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Marital happiness – conditions and challenges

Szczęście małżeńskie – uwarunkowania i wyzwania

Abstract

Aim. The aim of the article is to try to answer the question regarding what factors most determine the achievement of happiness in marriage/partnership in the opinions of Poles.

Methods and materials. A quantitative study was conducted using the technique of direct interviews conducted with the use of electronic equipment Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI/MOBI) on a representative random-quota sample of Poles (N=1000). The research was carried out in 2023.

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Results and conclusion. Friendship, trust, and love – these are the most important factors in the opinion of Poles that decide that a given marriage/partnership is successful. Most often, they assess their relationship as rather happy. However, they notice the existing deficits in it - above all, the lack of time that they could spend together. Their way of building a marriage/partnership of the highest quality is primarily communication with the partner, as well as showing and expressing love.

Keywords: transformations of family life, confluent love, marital happiness, determinants, challenges.

Abstrakt

Cel. Celem artykułu jest próba odpowiedzi na pytanie o to, jakie czynniki w największym stopniu warunkują osiągnięcie szczęścia w małżeństwie/w związku partnerskim w opiniach Polaków.

Metody i materiały. Badanie ilościowe zostało przeprowadzone z wykorzystaniem techniki wywiadów bezpośrednich realizowanych z użyciem sprzętu elektronicznego Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI/MOBI) na reprezentatywnej losowo-kwotowej próbie Polaków (N=1000). Badania zostały zrealizowane w 2023 roku.

Wyniki i wnioski. Przyjaźń, zaufanie oraz miłość to najistotniejsze – zdaniem Polaków – czynniki decydujące o tym, że dany związek małżeński/partnerski jest udany. Najczęściej oceniają swoją relację jako raczej szczęśliwą. Dostrzegają jednak istniejące w niej deficyty – brakuje im przede wszystkim czasu, który mogliby spędzać tylko we dwoje. Ich sposobem na budowanie związku małżeńskiego/partnerskiego o jak najwyższej jakości jest przede wszystkim komunikacja z partnerem/partnerką, a także okazywanie i wyrażanie miłości.

Słowa kluczowe: przemiany życia rodzinnego, miłość współbieżna, szczęście małżeńskie, determinanty, wyzwania.

Introduction

A marriage, as it can be assumed, is entered into in good faith, for life. Although there has been a fairly large decrease in the number of marriages with and without children, they are still the most common type of family in Poland (GUS, 2021, p. 43). Family happiness consistently ranks high among the most important values that Polish citizens follow in their daily lives (CBOS, 2019).

The results of numerous studies indicate that healthy marital relationships contribute to overall life satisfaction (Krok, 2015, p. 146). At the same time, it has been

signalled for a long time that the approach to love and love relationships is changing (Beck, 2002; Bauman, 2007; cf. also Wrochna, 2018). “The ideals of romantic love are crumbling under the pressure of sexual emancipation and autonomy” (Giddens, 2007, p. 79). Anthony Giddens considers *confluent love* to be a model characteristic of late modernity. It is “[...] active and conditional love and as such it conflicts with the ‘only’ and ‘forever’ of the romantic love complex” (Giddens, 2007, pp. 79–80), it does not require sacrifices, although “[...] it assumes devotion and commitment” (Giddens, 2012, pp. 129–130). Confluent love is an element of a *pure relationship*, i.e. one in which “individuals enter into a relationship “ (Giddens, 2012, p. 127), and not to achieve any social goals. Therefore, it does not bring a sense of security, because each partner can leave at any time if they no longer feel satisfied – there is no obligation to stay in a relationship that does not bring them happiness, there is a large margin of freedom available, but the risk of hurting at least one of the parties is also high. Expressive, emotional individualism is at the core of the modern understanding of marriage (Giddens, 2008). Marriage is not a given, but a task for the partners: “[...] a relationship is a job that requires conscious planning” (Gdula, 2009, p. 139). Today, “we start families not to jointly generate income and provide each other with offspring who will one day take over this income, but to obtain emotional support, love and tenderness in them” (Szlendak, 2010, p. 118). The very understanding and creation of a family is changing dynamically; it is estimated that today we are dealing with the normalisation of family diversity: “[...] from homogeneity to diversity, from stability to change; from male domination to dismantled patriarchy” (Szlendak, 2010, p. 395). The need to develop a theoretical and research approach that takes this diversity into account is assumed by the *New Family Studies* trend, which has been developing since the end of the 1970s (cf. Michalczak, Olasik, & Stasińska, 2013). As Ulrich Beck (2004) wrote:

[...] it was no longer clear whether and when to get married, to live together without getting married, to get married and not live together, to have or raise a child within or outside the family, to have a child with the person one lives with or with the person one loves but who lives with someone else, or to decide to have a child before, before, after or during your career (p. 153).

It has long been noted that “[marital roles] cannot be learned by imitating one’s parents, but must be created from the structural and functional elements of one’s institution of marriage and family, as well as from individual elements typical of the partners” (Matuszewska, 1990, p. 142), that marriage and family stand out among other randomly gathered communities with the greatest wealth of contact, spatial proximity, communication, that they are characterised by the totality of relationships, the extent of bonds between individual family members, the interdependence of goals of action,

which are considered permanent and therefore particularly prone to conflict (Trawińska, 1977). It has been recognised that conflict is an inherent feature of marriage, but that its proper functioning does not involve avoiding conflicts or concealing a different opinion on a given subject (cf. e.g., Przybył, 2002), that “[...] conflicts eliminated at their root and resolved in time leave no traces” (Adamski, 1982, p. 40). Marriage is a specific relationship in the family system, it is its basis and at the same time it is the least stable relationship in this system and can be broken (Małus, Konarzewska, Szulc, & Galińska-Skok, 2013). It is broken much more often than several decades ago, as shown by data on divorce rates both in Poland and worldwide (cf. GUS, 2021; Eurostat, 2022). As Zbigniew Tyszka (2003) wrote: “If love ends, a certain proportion of spouses feel entitled to seek happiness again in subsequent relationships, considering the welfare of their children to be of secondary importance” (p. 146). Divorce has become a natural part of today’s social reality, and, according to the trends observed in recent years, there is a clear increase in Poles’ tolerance for this phenomenon, which is met with understanding much more often than with disapproval (CBOS, 2021, p. 2). Although it has been spoken of in terms of social pathology (cf. e.g., Podgórecki, 1969), or it has been and is seen as legal sanctioning of the already broken family, it cannot be forgotten that it is “the principle of the permanence of marriage is one of the basic principles of Polish family law, resulting from the regulations governing the institution of marriage and indicated by representatives of the doctrine in all studies in this field” (Łączkowska, 2014, p. 61). It benefits both spouses, their family and the state. Therefore, a very important task of representatives of various scientific disciplines is to search for answers to the question of what factors promote the durability of marriage and the achievement of marital happiness.

The concept of marital happiness

In addition to *happiness in marriage*, the literature on the subject also uses terms (synonyms) such as: marital success, marital satisfaction, marital bliss, marital fulfilment, marital quality and durability, happy relationship, compatible relationship or marriageability. A review of research on this issue leads to the conclusion that it is neither easy to define nor to research this concept (cf., e.g., Aszkiełowicz, 2012; Krok, 2015). Much earlier, Jan Rostowski (1991) indicated that one of the basic research tasks of the marriage issue at that time was to define a fundamental model of the functioning of a marriage, a model that is adequate, simple and at the same time informative about whether a given relationship functions properly or not, because of the tasks it faces. The solution turned out to be the use of the concept of *marital quality*. Its authors, Robert A. Lewis and Graham B. Spanier, wrote that marital quality “[...] is a unifying

term that includes dimensions such as a sense of integration, satisfaction, happiness, adaptation, and communication” (as cited in Ryś, 1994, p. 19). This quality, considered as a process, requires taking into account the time parameter in which a given marriage is in the course of the research, and as a state, the occurrence of some continuum of the examined marital quality. The authors also proposed a definition of marital durability (stability), which they defined as an unbreakable bond until the death of one of the spouses (Ryś, 1994).

Mutual acceptance, ability to show affection, mutual respect, feeling of happiness in marriage, mutual love, satisfaction with sexual life, mutual tolerance, satisfaction with spouse’s participation in household chores, similarity in terms of religious beliefs and practices, compatibility in terms of material matters, acceptance of spouse’s interests, compatibility of characters, ability to resolve conflicts, fulfilment of expectations regarding the number of children, feeling of spouse’s attractiveness, satisfaction with spouse’s job, knowledge about marriage before its conclusion, range of common topics of conversation, knowledge of marital fertility, awareness of marital unity, convergence in parenting attitudes, mutual kindness, honesty, convergence of important views and conformity to important moral norms, feeling of closeness to spouse, mutual honesty, feeling of satisfaction and fulfilment in marriage, the feeling of having an influence on the inner enrichment of the spouse, the feeling that the spouse is the right life partner, the belief that mutual love will grow, the feeling of being connected to the spouse, the feeling of being understood in all important situations, the knowledge that the spouse can always be counted on, trust in one’s spouse, mutual fidelity, and openness – these are aspects of a couple’s relationship that determine the quality of a marriage, as mentioned in psychological literature (Ryś, 2004). Many authors emphasise that communication between spouses, including the ability to resolve conflicts, is of great importance in achieving a high quality of marriage (cf., e.g., Ryś, 2004; Rostowski, 1987; Plopa, 2008).

In some publications on the subject, researchers (e.g., Kurowska, Nickel, 2023; Zarosińska, Śliwak, 2020; Walęcka-Matyja, Szkudlarek, 2019; Wosik-Kawala, 2018; Krok, 2015; Jankowiak, 2007) usually have in common that they refer to the considerations of the same authors (at least several). Among them is Maria Braun-Gałkowska (1978), who considers a lasting relationship, evaluated positively by the spouses, to be a successful marriage. She believed that the ultimate determinants of a successful marriage should be found in the personalities of the spouses, because

[...] marital satisfaction depends on the duration of the engagement, the housing situation, having children and whether the couple come from a family with one or many children. There is also a connection between marital satisfaction and the level of neuroticism. Factors seemingly external to the spouses also depend on them

to some extent. For example, there is a relationship between having children and marital satisfaction; it is up to the spouses themselves whether they have their own or foster children (Braun-Gałkowska, 1978, p. 156).

Several decades ago, Franciszek Adamski (1982) wrote that marital happiness is “[...] the result of the forces emanating from the personalities of the partners, it is the result of their ability to adapt to each other and life situations, and it is also to some extent conditioned by favourable external circumstances, independent of the will and characteristics of the spouses” (p. 40). The criteria defining this concept are, above all: the durability of the marriage, the subjective sense of happiness of both partners, the full development of their personalities related to the achievement of full adaptation, the internal integration of the relationship without lasting marital or family conflicts or tensions, and as an external criterion: the fulfilment by the spouses of the expectations of wider social groups – mainly the birth and upbringing of offspring. In turn, J. Rostowski (1987) introduced the concept of a well-chosen marriage, which has many common assumptions with the concept of marital quality, understood as a specific process, the results of which are determined by the appropriate degree of: love, interpersonal bond, intimacy, similarity, sexual intercourse, relationship to children and the type of motives for choosing a marriage partner; the author distinguished interpersonal and intrapersonal factors determining the level of satisfaction with marriage. Iwona Janicka and Leon Niebrzydowski (1994) believe that “[...] a marriage is considered successful, well-matched or of high quality only when there is a subjective sense of happiness among the partners” (p. 66). Mieczysław Płopa (2008), on the other hand, distinguished four main dimensions determining overall marital satisfaction: intimacy, self-fulfilment, similarity, and disappointment related to the feeling of life failure resulting from entering into and remaining in a marriage. For Najafi A. Zadeh and Mirzajan A. Tabrizi (2014), marital satisfaction is a situation “[...] in which both men and women feel happy and satisfied with themselves” (p. 160). It should be mentioned that methods for examining the quality of marriage have been developed, including Rys’s *Skala Jakości i Trwałości Małżeństwa* [Scale of Marriage Quality and Durability], Braun-Gałkowska’s *Skala Powodzenia Małżeństwa* [Scale of Marriage Success], Płopa and Rostowski’s *Kwestionariusz Dobranego Małżeństwa* [Questionnaire on a Good Marriage], and Józef Szopiński’s *Skala Więzy Małżeńskiej* [Scale of Marriage Bond].

What does *happiness in marriage* mean, and what determines it in an age when marriage is institutionalised as an individualised programme and the focus has shifted from the “whole to the individual” (Slany, 2002, p. 54)? In times when “[...] even old forms of marriage must be chosen and experienced at one’s own risk [...] and no one can currently say what is hidden under the term ‘marriage’ – what is allowed, required,

taboo or necessary” (Slany, 2002, p. 54)? In times when “[...] the order of marriage is [...] an individual order, questioned and reconstructed during individuals’ lives” (Slany, 2002, p. 54)? According to Mariola Bieńko and Anna Kwak (2020), “[...] personal happiness and the way to achieve it is understood individually [...], and a close relationship is supposed to respond to personal needs, not the expectations of society or family” (pp. 292–293).

Research methodology

The presented research aims to try to answer the question: What factors are most responsible for achieving happiness in a marriage/partnership in the opinion of Poles? The following specific problems have been formulated:

- What factors determine that a given marriage/partnership is happy in the opinion of Poles?
- What is their subjective assessment of their marriage/partnership?
- What deficits do they perceive in it?
- What actions do they take to achieve the highest possible quality?

The quantitative study was conducted using the Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI/MOBI) technique on a representative random-quota sample of adult Poles (N=1000), reflecting the structure of Poland in terms of gender, age, education, size of town/city of residence and macroregion. The research was carried out in 2023 by the research agency 4p Research Mix Sp. z o. o. The research tool used a combination of multiple-choice, semi-open and open questions. The questions regarding marital happiness corresponded to the above-mentioned specific problems and constituted one of many thematic blocks included in the survey, and the whole was concluded by a form.

Characteristics of the sample

More than half of the respondents were women (53.4%), and less than half (46.6%) were men. The largest group were people aged 60 and over (27.3%), slightly fewer were aged 16–19 (20.3%) and 30–39 (19.5%), and the fewest were aged 50–59 (17.5%) and 40–49 (15.4%). Almost half of the respondents are married (48.2%), a slightly smaller group are single (35%), an even smaller group are divorced or separated (10.3%), and the smallest group are widowed (6.5%).

The vast majority are Catholics (77.1%), with much fewer declaring other Christian denominations (3.8%) or non-Christian denominations (1.3%), and the remaining people declaring no religion (17.8%).

The majority of the respondents are married/in a civil partnership (68.6%). Among them, the largest group are those with more than 20 years of partnership (25.4%), followed by 6–10 years (12.3%) and 3–5 years (11.4%). There are significantly fewer people who have been in a relationship for 11–15 years (8.1%), even fewer for 1–2 years (4.7%) and 16–20 years (4.1%) and the fewest for less than a year (2.6%).

The largest group are middle managers, administrators and service providers (28.5%), followed by pensioners (22.5%), much fewer managers and specialists (14.8%), manual workers (13.5%), even fewer housewives and unemployed people (9.2%) and pupils and students (8.1%), and the least frequently farmers and self-employed people (3.0%). Several people did not specify their employment status (0.4%), including those on maternity leave, parental leave, casual work, or sick leave (0.1% each).

More than half of the respondents are urban residents (60.3%), with the highest number living in cities with up to 100,000 inhabitants (31.6%), significantly fewer in cities with 100,000–500,000 inhabitants (17.1%) and the fewest in large urban agglomerations (11.6%). The remaining people are rural residents (39.7%). The largest number of people live in the Mazowieckie (15.2%) and Śląskie (12.6%) provinces, followed by the Wielkopolskie (9.2%), Małopolskie (8.5%), Dolnośląskie (6.6%), Kujawsko-Pomorskie and Podkarpackie (6.5% each) łódzkie (6.2%), pomorskie (6.1%), lubelskie (6.0%) zachodniopomorskie (4.1%), świętokrzyskie (3.5%), warmińsko-mazurskie (3.1%), lubuskie (2.1%) and, to a lesser extent, opolskie and podlaskie (1.9% each).

Research results

Friendship (64.5% of responses), trust (64.3%) and love (58.6%) are the most important factors that determine whether a marriage/partnership is happy, according to Poles, chosen by more than half of the respondents. The respondents could choose from a list of the 5 most important factors and were also allowed to add their own suggestions.

Other important factors, although less frequently chosen by the respondents, include: responsibility (45.2%), communication/conversation (44.9%), and caring (37.2%). Slightly less important are: the ability to express feelings (30.9%), shared interests (29.2%). Even less important are having children (19.2%), sensitivity (19.2%), diligence (17.4%), intelligence (15.7%), and least of all: good relationship with the partner's family (14.3%), attractiveness of the partner (13.2%) and lack of arguments (12.7%). Only a few people wrote their suggestions for a decisive factor for happiness in marriage/partnership, and these were the following answers: good cohabitation, loyalty, faithfulness, and closeness (0.1% each). A dozen or so respondents chose the answer "other," but did not specify their answer (1.5%).

Table 1

Hierarchy of factors determining a happy marriage/partnership according to Poles (N=1000)

The factor	Percentage
Friendship	64.5
Trust	64.3
Love	58.6
Responsibility	45.2
Communication/conversation	44.9
Caring	37.2
Ability to express feelings	30.9
Common interests	29.2
Having children	19.2
Sensitivity	19.2
Diligence	17.4
Intelligence	15.7
Good relationship with the partner's family	14.3
Partner's attractiveness	13.2
No arguments	12.7
Other (good sex, loyalty, faithfulness, closeness)	0.4
None of the above	1.5

Source: Author's own study.

Almost all respondents who were married/in a partnership (67.9%) answered the question about what they lack in their marriage/partnership (most often one deficit was mentioned, least often – five), whereas a few people (0.3%) said that they lack everything, and several did not answer (0.6%).

Married/partnered respondents mainly lack time (12.5%). They mainly pointed out the lack of time spent only together – time for trips and outings, e.g., to the mountains, for walks, for meals together, for breakfasts together or for baths together and dates. Slightly less often, they mentioned the lack of time for family outings, for pleasure, for conversation, for pursuing shared passions and for the child.

The second deficit most strongly expressed in the respondents' statements was the deficit in the area of feelings (5.8%). The lack of love (2.4%), friendship (0.4%), lack of showing feelings/empathy (1.9%) or lack of affectionate gestures (including touch) or words (0.9%) was indicated: "Lack of small gestures and efforts: going out on dates, giving flowers, holding hands, showing small gestures in public,"* as well as lack of reciprocated feelings, devotion (0.3%).

The third – almost as common as the above – was a deficit in communication between partners (5.7%): Lack of communication, lack of honest communica-

* Wszystkie wypowiedzi pochodzą z badań własnych.

tion or willingness to communicate, to express needs, to share experiences or to listen to the other person, as well as inability to resolve conflicts, lack of agreement/consensus and frequent arguments or resentment on the part of the partner, insulting the other person: "There should be no days off for arguments."

In addition to all the above, the respondents often mentioned a lack of financial means (3.6%) that could be used to pursue interests together with their partner, go on trips together or buy a flat. Another factor mentioned by the respondents was the lack of care/sensitivity/involvement/appreciation/interest on the part of the partner in the relationship or (less frequently) the child (3.3%) ("I miss being put first"; "I miss being flattered"). The respondents mentioned a lack of closeness almost as often as a lack of passion and sex – in general, more frequent or spontaneous sex (3.2%), as well as a lack of attractiveness in the relationship (2.9%) – romanticism, longing, surprises, gifts, excitement, fantasy, spontaneity, craziness, nonchalance, changes, ease, variety, making dreams come true, new experiences, and even jealousy, which could kill the monotony they feel in their current relationship. Not much less often, they pointed to their partner's lack of understanding – e.g., of their needs (including "forbearance for frills and shoes"), their views or the situation (e.g., professional) in which they found themselves (2.8%)

Respondents also mentioned, although much less frequently, the lack of:

- trust (1.9%),
- help from a partner/lack of partnership/cooperation/sharing of responsibilities with a partner, which they feel overburdened with (1.6%),
- sincerity/truthfulness/openness (0.9%),
- rest/peace (0.9%),
- a sense of security/stability/certainty about the future, which has been shaken, for example, by the loss of health of one of the partners (1.1%),
- contact with other people (1.1%) – primarily social contacts, less often with the spouse's family,
- shared passions/interests (0.5%),
- jokes/the same sense of humour (0.2%),
- similar views (0.1%),
- health (0.7%),
- decisiveness/partner's responsibility for the family (0.4%),
- predictability of their behaviour/emotional stability (0.2%),
- resourcefulness (0.1%),
- diligence (0.2%)
- respect (0.4%),
- freedom (0.3%),
- faithfulness (0.2%) or loyalty of their partner (0.1%),
- acceptance (0.3%),

- marriage/engagement (0.3%),
- children (0.2%),
- spirituality/praying together (0.2%),
- planning/pursuing goals (0.2%),
- joy (0.2%)
- perseverance/strength (0.2%) and – in individual cases – carefree and warm-heartedness, tolerance, celebrating anniversaries, honesty, betrayal or the partner ironing shirts. Respondents also expressed longing for the past (1.2%) – the old home, youth, and what used to be between partners.

So, how do the respondents rate their own marriage/partnership? 68.8% of those who are married/in a partnership answered this question. Most respondents consider their relationship to be rather happy (28.5%), slightly fewer consider it to be definitely happy (23.2%), significantly fewer consider it to be average (14%), even fewer consider it to be rather unsuccessful (2%), and the fewest consider it to be definitely unsuccessful (0.9%).

What do Poles do to make their relationship happy and successful? The list is long. The respondents most often gave one answer and least often gave five. As with the previous question, 68.8% of people answered this question, all of whom were married/in a relationship, while the rest, who were not in a relationship, did not answer this question (31.2%). The vast majority of Poles focus on proper communication with their partner (18.9%) in order to maintain the highest possible quality of their relationship. Respondents encourage honest conversations, talk to their partner every day about everything or the most important issues and problems, listen carefully to them, strive for a compromise (“We don’t insist on our own opinion”), solve emerging problems/conflicts together, clarify emerging doubts, emotions and behaviours on an ongoing basis, behaviours, avoid bad days, take care of the message – try to say nice things to your partner, be nice (e.g., “I write notes with nice words”), give them compliments, not insult, swear, criticise or get angry, flirt with them, give them advice. According to the principle “disagreement destroys, but agreement builds,” the respondents declare that they do not argue at all or try to avoid arguments (“I do not give reasons for jealousy”; “I do not give reasons for accusations”), and if they argue, “It’s not just about anything” (4.2%).

Love is very important to the respondents – loving their partner in return and showing their feelings and maintaining closeness (16.2%; “I cuddle”; “I hug”; “I miss”; “I remember anniversaries, birthdays” etc.; “I buy flowers for her without an occasion because I love her”). Showing respect for the other person is also important (2.0%). It is important to build and develop friendship between partners (1.3%), as well as liking (0.2%) or appreciating the partner (0.7%).

Quite often – compared to other answers – the respondents indicate the importance of trust (10.6%) and care (10.4%) in the broadest sense of the word: small compliments, the house

(cleaning it), good sex, the other person, thinking about them, about oneself, physical fitness, physical attractiveness, beauty, health, children, spending time together, communication, the common good or “a relationship to prevent boredom from creeping in.” They also write in a rather general way that they try, rarely specifying what (1.0%; e.g., to be a good wife, the best partner).

Respondents attach considerable importance to spending time together as a couple, dedicating time to each other (9.9%): planning it, preparing meals together, going on trips together, going on dates, going to the cinema, theatre, restaurants, concerts, doing various kinds of sports, going for walks or travelling. Some also emphasise the importance of spending time with children or other members of their immediate and extended family (1.1%).

For some respondents, sex is important (1.8%; unforced; successful; “I try to make sex varied”).

Some respondents emphasise the importance of building trust between partners (0.8%; “No mutual control – complete trust”). Others emphasise partnership and the division of household chores (1.5%). For others, it is about accepting their partner, including their faults (0.4%; “I don’t try to change my partner”). For some, it is important to have children (0.5%) or to take good care of them (0.4%), as well as to have a large family (0.1%).

It is important to support and help your partner (1.7%, e.g., “I comfort my husband when he has a problem”; “I drive him”). Giving your partner space and respecting his boundaries (1.1%; for pursuing hobbies, for resting, for working; “I don’t impose myself”; “I’m not intrusive”). Cooking for him (1.3%) or doing household chores (0.1%). Pampering oneself and one’s partner (0.2%). What is important is what the partners have in common (3.8%) – above all, their passions and interests (travel, music, films, “We read the same books”), as well as decision-making, similar views, goals, sense of humour, values, lifestyle, rights, and budget. The respondents also value peace (0.4%).

Caring for their partner/showing interest in them, not only when they are ill but also on a daily basis (5.5%; e.g., offering them a coffee), being understanding (3.4%), being faithful (2.8%; “I don’t cheat on my husband”), being hard-working (0.6%), being honest (2.0%; “No secrets”), honesty (2.0%), truthfulness (0.7%; “I don’t lie”), kindness (0.4%), commitment (1.3%; “I give 80% of my best”), loyalty (1.2%), tenderness (0.4%), patience (0.5%), tolerance (0.3%), sensitivity (0.6%), responsibility (1.2%), resourcefulness (0.4%), empathy (0.6%), neutrality (0.1%), modesty (0.1%), the ability to surprise the other person with gifts, surprises, small gestures (1.8%; “I try to give small pleasures, buy something nice that my partner likes, plan trips to places he likes”; “I don’t get stuck in a rut; we try new things”), planning skills (0.1%), tolerance (0.8%), thriftiness (0.2%), reliability (0.1%), courage (0.1%), optimism/joy/smile (0.8%), sense of humour (1.1%; “I make my husband laugh”; “I am funny”), tenderness (0.1%), ability to forgive (1.0%), resourcefulness (0.2%), ability to make the family feel safe (1.1%; “I work professionally”), being yourself (0.3%), openness (0.3%), keeping your word (0.1%), constancy in feelings (0.1%), delicacy (0.1%), objectivity (1.0%),

showing gratitude (0.1%), submissiveness (0.1%; “I am submissive”; “I fulfil my partner’s wishes”), compliance (0.1%), intelligence (0.1%), and faith (0.1%) – this is the list of partner characteristics that, in the opinion of the respondents, are conducive to building happiness in a marriage/partnership.

Several respondents stated that they simply are: “I am here,” “I am here for you,” “I am available whenever you need me” (0.7%). Two indicated that they work on themselves “according to their partner’s requirements” (0.2%), and two others said they did not have high expectations of a relationship or partner (0.2%): “I don’t have high expectations so I don’t end up feeling disappointed”; “I have low expectations of my partner.” Other individual statements made by the respondents about how to make their relationship as successful as possible are as follows:

- I don’t prioritise my career over my relationship.
- Sometimes I flirt.
- I have my own opinion.
- I try not to be a burden.
- I ignore resentment and grievances.
- I keep quiet.
- I escape to quiet days.
- I go shopping.
- I give my partner freedom.
- I go to parties.
- I wait.
- I am financially independent.
- I try to maintain good relationships with my partner’s friends.
- I participate in activities outside the home.
- I dedicate myself to him.
- There is no jealousy between us.
- Sometimes we take a break from each other.
- I keep a low profile.
- I try to change my partner.
- The goal is my wife’s happiness.
- I fight.
- We work together professionally.
- We have compatible personalities.
- I don’t use stimulants.
- I don’t nag.
- I apologise.
- He can always count on me.

Good memories are also important.

A few people said that they are not really doing anything special (0.6%), that they are doing everything they can (0.5%), that they are not doing anything anymore (0.3%), or that they cannot answer the question (1.5%). In individual cases, the following was written: "Everything works out by itself"; "It's my private business"; "I didn't succeed"; "I'm not happy"; "My relationship is a failure"; "My relationship is perfect."

The above describes the actions that the respondents take to improve the quality of their marriages/partnerships. Perhaps some of them may raise doubts and questions about whether they really fulfil their function, but according to the respondents, this is what happens.

Conclusion

There is no single recipe for marital happiness. In the literature on the subject and based on an analysis of the results of nationwide surveys, it is difficult to find a clear answer to the questions posed. Marriage is not a given, as was already noted several decades ago: "Nowadays [...] marriage is increasingly becoming a life adventure of two people, intentionally and personally undertaken, experienced in solidarity and in a freer way" (Rostowski, 1978, p.). Friendship, trust, and love are the most important factors that determine the success of a marriage or partnership, according to Poles. They most often rate their relationship as rather happy. However, they recognise the deficits in their relationship – above all, they lack time that they could spend only with each other, as well as space for showing and expressing their feelings and for communicating with their partner in the broadest sense. Their way of building the highest quality marriage/partnership is primarily communication with their partner, as well as showing and expressing love. The importance of communication has been discussed for a long time: "[...] communication is one of the basic factors influencing the development of love and bonds in marriage, i.e., the success of a relationship" (Ryś, 1999, p. 72; cf. also Linek, 2023, p. 132).

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