# CO - DEVELOPMENT AS RESOURCE FOR PARTNERSHIP SATISFACTION IN LONG - TERM MARRIAGES

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## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND AIMS OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

Due to the increase in life expectancy, couples are now faced with a longer potential common life span than ever before. While some couples successfully stay together for many decades, other relationships break up and result in separation or divorce. I would like to investigate marital relationships with the explanatory focus on positive aspects - from the angle of relationship resources - in contrast to the mainstream of research, where there is a tendency to view marriage from the point of dissolution and relationship break down (Parker, 2002). In addition a great deal of relationship studies focuses on critical life events like the embarkment towards marriage as newlyweds or the transition to parenthood, despite the fact that marriages last for decades.

The question how marriages develop and what kind of determinants influence the success of these relationships has aroused the interest of psychological research in the two last decade (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000.) The following research leading questions are of central interest for my dissertation:

- Are there any gender differences related to co-evolution in marriages?
- What is the predictory power of partners co-evolution for marital satisfaction?
- How is co-evolution linked to other determinants of relationships (as personal and relationship variables)?
- What are meaningful psychosocial predictors of long lasting relationships?

In my dissertation I would like to contribute to a better scientific understanding of different forms and processes of long lasting biographies of marital couples.

## METHOD

Cross-sectional data were collected in line with the 1st wave of the IP12 which was realized 2012. Data Analysis was performed by gender comparison (means) with regard to psychological and physical well-being as well as using a multiple linear regression analysis (Outcome marital satisfaction).

*Sample description*
Married individuals (n=507; women= 254; men= 253)
Age 65-90 years (M,SD 75.83; 6.93)
who are married for more than 20 years,
who never experienced a divorce or a spousal loss

*Instruments*
**Psychological and physical well-being**
[1]Life Satisfaction: Satisfaction with life Scale (Diener et al, 1985)
[2]Marital Satisfaction: Marital Satisfaction Inventory revised (Klann et al., 2006)
[3]Subjective Health: Item from Swiss Household Panel

**Predictors of marital satisfaction**
[4]Personality: Big five Inventory, (Rammstedt & John, 2007)
[5]Co-evolution: Self-developed Items
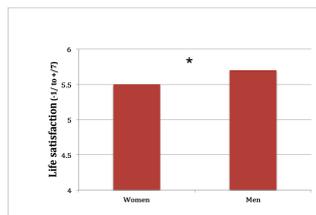[6]Quality of sexuality: Self-developed Item

## FIRST RESULTS


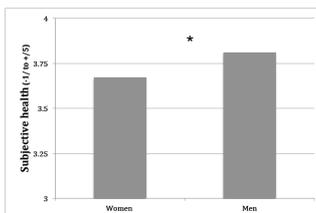**Figure A.** Gender comparsion regarding life satisfaction, * significant difference (p <.05)


**Figure B:** Gender comparsion regarding subjective health, * significant difference (p <.05)

**Table A.** Predictors of marital satisfaction[2]

| | Marital Satisfaction (n = 507) |
|---|---|
| | ß |
| **Demography** | |
| Age | .07 |
| Gender (w/m) | -.05 |
| **Intrapersonal resources** | |
| Extraversion[4] | .04 |
| Neuroticism[4] | -.10* |
| Agreeableness[4] | .06 |
| Conscientiousness[4] | -.04 |
| Openness[4] | -.07 |
| **Interpersonal resources** | |
| Co-evolution: own possibilities[5] | .04 |
| Co-evolution: support from partner[5] | .31*** |
| Quality of sexuality[6] (-1/ to +/5) | .10† |
| Time spent married (years) | -.06 |
| **Psychological and physical well-being** | |
| Life satisfaction[1] | .06 |
| Subjective health[3] (-1/ to +/5) | .08 |
| $R^2$ | .23 |

†p < .10, *p < .05, ***p < .00p

**Table B.** Comparison regarding psychological and physical well-being by gender

| | Long-term married (M (SD)) | | | | U |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n | Women | n | Men | |
| Life satisfaction | 232 | 5.5 (.83) | 238 | 5.70 (.83) | .013* |
| Marital satisfaction | 222 | 1.35 (.24) | 229 | 1.35 (.24) | .089 |
| Subjective health | 249 | 3.67 (.73) | 252 | 3.81 (.72) | .031* |

Significant difference (p<.05*)

## DISCUSSION AN FURTHER STEPS

Analyzing gender differences, focusing on the psychological and physical well-being, there could be seen that men show significant higher rates of life satisfaction and subjective health than women. While the measure of marital satisfaction shows no significant difference in gender.

Concerning the predictors of marital satisfaction, there could be shown that the intrapersonal resource neuroticism and the interpersonal resources partners support for co-development, which is highly significant and the quality of sexuality, which is significant by trend are most relevant. Further analyses including different indicators of marital satisfaction such as family of origin and the use of structural equation modeling are intended for testing how the predictors themselves and the marital satisfaction are related to each other (Article 1).

*Planned Publications:*
Referring to the guidelines of the faculty of human science, University of Bern, three articles (working titles) are planned for my doctoral thesis:

Article 1: The role of co-development as resource for partnership satisfaction in long-term marriages (structural equation modeling are planned)

Article 2: Long-lasting marriages: How happy are they really? (Defining a typology of long term married individuals using latent class modeling)

Article 3: Determinants of long term married and divorced individuals in old age (Group comparison for psychosocial and contextual variables and further analysis using SEM are planned)

*References*
Bradbury, T., Fincham, F. & Beach, S. (2000). Research on the nature and determinants of marital satisfaction: A decade in review. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol. 62, no. 4, pp. 964-980.
Parker, R. ( 2002). *Why marriages last: a discussion of the literature.* Australian Institute of Family Studies.