Emotional Intelligence and Marital Quality:
Dyadic Data on Croatian Sample

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The aim of this study was to examine if emotional intelligence (EI) measured by tests and self-reports contributes to the explanation of self and partner's assessments of marital quality. Ninety eight married heterosexual couples participated. Each partner completed for itself measures of EI, quality of marriage, personality inventory and some socio-demographics. Models showed that socio-demographics, personality traits, and EI measure explained between 21% and 27% of own and partner's quality of marriage, with 5% – 7% of specific contribution of EI measures to quality of marriage. Among EI measures, ability to regulate one's own and others' emotions was significant predictor of own and partner's quality of marriage, while self-reported measure of regulation and managing of emotions significantly predicted own quality of marriage. Other significant predictors were extraversion for both own and partner's quality of marriage, and agreeableness, length of acquaintance before marriage and cohabitation for partner's quality of marriage only.

Key words: emotional intelligence, marital quality, marriage

Introduction

In Croatia, as well as in other countries, marriage rate has decreased and divorce rate has increased. For example, in 2013 in Croatia 19169 couples got married and 5992 married couples got divorced (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Divorce is an extremely stressful event for couples, their children and their broader family (e.g., Swisher, 2015). So the important question is what can we do to make marriages more stable and to decrease the number of divorces?

Low marital quality is one of the psychological indicators of potential divorce (e.g., Tach & Halpern-Meekin, 2012). Marital quality refers to an evaluation of marital satisfaction and marital adjustment of marriage partners (Obradović & Čudina-Obradović, 1998). It includes positive experiences, such as feeling loved, cared for, and satisfied in a relationship, as well as negative experiences such as demands from one's spouse and marital conflicts (Umberson & Williams, 2005). However, in the literature on marital quality, other similar constructs are used for describing marital quality, like marital satisfaction and marital happiness. Marital happiness

is based on an affective evaluation of a relationship (positive and negative emotions in marriage, emotional affection, partner's emotionality, etc.), while marital satisfaction includes affective evaluation and cognitive evaluation of a relationship according to some standards (e.g., equitable distribution of responsibilities, maintaining of reciprocal esteem, agreement upon important questions, joint decision-making and joint interests) (Glenn, 2003). Marital adjustment, however, refers to partners' satisfaction with all aspects of married life (Spanier, 1976). All these constructs are, according to contemporary perceptions, narrower concepts than marital quality and they are seen as dimensions of marital quality (Glenn, 2003).

Marital quality is connected to different attributes of marital partners (e.g., gender, age, education, employment, personality traits), characteristics of marriage and marriage processes (e.g., duration of marriage, stage of marriage, number and age of children, partner's positive behavior, sexual satisfaction, conflict resolution methods, stressful events, intimacy of partners) and characteristics of social environment (nuclear or expanded family, income of the family) (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Marriage is a consensual and contractual relationship recognized by law (Merriam-Webster online dictionary, 2018). For individuals who enter into marriage in western cultures, marriage has individual meaning too, such as an intimate, permanent relationship with a partner (Bird & Melville, 1994). Also, marriage is characterized by love and other positive emotions and by negative, sometimes very intense, emotions. The way partners deal with their emotions and how successfully they can identify and manage their own and their partner's emotions, could be important for marital quality, satisfaction and happiness.

The construct of emotional intelligence (EI) refers to abilities connected with processing of emotional information (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

It includes four levels of emotional abilities: perception and expression of emotion (1st), utilization of emotions to facilitate cognition (2nd), emotional knowledge and understanding of emotion (3rd) and managing emotions (4th). According to the theory and to the results of different studies as well, people with a higher level of EI have better social skills and better social relationships (e.g., Brackett et al., 2006; Côté, Lopes, Salovey, & Miners, 2010). It has been considered that emotional abilities could be more important for intimate relationships than previously thought. Understanding of the partner's and one's own emotions could contribute to the maintaining of intimacy and a positive emotional atmosphere. Managing emotions could be crucial for successfully dealing with emotionally tensed situations and conflicts.

Two approaches in the conceptualization and investigation of EI have emerged. The first approach is represented by the aforementioned authors of the construct and states that EI includes abilities of emotional information processing (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). Accordingly, ability tests are the best method for measuring EI (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2016). The second approach conceptualizes EI as a personality trait ("trait EI") and refers to the self-perception of emotional abilities and different characteristics connected to emotion processing, like optimism, empathy, frustration tolerance, etc. (Blanco, García, & Aluja, 2016). Trait EI is measured by questionnaires measuring typical behavior. Due to the differences in conceptualizations and measurement, correlations of these two constructs with other constructs differ as well. Much research has confirmed a positive connection between self-report measured EI and different measures of marital or romantic relationships quality (e.g., Batool & Khalid, 2012; Eslami, Hasanzadeh, & Jamshidi, 2014; Foran, O'Leary, & Williams, 2012). Results of a meta-analysis conducted on data from 6 studies (Malouff, Schutte, &

Thorsteinsson, 2014) showed a correlation between self-rated EI and relationship satisfaction of $r = 0.32$. Self-rated EI is connected not only to self-rated relationship satisfaction, but also to relationship satisfaction rated by the partner (e.g., Batool & Khalid, 2012). Especially worthwhile investigations are those that include both self and partner's ratings and observe predictors of marital quality regarding both partners' perception of their marriage.

However, we found only one study of the relationship between EI tests and marital quality. Zeidner, Kloda, and Matthews (2013) examined the relations of self-rated EI and EI tests with marital quality on a sample of one hundred newlywed heterosexual couples. The total results of both EI measures were associated with marital quality, but only for an individual partner. EI of an individual was not connected to their partner's marital quality. It was also shown that the relationship between EI and marital quality is mediated by dyadic coping.

The theory presumes the importance of the relationship between emotional abilities and marital quality assessments, which has been confirmed by the above findings. Since there is a lack of research concerning that problem in the context of ability EI models, the aim of the present study was to examine the specific contribution of EI measured by self-reports (trait EI) and by EI tests (ability EI) to marital quality (both partners self-reports were used as the criterion), after controlling for demographic characteristics, characteristics of marriage and personality traits.

Method

98 married heterosexual couples from the area of Osijek, Croatia participated in this study. The age of participants varied from 19 to 60 years ($M = 41.93$; $SD = 11.32$). The characteristics of participants (age, education, family income) are shown in Table 1. In the same table some char-

Table 1 *Characteristics of the participants and their marriages (N=196)*

Characteristic	Categories	Number of participants	Percentage of participants
Age	19-29	31	15.8%
	30-39	57	29.1%
	40-49	35	17.9%
	50-60	73	37.2%
Education	Elementary school	6	3.1%
	High school	115	58.7%
	Bachelor or higher expertise	29	14.8%
	Master or high expertise	46	23.5%
Income of the family	Lower than average	18	9.2%
	Average	137	69.9%
	Better than average	41	20.9%
Cohabitation	YES	60	30.6%
	NO	136	69.4%
First marriage	YES	188	95.9%
	NO	8	4.1%
Number of children	0	33	16.8%
	1	59	30.1%
	2	83	42.3%
	3	21	10.7%

Table 2 *Descriptive statistics of continuous variables of mariage characteristics (N=196)*

	N	*M*	*SD*	*Min.*	*Max.*
Length of acquaintance before marriage (years)	196	4.23	3.32	0.25	18.00
Age when got married	196	26.09	4.38	17	49
Duration of the marriage	196	15.88	12.01	0.16	38.00

acteristics of the participants' marriages (pre-marriage cohabitation, first or repeated marriage and number of children) are shown as well. Descriptive statistics of continuous variables of marriage characteristics are shown in Table 2.

Snowball sampling was used – first recruits were the authors' acquaintances, and they recommended other married couples who could be contacted. The researcher visited couples in their home where she gave them a short explanation of the study and booklets with questionnaires and tests. Questionnaires and tests were administered to both partners at the same time, and the researcher supervised to make sure that there is no communication between partners while completing the research material. The first page of the booklet with tests and questionnaires contained general information about the investigation. Participants coded their booklets, so the investigators could match the couple's data. Questionnaires and tests were sequenced in the following way: Questionnaire of general sociodemographic data, Emotional Management Test, Emotional Competence Questionnaire, Emotion Analysis Test, Marital Quality Index and Big Five Inventory. Duration of the administration was between 45 and 60 minutes.

The following instruments were used in this study:

1. Emotional Competence Questionnaire-45 (UEK-45, Takšić, 2002) is a shortened version of the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire-136 (UEK-136, Takšić, 1998). It consists of 45 items (statements) grouped in three subscales: Perception and understanding of emotions, Ex-

pressing and labeling of emotions and Regulation and managing of emotions. Participant estimated each statement on a 5 points Likert scale (1 – "I don't feel or think in that way at all"; 5 – "I always feel or think in that way"). Total results are formed for each subscale like linear combination of ratings. Cronbach α coefficients for the Perception and understanding of emotions subscale are in the range from 0.82 to 0.88, for the Expressing and labeling of emotions subscale in the range from 0.78 to 0.84 and for the Regulation and managing of emotions subscale from 0.68 to 0.72 (Dobrota & Reić Ercegovac, 2012; Takšić, Mohorić, & Munjas, 2006). In this research those coefficients are even higher (Table 3). A somewhat shortened version (42 items) of the questionnaire is used and validated in different European countries, but under the name Emotional Skills and Competence Questionnaire (Costa, Faria, & Takšić, 2016).

2. Emotion Analysis Test (TAE, Kulenović, Balenović, & Buško, 2001) is an ability test intended to measure understanding and analysis of emotions. It consists of 25 problems. For a word that describes a complex emotional state (like disappointment) six basic emotions are offered (guilt, sadness, joy, shame, surprise, malice). The participants' task was to mark 2 out of 6 emotions that are most often or always present in that complex emotional state and two emotions that are never or very rarely present in that state. The total result is formed as a sum of correct answers and, theoretically, it varies between 0 and 100. The test has satisfactory psychometric properties on students' samples

(Kulenović, Balenović, & Buško, 2000; Maslić Seršić, Vranić, & Tonković, 2004). In this research, Cronbach α coefficient was 0.81.

3. Emotion Management Test (TUE) is an ability test developed for this research by the authors, and is designed to measure the ability to regulate one's own and others' emotions in the adult population. The previous version of this test is aimed at adolescents (Buško & Babić Čikeš, 2013). The test consists of thirteen problem situations. Each problem includes a short description of the situation in which the main character experiences an intense emotion (fear, sadness, disappointment, worry, anger, frustration, happiness, proud, content). For each situation four potential actions are offered. The participant's task was to assess, on a 7-point scale (-3 = very harmfully, 3 = very useful), the usefulness of each of the four suggested reactions in mitigating the negative or maintaining the positive emotions in the situation. For example: *Tomorrow at work Sandro has to give an important presentation. His promotion depends on it and he feels frightened. Please indicate how helpful are each of the following actions for Sandro to reduce his stage fright.*

a) Telling himself that he is prepared and that everything will go well.

b) Complaining to a friend.

c) Thinking about everything that can go wrong.

d) Hoping for a miracle so that he won't be obliged to give the presentation.

The accuracy of the answers is determined by the expert criteria where the correct answer is awarded 2, the adjacent answer 1, and others 0 points. The total score is the sum of points in individual items. Cronbach α coefficient for the test in this research is 0.72 and it correlates positively with the Regulation and managing of emotions subscale of UEK-45 ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$) and TAE ($r = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$).

4. Quality of Marriage Index (Norton, 1983) is the measure of marriage quality that gives quality of marriage index and global assessment of marital quality. It consists of six items, which describe the relationship of a person with their partner. Participants assess their agreement with the first five items on a 7-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree, 7 – strongly agree). A linear combination of answers to these first five items refers to *the quality of marriage index*. The sixth item refers to overall assessment of marital satisfaction on a 10-point Likert scale (1 – very unhappy, 10 – very happy) and presents *the global assessment of marital quality*. The results of married couples are connected to each other by code, so each participant has two self-report outcomes and two partner's outcomes.

5. Big Five Inventory (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998) is a questionnaire intended to measure the Big Five personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience). It consists of 44 behavioral descriptions. Each description represents one of the personality traits. Participants assess the extent to which each statement applies to them (1 – doesn't apply to me at all, 5 – totally applies to me). The total results are calculated separately for each dimension. The bigger the result, the more expressed the trait.

6. Questionnaire of General Sociodemographic Data is used to collect sociodemographic and marriage characteristics data (gender, age, education, employment, income, length of acquaintance before marriage, duration of cohabitation, age when married, duration of the marriage, first of repeated marriage and number of children).

Results

Main descriptive statistics of the variables are presented in Table 3.

Although K-S values indicate that the distribution of the most of the variables differs from normal distribution, Kline (2005) criteria (skewness values lower than +/- 3, kurtosis values

Table 3 *Main descriptive statistics of personality traits. emotion intelligence and marital quality variables*

Variables	M	SD	Min.	Max.	K-S	Skewness		Kurtosis		α
Neuroticism	2.65	0.62	1.13(1)	4.25(5)	0.06	0.16	0.17	-0.20	0.35	0.80
Openness to experience	3.35	0.65	1.80(1)	4.90(5)	0.08**	-0.23	0.17	-0.35	0.35	0.86
Conscientiousness	3.81	0.50	2.44(1)	5.00(5)	0.07**	-0.21	0.17	0.01	0.35	0.78
Extraversion	3.50	0.56	2.13(1)	5.00(5)	0.07*	-0.14	0.17	-0.08	0.35	0.76
Agreeableness	3.70	0.53	1.89(1)	5.00(5)	0.09	-0.32	0.17	0.71	0.35	0.74
TAE	67.69	9.50	35(0)	88(100)	0.11**	-0.91	0.17	0.86	0.35	0.81
TUE	59.72	9.90	12(0)	79(104)	0.08**	-0.97	0.17	2.26	0.35	0.72
UEK-P/U	52.23	7.35	29(15)	74(75)	0.06	0.00	0.17	0.61	0.35	0.90
UEK-E/N	50.04	6.65	32(14)	68(70)	0.08**	-0.12	0.17	-0.02	0.35	0.84
UEK-R/M	59.49	5.95	42(16)	78(80)	0.06	-0.10	0.17	0.14	0.35	0.75
Quality of marriage index	30.89	4.93	10(5)	35(35)	0.20**	-1.87	0.17	4.29	0.35	0.95
Global assessment of MQ	8.84	1.40	2(1)	10(10)	0.22**	-2.07	0.17	6.20	0.35	-

Note. K-S – Kolmogorov-Smirnov test values; TAE – Emotion Analysis Test; TUE – Emotion Management Test for Adults; UEK-P/U – Emotional Competence Questionnaire-45. Perception and emotion understanding subscale; UEK-E/N – Emotional Competence Questionnaire-45. Expression and nomination of emotions subscale; UEK-R/M – Emotional Competence Questionnaire-45. Regulation and emotion management subscale.
$* p < 0.05$; $** p < 0.01$; $*** p < 0.001$

lower than +/-10) and the same (negative) direction of asymmetry (Petz, 2004) allows using of parametric statistics with due caution in interpreting results.

Correlations of demographic and marriage characteristics variables, EI variables and personality traits with marriage quality variables are presented in Table 4.

None of the demographic characteristics correlated with marriage quality variables. Among variables measuring marriage characteristics, only length of acquaintance before marriage and cohabitation correlated with partner's assessments of marital quality, but those correlations are low. Longer acquaintance and lack of cohabitation before marriage correlated with lower

marital quality. Correlations of personality traits with marital quality are mostly small. Only openness to experiences did not correlate with any marital quality variable. Neuroticism is in a negative correlation, while conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness are all in positive correlation with marital quality variables, as expected. Among EI variables, TUE and UEK-R/M correlate significantly and positively with marital quality variables. Marital quality index and global assessment of marital quality are highly intercorrelated. Self-assessments of marital quality are also highly correlated with partners' assessments of marital quality.

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to estimate the potential role of EI in ex-

Table 4 *Correlations of demographic and marriage characteristics variables, EI variables and personality traits with marriage quality variables (N=196)*

	Quality marriage index	Global assessment of marital quality	Partner's quality marriage index	Partner's global assessment of marital quality
1. Age	.02	.01	-.01	-.02
2. Gender	.02	-.03	.02	-.03
3. Education	.03	.05	.09	.07
4. Income	-.01	.01	.01	-.01
5. Length of acquaintance before marriage	-.10	-.12	-.18*	-.25***
6. Cohabitation	-.10	-.07	-.16*	-.15*
7. Age when got married	-.12	-.10	-.11	-.13
8. Duration of marriage	.06	.05	.03	.03
9. Number of children	-.06	-.06	-.02	-.02
10. Neuroticism	**-.19****	**-.17***	**-.15***	**-.16***
11. Openness to experience	.00	-.03	.01	-.03
12. Conscientiousness	**.19****	**.17***	**.16***	**.17***
13. Extraversion	**.22****	**.15***	**.15***	.05
14. Agreeableness	**.19****	**.18***	**.23****	**.28****
15. TAE	-.02	-.02	-.02	.01
16. TUE	**.20****	**.21****	**.25*****	**.25*****
17. UEK-P/U	.07	.06	.09	.07
18. UEK-E/N	.11	.05	.11	.10
19. UEK-R/M	**.28*****	**.27*****	**.20****	**.22****
20. MQ index	1	**.89****	**.62****	**.57****
21. Global assessment of MQ		1	**.57****	**.63****

Note. The point biserial correlation coefficients are calculated for the categorical variables and the Pearson correlation coefficients for the continuous variables. TAE – Emotion Analysis Test; TUE – Emotion Management Test for Adults; UEK-P/U – Emotional Competence Questionnaire-45, Perception and emotion understanding subscale, UEK-E/N – Emotional Competence Questionnaire-45, Expression and nomination of emotions subscale, UEK-R/M – Emotional Competence Questionnaire-45, Regulation and emotion management subscale.
*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$.

planation of the variance of marital quality variables with control of demographic characteristics, characteristics of marriage and personality traits. We conducted four regression analyses for all marital quality variables as criterion variables (individual and partner's marital quality index and individual and partner's global assessment of marital quality). In the first step of regression

analysis demographic variables are entered, in the second characteristics of marriage, in the third personality traits, and, finally, in the fourth step EI variables were entered. Duration of marriage is excluded from these analyses due to its high correlation ($r = .93$) with the variable of age. Results of all hierarchical regression analyses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5 *Results of hierarchical regression analysis for prediction of self and partner rated quality of marriage variables (quality of marrage indeks and global assessment of marital quality)*

Predictor set of variables	Quality marriage index		Global assessment of marital quality		Partner's quality marriage index		Partner's global assessment of marital quality	
	β	β^1	β	β^1	β	β^1	β	β^1
1. step								
Age	.02	.25*	.02	.19	.01	.19*	-.01	.14
Gender	.02	-.07	-.04	-.13	.00	-.05	-.05	-.10
Education	.05	.05	.07	.07	.12	.18*	.11	.17*
Income	-.03	.03	-.02	.05	-.07	-.02	-.06	-.01
	R=.05 R²=.00		R=.07 R²=.01		R=.11 R²=.01		R=0.10 R²=.01	
2. step								
Length of acquaintance before marriage	-.08	-.05	-.11	-.08	-.19*	-.16*	-.27**	-.23**
Cohabitation	-.16	-.16	-.11	-.10	-.24**	-.23**	-.21*	-.20*
Age when got married	-.17*	-.25**	-.14	-.22**	-.11	-.19*	-.12	-.18*
Number of children	-.17	-.17	-.14	-.14	-.06	-.06	-.06	-.05
	R=.25 R²=.06 ΔR²=.06		R=.23 R²=.05 ΔR²=.04		R=.32 R²=.10 ΔR²=.09**		R=.36 R²=.13 ΔR²=.12**	
3. step								
Neuroticism	-.03	.02	-.04	.01	.09	.11	.08	.11
Openness	-.17	-.15	-.18*	-.15	-.14	-.13	-.14	-.13
Conscientiousness	.09	.03	.10	.04	.06	.02	.09	.05
Extraversion	.26**	.25**	.20*	.21*	.19*	.19*	.09	.07
Agreeableness	.14	.09	.12	.07	.24**	.19*	.29**	.24**
	R=.41 R²=.18 ΔR²=.12**		R=.37 R²=.14 ΔR²=.10*		R=.43 R²=.18 ΔR²=.08***		R=.47 R²=.22 ΔR²=.09***	
4. step								
TAE	-.12	-.12	-.14	-.14	-.14	-.14	-.12	-.12
TUE	.19*	.19*	.21**	.21**	.24**	.24**	.21**	.21**
UEK-P/U	-.06	-.06	-.03	-.03	-.00	-.00	-.03	-.03
UEK-E/N	-.03	-.03	-.08	-.08	.01	.01	.02	.02
UEK-R/M	.20*	.20*	.21*	.21*	.08	.08	.13	.13
	R=.48 R²=.23 ΔR²=.05***		R=.46 R²=.21 ΔR²=.07***		R=.49 R²=.24 ΔR²=.06***		R=.52 R²=.27 ΔR²=.05***	

Note. β – standardized partial regression coefficients; β^1 – values of β coefficient in the last analysis equation; R – multiple correlation coefficient; ΔR^2 – change in the coefficient of multiple determination
* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Predictor sets of variables presented above explained between 21 and 27% of variance of marital quality variables. Demographic variables and characteristics of marriage did not contribute significantly to the explanation of self-assessed marital quality. However, the participant's age when they got married showed to be a significant predictor of both self-assess-

ments criteria. Marital quality decreases with the increase in age at the time of marriage. But the contribution of that variable is very small and it is possible that, in part, it is a product of the suppression effect. The same effect is detected at the variable of age in the analysis for both marital quality indexes predictions (self and partner's). Age is not significantly correlated

with the criteria, but in the last equations its contributions became significant.

Personality traits contribute significantly to the self-assessments of marital quality. Only extraversion is a significant predictor for both criteria.

Emotional intelligence variables explained additional 5% (marital quality index) and 7% (global assessment) of the criteria variance. Emotion regulation is a significant predictor, measured by a test (TUE) and self-reports (UEK-R/M), for both self-assessments criteria.

Regression analysis regarding the partner's marital quality assessments revealed similar, but somewhat different results. Demographic characteristics did not explain the significant amount of criteria variance but education is a significant predictor for both criteria. Participants whose partners are more educated have higher assessments of marital quality.

Marriage characteristics explained additional 9% (marital quality index) and 12% (global assessment) of the variance of the partner's marital quality assessments. Significant predictors are length of acquaintance before marriage, cohabitation and age at the time of marriage. The partner's assessments of marital quality were higher if acquaintance before marriage was shorter, if the couple cohabitated and if the partner was younger when they got married.

Personality traits explained additional 8% and 9% of the criteria variance. Significant predictors are partner's extraversion (marital quality index) and agreeableness (both criteria).

Emotional intelligence variables explained additional 6% (marital quality index) and 5% (global assessment) of the criteria and only TUE was shown to be a significant predictor for both.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine if EI measured by tests (ability EI) and self-reports (trait EI) contributes to the explanation of self and partner's assessments of marital quality. Ninety-eight couples that have been married between a few months and 38 years participated in the study. Participants mostly finished high-school or higher levels of education, and have average or better than average income. For most of them this is their first marriage and they mostly have one or two children. In the continuation of the Discussion we are going to explore marital quality in relation to demographic characteristics, marriage characteristics, personality traits and emotional intelligence abilities.

Marital Quality and Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristics of the participants did not explain a significant proportion of marital quality assessments. In our research, age and duration of marriage were highly correlated, so we decided to include only age in the regression analysis. Previous research indicated different patterns of relationship between duration of marriage and marital quality (Glenn, 1990), but according to the latest, marital quality decreases with time (VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). The decrease could be explained by conflicts over the allocations of marital obligations between partners, adjustment to conflicts in long-term relationships, changes in partners' personality traits and changes in perception of equality in marriage and habit. In our sample, marital quality assessments showed to be independent of age/duration of marriage, as some other research showed (Goddard et al., 2016; Smith, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2008). One possible explanation of such results could be that changes in marital quality are more connected to some other processes or specific events in life of the partners (like birth of a child, career development, illness in a family, etc.) than with the simple flow of

time. Furthermore, some authors suggest that longitudinal courses of marital quality could stay uncovered if a sample is heterogeneous in marital length (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007), which is the case in this study.

There are no gender differences in marital quality assessments either. According to previous investigations, women have generally lower marital quality assessments (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Their burden of household and children care obligations, as well as fewer opportunities for achieving their own progress were seen as causes of their lower satisfaction with marriage. More recent studies imply fewer or no gender differences (Jackson, Miller, Oka, & Henry, 2014), probably due to more equality in marriages nowadays. Considering that our sample includes average and above average participants, according to their education and income, and that the same proportion of women and men are employed, we could assume that their marriages are more egalitarian. Consequently, gender differences in marital quality assessments have not been found.

Education and income of the family also failed to contribute to marital quality variables explanation. Given that education and income of the family generally present factors of security and stability, it is assumed that they could have a positive contribution to marital quality (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Obradović & Čudina-Obradović, 2000). It is possible that the positive selection of our sample did not enable the effects of those characteristics to manifest.

Marital Quality and Characteristics of Marriage

The examined marital characteristics explained a small but significant proportion of the criteria variance. The contribution is larger for partner's assessments than self-assessments. It is unexpected, considering that marital characteristics are the same for both partners and both partners participated in the study. Still, it clearly shows the importance of perception – objectively same characteristics could be viewed differently by partners. The length of acquaintance before marriage and cohabitation are significant predictors of both partner's marital quality criteria. Partners who knew each other for a longer time before they married have lower quality of marriage. This evidence is contrary to the majority of research, which showed that marital quality is higher for those couples who dated for a longer time (Lauer & Lauer, 1994). However, some research showed that marriage quality of couples that were in a pre-marriage relationship longer is lower because they married when the quality of their relationship already started to decrease (Alder, 2010). Cohabitation showed to be a significant predictor of partner's marital quality assessments, but it seems that the result is the consequence of the suppression effect (correlation coefficients between those variables are very low). So we can say that cohabitation does not contribute to marital quality in this research. Other research found negative correlation between cohabitation and marital quality (Goddard et al., 2016).

Age when they got married is not in a significant correlation with the marital quality variables, and its significant contribution in regression analysis probably represents an effect of suppression. Other research implies that there is an optimal period to get married (Glenn, Uecker, & Love Jr., 2010), and that is between 22 and 25 years of life. In our sample, there are participants who got married younger and older compared to that age, so that could be the reason why age at the time marriage is not connected to marital quality in our sample.

Number of children is not a significant predictor of marital quality in this research either. Some other studies showed that married couples without children are more satisfied with their marriages compared to couples with children (Obradović & Čudina-Obradović, 2000). Our

investigation includes couples at different stages of life, marriage and life cycle of the family, so maybe the effects of the number of children on marital quality variables are confounded.

Marital Quality and Personality Traits

The Big Five personality traits explained a significant proportion of variance of all marital quality criteria. For self-assessments of marital quality only extraversion showed to be a significant predictor. Its contribution is positive, which means that people who are higher on extraversion rate the quality of their marriages higher. Extroverted people are focused on more people in their life, so maybe, compared to introverted people, they focus less on marriage issues and problems. That could result in higher marital quality assessments. Other research has found the same results (Barelds, 2005). Neuroticism, conscientiousness and agreeableness are in significant, although rather small, correlations with marital quality self-assessments, but their contribution in regression analysis is insignificant. Other research reported that those traits are significant predictors of marital quality (Barelds, 2005; Claxton, O'Rourke, Smith, & DeLongis, 2012). Neuroticism proved to be especially problematic for quality of relationships. Claxton et al. (2012) pointed out the reasons for the differences in research results concerning the role of different personality traits in marital quality explanation. One of them is the change over the course of marriage, meaning that in different periods of married life different traits could play a significant role. Our sample includes couples with duration of marriage from a couple of months to thirty-eight years, so maybe the strongest effect proved to be significant, but others, connected to different stages of life and marriage, stayed undisclosed.

Agreeableness showed to be a significant predictor for partner's assessment of marital quality. Individuals who are high on this personality dimension are polite and caring and it is expected that their behavior contributes positively to their partners' satisfaction with marriage. Extraversion is a significant predictor for partner's quality of marriage index, but not for the global assessment of marital quality. It could be that partner's extraversion contributes to some aspects of marriage quality, like maybe a sense of partnership, but not to the general satisfaction with marriage. Extroverts are more open in relationships, they communicate more with other people, probably with their partners too, and those qualities could be positively connected to the partner's satisfaction in marriage. Neuroticism and conscientiousness are in significant correlations with partner's assessments of marital quality, but they failed to be significant predictors of these criteria. As said before, it is expected that neuroticism contributes to both, self and partner's marital quality assessments in negative way. Many research studies confirmed these assumptions (e.g., Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2002) and it is hard to say why in our investigation its contribution is not significant. One reason could be that social desirability affected the results in a way that the participants were underestimating their negative behaviors and characteristics, and accenting the positive one. In that case neuroticism lost its power in marital quality criteria explanation while agreeableness acquired it. Another reason could be that only couples that are satisfied with their marriages participated in the study, so neuroticism is not showed to be a significant predictor in this sample.

Marital Quality and EI

Previous investigations confirmed that self-rated EI is connected to marital quality (e.g., Batool & Khalid, 2012; Eslami et al., 2014), however, there is not much evidence for the correlation of EI tests with this criteria (Zeidner et al., 2013). According to the theory, abilities on the

third and fourth level of Mayer and Salovey's model (1997) – understanding of emotions and managing emotions – should contribute to the explanation of self and partner's assessments of marital quality. If a person understands the partner's different emotional states and his/her own as well, and they can regulate their own and their partner's negative emotional states, it should result in a positive effect on the quality of their romantic relationship or marriage.

This study confirmed the contribution of managing emotions to marital quality explanation, measured by test and self-reports as well. The TUE is a significant predictor for both self and partner's assessments of marital quality, as expected. That means that an individual's knowledge of the right actions in emotional situations is reflected on the quality of marriage in general, whether assessed by him/her or by his/her partner. However, the contribution is rather small. If we consider that TUE consists of descriptions of different emotional situations, not those that can occur in marriage, we could assume that some other measure, focused on marriage situations only, would have a bigger contribution to marital quality explanation. It is also important to emphasize that TUE does not measure behavior in real situations, so the ability to manage emotions could be even more important than research shows. In this research, the ability to understand emotions measured by TAE is not correlated to marital quality variables, which suggests that only specific EI abilities contribute to marital quality. It seems that person's knowledge about emotions does not contribute to marital quality, but its ability to manage one's own and emotions of other people does. It makes sense if we realize that a person, who has good knowledge about emotions does not need to use that knowledge to positively contribute to the emotional atmosphere in a marriage. On the contrary, competence in managing emotions implies positive effects on the individuals involved. Of all self-rated EI variables, only the third, Regulation and managing of emotions, contributes to marital quality, but only for self-assessments. A person who assesses that their abilities of regulation and managing emotions are high, has higher ratings of marital quality. In other words, this type of person believes in their own capacities in regulating emotions, which affects their marital quality in a positive way. Self-assessments of regulation and managing emotions are correlated with partner's assessments of marital quality, but they fail to be significant predictors. It seems that, for a partner, it is more important how a person actually manages their emotions than what he/she thinks about their own abilities to regulate emotions. However, while interpreting the results we should consider the fact that self-report measures were used for measuring both, trait EI and marital quality, and that some part of the shared variance between those variables could be derived from the method used (method variance). That is one of the most commonly mentioned limitations of self-report measures of EI (trait EI). In this research only the third subscale of UEK correlates with the criteria, so we can exclude that it is due to method variance. In Zeidner et al. (2013) research, partners' EI measured by test and self-assessment was not connected to assessments of marital quality, but they measured only global EI, not specific abilities.

Limitations of the study mostly concern the methodology. A snowball sampling method was used, and as a consequence it is a biased sample, which does not fully represent the general population of Croatia. The low socio-economic status group is not sufficiently represented and couples, who consented to participate in the study probably do not have any bigger problems in their marriage. In line with that, distributions of marital quality variables are negatively asymmetric, which means that most of the couples are rather satisfied with their marriages. In sum, we think that some

trends found in this study would be emphasized if the study was conducted on a sample that is representative for the whole population of Croatia. Another limitation is connected to the well-known disadvantage of self-reports, and social desirability. In our opinion, social desirability could have affected the results even more because the investigator visited couples in their home. Furthermore, there is a disadvantage of self-reports that is connected to assessing one's own emotional abilities. The question is can a person assess their own emotional abilities, especially if they are low? The correlation between the test and the self-report intended to measure managing emotions in this research is low ($r = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$) and it is in line with other research (Brackett et al., 2006). So it is questionable what is actually measured by this measure. Finally, a longitudinal design would enable us to make much more convincing conclusions concerning the role of emotional intelligence and other relevant factors in the quality of married life.

To conclude, considering the results of this study, the ability to manage one's own and others' emotions is a significant factor for marital quality, reported by the individual and his/her partner as well. It is important to emphasize that a rather small proportion of variance was explained by all variables included in the research. It seems that quality of marriage is a complex construct affected by many different individual, couple and environmental factors that are all hard to include in just one study.

Marital quality is important for quality of life of married couples, their children and broader circle of family and friends. We could say that it represents a factor of stability in a community. So, it is in the interest of the whole society to invest in all factors connected to marital quality, such as emotional intelligence. Different programs aimed to support the development of emotional intelligence of children, adolescents, and even the adult population are welcomed,

because they increase a chance for a marriage or other intimate relationships to be successful.

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