX?-HSF Sex as Coping ($\beta = -.11$, 95% CI: -.19 to -.03, $p = .010$), DCI One's Own Dyadic Coping ($\beta = -.15$, 95% CI: -.27 to -.03, $p = .012$), and DCI Negative Dyadic Coping ($\beta = -.12$, 95% CI: -.23 to -.01, $p = .034$). See Table 1 for the exact values.

The comparison between males and females revealed that on the one hand STLS Intimacy was more positively associated to RAS in males ($z = 2.57$, $p = .005$), while having at least one child was a stronger negative predictor of RAS in males ($z = 1.76$, $p = .039$). On the other hand, STLS Commitment ($z = 1.69$, $p = .045$) and DCI Positive Dyadic Coping ($z = 2.09$, $p = .018$) were more positively associated to RAS in females, while YSEX?-HSF Sex as Coping was a stronger negative predictor of RAS in females ($z = 1.74$, $p = .041$).

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Table 1 Regression analyses for the combined score of RAS-H with STLS, YSEX?-HSF, and DCI subscales, and whether the participant had children as the independent variables. The table shows the point estimates (B), standardized estimates (β), 95% confidence intervals (95%CI) for the standardized estimates. Sex differences were tested between the standardized estimates using Fisher r-to-z comparisons, statistical results are displayed in the rightmost columns of the table.

Predictor	Males						Females						Sex differences	
	B	t	p	β	95% CI		B	t	p	β	95% CI		z	p
					Lower	Upper					Lower	Upper		
SLTS I	0.134	4.111	<.001	0.398	0.206	0.590	0.049	2.131	0.034	0.146	0.011	0.281	2.57	<.001
SLTS P	0.066	2.851	0.005	0.279	0.085	0.473	0.043	3.000	0.003	0.186	0.064	0.308	0.93	0.176
SLTS C	0.023	1.002	0.318	0.095	-0.093	0.285	0.077	4.564	<.001	0.270	0.153	0.387	1.69	0.045
YSEX?-HSF PGA	-0.049	-1.620	0.108	-0.119	-0.264	0.026	0.006	0.335	0.738	0.013	-0.064	0.091	1.24	0.107
SYEX?-HSF RR	-0.003	-0.158	0.875	-0.009	-0.132	0.113	0.014	1.161	0.247	0.047	-0.032	0.127	0.53	0.298
YSEX?-HSF SaC	0.037	1.113	0.268	0.077	-0.060	0.216	-0.059	-2.576	0.010	-0.107	-0.189	-0.025	1.74	0.040
DCI DCO	-0.063	-0.926	0.357	-0.086	-0.272	0.098	-0.118	-2.531	0.012	-0.149	-0.264	-0.033	0.59	0.277
DCI DCP	-0.058	-0.684	0.495	-0.094	-0.369	0.179	0.024	0.560	0.576	0.042	-0.106	0.192	1.29	0.098
DCI NDC	-0.220	-2.155	0.033	-0.182	-0.349	-0.014	-0.137	-2.131	0.034	-0.118	-0.227	-0.009	-0.61	0.270
DCI PDC	0.048	0.640	0.524	0.103	-0.217	0.424	0.149	3.643	<.001	0.315	0.145	0.486	2.09	0.018
Have children: Yes ^a – No	-1.419	-2.180	0.031	-0.240	-0.458	-0.021	-0.339	-0.694	0.488	-0.056	-0.215	0.103	1.76	0.039

Note. STLS I = Sternberg Love Triangular Scale Intimacy; STLS P = Sternberg Love Triangular Scale Passion; STLS C = Sternberg Love Triangular Scale Commitment; YSEX?-HSF PGA = Reasons for Having Sex Questionnaire, Hungarian Short Form Personal Goal Attainment; YSEX?-HSF RR = Reasons for Having Sex Questionnaire, Hungarian Short Form Relational Reasons; YSEX?-HSF SaC = Reasons for Having Sex Questionnaire, Hungarian Short Form Sex as Coping; DCI DCO = One's Own Dyadic Coping; DCI DCP = Partner's Dyadic Coping; DCI NDC = Negative Dyadic Coping; DCI PDC = Positive Dyadic Coping. ^a Reference level.

5. Discussion

The present study explored sex differences on a set of psychological factors potentially predicting intimate partners' relationship satisfaction, including the four types of dyadic coping (one's own dyadic coping, partner's dyadic coping, negative dyadic coping, positive dyadic coping), the three love components (intimacy, passion, commitment), the three major types of sexual motives (personal goal attainment, relational motives, sex as coping), and having children. The obtained findings revealed that more factors had an effect on women's relationship satisfaction than on men's (7 vs. 4, respectively), and nearly half of the assessed predictors (5 out of 11) showed significant sex differences. These findings are discussed in detail below.

In males, high levels of intimacy and passion predicted high relationship satisfaction, while negative dyadic coping (including hostile, ambivalent and superficial coping responses) and having at least one child were associated with low satisfaction. These results are consistent with the related previous findings reported in the literature (e.g., Falconier & Kuhn, 2019; Martos et al., 2019).

As compared to males', females' relationship satisfaction showed a more complex psychological background as reflected in a larger number of both positive and negative predictors. High satisfaction was explained by high levels of intimacy, passion and commitment, and by high positive dyadic coping (i.e., the partners' mutual and/or joint efforts to deal with the stressor), while low satisfaction was predicted by the high perceived importance of using sex as coping, of the female partner's own dyadic coping (i.e., expressing her feelings to the partner in stressful dyadic situations), and of negative dyadic coping. Some of these results are in line with the related previous findings on sex differences in dyadic coping (e.g., Hilpert et al. 2016; Rusu et. al., 2016), sexual motivation (Meskó, Szatmári et al., 2021; Meston et al., 2019). Sex differences in relationship functioning are likely to be part of a broader human mating strategy that also organizes social cognition

(Pearce et al., 2021), intimate relationships (Pearce et al., 2019) and mating preferences (Walter et al., 2020; 2021).

The negative association between the female participants' relationship satisfaction and their own dyadic coping is a seemingly contradictory finding, therefore it deserves particular attention. The most plausible explanation for this finding is that the female participants perceived their individual contribution to dyadic well-being to be disproportionately high. This explanation is consistent with a previous finding obtained for Hungarian males, which revealed that their satisfaction was positively associated with the self-perceived importance of their own dyadic coping (Martos et al., 2016, 2019). Hungarian couples tend to conform to traditional gender roles (e.g., Lomazzi et al., 2019; Shnabel et al., 2016; Sorokowski et al., 2021; Steiber et al., 2016), which require the male partner to be strong and overcome the difficulties the couple faces, whereas if it is the female partner who fulfils this function in dyadic coping, it may impair the couple's satisfaction with their relationship.

The cross-sex comparisons for the relative importance of the predictors of relationship satisfaction revealed that the intimacy component of love and having at least one child were more closely associated with men's than women's satisfaction, the former predictor positively, the latter negatively. By contrast, the commitment component of love, the partners' mutual support reflected in positive dyadic coping, and using sex as a means of coping with emotional problems in the relationship were more closely associated with women's than men's satisfaction, the former two positively, the last one negatively.

In line with related previous findings, the obtained sex differences suggest that women's general satisfaction in intimate partner relationships involves more complex psychodynamics than men's. This is not surprising, considering that women as opposed to men are generally characterized by a wider variety of dyadic coping modes (e.g., Falconier & Kuhn, 2019; Martos et al., 2019) and sexual motives (e.g., Meskó, Szatmári et al., 2021), and by more complex experiences of love (e.g., Meskó, Zsidó et al., 2021; Sorokowski et al., 2017). At the same time, this greater complexity is potentially associated with more vulnerable relationship

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satisfaction in women. That is, the male partner's failure to provide adequate emotional support or to foster a partnership-oriented attitude may drastically impair the female partner's relationship satisfaction.

Some authors point out the importance of a shared perspective as opposed to the pursuit of competing individual interests in terms of long-term satisfaction (e.g., Alea et al., 2015; Topcu-Uzer et al., 2021). Skerrett and Fergus (2015) refers to this shared perspective as *we-ness*, that is, a third identity shared by the two partners, which is expressed from time to time by symbolic actions mutually done and received as gestures of love rather than costly individual sacrifices. Successful dyadic coping contributes to the development of a shared identity, while a sense of *we-ness* provides a resource for dyadic coping with the stressors associated with shared activities and responsibilities such as parenting, for example.

Finally, the obtained findings may provide useful insights for practitioners who support committed adult couples in dealing with their differences in relationship satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

There are a number of limitations that have to be addressed. First, the self-report methodology used in the present study was based on the assumption that respondents had conscious access to their psychological contents (e.g., love emotions, sexual motives, dyadic coping functioning), which is not necessarily true in all cases. Second, the overall sample was not tested for representativeness. For example, since the sample is characterized by above-average education and predominantly committed relationships, the results may not be valid for the general population in all respects. Third, no data on the participants' sexual orientation was collected, thus the study enables no conclusion on the associations between sexual orientations and dyadic coping, relationship satisfaction and sexual motivation. Exploration of the possible associations is a subject of future research.

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