

## Marital Satisfaction: The Role of Social Skills of Husbands and Wives<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** Among the multiple determinants of marital satisfaction, evidence points to the social skills of married couples. This study investigates the correlations between these constructs, cross-correlating data from husband and wives. A total of 406 married individuals, 188 men and 218 women, completed the Marital Satisfaction Scale, Social Skills Inventory (SSI-Del-Prette) and Marital Social Skills Inventory (MSSI-Villa&Del-Prette). The results revealed a significant correlation among the scores of the three instruments, confirming the relationship between marital satisfaction and the social skills of married couples. In the cross-correlations, three classes of marital social skills (proactive self-control, reactive self-control and expressiveness/empathy) were more strongly correlated to husbands' marital satisfaction, and husbands' three social skills (assertive conversation, self-assertiveness and expressiveness/empathy) were correlated with wives' marital satisfaction. Gender differences concerning the importance of one spouse's social skills leading to the other spouse's satisfaction are stressed as an item to be used in detailed diagnostics and effective interventions with couples. Some issues for future research are also discussed.

**Keywords:** social skills, marriage, marital relations, gender

## Satisfação Conjugal: O Papel das Habilidades Sociais de Maridos e Esposas

**Resumo:** Entre os múltiplos determinantes da satisfação conjugal, evidências apontam para as habilidades sociais conjugais. Este estudo investiga correlações entre esses dois constructos, cruzando dados dos maridos e das esposas. Participaram 406 pessoas casadas, 188 homens e 218 mulheres, que responderam à Escala de Satisfação Conjugal, ao Inventário de Habilidades Sociais (IHS-Del-Prette) e ao Inventário de Habilidades Sociais Conjugais (IHSC-Villa&Del-Prette). Os resultados mostraram correlação entre os escores dos três instrumentos, confirmando a relação entre satisfação conjugal e habilidades sociais conjugais. Nas correlações cruzadas, três classes de habilidades sociais conjugais (autocontrole proativo, autocontrole reativo e expressividade/empatia) se correlacionaram mais fortemente com a satisfação conjugal dos maridos, e três classes de habilidades sociais conjugais dos maridos (conversa assertiva, autoafirmação assertiva e expressividade/empatia) se correlacionaram com a satisfação conjugal das esposas. Diferenças de gênero quanto à importância das habilidades sociais do parceiro para a satisfação conjugal de cada um deles são defendidas como um item de diagnóstico detalhado e intervenção efetiva junto a casais. São também discutidas algumas questões para futuras pesquisas.

**Palavras-chave:** habilidades sociais, casamento, relações conjugais, gênero

## La Satisfacción Marital: El Papel de las Habilidades Sociales de Esposos y Esposas

**Resumen:** Entre los múltiples factores determinantes de la satisfacción marital, alguna evidencia apunta para las habilidades sociales de pareja. Este estudio se centra en estos dos constructos, cruzando datos de maridos y esposas. Participaron 407 personas casadas, 188 hombres e 218 mujeres, que contestaran a la Escala de Satisfacción Marital, al Inventario de Habilidades Sociales (IHS-Del-Prette) y al Inventario de Habilidades Sociales Maritales (IHSM-Villa & Del-Prette). Los resultados mostraron una correlación significativa entre las puntuaciones de los instrumentos, confirmando la relación entre satisfacción marital y habilidades sociales de pareja. En las correlaciones cruzadas, tres clases de habilidades sociales de pareja (autocontrol proactivo, autocontrol reactivo y expresividad/empatía) se correlacionaron más fuertemente con la satisfacción marital de los maridos, y tres clases de habilidades sociales de pareja de los maridos (conversación asertiva, autoafirmación asertiva y expresividad/empatía) se correlacionaron con la satisfacción marital de las esposas. Diferencias de género cuanto a la importancia de las habilidades sociales del compañero para la satisfacción marital de cada uno de ellos son defendidas como ítem de detallado y intervención efectiva junto a pareja. Son también discutidas algunas cuestiones para futuras investigaciones.

**Palabras clave:** habilidades sociales, matrimonio, relaciones conyugales, género

The affective relationship between two people who maintain a commitment to live together and mutually enjoy their

sexuality can be called a marital relationship or simply marriage (formal or consensual union). It has not always been so. Studies addressing affective/marital relationships have been made since the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Féres-Carneiro & Diniz Neto, 2010) and have, in the last decade, indicated profound transformations in relationships (Araújo, 2005; Garcia & Tassara, 2003; Jablonski, 1991/1998; Menandro, Rölke, & Bertollo, 2005; Perlin & Diniz, 2005; Villa, 2005). Marriages are no longer arranged

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according to political or social convenience or based on family impositions but, in general, they occur by the free choice of partners who desire to share their lives.

The expectations of men and women in regard to their spouses are also no longer the same. Companionship, mutual commitment, the constitution of a family with the attributions of fathers and mothers, sexual fulfillment, in addition to other expectations, such as professional achievement and economic independence (Garcia & Tassara, 2003; Perlin & Diniz, 2005; Villa, 2005), are currently valued. Mutual appreciation and cooperation seem to be part of the expectations in a marriage (Araújo, 2005; Menandro et al., 2005; Villa, 2005). Despite a seeming situation of crisis in the institution of marriage, it remains an ideal to be pursued by many single and formerly married people seeking relationships that promote satisfaction and happiness (Mosmann, Wagner, & Féres-Carneiro, 2006). The expectations concerning marriage go beyond happiness and satisfaction, involving stability and affective and emotional security, as opposed to uncommitted and temporary relationships. Marriage directly impacts other spheres of the spouses' lives, such as relationships with children and the extended family of both partners, professional performance, spirituality, and physical and emotional health (Bolsoni-Silva & Marturano, 2010; Feldman & Wentzel, 1990; Silliman, Stanley, Coffin, Markman, & Jordan 2002; Villa, 2005; Villa, Del Prette, & Del Prette, 2007).

Despite a lack of consensus on marital satisfaction and the various forms of conceiving it, this is one of the measures used to appraise the quality of marriage in its different conceptions (Perlin & Diniz, 2005; Villa, 2005). Despite the different conceptions, there are aspects linked to the assessment of the marital relationship that are the objective of this study and refer to marital satisfaction. Like the study by Dela Coleta (1989), we consider marital satisfaction in a broader sense, as a construct formed by three main axes: (1) interaction with the spouse (what each spouse is satisfied with/the frequency one another seeks interaction); (2) the partner's emotional aspects (how much each spouse is satisfied with the way the other deals with emotions), and (3) the practical aspects of marriage (how much each of the spouses is satisfied with the way the other deals with personal organization, priorities, domestic rules, and problem-solving).

We wonder, however, what variables determine a good relationship and, consequently, contribute to high levels of marital satisfaction. Since the 1970s, this question has been acknowledged as a multidimensional phenomenon (Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Among the various authors seeking to understand the facets of this phenomenon, most have indicated the interpersonal element as essential for a good marital relationship (Bratfisch, 1997; A. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001; Flora & Segrin, 1999; Gottman & Rushe, 1995; Norgren, Souza, Kaslow, Hammerschmidt, & Sharlin, 2004; Rangé & Dattilio, 1995; Sanders, Halford, & Behrens, 1999; Schaper, 2000; Perlin & Diniz, 2005; Villa, 2005; Villa, Del Prette, & Del Prette, 2007). Flora and Segrin (1999) relate social abilities to

marital satisfaction without, however, specifying which classes of abilities would be critical. Norgren et al. (2004) concluded that spouses' social behaviors, such as expression of affection, problem-solving capacity, and communication are related to marital satisfaction in long-lasting marriages. Other authors establishing a relationship between marital satisfaction and social interaction dimensions do not explicitly refer to the term social skills (Dela Coleta, 1992; Schaper, 2000).

The field of Psychology called Social Skills, or to use the most common terminology, Social Skills Training (SST), has focused on issues linked to interpersonal relationships for many decades (Argyle, 1967/1994; Del Prette & Del Prette, 1996; Hidalgo Carmona & Abarca Melo, 1992). Therefore, there are currently various definitions and systems of classes and subclasses of social behaviors that are expected in various contexts and situations, as well as indicators, assessments, and programs to promote individuals' repertoires of social skills and social competence (A. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001; Del Prette, Monjas, & Caballo, 2006). Based on the concepts of social skills and social competence, we define marital social skills as the repertoire of behaviors (or class of behaviors) used to appropriately deal with interpersonal situations involving spouses, specifically in the marital context. No empirical-specific studies that have addressed in sufficient detail the classes and subclasses of behavior that can be characterized as social skills expected in the marital context or the way these can impact the satisfaction of spouses were found.

Considering the importance of social skills in a marital relationship, as described in the literature, and at the same time, the lack of clarity in relation to its specificities (that is, the role of social skills in the marital context), this study's objectives include: (a) to characterize the relationship between the respondent's marital satisfaction and his/her own repertoire of (general and marital) social skills and the respondent's marital satisfaction and his/her spouse's social skills; and (b) to identify classes and subclasses of social skills specifically relevant in the marital context.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 406 married individuals, either individually or together with their spouses, participated in the study. The participants were 218 women and 188 men who met three inclusion criteria: (a) being married for at least one year; (b) having completed high school, and (c) being at least 20 years old. Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the studied sample.

The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 73 years old, with a predominance of individuals 31 to 40 years old. The socioeconomic classification, according to *Critério Brasil*, a socioeconomic classification provided by the Brazilian Institute of Public Opinion and Statistic (IBOPE), showed the participants were in classes A2, B1 and B2, that is, the studied individuals belonged to economically more-favored populations.

Table 1  
*Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (n = 406)*

Variable	Absolute frequency	Relative frequency (%)
Age (years)		
20 to 30	56	13.8
31 to 40	152	37.5
41 to 50	114	28.1
51 to 60	44	10.8
61 to 70	13	3.2
71 to 80	2	0.5
Did not answer	25	6.2
Sex		
Female	218	53.6
Male	188	46.3
Education		
Middle school	167	41.1
Incomplete high school	23	5.7
Complete high school	215	53.0
Did not answer	1	0.2
Socioeconomic status*		
A1	34	8.4
A2	107	26.4
B1	120	29.6
B2	97	23.9
C	38	9.4
Did not answer	10	2.5
Duration of marriage (years)		
1 to 10	163	40.2
11 to 20	139	34.2
21 to 30	72	17.8
31 to 40	24	5.8
41 to 50	4	0.9
Did not answer	4	1.0

Note. \*According to *Critério Brasil* (IBOPE).

## Instruments

*Marital Social Skills Inventory* (MSSI-Villa & Del Prette) (Villa & Del Prette, 2012). Instrument with satisfactory psychometric characteristics (Del Prette, Villa, Freitas & Del Prette, 2008; Villa & Del Prette, 2012), with 28 items, each one describing a specific interpersonal situation in the marital context and one possible behavior of the respondent in the face of it.

Based on the described situation, the respondent estimates the frequency with which s/he presents the described behavior and checks an option on a five-point Likert scale (ranging from “never or rarely” to “always or almost always”). As a result, a score for each item, a general score (sum of all items), and five Factors are obtained: (a) Expressiveness/Empathy (F1); (b) Self-assertiveness (F2); (c) Reactive self-control (F3); (d) Proactive self-control (F4), and (e) Assertive conversation (F5).

*Marital Satisfaction Scale* (MSS) (Dela Coleta, 1989). The MSS was originally developed by Weiss and Palos (1988), then translated and validated for the Brazilian Population by Dela Coleta (1989), with satisfactory psychometric characteristics. It is composed of 24 items, with three options: (“I like the way it is”, “I wish it was a little different” and “I wish it was very different”), producing negative indicators; that is, the higher the scores, the lower the marital satisfaction. The items refer to three aspects of relationship, enabling a global measure and three partial measures of satisfaction (subscales or factors): (a) satisfaction with marital interaction (S1); (b) satisfaction with the spouse’s emotional aspects (S2), and (c) satisfaction with the spouse’s organization and establishment of rules and compliance with them (S3).

*Social Skills Inventory* (SSI-Del-Prette) (Z. A. P. Del Prette & Del Prette, 2001; 2013). This is a self-reported instrument addressing social skills. It comprises 38 items, each describing a situation of interpersonal relationship that demands skills. The respondent estimates the frequency with which s/he reacts, as suggested in each item (considering the total number of times s/he finds her/himself in the described situation), and checks an option on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from “never or rarely” to “always or almost always”. The SSI-Del-Prette’s items, which address demands for different skills in different contexts and with diverse interlocutors, present a structure of five factors: (a) Coping and Self-assertiveness with Risk (F2); (b) Self-assertiveness in the Expression of Positive Affect (F2); (c) Conversation and Social Confidence (F3), (d) Self-exposure to Unknown People and New Situations (F4), and (e) Self-Control of Aggressiveness (F5).

## Procedure

**Data collection.** The participants were recruited in churches, clubs, teaching institutions and households. They were invited to participate in the study and meetings were scheduled for the application of the instruments. Each meeting was initiated with an explanation of the study’s objectives and the signing of free and informed consent forms. Then, each of the instruments was completed according to instructions. Most applications occurred in groups, while men and women separately and individually completed the instruments; that is, it was not a criterion that both spouses should participate in the study. Hence, married men and women participated in the study, but not necessarily both spouses.

**Data analysis.** The instruments’ scores were tabulated according to their respective manuals or studies and then organized in worksheets in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Statistical analyses were performed (correlations among data of the three instruments and between them and socio-demographic characteristics, adopting  $p < .05$ ). We decided to withdraw those participants from the calculation of the factor involved if they failed to check any of the inventories’ items. This explains the differences in the number of respondents presented in the results section.

**Ethical Considerations**

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at FFCLRP-USP (Process No. 109/2003) and all the current ethical parameters were met.

**Results**

Correlations between socio-demographic variables and marital satisfaction were analyzed and no association was found between marital satisfaction and the socio-demographic variables age, sex, socioeconomic status, duration of marriage, number of children, and whether it was the first marriage or not.

**Marital Satisfaction and (General and Marital) Social Skills**

The scores obtained on the MSSSI-Villa & Del-Prette and SSI-Del-Prette presented normal distributions, but the marital satisfaction scores (MSS) did not allow acceptance of the hypothesis of normality. The results concerning correlations among the total score and the three scales of marital satisfaction and marital social skills (specific to marital relationships) for the total sample are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that the strongest correlations were obtained between marital satisfaction (total score and the three subscales) and the total score and F1 from the MSSSI-Villa & Del-Prette, showing the important role of expressiveness and empathy in marital satisfaction, or vice-versa. Additionally, a significant negative correlation was found between the scores from the MSSSI-Villa & Del-Prette (general score and the five factors) and the MSS scores (general score and the three subscales) indicating that the most satisfied respondents (lower scores) are also those who presented the most developed repertoire of interpersonal skills. In other words, the various classes of marital social skills assessed (MSSSI-Villa & Del-Prette factors) seem to contribute to all the components of marital satisfaction: marital interaction; the spouse’s emotional aspects; and the spouse’s organization and establishment of rules and compliance with them. We note that since the MSS score produces a negative indicator (the higher the score, the lower is marital satisfaction) and the other instruments (the SSI-Del-Prette and MSSSI-Villa & Del-Prette) produce positive indicators (the higher the score, the more developed the repertoire of social skills), negative correlations express high scores of satisfaction associated with high scores of social skills, while the inverse is also true.

Table 2  
Correlations (Pearson) Between the Scores of MSSSI-Villa & Del-Prette and MSS for the Total Sample

MSS	MSSI					
	Total Score	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Total Score	-.445**	-.416**	-.229**	-.336**	-.240**	-.181**
	400	406	406	406	406	406
S1 – Marital Interaction	-.417**	-.412**	-.205**	-.328**	-.222**	-.180**
	400	406	406	406	406	406
S2 – Emotional Aspects	-.351**	-.276**	-.237**	-.214**	-.201**	-.157**
	400	406	406	406	406	406
S3 – Practical Aspects	-.349**	-.340**	-.151*	-.286**	-.183**	-.121*
	400	406	406	406	406	406

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

The correlations between the total score on the MSSSI-Villa&Del-Prette and the MSS score, obtained separately for each sex, were also significant for both females ( $S = -.374$ ;  $p = .01$ ;  $n = 147$ ) and males ( $S = -.434$ ;  $p = .01$ ;  $n = 146$ ). Of 28 items on the MSSSI-Villa&Del-Prette, 26 (92,85%) presented a correlation with the score for marital satisfaction. A more detailed analysis enabled identifying 15 items of marital social skills more strongly correlated with marital satisfaction, considering the maximum correlation (-.352) and above -.200. In descending order, they were: (1) talking and reaching an agreement when facing problems (item 16), (2) putting oneself in the spouse’s place and expressing understanding of her/his emotional state (item 28), (3) apologizing (item 7), (4) complimenting (item 18), (5) expressing affection (item 6), (6) talking about any subject (item 1), (7) showing support (item 24), (8) asking questions (item 14), (9) talking about what pleases during sexual relations (item 27), (10) dealing with

jokes (item 21), (11) expressing displeasure (item 15), (12) expressing wellness (item 20), (13) trying to be understood (item 23), (14) reacting to criticism (item 13), and (15) acknowledging compliments (item 3).

Table 3 presents the correlations (Pearson) among the total score and the five factor scores of the SSI-Del-Prette and the total score and S1, S2 and S3 of the MSS for the total sample, showing associations between marital satisfaction and general social skills (those not specific for marital relationships). Table 3 shows lower levels of correlation between marital satisfaction and general social skills if compared to correlations between marital satisfaction and marital social skills as presented in Table 2. Additionally, correlations were limited to the general score and F1 (Coping and self-assertiveness in the face of risk) and F2 (self-assertiveness in expressing positive feelings) of the SSI-Del-Prette, which were correlated with the general score and

with S2 of the MSS. S1 presented a correlation with total score and with F2 (Self-assertiveness in expressing positive feelings) and with F5 (Self-control of aggressiveness) of the SSI-Del-Prette, while S3 presented correlation with the total score and with F2 (Self-assertiveness in the expression of positive feelings). These findings indicate that the higher the respondent's scores for (nonspecific) social skills, the more satisfied is the respondent with her/his marital relationship

### The Respondent's Marital Satisfaction and the Spouse's Social Skills

Figure 1 presents a scheme of cross-correlations found between the respondents' general scores and the factor scores of the MSSI-Villa-Del-Prette and SSI-Del-Prette and their spouses' general scores and the MSS subscales. As observed, all the significant correlations occurred in the expected

Table 3

*Correlations Between the Total Scores and Factors of SSI-Del-Prette and MSS for the Total Sample*

MSS	SSI-Del-Prette					
	Total Score	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
Total Score	-.171** 400	-.107* 400	-.210** 402	-.093 402	.022 403	-.093 402
S1 - Marital Interaction	-.149** 400	.072 400	-.214** 402	-.074 402	.030 403	-.120* 402
S2 - Emotional Aspects	-.131* 400	-.122* 400	-.110* 402	-.068 402	.010 403	-.050 402
S3 - Practical Aspects	-.134** 400	-.081 400	-.180** 402	-.081 402	.053 403	-.061 402

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

direction: greater marital satisfaction with better repertoires of social skills. There were more significant correlations between marital satisfaction and marital social skills than with general social skills in the assessment both of husbands and of wives, showing that there is a specificity to this repertoire. We highlight the association of the marital social skills of each spouse with the general score of marital satisfaction and with S1 of the MSS. The class of the wives' marital social skills that seems to have a greater impact on the husbands' satisfaction was Proactive Self-control (F4) followed by Expressiveness/Empathy (F1) and Reactive Self-control (F3). Both the MSS general score and S1 (husbands' Satisfaction with marital interaction) were correlated with the wives' general scores on the MSSI-Villa & Del-Prette and with F1, F3 and F4. On the MSS, S2 (the spouse's emotional aspects) and the husbands' S3 (the spouse's organization and establishment of rules) were correlated with F4 of the MSSI-Villa & Del-Prette. In regard to social skills not specific to marital relationships, data suggest that husbands who are more satisfied with marriage in general, with marital interaction (F1) and the spouses' emotional aspects (F2), may have wives with a better repertoire of Self-control of aggressiveness (F5).

The results show that the husbands' marital social skills that seem to have a greater association with the wives' marital satisfaction is Assertive conversation (F5) followed by Expressiveness/Empathy (F1) and self-assertiveness (F2). Correlation was found between the wives' general scores on the MSS and the husbands' general scores on the MSSI-Villa & Del-Prette. In general, husbands with higher levels of social skills in the marital context have wives who are more satisfied with their relationship. The wives' general

score on the MSS was also negatively correlated with the husbands' F1, F2 and F5 on the MSSI-Villa & Del-Prette. The wives' S1 (Marital interaction) in MSS was significantly correlated with the total score for the MSSI-Villa & Del-Prette and with F1, F2, F3 and F5. The wives' S2 (spouse's emotional aspects) was associated only with the general score on the MSSI-Villa & Del-Prette. Finally, the wives' S3 on the MSS (spouse's organization and establishment of rules) presented a correlation with the husbands' general score on the MSSI-Villa & Del-Prette and with F5. In relation to social skills not specific to marital relationships, the results indicate that wives who are more satisfied with marriage in general and with marital interaction (S1) have husbands with a higher score of Self-assertiveness in expressing positive feelings (F2).

### Discussion

The study by Villa (2005) reports no association between marital satisfaction and socio-demographic variables. These findings are in agreement with the results of other studies (Johnson & O'Leary, 1996; Langis, Sabourin, Lussier, & Mathieu, 1994; Miranda, 1987; Norgren et al., 2004; Sardinha, Falcone, & Ferreira, 2009). Hence, these suggest that marital satisfaction is not linked to socio-demographic variables but to the spouses' behavioral characteristics.

This study's results show a close relationship between the respondents' marital satisfaction and their own repertoire of social skills, as well as between their marital satisfaction and their spouses' repertoire of social skills. These data confirm the general hypothesis that an interpersonal behavioral repertoire (whether specific to marital relationships or not), called here

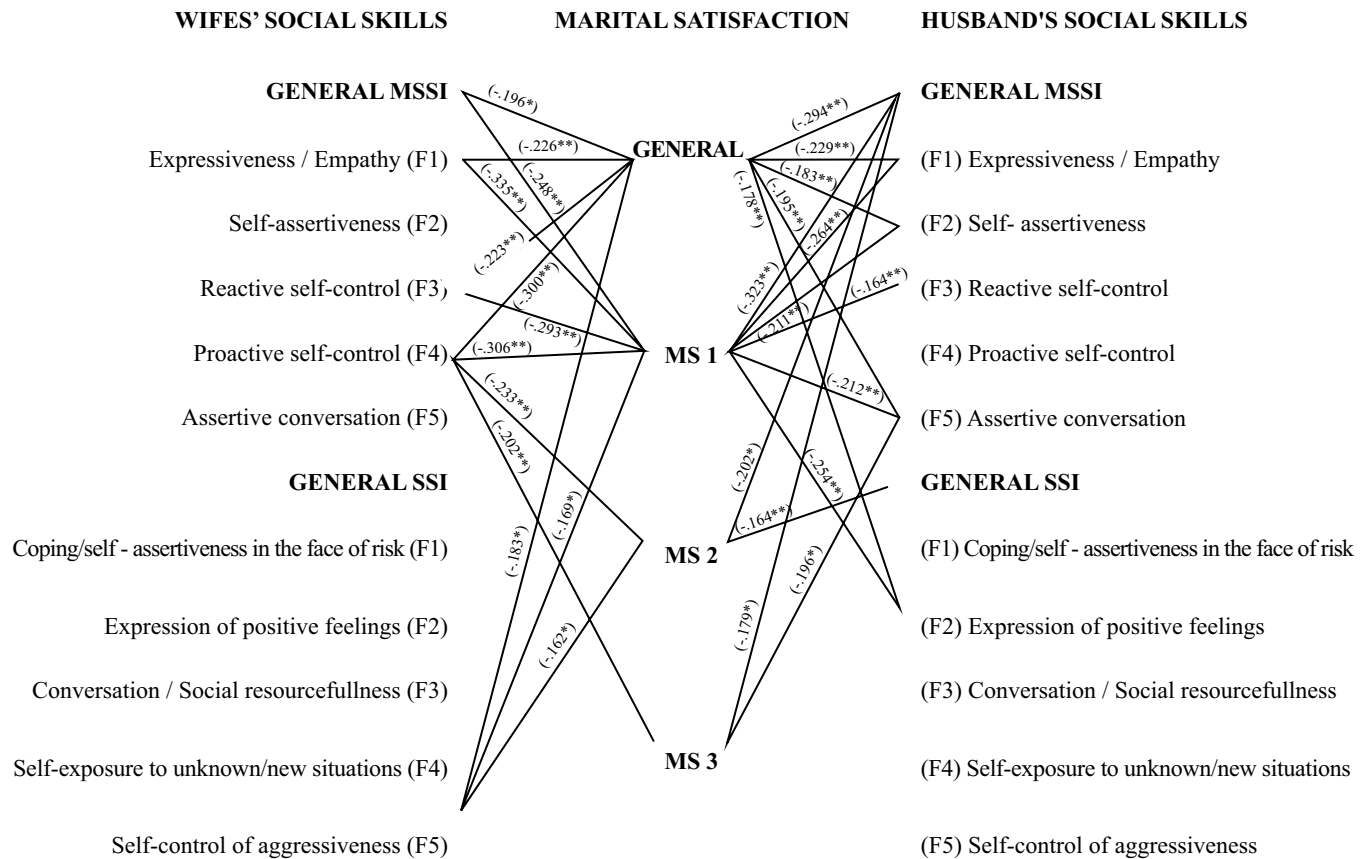


Figure 1. Summary of significant correlations between the respondents' and their spouses' scores in the MSSI-Villa & Del-Prette, SSI-Del-Prette, and MSS.

social skills, favors marital relationships and are associated with the spouses' marital satisfaction. These findings are in agreement with what has been reported in the literature in the field and the recommendation of Bolsoni-Silva and Marturano (2010), that the assessment of couples and related interventions should take into account the repertoire of interpersonal behaviors (social skills) of both spouses. Additionally, they suggest the relevance of analyses of the impact of social skills programs directed to couples, especially in terms of the clinical significance of these interventions, (Del Prette & Del Prette, 2008), to include indicators of marital satisfaction.

Nonetheless, more than demonstrating this association between social skills and marital satisfaction, this study's results can facilitate the work of therapists and researchers as they specify classes of behaviors that are essential for the satisfaction of husbands and wives. The scores for marital satisfaction presented higher correlations that are more significant for social skills specific to the marital context than for general social skills, supporting the idea of the situational specificity of social skills (Z. A. P. Del Prette & Del Prette, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2009). In this context, the correlation among items of the MSSI-Villa & Del-Prette with the marital satisfaction score enabled verifying that all the subscales of marital social skills assessed by the MSSI-Villa & Del-Prette were especially relevant in the marital context.

In many cases, the results showed a correlation between the spouses' (general) social skills and marital satisfaction, though these correlations were lower and sparser when compared to interpersonal behaviors specific to the marital context. More social skills appear as important ingredients of marital satisfaction, confirming previous studies (Del Prette & Del Prette, 1999; Gottman & Rushe, 1995; Moraes & Rodrigues, 2001). The (non-specific) social skills that particularly stand out in this study were: (a) Coping and self-assertiveness in the face of risk, which ensures a more honest and open relationship in situations that involve the possibility of conflict in non-marital contexts; (b) Self-assertiveness in the expression of positive feelings, which has been addressed in marital therapies (Rangé & Datilio, 1995), and (c) Self-control of aggressiveness, defined by Z. A. P. Del Prette and Del Prette (2001) as the ability to express anger and displeasure in a socially competent way, as opposed to impulsiveness and outbursts. Hence, the spouses' appropriate social repertoire (both in the marital context and in other contexts of social interaction) plays an essential role and benefits one's own marital satisfaction.

This study also provides data indicating that one spouse's social skills are associated with the other spouse's marital satisfaction (cross-correlations). In general, the findings are in consonance with those reported by Sardinha et al. (2009), in which social skills perceived by spouses strongly contributed

to explaining one's own marital satisfaction. We note that cross-correlations were performed in this study of the wives' marital satisfaction with the husbands' social skills and vice-versa. Sardinha et al. verified the existence of correlations between the wives' marital satisfaction and their perceptions of their husbands' (marital) social skills and vice-versa. Even though the studies performed different analyses, both verify a relationship between marital satisfaction and marital social skills.

In relation to the wives' marital satisfaction, the cross-correlations indicated that, in general, wives whose husbands presented higher scores of marital social skills are more satisfied with their marriages. The three classes of the husbands' marital social skills that were more strongly correlated with the wives' satisfaction where: (a) Assertive conversation; (b) Expressiveness/Empathy, and (c) Self-assertiveness. The first and second classes involve behaviors such as remembering the spouse about agreements, asking questions, expressing disagreement, apologizing, expressing support, talking, thanking, compliments, and expressing wellness. Historically, men experience more difficulty with intimate relationships, in expressing feelings, and with communication per se, when compared to women (Carter & McGoldrick, 1995; Gottman, 1998), which perhaps explains women's demands concerning men's behaviors related to communication. In regard to the class of behaviors labeled Self-assertiveness, this study indicates that more satisfied wives have more assertive husbands in the marital context, as opposed to those who do not openly expose themselves in potentially stressful situations. This result follows the trend of the study by Langis et al. (1994), in which wives' marital satisfaction was related to husbands' level of "masculinity", conceived by these authors as "Assertive leadership".

In relation to the wives' repertoire of social skills associated with husbands' satisfaction, we highlight the classes: (a) Proactive self-control; (b) Reactive self-control, and (c) Expressiveness/Empathy. Note, therefore, that the wives' behaviors related to self-control (ability to control oneself and appropriately deal with situations of conflict) are crucial for the husbands' satisfaction. Considering the study by Carter and McGoldrick (1995), according to which men would experience more difficulties in intimate relationships, we can assume that as women are more skillful in dealing with situations of conflict, the relationship demands fewer skills from husbands and becomes more comfortable for them.

The class Expressiveness/Empathy, indicated as important for the marital satisfaction of both men and women, involves communication/expression and empathy, behaviors previously mentioned and widely disseminated in the literature as being crucial for a healthy marital relationship. In this sense, the study by Sardinha et al. (2009) highlights that the combination of assertive and empathic expressions would strongly influence marital satisfaction, which is also clear in this study. Assertive responses, in contrast to those characterized as aggressive or passive, maintain or improve the relationship with the interlocutor, contribute to the issuer's self-esteem and to the achievement of objectives. In the marital

context, assertive expressions can improve the relationship, making it more open and honest, as each spouse has the right and freedom to express themselves even if it does not please the other. Additionally, assertive behavior enables a balance of power in the couple and improves each spouse's self-esteem, which in turn favors the relationship.

On the other hand, empathic behaviors between spouses can strengthen the relationship, generating feelings of acceptance and understanding on the part of the spouse. It is worth noting that, with the exception of Expressiveness/Empathy, which is important for the satisfaction of both husbands and wives (as its correlation with marital satisfaction demonstrates), the remaining classes of behaviors considered crucial for marital satisfaction are different for men and women. This information can provide important cues for couples therapists in relation to the need to assess and encourage the development of repertoires of common behaviors but also behavior specific for men and women.

This study also analyzed the association between one of the spouses' social skills not specific to the marital context and the other spouse's satisfaction. The results indicated that the wives' ability to practice self-control in regard to aggressiveness was the only one associated with the husband's satisfaction. Like Reactive and Proactive self-control in the marital context, this ability of wives seems to be crucial to husbands' sense of satisfaction. Both cases can be interpreted as exhibiting that it is wives' skills that reduce the likelihood of conflict in the marital relationship and contribute to a more harmonious climate between the spouses. The wives' sense of satisfaction was correlated with the husbands' general social skills; that is, men with a good repertoire who appropriately deal with interpersonal situations have wives who are more satisfied with the relationship. In terms of more specific behaviors, husbands' Self-assertiveness in the expression of positive feelings was related to their wives' satisfaction, in the same way that expressing feelings in the marital context was important for the satisfaction of both wives and husbands. Expressiveness in diverse contexts was also a skill related to wives' satisfaction, therefore, crucial for men who seek a more harmonious relationship free of conflict.

## Conclusion

Some limitations should be acknowledged, despite the study's relevant results. These limitations point to possible new studies in the field. Even though justifiable given the ethical issues involved in intimate relationships, data collected through self-reports are not free of potential biases. Hence, complementary studies using other procedures and instruments, i.e., multimodal assessments, are needed. A second limitation, inherent to the adopted methodology, is the use of the correlational design, which suggests associations without however, indicating causality. In this study, we could both conceive of social skills as a factor of marital satisfaction and the inverse, that is, marital satisfaction as a context conducive for the performance and improvement of social skills, or even

that both are determined by other factors and therefore are inter-correlated. Even though it is plausible to assume that social skills are behaviors that contribute to positive feelings of marital satisfaction, the final direction of these relations is open to future research. We should keep in mind that this study focused on the interpersonal dimension of the quality of marital relationship. Other variables, however, (e.g., the spouses' physical and psychological health and other personal factors) cannot be ignored as aspects involved in relationships and marital satisfaction. The study does not exhaust the investigation of the determinants of marital satisfactions, but indicates aspects that can be highlighted as factors that promote marital satisfaction for men and women and, in general, are skills that can be learned through specific training.

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