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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND MARITAL COMMUNICATION AMONG MARRIED COUPLES AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF MARRIAGE

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Abstract: The aim of this research was to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and marital communication (in terms of support, involvement and depreciation) among married couples at different stages of marriage. The sample comprised 71 couples from the Silesian region of Poland with an average age of 36 years for women and 38 for men. Couples belonged to various stages of marriage according to the categorisation proposed by Duvall's (1985) family life-cycle theory. The Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire and the Questionnaire of Marital Communication were used. In comparison to men, women demonstrated significantly higher levels of emotional intelligence (EI) and reported giving higher support to their partners. Marital stage was found to affect EI, support, involvement and depreciation. Hierarchical regression analysis indicated that EI was a strong predictor of all the communication dimensions, when demographic variables were under control. EI positively predicted support and involvement, and negatively depreciation. Moreover, marital stage moderated the relationship between EI and support, but only at two marriage stages (i.e., Family with School-age Children and Family as Launching Centre).

Key words: Emotional intelligence, Marital communication, Spouses, Stages of marriage

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INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have demonstrated associations between EI and marital communication (Adamczyk, 2013; Batool & Khalid, 2009; Dwyer, 2005; Keaten & Kelly, 2008; Smith, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2008; Stolarski, Postek, & Smieja, 2011). Although the existing evidence offers insight into the complexity of the link between EI and marital communication, there is still lack of studies on how EI relates to marital communication across the marital life. The limited available findings suggest that communication effectiveness is likely to vary in different stages of marriage. Specifically, it tends to be highest at the initial stage of marriage and lowest at the final one (Biel, 2013; Harwas-Napierała**,** 2006; Ziemska, 2001). Ageing reduces the spouses' involvement in the communication process and marital happiness decreases with time (Krok & Murlowska, 2011). However, in rapidly transforming modern societies, even the traditional nuclear family is undergoing significant changes which can create new patterns of social behaviours, including communication. Thus, there is a strong need to replicate previous research and monitor developments in this area. In view of the above, the present study is an attempt to draw attention to the area of family, especially marriage, considering the family life-cycle, marital communication, EI and the interrelationship among them.

Emotional intelligence

The concept of EI was introduced in the 1990s by Mayer and Salovey (1997), who described it as a type of social intelligence that captures an individual's ability to perceive, reason with (or use) emotions, understand emotions and manage them. Since then, other conceptualisations of EI have been proposed, commonly classified as the ability and the trait EI models (Petrides & Furnham, 2001). The main distinction between these two types of models lies in the methods used to measure EI, namely, maximum performance tests (ability EI models) versus self-reports (trait EI models) (Platsidou & Tsirogiannidou, 2016; Szczygieł, Jasielska, & Wytykowska, 2015). In the 'ability models', EI belongs to the domain of cognitive ability, while 'trait EI' falls within the field of personality (Petrides, 2011); yet, both ability and trait EI constitute 'important and mutually complementary dimensions of adaptive intellectual functioning' (Tsirigotis & Łuczak, 2016, p. 167). In the mixed models (Bar-On & Parker, 2000; Goleman, 1995), emotional intelligence may also include motivation, various dispositions and traits (e g., empathy, happiness, self-esteem, optimism and self-management) and global personal and social functioning, besides an ability to perceive, assimilate, understand and manage emotions. In this article,

we use the trait EI model, defined as a constellation of self-perceptions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies (Petrides, Pita, & Kokkinaki, 2007). However, it is worth emphasising that EI, defined both as trait and transitory situational response, can be subject to change.

Research indicates that EI is a strong predictor of quality of life, including interpersonal communication and relationships, mood regulation, sense of happiness, life satisfaction and optimism (Asghari & Besharat, 2011; Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000; Ciarrochi, Chan, & Bajgar, 2001; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008; Mayer & Salovey, 1995). Moreover, numerous studies have shown that females report higher levels of EI than males (e.g., Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004; Ciarrochi et al., 2000; Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Mayer & Geher, 1996; Van Rooy, Alonso, & Viswesvaran, 2005).

EI and marital communication

The role of EI in various manifestations of a satisfying marital relationship has also been shown (Bracket, Warner, & Bosco, 2005; Lavalekar, Kulkarni, & Jagtap, 2010; Lopes, Salovey, & Straus, 2003; Mears, 2012; Schutte et al., 2001). Ciarrochi et al. (2000), in their critical examination of the El construct, found significant positive correlations between El and relationship quality as well as EI and such traits as empathy, extraversion and self-esteem. It has been also established that, compared to unhappy couples, happy spouses were more likely to balance than to retaliate during conflicts (Fitness, 2001; Rusbult, Bissonnette, Arriaga, & Cox, 1998). In general, higher EI leads to better management of disagreements, less conflict in couples and higher relationship satisfaction (Adamczyk, 2013; Batool & Khalid, 2009; Dwyer, 2005; Keaten & Kelly, 2008; Smith et al., 2008; Stolarski et al., 2011). For the above reasons, EI is considered as critical factor in the overall marriage situation, including marital communication. There is consistent evidence that, due to gender roles and existing status, men and women vary with regards to their communication behaviour. Women, for example, are more likely than men to initiate relational talk, to discuss problems in the relationship and to be concerned that a male partner does not have enough commitment to the relationship. On the other hand, men interrupt their interaction partner more often and give more directives. There is also evidence that women are more often confronted with dominant or status-asserting behaviour than men are (Athenstaedt, Haas, & Schwab, 2004; Carli & Bukatko, 2000). However, many authors emphasise that gender provides little predictive power in accounting for communication. They suggest that gender is not simply another research variable; it is rather about how people are re-created and perceived in society (Reeder, 1996). Particularly for supportive behaviour, contrary to prior data stressing gender

divergence in styles and types of providing support (the so-called marital support gap hypothesis), some subsequent findings have revealed a high degree of similarity in both gender patterns of responses during social support interactions (MacGeorge, Graves, Feng, Gillihan, & Burleson, 2004; Perrin et al., 2011).

Marital communication in the marital life span

Marital communication, in the sense of verbal or nonverbal information exchanging between two partners, influences spousal relationships (Grundland, 2016; Peterson & Green, 2009; Platsidou & Tsirogiannidou, 2016). Kaźmierczak and Plopa (2008) suggested that marital communication processes in a marriage consist of the following dimensions: support, involvement and depreciation. *Support* is conceptualized as showing respect for one's partner, appreciation for their activities, interest in the needs of one's partner and active participation in joint problem solving. *Involvement* is defined as engaging in communication processes. It is associated with the ability to create trust and mutual understanding, which forms the basis of partnership. It also prevents crises in married couples' lives. *Depreciation* relates to 'being aggressive towards a partner, dominating a spouse, controlling a partner's actions, lack of respect for a partner's dignity' (Kaźmierczak & Plopa, 2006, p. 217).

Marriage is not static; it evolves as family circumstances change and spouses' roles, duties and interaction patterns are renegotiated and redefined. Research suggests a U-shaped pattern of marital happiness and satisfaction during marital life, with marital quality tending to peak in the first few years of marriage. It declines in the next years of marriage and rises in later years (Braun-Gałkowska, 1980; Orbuch, House, Mero, & Webster, 1996). Moreover, studies show that relationship maintenance behaviours, defined as behaviours that function to preserve ongoing relationships, in general, follow a curvilinear pattern (Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999).

Couples' communication, because it is related to marital satisfaction, might also follow a U-shaped pattern over marital life span (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). However, researchers have suggested that the U-shaped pattern might be an artefact of cross-sectional research and what is important in the relationship between quality of marital life and years of marriage is the cultural context and socioeconomic status (Munoz, 2011; Van Laningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). For example, in the Polish context, while early research found a curvilinear pattern in marital satisfaction and communication over time (Braun-Gałkowska, 1980), more recent findings have suggested a continuous deterioration in marital communication over time, particularly in the period when the children leave the family home (Biel, 2013; Harwas-Napierała, 2006; Krok & Murlowska, 2011). These results have been supported by both cross-

sectional and longitudinal research findings regarding older married couples. In a similar vein, Duba, Hughey, Lara, and Burke (2012) showed various areas of dissatisfaction (e.g., affective communication, conflict over child-rearing) among couples married for at least 40 years. Furthermore, a set of conflict-related behaviours in which one partner blames or pressures while the other withdraws or avoids confrontation was observed at three time points across 13 years in 127 middle-aged and older long-married couples. The trend to increase avoidance behaviour with the passage of time and to stabilise in all other blame or pressure and withdrawal behaviours for both spouses was noted (Holley, Haase, & Levenson, 2013).

In marital and family development theorising, the family life-cycle concept remains a useful predictive tool (Kapinus & Johnson, 2003). From the perspective of the family life-cycle theory, the notion that a family is a complex system moving in time with changing functions and priorities is axiomatic (Birchler, 1992; Carter & McGoldrick, 1989). The entrance (e.g., births) and exit (e.g., divorce, death, children moving from the family home) of family members set transitions from one life-cycle stage to the next. Transitions not only change the constellation of family members, but also create new roles and demands for them. Thus, the different life stages have diverse developmental tasks for both the individual and their family (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989; Duvall, 1985).

Duvall (1985) categorised the family life-cycle into eight stages: *beginning families* (i.e., a married couple without children), *childbearing families* (i.e., the eldest child, birth to 30 months), *families with preschool children* (i.e., the eldest child 2½–6 years), *families with school-age children* (i.e., the eldest child 6–13 years), *families with teenagers* (i.e., eldest child 13–20 years), *families as the launching centre* (i.e., the first child has gone to the last child leaving home), *families in the middle years* (i.e., empty nest to retirement), *ageing families* (i.e., one or both spouses have retired).

To sum up, family life theory emphasises the common family flow over time to facilitate understanding of transitions and changes in family life (Duvall, 1985). It can be assumed, then, that marital communication patterns that spouses use to handle everyday matters, as observed at a specific marital stage, will reflect both spousal characteristics such as EI but also the demands of the various cycles of family life.

The present study

This study examined the association between spouses' EI and communication at different stages of marital life. EI was measured as trait that is influenced by individual differences factors such as gender. Marital communication was measured in terms of support, involvement and depreciation. Stages of marital life were defined in

accordance with the marital and family life-cycle framework in which births and exits of family members set the transitions from one marital stage to another. According to the research referred above, the following hypotheses were formulated:

(1) Women will have higher scores on EI than men (Hypothesis 1).
(2) Marital communication will differ between marriage stages. Couples at the Beginning Family stage of marriage will be characterised by the most efficient communication (the highest level of support and involvement and the lowest depreciation level) compared to couples in the later marital stages. Women will have higher scores on the support and involvement scales and lower on the depreciation scale (Hypothesis 2).
(3) Higher spouse EI scores will be associated with better marital communication, that is, a higher level of support and involvement and lower level of depreciation (Hypothesis 3).

METHOD

Participants

The research sample included 71 couples from the Silesian region of Poland (N = 142), aged 22-55 years (M = 36.85; SD = 9.64). Because the study examined the traditional nuclear family, the following inclusion criteria were applied: all the participants were married; all the couples were stable, not involved in any divorce actions; the participants came from different socioeconomic backgrounds and had different levels of schooling (see Table 1 for more details). A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether the participants representing various educational levels differed with regards the dependent variables. Because significant effects were found on emotional intelligence, $F(4, 134) = 3.70$, $p < .01$, support, $F(4, 134) = 7.74$, $p < .001$, and involvement, $F(4, 134) = 4.94$, $p < .001$, education was controlled in the regression analysis.

Marital stage. The couples were divided into seven groups according to their stage of marriage. The eighth stage was excluded from the analyses because of the upper age limit of the sample (54 years) that resulted in absence of aging families. With regards the criterion of children's age for the differentiation of marital stage, the Polish educational regulations were used. Specifically, preschool entering age is three years and school entering age is seven years (see also Biel, 2013; Brzezińska & Appelt, 2015). The number of participants included in the particular marital stages were as follows: fourteen couples belonged to the Beginning Family stage (married couple

Table 1. Correlations between Nostalgia Manipulation Check, Social Connectedness, and Self-Continuity: Experiment 1 (N = 122) and Experiment 2 (N = 193)

	Total sample		Marital stages													
			1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
Demographic variables	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Age	36.95	9.65	26.68	2.72	30.18	3.79	33.58	2.27	33.42	3.85	42.92	4.51	47.80	4.37	52.80	1.96
Marital duration	12.99	10.56	2.36	1.47	4.09	1.72	8.50	2.24	8.31	2.78	21.50	3.92	24.80	1.03	30.30	2.75
Premarital duration	2.96	1.57	3.50	1.67	4.45	2.06	3.50	1.00	2.38	1.10	2.17	0.92	1.80	0.79	2.50	0.95
Number of children	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
One	56	39.16	0	0.00	20	14.08	6	4.23	14	9.86	12	8.45	4	2.82	0	0.00
Two	44	30.77	0	0.00	2	1.41	6	4.23	10	7.04	8	5.63	6	4.23	12	8.45
Three	10	6.99	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.41	4	2.82	0	0.00	4	2.82
Four	4	2.80	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	4	2.82
Gender																
Women	71	50.00	14	9.86	11	7.75	6	4.23	13	9.15	12	8.45	5	3.52	10	7.04
Men	71	50.00	14	9.86	11	7.75	6	4.23	13	9.15	12	8.45	5	3.52	10	7.04
Educational level																
Primary school	2	1.41	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	1.41
Vocational school	29	20.42	1	0.70	3	2.11	1	0.70	0	0.00	8	5.63	5	3.52	11	7.75
High school	31	21.83	6	4.23	5	3.52	3	2.11	2	1.41	5	3.52	5	3.52	5	3.52
College	21	14.79	3	2.11	3	2.11	0	0.00	8	5.63	6	4.23	0	0.00	1	0.70
University	59	41.55	18	12.68	11	7.75	8	5.63	16	11.27	5	3.52	0	0.00	1	0.70

Note: The marital stages are: 1 = Beginning Family, 2 = Childbearing Family, 3 = Family with Preschool Children; 4 = Family with School-age Children, 5 = Family with Teenagers stage, 6 = Family as Launching Centre, 7 = Middle-aged Spouses.

without children, $n = 28$); eleven couples to the Childbearing Family stage (the eldest child, birth to 3 years, $n = 22$); six couples to the Family with Preschool Children stage (the eldest child 3–7 years, $n = 12$); thirteen couples to the Family with School-age Children stage (the eldest child 7–13, $n = 26$); twelve couples to the Family with Teenagers stage (the eldest child 13–21, $n = 24$); five couples to the Family as Launching Centre stage (the first child gone to the last child leaving home, $n = 10$), and 10 families to the Middle-aged Spouses stage (empty nest to retirement, $n = 20$).

Measures

Emotional intelligence

EI was assessed using the Polish version of the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (INTE, Schutte et al., 1998) as adapted by Jaworowska and Matczak (2001). The questionnaire is based on the model of emotional intelligence developed by Mayer and Salovey (2001). It is a 33-item self-report measure that assesses general EI. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The total score ranges from 33 to 165. Example items are as follows: 'Other people easily give me their trust' (Item 4), 'I manage my feelings' (Item 21), 'I help people to feel better when they are distressed' (Item 30). The internal consistency reliability of the scale, measured using Cronbach's α coefficient, is high and ranges from .83 to .90 (Jaworowska & Matczak, 2001; Schutte et al., 1998). Cronbach's α in the present study was .91.

Marital communication

Marital communication was measured using the Questionnaire of Marital Communication (KKM) by Kaźmierczak and Plopa (2008). There are two versions of the KKM: the self-behaviours report (used in the present study) and the description of partner's behaviours. Both versions consist of 30 items and have three subscales to evaluate each domain of marital communication: Support in the relationship (10 items; e.g., 'I am interested in my partner's successes and problems'), partner involvement (9 items; e.g., 'I hug my partner and kiss him') and depreciation in the relationship (11 items; e.g., 'I offend my partner'). Each item is assessed on a 5-point scale tapping the frequency of each particular behaviour (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*). The total scores of the subscales range from10 to 50 (support), from 9 to 45 (involvement) and from 11 to 55 (depreciation). High scores on each subscale indicate that there is a high level of support, involvement and depreciation. The internal consistency of the KKM self-behaviour scale, as assessed by Cronbach's α, in the original Polish sample was high for all three dimensions: support (α = .91), involvement (α = .85) and

depreciation (α = .87) (Kaźmierczak & Plopa, 2008). Cronbach's α for the KKM self-behaviours in the present study was also high: .93 for support, .89 for involvement and .89 for depreciation.

Procedure

Participation in the study was voluntary. The study was conducted following the ethical standards according to the Helsinki Declaration. Informal local parent groups on social media sites were contacted and asked to take part in the study. Other recruitment efforts included snowball sampling through word-of-mouth, as participants were asked to share the study information with other couples. All information completed by participants was confidential and anonymous. Although additional demographic information was collected, the primary inclusion criterion was current engagement in a traditional nuclear family. Couples were tested in home settings. Informed consent was received from participants prior to the survey. The KKM self-behaviours report was administered first, followed by the INTE self-report. The participants completed the measures in the same room, in the presence of a researcher who made certain they were not able to make contact with each other. The response sheets were sealed in an envelope directly after the study so that they could be matched after the data-collecting phase.

RESULTS

In the first step, descriptive analyses were performed. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov *d* test for normality indicated that the criterion of normal distribution of variables was fulfilled, therefore in the subsequent steps, parametric tests were conducted using Statistica (2019) software. The descriptive statistics, including mean (M) and standard deviations (SD) for the total sample, gender and marital stages, are presented in Table 2.

Emotional intelligence. A 2(Gender) x 7(Marital stage) ANOVA was performed on emotional intelligence scores. Gender, $F(1, 128) = 13.84$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, and marital stage, $F(6, 128) = 3.19$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$, significantly differentiated participants with regards to emotional intelligence. The interaction of gender with marital stage was nonsignificant, $F(6, 128) = 0.76$, $p = .60$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Figure 1 shows the means of the groups. Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) post-hoc tests were used to test the significance of pairwise differences. Consistent with expectations, women scored higher than men in emotional intelligence, $p < .001$. Among groups representing particular marital stages, the first stage differed from the fifth ($p < .01$),

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for emotional intelligence and the three dimensions of marital communication (support, involvement and depreciation) as a function of gender

	Total sample		Marital stages													
			1		2		3		4		5		6		7	
Variables/Gender	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Emotional intelligence	124.85	16.10	131.04	15.40	123.55	11.22	130.75	14.64	129.35	15.39	120.63	16.12	117.60	18.72	116.90	17.54
Women	129.23	15.94	132.57	17.79	124.36	11.50	136.00	11.31	134.08	14.65	126.00	17.50	127.40	18.39	124.30	18.36
Men	120.46	15.14	129.50	13.08	122.73	11.44	125.50	16.65	124.62	15.18	115.25	13.18	107.80	14.50	109.50	13.80
Marital communication																
Support	41.35	7.01	46.57	3.48	41.00	6.52	44.42	4.70	43.19	5.16	36.58	7.98	38.30	6.67	37.40	7.32
Women	42.52	6.59	47.14	4.31	41.27	4.20	45.67	3.27	44.77	5.10	39.08	7.54	39.60	8.62	38.20	7.60
Men	40.17	7.27	46.00	2.42	40.73	8.46	43.17	5.85	41.62	4.91	34.08	7.91	37.00	4.64	36.60	7.35
Involvement	31.82	6.97	37.89	3.69	31.50	5.60	33.75	7.02	34.27	5.72	27.88	5.34	27.80	7.57	26.10	6.73
Women	32.21	7.26	38.21	3.60	30.73	4.73	35.17	5.78	35.92	5.57	27.50	6.46	30.20	9.52	25.50	6.96
Men	31.44	6.69	37.57	3.88	32.27	6.50	32.33	8.38	32.62	5.59	28.25	4.20	25.40	4.88	26.70	6.80
Depreciation	22.39	6.92	19.04	6.68	24.27	7.06	23.42	5.18	19.19	5.78	26.21	6.87	23.90	4.38	23.25	7.43
Women	23.10	6.64	20.71	7.39	25.82	6.32	25.17	6.71	19.31	4.97	25.58	7.59	24.20	3.27	23.60	6.00
Men	21.69	7.16	17.36	5.65	22.73	7.71	21.67	2.58	19.08	6.69	26.83	6.35	23.60	5.68	22.90	8.95

Note: The marital stages are: 1 = Beginning Family, 2 = Childbearing Family, 3 = Family with Preschool Children; 4 = Family with School-age Children, 5 = Family with Teenagers stage, 6 = Family as Launching Centre 7 = Middle-aged Spouses.

sixth ($p < .05$) and seventh stages ($p < .001$); the third stage differed from the sixth ($p < .05$) and seventh stages ($p < .05$); and the fourth stage differed from the fifth ($p < .05$), sixth ($p < .05$) and seventh stages ($p < .01$).

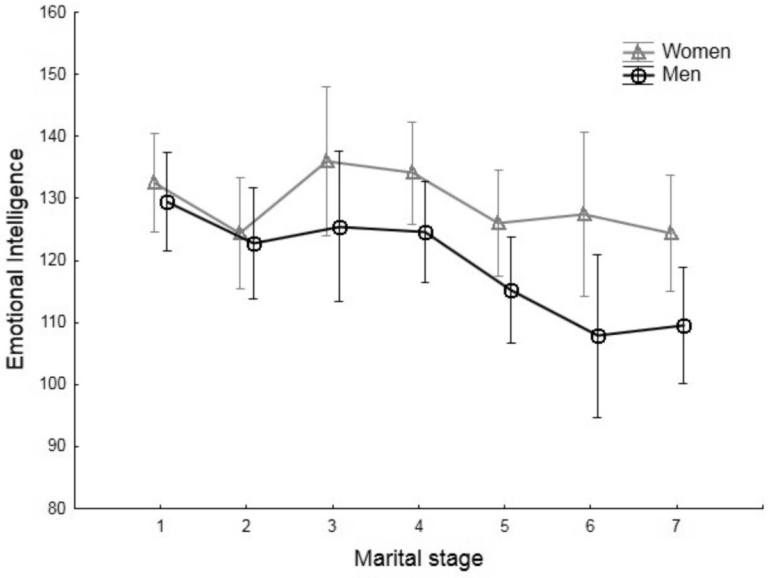

Figure 1. Mean Emotional Intelligence scores as a function of gender and marital stage. Error bar indicates 95% confidence interval.

A two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to determine whether there were any gender and marital stage effects on the dimensions of marital communication (support, involvement and depreciation). The multivariate result was significant for gender, Wilk's Lambda = .91, $F(3, 132) = 4.55$, $p < .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, and also for marital stage, Wilk's Lambda = .57, $F(18, 374) = 4.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$. Women scored significantly higher than men in support, $F(1, 134) = 5.46$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, as shown by Fisher's LSD post-hoc test ($p < .05$). However, there were no gender differences in involvement, $F(1, 134) = 0.64$, $p = .42$, and depreciation scales, $F(1, 134) = 1.68$, $p = .20$. Significant marital stage differences were found in support, $F(6, 134) = 8.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .28$, involvement, $F(6, 134) = 12.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .35$, and depreciation scales, $F(6, 134) = 4.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$. Figure 2 shows the mean scores in all three dimensions of marital communication (support, involvement and depreciation) for the seven marital stage groups. Pairwise group differences were tested using Fisher's LSD. They are shown in Table 3.

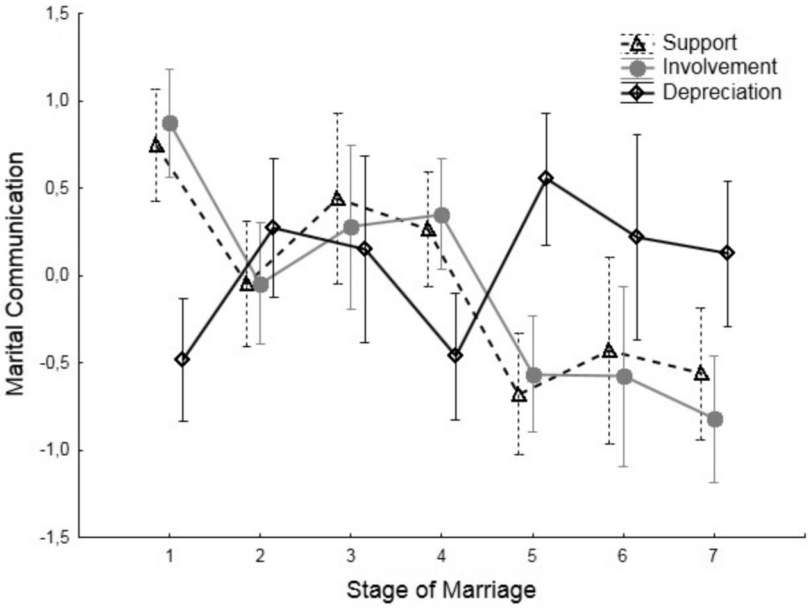

Figure 2. Mean scores in the dimensions of the Marital Communication Scale (Support, Involvement, and Depreciation) as a function of marital stages. Error bar indicates 95% confidence interval.

Relations between emotional intelligence and marital communication

Consistent with the hypotheses, significant positive correlations were found not only between EI and support, $r = .57$, $p < .001$, but also between EI and involvement, $r = .56$, $p < .001$. In addition, there were moderate negative correlations between EI and depreciation, $r = -.31$, $p < .001$. To make interpretations easier and to avoid multicollinearity, all variables (besides gender, which was coded Women = 0, Men = 1) included in the models of the multiple regression analysis following were standardised: emotional intelligence, marital communication dimensions (support, involvement, depreciation), marital stage and demographics (gender, age, education). A series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to predict separately the three dimensions of marital communication (i.e., support, involvement and depreciation) from gender, age and education in the first model, from gender, age, education and marital stage in the second model and gender, age, education, marital stage and emotional intelligence in the third model. The results are shown in Table 4. The analyses showed that emotional intelligence is a predictor of support, involvement

Table 3. Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD) post-hoc comparisons of marital stages in relation to the three dimensions of marital communication (support, involvement and depreciation)

Support (*p*-value)						
Marital stages	1	2	3	4	5	6
2	0.001					
3	0.299	0.115				
4	0.040	0.209	0.559			
5	0.000	0.014	0.000	0.000		
6	0.000	0.240	0.019	0.030	0.448	
7	0.000	0.054	0.002	0.001	0.653	0.699
Involvement (*p*-value)						
2	0.000					
3	0.038	0.276				
4	0.022	0.098	0.796			
5	0.000	0.034	0.004	0.000		
6	0.000	0.093	0.017	0.003	0.972	
7	0.000	0.003	0.000	0.000	0.308	0.445
Depreciation (*p*-value)						
2	0.005					
3	0.052	0.713				
4	0.929	0.008	0.064			
5	0.000	0.313	0.225	0.000		
6	0.043	0.880	0.862	0.053	0.345	
7	0.028	0.610	0.944	0.037	0.134	0.796

Note: The marital stages are: 1 = Beginning Family, 2 = Childbearing Family, 3 = Family with Preschool Children; 4 = Family with School-age Children, 5 = Family with Teenagers stage, 6 = Family as Launching Centre, 7 = Middle-aged Spouses.

and depreciation, when the demographic variables are controlled. The full models explained 45%, 50% and 16% of the variability of support, involvement and depreciation, respectively.

Finally, we explored the possible moderation effects of the marital stages on the relationship between EI as an independent variable and each of the three dimensions of marital communication as dependent variable. The moderation model was tested separately for support, involvement and depreciation, using the PROCESS 3.3 macro (Hayes, 2017, 2019; see SPSS, 2019). The conditional effect was tested based on a bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure with 1000 samples. A bootstrap confidence interval (95% CI), which does not include the 0 value, signals a significant effect. In addition, as suggested by Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes (2007), the independent variable (i.e., emotional intelligence) was mean-centred prior to analysis, providing a clearer and easier explanation of the interaction effect between the predictor and moderator variables on the dependent variable. The results are reported in Table 5.

Table 4. Hierarchical regression analysis with predictors of marital communication dimensions (support, involvement and depreciation)

		Support					Involvement					Depreciation				
Model	Variable	β	*SE*	*t*	R^2	*F*	β	*SE*	*t*	R^2	*F*	β	*SE*	*t*	R^2	*F*
1					.25	15.37***				.32	21.74***				.04	1.99
	Gender	-.11	.08	-1.5			-.01	.07	-0.1			-.12	.09	-1.43		
	Age	-.4	.09	-4.42***			-.56	.09	-6.53***			.16	.10	1.53		
	Education	.12	.09	1.26			.01	.09	0.12			-.03	.10	-0.32		
2					.25	11.49***				.32	16.20***				.04	1.59
	Gender	-.12	.08	-1.54			-.01	.07	-0.13			-.11	.09	-1.29		
	Age	-.34	.18	-1.83			-.53	.17	-3.04**			.04	.21	0.2		
	Education	.11	.09	1.25			.01	.09	0.12			-.03	.10	-0.3		
	Marital stage	-.07	.18	-0.38			-.03	.17	-0.18			.13	.20	.0.64		
3					.42	20.04***				.50	27.39***				.14	4.40***
	Gender	-.01	.07	-0.14			.1	.06	1.56			-.19	.09	-2.26*		
	Age	-.29	.16	-1.79			-.48	.15	-3.22**			.01	.20	0.03		
	Education	.05	.08	0.64			-.05	.08	-0.7			.01	.10	0.15		
	Marital stage	-.02	.16	-0.12			.02	.15	0.13			.09	.19	0.48		
	Emotional intelligence	.46	.07	6.39***			.47	.07	7.02***			-.34	.09	-3.87***		

Note: Gender: 0 = Women, 1 = Men. Education: 0 = Primary School, 1 = Vocational School, 2 = High School, 3 = College, 4 = University. Marital stages: 1 = Beginning Family, 2 = Childbearing Family, 3 = Family with Preschool Children; 4 = Family with School-age Children, 5 = Family with Teenagers stage, 6 = Family as Launching Centre, 7 = Middle-aged Spouses.

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

The overall model accounted for significant variance of the support, $R^2 = .49$, $F(13, 128) = 9.61$, $p < .001$, involvement, $R^2 = .53$, $F(13, 128) = 11.04$, $p < .001$, and depreciation, $R^2 = .23$, $F(13, 128) = 2.93$, $p < .001$, scales. However, the moderation effect was nonsignificant for involvement or depreciation. The relationship between emotional intelligence and support was moderated by both the fourth and sixth marital stages (see Table 5 for more details). As shown in Figure 3, the relationship between support and emotional intelligence was stronger when couples were in the fourth and sixth stages of marriage (Family with School-age Children and Family as Launching Centre, respectively).

Table 5. Moderation analysis with Support as dependent variable (DV), Emotional Intelligence (EI) as independent variable (IV) and marital stages as moderator (MV)

					Bootstrap 95% CI				
Variable	*b*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	LL	UL	R^2	$F(13, 128)$	*p*
Support (DV)							.49	9.61	< .001
Constant	46.04	1.07	43.08	.0000	44.46	47.52			
EI (IV)	.06	.06	1.31	.1928	.01	.16			
MS (MV)									
1	-4.89	1.55	-3.15	.0020	-7.98	-2.02			
2	-1.82	1.96	-.93	.3553	-5.70	1.16			
3	-3.78	1.51	-2.49	.0138	-6.26	-1.33			
4	-8.17	1.54	-5.31	.0000	-11.56	-5.14			
5	-6.14	2.08	-2.95	.0038	-13.34	-2.05			
6	-6.42	1.68	-3.83	.0002	-9.34	-3.55			
EI x MS									
1	.04	.12	.31	.7564	-.26	.34			
2	-.05	.13	-.42	.6735	-.27	.15			
3	.12	.09	1.28	.2041	-.01	.28			
4	.22	.09	2.33	.0215	.06	.37			
5	.14	.11	1.19	.2344	-.22	.45			
6	.19	.09	2.04	.0431	.04	.37			

Note: Number of bootstrap samples for percentile bootstrap confidence intervals was 1000.

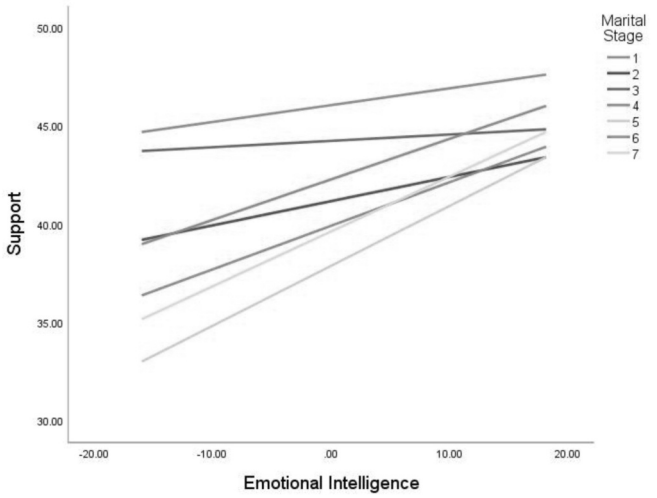

Figure 3. Interaction between emotional intelligence and marital stages on support as a dimension of marital communication.

DISCUSSION

Emotional intelligence: Effects of gender and marital stage

The results of the present study support the first hypothesis (H1). It was found that women scored significantly higher in general EI than men. Most of the studies of gender differences in EI converge that females have higher EI than men (Brackett et al., 2004; Ciarrochi et al., 2000; Mayer et al., 1999; Mayer & Geher, 1996; Van Rooy et al., 2005). It is plausible that women have better emotional competences which enable them to apply knowledge about emotion in a more efficient way than men. Our findings also indicated that marital stages significantly differentiated participants in terms of EI. The effect of marital stage on EI can be explained by the changing life conditions associated with marriage and child bearing. Petrides et al. (2007) suggested that our appraisal of circumstances and our reactions to life events may be partly filtered through our perceptions of our emotional abilities. Still, spouses' behaviours, personal investment, expectations, or beliefs may impact the development of the EI of each other. Factors that likely impact spouses' person characteristics and via them their EI include experiencing the generation gap or the changing nature of marriage itself over time (Treas, Lui, & Gubernskaya, 2014). Societal factors such as pro-family policies in Central European countries (Zdulski, 2016) and, particularly, changes in the

perception of the value of family in Silesia (Swadźba, 2015), may have also impacted spouses' beliefs, attitudes towards marriage, and emotional responses in changing marital conditions in the various marriage stages.

Marital communication: Effects of gender and marital stage

The present study also showed that women reported a significantly higher level of supportive marital communication compared to men. This finding is in line with previous research suggesting that women are more adept at providing sensitive, emotional support than men and pay more attention to the supportive communication skills of their friends and partners than men do (McGeorge, Gillihan, Samter, & Clark, 2003; Samter, 2002). This might explain why women seem to be less satisfied than men with the support they receive from their male partners. This applies to marital relationships, in particular (Burleson et al., 2009; Curtona, 1996; Servaty-Seib & Burleson, 2007). However, a word of caution is in order here: gender differences in self-reported measures (this also covers EI self-report scales) are largely based on gender stereotypes (Reeder, 1996). The reports may be biased by socially desirable responses and lack of awareness of one's own stereotypes. In addition, the use of biased measures, such as item content considered more typical of women than men, may also influence the findings (Lopez-Zafra & Gartzia, 2014; Rudman & Goodwin, 2004). However, it is also true that both men and women largely prefer to seek and receive emotional support from women (e.g., Clark, 1994; MacGeorge et al., 2004). It seems that the active, cognitive construction of stereotypes through interaction with the environment since childhood as well as social roles, which are often segregated along gender lines, are associated with different expectations and require different skills (Vogel, Wester, Heesacker, & Madon, 2003; Weisgram, 2016).

Hypothesis 2 also predicted that marital communication would differ at specific stages of marriage. We hypothesized that couples at the Beginning Family stage would be characterised by the most efficient communication, contrary to couples at the other marital stages. This hypothesis was fully supported. Indeed, the highest level of support and involvement and the lowest depreciation level was found in the couples at the beginning marriage stage. These findings are consistent with the viewpoint that the presence of children in a family and the responsibility for raising them can strongly influence a marital relationship. Research suggest that although children increase the stability of marriage, at least when young, they decrease marital qualities including love and satisfaction (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003; Munoz, 2011). They are also in line with studies showing the highest marriage and communication quality

in the initial period of marriage (Biel, 2013; Braun-Gałkowska, 1980; Harwas-Napierała, 2006; Krok & Murlowska, 2011; Orbuch et al., 1996; Weigel & Ballard-Reisch, 1999).

Interestingly, couples at the Family with Teenagers stage showed the most inefficient communication pattern, namely, the lowest level of support and involvement and the highest depreciation level. In the Polish context, this finding likely reflects a rather progressive deterioration of marital communication in the final stages of marriage (starting from the Family as Launching Centre stage). There is evidence that the worst communication pattern among couples occurs at the Family with Teenagers stage (Biel, 2013; Harwas-Napierała, 2006; Krok & Murlowska, 2011; Ziemska, 2001). This finding is likely associated with the separation of youth from the family and the need for redefinition of the existing communication patterns between spouses (Brzezińska & Appelt, 2015). An alternative plausible explanation could be that families and married couples are subject to transformations that are marked by radical social changes. One such social change is the comparatively rapid improvement in employment and income-earning opportunities among adolescents, and consequently a faster and more sudden separation from the family process than before. This factor seems to be an additional and important trigger of crisis for spouses. Due to this situation, there is strong and continuous need to monitor societal developments to better understand changes in family life and communication.

The relationship between EI, marital communication and stage of marriage

Emotional intelligence was positively associated with support and involvement, and negatively with depreciation. This finding confirmed Hypothesis 3 and is in line with previous research (Adamczyk, 2013; Harwas-Napierała, 2006). It suggests that higher self-reported EI is related to higher respect of one's partner, more active engagement in conflict resolution, higher investment on understanding one's partner and building cooperation with the other. Members of couples with high EI and positive marital communication tend to be less aggressive, dominant or controlling of their partner and more respectful of a partner's dignity (Kaźmierczak & Plopa, 2006).

Furthermore, EI was the only significant predictor – compared to demographic variables and stage of marriage – of the three communication dimensions: support (the overall model accounted for 45% of the variance), involvement (it accounted for 50% of the variance) and depreciation (it accounted for 16% of the variance). It can be said, therefore, that the way in which spouses communicate, when it comes to support, involvement and depreciation depends on their EI. Nevertheless, EI is weaker predictor of depreciation compared to support and involvement. Considering that

depreciation largely corresponds to the conceptualisation of intimate partner violence it is evident that other person characteristics are involved in depreciation than EI.

Interestingly, the present research indicates that men are less likely to report physical abuse perpetrated on them (Nabors, Dietz, & Jasinski, 2006). In addition, O'campo et al. (2017) found that men tended to rate non-physical controlling behaviours as less important when they were involved in intimate partner violence. Moreover, even when men and women used similar labelling language for non-physical abusive behaviours, they perceived them in different ways. Therefore, it can be assumed that these factors, along with intimacy and psychopathology, might, to some extent, have influenced depreciation-related self-reports rather than EI (Dutton & Nicholls, 2005).

In the present study, the role of EI in the depreciation process was also investigated through the moderation analyses in which the conditional effect of the stage of marriage on the relationship between EI and marital communication was explored. The bias-corrected bootstrapping procedure showed that overall, marital stage did not moderate the association between EI and involvement nor did it moderate the link between EI and depreciation. The interaction effect between marital stage and emotional intelligence as predictor of support was found in the case of only two stages: Family with School-age Children and Family as Launching Centre. In other words, self-reported support behaviour towards a partner was significantly more predicted by the EI level at the stages that precede and follow the Family with Teenagers stage. It is worth noting that this finding is consistent not only with the marital communication pattern found in this study, but also with the sharp drop in spouses' EI in this stage. The Family with Teenagers stage emerges as the most critical in a couple's communication, possibly because the 'midlife crisis' of one or both spouses overlaps with the adolescent identity crisis (Dankoski, 2001; Erikson, 1968). The Family with School-age Children and Family as Launching Centre stages are benchmarks indicating the end of initial communication patterns in the marital life of a couple and the relative stabilisation and realignment of the family system respectively. In the latter stage, the disturbances of emotional skills are substantially lower. As transition to parenthood is far behind and older children do not demand so much attention, parents feel comfortable in their roles and, more often than before, have well-established professional and social standing. At the Family as Launching Centre stage, the decreased responsibilities for parenting and lack of children present at home often offer the possibility for couples to refocus on and reorganise their marital relationships, which, in its turn, offers new opportunities for activating emotion-related dispositions (Dankoski, 2001) such as EI and support behaviours in marital communication. Indeed, support is a significant predictor of well-being and marital

satisfaction (Elegbede & Ogunleye, 2018; Kong, Gong, Sajjad, Yang, & Zhao, 2019; Yedirir & Hamarta, 2015) and EI contributes to one's ability to develop and elicit social support (Rode, 2013).

To sum up, the present study showed that EI is a significant predictor of marital communication ability, despite the marital communication decline in the final stages of marriage. In view of EI's role in positive communication patterns, it would be interesting to investigate the effectiveness of EI-related intervention programmes for spouses in the later stages of marriage – starting with couples with teenager – aiming at enhancing spouses' emotional skills.

Limitations of the study

The present study has limitations that might impact the generalisability of its findings. One important limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the study that does not allow any causal inferences about the factors that may impact the association between EI and marital communication in the various marriage stages. The small sample size in the various marriage stages is another limitation. Further longitudinal research with larger sample sizes is needed to replicate the present findings. Moreover, the present study did not include couples in which one or both spouses are retired (Ageing Family stage). Future research should expand the marriage stages in the sample to get a more comprehensive picture of the role of EI in the marital and family life-cycle. Finally, this study used self-report measures only. Such measures may be biased due to contextual factors, memory and socially desirable responses. Future research could combine self-report measures with more objective ones such as observation of couple interactions in structured experimental settings or even everyday-life situations. Evidently, this is a promising line of research with great societal implications.

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