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Social Anhedonia and Relationships

RUNNING HEAD: SOCIAL ANHEDONIA AND MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Social Anhedonia, Communication and Marital Satisfaction in Newlywed Couples

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https://osf.io/akx5d/?view_only=da71cb8a6e624821ac434ef9d1e7aec5

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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Accepted Article

Abstract

Objective: Social anhedonia is associated with disinterest in social interactions and poor relationship functioning, yet little is known about the specific mechanisms underlying associations between social anhedonia and romantic relationship behaviors and satisfaction. We examined the links between social anhedonia, perceptions of conflict communication patterns, and marital satisfaction.

Method: The current research examined the role of social anhedonia on marital quality and functioning longitudinally across a year in a sample of 100 newlywed couples using an actor-partner interdependence framework.

Results: Social anhedonia was negatively associated with own and partner's marital satisfaction. It was also negatively associated with constructive communication and positively associated with destructive communication. Furthermore, cross-sectional mediation analyses showed that communication patterns mediated the social anhedonia-satisfaction link.

Conclusions: Taken together, these findings suggest that social anhedonia is likely to lead to lower marital satisfaction, partly through its effect on communication between partners.

Keywords: Social Anhedonia, Communication Patterns, Marital Satisfaction, Marital Relationships, Actor-Partner Interdependence Model

Social Anhedonia, Communication and Marital Satisfaction in Newlywed Couples

Social anhedonia is defined as a diminished interest in social interactions and reduced capacity to experience social reward. It has also been conceptualized as a deficit in one's need to belong (Blanchard et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2007; Silvia & Kwapil, 2011). Research examining social anhedonia and romantic relationships has shown that individuals with greater levels of social anhedonia have less desire to be involved in dating or marital relationships (Kwapil, 1998; Mishlove & Chapman, 1985) and have fewer close relationships compared to individuals with low levels of social anhedonia (Blanchard et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2007). Furthermore, social anhedonia is associated with lower romantic relationship satisfaction, *perceptions of partner's* satisfaction, commitment, and care (Assaad & Lemay, 2018; Kwapil, 1998), as well as less social support and more conflict (Blanchard et al., 2011; Horan et al., 2007). This emphasizes the detrimental impact that social anhedonia has on relationship functioning; however, the impacts of social anhedonia have rarely been looked at through a dyadic lens. Because relationships are of a dyadic nature, it is important to extend to the current literature by also examining how one's social anhedonia impacts their *partner's* perceptions of romantic relationship quality and functioning. Furthermore, there are open questions regarding the longitudinal effects of social anhedonia on romantic relationships. A dyadic, longitudinal study provides a more comprehensive view of the effects of social anhedonia in romantic relationships, particularly in established, committed relationships such as marital relationships.

Beyond examining the dyadic nature of social anhedonia in romantic and marital relationships, the current study seeks to understand the interpersonal processes that could explain diminished relationship satisfaction for individuals with social anhedonia. Research has shown that social anhedonia is associated with attachment avoidance (i.e., discomfort with intimacy;

Berry et al., 2006; Troisi et al., 2010) and consequently negative relationship functioning.

Furthermore, prior research has shown that social anhedonia is associated with lack of verbal expression and responsiveness (Collins et al., 2005). We propose that a plausible mechanism that could underlie relationship distress between partners in a couple is communication.

Communication has been shown to be influential in determining satisfaction in marriage as well as other close relationships (Fletcher, 2002). The effects of communication can be beneficial or detrimental in attempts to solve and deal with everyday problems and conflict (Christensen & Shenk, 1991).

Social Anhedonia and Romantic Relationships

Social anhedonia has been conceptualized as a deficit in one's need to belong and the lack of pleasure from social interactions (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM-5]; American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Silvia & Kwapil, 2011). It is an element of trait anhedonia, which comprises both physical and social anhedonia. Whereas physical anhedonia is associated with deficits in physical and sensory experiences, we are particularly interested in *social* anhedonia, which is associated with lack of interest in social interaction (Chapman et al., 1976). Anhedonia, including social anhedonia, is a feature of numerous mental health disorders, such as depression, schizophrenia, and schizotypy (Blanchard et al., 1998; Kwapil, 1998; Meehl, 1962). More recently social anhedonia has been considered a transdiagnostic risk factor for mental health disorders (Barkus et al., 2019). Social anhedonia is associated with more time alone and lack of positive affect experienced during social situations (Brown et al., 2007; Kwapil et al., 2009). Social anhedonia is not meant to describe enjoyment of solitary activities, normal introversion, or the occasional preference to be alone (e.g., solitude-seeking; Ren et al., 2021) within the context of healthy social interests (Leary et al., 2003), even

though there might be some overlap. It is also distinct from social anxiety, whereby socially anxious individuals *desire* social interactions, but experience negative emotions, insecurity, and self-consciousness during social interactions (Brown et al., 2007).

To date, most of the theoretical and empirical work on social anhedonia has occurred within the study of depression, schizotypy, and schizophrenia. These existing studies show that social anhedonia is associated with poor social functioning for both healthy and clinical populations (Brown et al., 2007; Harey et al., 2007). However, only a limited number of studies have examined the effects of social anhedonia on *romantic* relationship quality and functioning. As mentioned earlier, extant research shows that social anhedonia has been linked to decreased rates of dating and marriage (Blanchard et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2007). Moreover, individuals with higher levels of social anhedonia experience social relationships that are hampered by poor interpersonal functioning in the form of greater conflict and reduced social and family support (Blanchard et al., 2007; Horan et al., 2007). Furthermore, research has shown that positive associations between social anhedonia and attachment avoidance (i.e., discomfort with intimacy) are marked by similarities in distancing and isolation and linked to negative romantic relationship outcomes (e.g., Berry et al., 2006; Troisi et al., 2010). As a consequence of these negative interpersonal processes, social anhedonia is likely to result in lower romantic relationship satisfaction and commitment (Assaad & Lemay, 2018; Kwapil, 1998).

Despite prior research highlighting the negative association between social anhedonia and romantic relationship quality, critical gaps remain in our understanding of the effects of social anhedonia on close, intimate relationships. Firstly, *no* research to date has taken a dyadic approach to understanding the effects of social anhedonia and examined if an individual's level of social anhedonia could be negatively associated with their *partner's* level of relationship

satisfaction, controlling for one's own level of social anhedonia. This limits our understanding of the dynamic interplay between social anhedonia and relationship quality as well as functioning, and research examining actor and partner effects of social anhedonia is crucial in aiding our understanding of how social anhedonia affects *both* members of a couple. Given that there is also little to no research on how individuals with higher levels of social anhedonia get into and maintain their romantic relationships, it is possible that another avenue by which trait anhedonia could be associated with relationship quality and functioning is via the combined effects of both members' traits within the couple in terms of similarity or homophily (e.g., Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Robins et al., 2000; Solomon & Jackson, 2014). It is unclear whether the interaction of personality traits within couples might yield especially beneficial or deleterious effects on relationship quality and functioning beyond main effects. If both partners have high levels of social anhedonia, it might exacerbate negative consequences of social disinterest and disinhibition and the resultant callousness could be especially detrimental to relationship quality and functioning (e.g., see Caughlin et al., 2000; Vohs et al., 2011). On the other hand, however, it might increase compatibility, with resulting decreases in conflict and increases in understanding. For example, prior research on similarity regarding constructs such as alcohol use, substance use, and impulsivity show that similarity is associated with greater compatibility as well as understanding and consequently promote greater relationship quality and functioning (e.g., see Derrick et al., 2016; Smith et al., 2020). In the current study, we use a dyadic perspective by examining 1) actor and partner effects of social anhedonia on outcome, and 2) similarity across partners for anhedonia levels on outcomes.

The second critical gap in the existing research on social anhedonia is a reliance on cross-sectional studies. Even though cross-sectional studies have demonstrated the negative effects of

social anhedonia on romantic relationship quality and functioning, it is unknown at what points in time social anhedonia might be associated with relationship dysfunction. For example, prior research has highlighted how such time points can be reflected either in terms of the initial level of quality/functioning (i.e., model intercept) as well as change in quality/functioning over time (i.e., model slope). On the one hand, it is possible that social anhedonia, much like neuroticism and depression (Karney & Bradbury, 1997) affects relationship quality and functioning at the onset of the relationship in terms of different intercepts rather than the slope. This is consistent with the enduring dynamics model (Huston et al., 2001), which posits that difficulties arise early in the relationship and remain consistent over time. On the other hand, it stands to reason that the negative effects of social anhedonia only emerge over time. For example, given the case that some individuals higher in social anhedonia find themselves getting married, the reduced capacity for experiencing pleasure and social reward becomes increasingly costly, especially in the close interdependent structure of a marriage, resulting in relationship dysfunction over time. Hence, it is imperative to examine the effects of social anhedonia using prospective longitudinal studies, especially in the earliest stages of marriage to examine whether impaired functioning occurs from the beginning of marriage, if it occurs over time, or even both (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Examining the effects of social anhedonia on marital functioning and quality over time could serve to elucidate the developmental trajectory of the effects of social anhedonia.

Social Anhedonia and Communication

Although it logically follows that social anhedonia can have a deleterious impact on romantic relationship quality, the underlying reason how social anhedonia is associated with poorer relationship functioning is not well understood. We posit that even though social anhedonia is a *transdiagnostic*, individual-specific risk factor associated with psychological

distress, the mechanism leading to lower relationship quality is *interpersonal* in nature.

Specifically, we posit that communication, a key variable in understanding relationship quality and functioning (Fletcher, 2002; Kanter et al., 2022; Gottman, 1994), will be particularly relevant for individuals high in social anhedonia.

Communication is essential to navigating the myriad of challenges and problems that couples face in everyday life and when dealing with conflict. Moreover, communication is central in establishing trust and predictability with one's partner, alleviating doubt and creating certainty within the relationship (Christensen & Shenk, 1991). Meta-analytic results show that constructive or positive forms of communication are typically associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction whereas destructive or negative forms of communication patterns are typically associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction (e.g., Fletcher, 2002; Kanter, 2022; Noller, 1984; Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1990; Woodin, 2011). It should be noted that typically maladaptive communication processes can be adaptive in certain situations or contexts. For example, direct and negative forms of engagement with conflict might actually engender change (e.g., Overall & McNulty, 2017; McNulty & Russell, 2010), whereas withdrawal from conflict can be beneficial to relationship satisfaction for couples lower in socioeconomic status as they may lack the resources and capacity to enact change (Ross et al., 2019). Furthermore, it is possible that dissatisfaction and discontent in the short term might actually be beneficial in the long term as couples navigate and grow resilient from past difficult interactions (e.g., Overall et al., 2009). In summary, certain couple-specific contexts may impact the effect of communication on relationship outcomes, but in general, communication is so impactful on couple functioning that it holds a privileged place in couples therapy interventions and relationship education purposes (Johnson & Bradbury, 1995).

Social anhedonia involves a reduced capacity to experience social rewards as well as the preference to be left alone (Silvia & Kwapil, 2011), and this may compromise an individual's ability to communicate adaptively with one's partner. As earlier mentioned, and as suggested by behavioral theorists (Gottman, 1994; Jacobson & Margolin, 1979), such impairment in communication would likely be a source of distress to the relationship, at least in the short term. Research has identified three primary patterns of communication involving both couple members during conflict or interactions: mutual constructive communication; demand/withdrawal; and avoidance-withholding (Christensen, 1988). Mutual constructive communication is characterized by perceiving that there is mutual discussion of the problem, positive expression of feelings and the eventual negotiation of solutions to resolve conflict. Thus, mutual constructive communication can be viewed in a positive light. Demand/withdrawal is characterized by one partner nagging or demanding some change and the other partner withdrawing from the discussion. Avoidance-withholding is characterized by both couple members avoiding discussion of the problem and withdrawing from each other. Both demand/withdrawal and avoidance-withholding can be perceived as more destructive forms of communication. Non-distressed couple members report more constructive communication, less demand/withdrawal and less avoidance-withholding compared to distressed couple members, with resultant consequences on relationship satisfaction (see Bodenmann, et al., 1998).

To date, even though there is no research examining the association between social anhedonia and marital communication patterns, there exists indirect evidence that marital communication patterns could mediate the association between social anhedonia and marital satisfaction. For example, prior research has shown that social anhedonia is generally associated with lack of verbal expression and responsiveness (Collins et al., 2005). Furthermore, social

anhedonia is linked to lower social functioning in terms of behavioral affiliative skills (e.g., verbal skills, nonverbal skills, friendliness, social competence; Blanchard et al., 2015; Llerena et al., 2012). There is also evidence that social anhedonia is linked to lower executive functioning and attentional control, which in turn mediates the link between social anhedonia and social impairment due to maladaptive responses in emotion regulation (Tully et al., 2014). The reduced ability to self-regulate for individuals with social anhedonia is also linked with the reduced ability to cope with conflict and rejection from a partner (Hooker et al., 2010). Social anhedonia, like the personality trait of impulsivity, is linked to reduced inhibitory control and impaired self-regulation (Tully et al., 2014; Whiteside & Lynam, 2001). Impulsivity is negatively associated with constructive communication and positively associated with demand/withdraw and avoidance-withholding communication for *both* the self and partner (Tan et al., 2017). Therefore, our hypotheses were that social anhedonia would be related to greater demand/withdrawal and avoidance communication and less constructive communication. Further, even though there may be instances in which putatively “negative” communication can have beneficial effects (e.g., Overally & McNulty, 2017), we hypothesized that these marital communication patterns would mediate, at least partially, the association between social anhedonia and marital satisfaction.

Current Research

The primary goals of the current study were to: a) examine the dyadic effects of social anhedonia on overall marital satisfaction, both cross-sectionally and longitudinally; b) examine the effects of social anhedonia on spouses’ perceptions of marital communication patterns; and c) determine whether these marital communication patterns mediate the association between social anhedonia and marital satisfaction. We hypothesized that: 1) social anhedonia would be negatively associated with one’s own and one’s partner’s overall marital satisfaction at Wave 1;

2) social anhedonia would be negatively associated with own and partner marital satisfaction over time; 3) social anhedonia would be negatively associated with one's own and partner's constructive communication, but positively associated with one's own and partner's demand/withdrawal communication and avoidance-withholding communication at Wave 1; and 4) marital communication patterns would mediate the association between social anhedonia and marital satisfaction at Wave 1 (see Figure 1 for a conceptual illustration of the Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model [APIMeM]; Ledermann et al., 2011). As an exploratory question, we also tested for actor-partner interactions of social anhedonia to examine if such combined effects might yield predictive power above actor and partner effects to predict relationship quality and functioning. This study was not preregistered and materials are available from this link: https://osf.io/akx5d/?view_only=da71cb8a6e624821ac434ef9d1e7aec5

Method

Participants and procedure

Participants were different-sex newlywed couples (married within the last 12 months at the first wave of data collection) who participated in a longitudinal three-wave study of personality and well-being in romantic relationships from 2011 to 2013. We were guided by recommendations from Kenny et al., (2006) and had an a priori sample size goal to recruit a minimum of 100 couples. Data from all three waves were examined for the current analyses. To be eligible to participate, individuals were required to be married for 12 months or less and living together, be between the ages of 18 and 55, and be comfortable with English.

One hundred and two couples met eligibility requirements and were enrolled into the study. One couple withdrew from the study; thus, the final sample size was 101 couples. During the Wave 1 laboratory session, participants received detailed information about the study and

completed IRB-approved informed consent. To ensure that the presence of one spouse would not influence the responses of the other, spouses were separated into different rooms and completed a battery of computer- and paper-administered measures. They received \$75 at the completion of this Wave 1 session. Couples then completed Wave 2 and Wave 3 data collection with an interval of 6 months between each wave of data collection. The social anhedonia measure as well as communication measures were only collected at Wave 1, whereas marital satisfaction was collected for all waves. There were 86 couples (151 participants) who participated at Wave 2 (75% of original sample), and 83 couples (134 participants; 66% of original sample) who participated at Wave 3. Participants received a \$25 gift card as compensation at the end of both Waves 2 and 3.

At Wave 1, couples had been married for an average of 4.94 months ($SD = 3.22$) and had dated for an average of 37.64 months ($SD = 27.89$) before marriage. The average age for male participants was 27.79 years ($SD = 6.162$), and they reported an individual salary of \$24,560.10 ($SD = 19,021.68$). The majority of male participants reported having at least a bachelor's degree (70.7%), and 83.8% were Caucasian, 7.1% were Asian, 3.0% were Hispanic, 1.0% were Native American, and 4.0% were "Multiracial" or "Other." Race data for one male participant was not available. The average age for female participants was 26.88 years ($SD = 6.01$), and they reported an individual salary of \$21,109.47 ($SD = 16,255.12$). The majority of female participants reported having at least a bachelor's degree (79.0%), and 78.0% were Caucasian, 11.0% were Asian, 2.0% were Black/African American, 2.0% were Hispanic, and 7.0% were "Multiracial" or "Other."

Measures

Social Anhedonia. Social anhedonia was measured using the Revised Social Anhedonia Scale (RSAS; Eckblad et al., 1982), which is a 40-item self-report questionnaire to assess disinterest in social contact. Example items include “In many ways, I prefer the company of pets to the company of people” and “When I am alone, I often resent people telephoning me or knocking on my door.” All items were measured on a true-false scale, with items summed to create an index of social anhedonia. This measure was only collected in Wave 1 ($\alpha = .86$).¹

The Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ). The CPQ (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984) is a 35-item self-report measure of how couples communicate and view conflict in their relationship. The scale consists of three broad sections that assess how partners behave when a problem arises (4 items), when they discuss the problem (18 items), and when the discussion is over (13 items). Within each section, partners rate how they and their partner behave (e.g., “*Both members try to discuss the problem*”) from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 9 (*very likely*). The current study used the constructive, demand/withdraw and avoidance-withholding subscales. Higher scores for the subscales indicate a greater occurrence of that communication style. Internal reliabilities for the constructive ($\alpha = .75$) and demand/withdraw scales ($\alpha = .70$) were good, although the internal reliability for the three-item avoidance-withholding scale was somewhat low ($\alpha = .50$). This measure was only collected in Wave 1.

Marital Satisfaction. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) (Spanier, 1976) is a well-known 32-item self-report measure of relationship satisfaction and adjustment. Four aspects of relationship adjustment are assessed by the DAS: Consensus, or the degree to which partners agree on important issues (13 items), Satisfaction, or the couple’s perceived happiness and frequency of conflict (10 items), Affectional Expression, or how affectionate partners seem (4 items), and Cohesion, or the occurrence of positive interactions between the partners (5 items).

Total scores on the DAS were used for the current analyses; scores range from 0-151. Higher scores reflected higher levels of marital adjustment (Wave 1 $\alpha = .85$, Wave 2 $\alpha = .82$, Wave 3 $\alpha = .91$).²

Data analysis. We used structural equation modeling (SEM) with Mplus version 8.0 (Muthen & Muthen, 1998-2015) to test the hypotheses. Maximum-likelihood estimation methods in Mplus were used to estimate parameters and account for missing data (Enders, 2010).

Because of the non-independent nature of the data, actor-partner interdependence modeling (APIM) was used to assess the contributions of each partners' social anhedonia score on their own and their partner's relationship outcome measures. APIM examines the extent to which a person's own attributes predicts his or her own responses and behaviors (actor effect) as well as the extent to which the partner's attributes predicts the actor's responses and behaviors (partner effect), controlling for each other. We also centered actor and partner social anhedonia around the grand mean and tested for the interaction of actor and partner effects to examine whether there were any combined or interactive effects of partners' social anhedonia.

Next, to test the association between social anhedonia and trajectories of marital satisfaction over time, we used growth curve analytic techniques via SEM to examine the effects of social anhedonia longitudinally over three waves. Latent growth curve models enable us to determine two different latent parameters that elucidate the form of the marital satisfaction trajectory: 1) the initial level (model intercept by fixing all loadings to 1) as well as 2) direction and rate of change over time (model slope by fixing loadings at Wave 1 to 0, Wave 2 to 1, and Wave 3 to 2).

Finally, we tested the mediation hypothesis using the Actor-Partner Interdependence Mediation Model (Lederman et al., 2011; APIMeM), where the basic structure of the mediation

model follows the APIM but with the inclusion of two mediator variables (i.e., one for each partner). The basic APIMeM is a complex mediational model with four actor/partner effects that can be potentially mediated by both partner variables, resulting in eight indirect effects for distinguishable dyads. Given our sample size, we decided to maximize power by using only one mediator variable for each APIMeM model we ran, even though it is possible to use multiple mediators in a single APIMeM, thereby increasing the number of parameters estimated (Ledermann et al., 2011). Hence, we ran three separate APIMeMs (Lederman et al., 2011) to test each of the three communication patterns (i.e., constructive communication, demand/withdraw communication, avoidance-withholding communication) as mediators. Direct and indirect effects were computed. Bootstrapping procedures were used with 5,000 iterations and fit of the models was assessed with chi-square, Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and root-mean square error or approximation (RMSEA), following standard guidelines (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations can be found in Table 1 for all variables of interest for the current study. Social anhedonia was significantly correlated with all communication measures and with relationship satisfaction, such that higher levels of social anhedonia were associated with less constructive communication, more destructive communication, and poorer relationship functioning. As assessed with the DAS, couples in this sample were relatively satisfied (scores > 97), and the mean level of social anhedonia was comparable to other samples examining social anhedonia and romantic relationship processes (Assaad et al., 2018).

We tested for distinguishability of our dyads by constraining actor/partner paths, actor/partner means and variances of the predictor as well as actor/partner means and variances

of the outcomes. Results showed that the model with parameters constrained did not provide a detriment in model fit compared to the unconstrained model, suggesting that partners within a couple were empirically indistinguishable (Ackerman et al., 2011). Because the models with parameters constrained is more parsimonious, we interpret these models below.

Social Anhedonia on Marital Satisfaction

The first set of analyses tested the effect of social anhedonia on marital satisfaction cross-sectionally. Consistent with our hypothesis, the actor effect showed that individuals who were higher in social anhedonia reported lower marital satisfaction, $b = -.43$, $\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$; 95% CI [-0.59, -0.28]. The partner effect also showed that *partners* of individuals who were higher in social anhedonia reported lower marital satisfaction, $b = -.24$, $\beta = -.15$, $p = .03$; 95% CI [-0.39, -0.08].

Next, to examine whether there were any effects of similarity on social anhedonia between partners, we added the interaction between actor and partner effects of social anhedonia. Results showed that the actor and partner effects remained and were negatively associated with marital satisfaction. However, there was no significant interaction effect of actor and partner social anhedonia on marital satisfaction, $b = .01$, $\beta = .02$, $p = .57$; 95% CI [-0.03, 0.06].

Finally, to examine whether social anhedonia was associated with trajectories of marital satisfaction over the first year of marriage, we used growth curve analytic techniques via SEM to examine the effects of social anhedonia longitudinally over three waves. However, we were unable to get the latent growth curve model to converge. Because we only had 3 waves of data, we then chose to examine changes in marital satisfaction as a function of social anhedonia instead of examining trajectories. We re-specified the model with Wave 1 social anhedonia predicting Wave 3 marital satisfaction, controlling for Wave 1 marital satisfaction. Results

showed that own social anhedonia had no significant effect on Wave 3 marital satisfaction, $b = .04$, $\beta = .02$, $p = .71$; 95% CI [-0.13, 0.21], controlling for Wave 1 marital satisfaction. However, own social anhedonia was marginally negatively associated with *partner* marital satisfaction at Wave 3, $b = -.19$, $\beta = -.09$, $p = .05$; 95% CI [-0.16, 0], controlling for Wave 1 marital satisfaction.

Marital Communication Patterns on Marital Satisfaction at Wave 1

The second set of analyses tested the effect of social anhedonia on the three marital communication patterns at Wave 1. Individuals higher in social anhedonia reported lower constructive communication, $b = -.25$, $\beta = -.24$, $p < .005$; 95% CI [-0.39, -0.11], higher demand/withdraw communication, $b = .39$, $\beta = .26$, $p < .001$; 95% CI [0.18, 0.58], and higher avoidance-withholding communication $b = .13$, $\beta = .20$, $p = .004$; 95% CI [0.07, 0.19]. There were no significant partner effects for constructive communication, $b = -.01$, $\beta = -.10$, $p = .15$; 95% CI [-0.24, 0.04], demand/withdraw communication, $b = .10$, $\beta = .07$, $p = .33$; 95% CI [-0.04, 0.24], or avoidance-withholding communication, $b = -.009$, $\beta = -.01$, $p = .84$; 95% CI [-0.10, 0.08]. There were also no significant actor-partner interaction effects for constructive communication, $b = .02$, $\beta = .01$, $p = .12$; 95% CI [-0.006, 0.52], demand/withdraw communication, $b = -.02$, $\beta = -.02$, $p = .35$; 95% CI [-0.06, 0.02], or avoidance-withholding communication, $b = -.007$, $\beta = -.008$, $p = .45$; 95% CI [-0.03, 0.01].

Mediational Analyses at Wave 1

To test whether communication patterns mediated the association between social anhedonia and marital satisfaction at Wave 1, we used three separate APIMeMs (Lederman et al., 2011) to test each of the three communication patterns (i.e., constructive communication, demand/withdraw communication, avoidance-withholding communication) as mediators as

earlier mentioned. We again compared fit of the unconstrained model, in which the actor and partner effects were allowed to vary to a constrained model (see Table 2). Once more, the parameters constrained mediation models were favored over unconstrained models, and indirect effects were estimated along with estimates for each parameter. Because the model was constrained, there are four plausible indirect effects: an actor-actor effect (own social anhedonia on own marital satisfaction, mediated by own communication pattern); a partner-partner effect (own social anhedonia on partner marital satisfaction, mediated by partner communication pattern); an actor-partner effect (own social anhedonia on own marital satisfaction, mediated by partner communication pattern); and finally a partner-actor effect (own social anhedonia on partner marital satisfaction, mediated by own communication pattern). Table 3 shows the parameter estimates for each of the APIMeMs, and Table 4 shows the total as well as specific direct and indirect effects that are present in each of the models tested.

We first added constructive communication as a mediator. There was a significant effect between actor's social anhedonia and own marital satisfaction, and this association was mediated by actor's constructive communication, indirect effect: $b = -.22$, $\beta = -.15$, $p < .001$; 95% CI [-0.36, -0.10]. There were no other significant indirect effects. The pattern of results was the same when demand/withdraw was entered as a mediator in the model, indirect effect: $b = -.16$, $\beta = -.12$, $p < .001$; 95% CI [-0.25, -0.06]; and when avoidance-withholding communication was entered as a mediator in the model, indirect effect: $b = -.10$, $\beta = -.06$, $p < .05$; 95% CI [-0.16, -0.02]. In summary, the effect of actor social anhedonia on their own marital satisfaction was mediated via own self-reported communication patterns.

Discussion

Social anhedonia has been primarily associated with marked disinterest in social contact, preferences to remain alone, as well as lower rates of dating and marriage (Brown et al., 2007; Silvia & Kwapil, 2011). Previous research has shown that individuals who experience social anhedonia who are in romantic relationships are likely to report lower relationship quality and relationship functioning (Assaad & Lemay, 2018; Kwapil, 1998). However, these effects have focused on the individual level and have not been examined with a dyadic perspective. The current study provides a novel perspective of the role of social anhedonia in marital relationships, utilizing a dyadic perspective and a longitudinal analysis. We discuss our major findings below.

First, our results from a dyadic perspective are consistent with, and build on, previous research showing the negative effects of social anhedonia on relationship quality (Assaad et al., 2018). We demonstrated significant actor *and* partner effects, such that relationship partners' marital satisfaction suffers not only from their own levels of social anhedonia but also from their partner's level of social anhedonia. However, we did not find that the joint influence of social anhedonia had additional predictive utility on marital satisfaction. It was not the case that when both partners were high on social anhedonia, that the negative impact of social anhedonia on marital satisfaction was exacerbated or even reversed (i.e., compatibility). Thus, building on previous findings, our results demonstrate that social anhedonia can predict negative marital processes and poor marital adjustment for both partners in the relationship, but that there was no evidence of the joint influence of social anhedonia.

Interestingly, from a longitudinal perspective, own marital satisfaction did not decline as a function of social anhedonia, but partner marital satisfaction showed evidence of decline instead, albeit only marginally. In looking at the data in totality at both Wave 1 and 3, and

consistent with an enduring dynamics perspective (Huston et al., 2001), one's own social anhedonia impairs marital quality in the first year after marriage. There is also some marginal evidence of an emergent distress perspective, where there are differential changes in functioning over time, with declines in marital satisfaction as a function of the *partner's* level of social anhedonia, suggesting that even though this trait was present early in the marriage, its negative effects might continue for the partner over time. However, there was no evidence of decline in one's own level of marital satisfaction, suggesting that social anhedonia did not influence change in marital satisfaction over time beyond initial levels. Thus, social anhedonia generally affects marital satisfaction early on and with lasting effects. This is also consistent with prior research showing that personality traits predict the initial levels of marital quality rather than change in marital quality over time (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1997). However, it is also possible that due to attrition, we might have lost the couples with the highest levels of social anhedonia, and therefore we were unable to find any evidence of change; however, in post-hoc analysis, we were unable to find evidence of study retention differing by level of social anhedonia. Given that we could not examine marital satisfaction trajectories as a function of social anhedonia, future research could examine both social anhedonia and marital satisfaction over a longer period of time, beyond the first year of marriage, to garner stronger evidence regarding longitudinal effects.

Second, extending previous research, social anhedonia was associated with lower levels of constructive communication, higher levels of demand/withdraw communication, and higher levels of avoidance-withholding communication. This builds on previous research showing that social anhedonia is generally related to lack of verbal expression and responsiveness (Collins et al., 2005) as well as behavioral affiliative skills (Blanchard et al., 2015; Llerena et al., 2012).

However, from a dyadic perspective, we did not find that actors' social anhedonia also predicted *partners'* marital communication patterns. A possible reason why this could be is that people high in social anhedonia prefer solitude and are more often alone by choice (Kwapil et al., 2009). Hence, there is marked disinterest in social contact and a lack of interaction between partners. As such, partners of individuals high in social anhedonia may not experience much communication per se from his or her partner. It is possible that rather than partner's use of a type of communication *pattern* being predicted by actor's social anhedonia, it could be the frequency of communication that is predicted by social anhedonia instead. Furthermore, it is also possible that a partner's relative disinterest in interaction does not change the other's marital communication patterns. Beyond looking at frequency of contact or communication, future research could also examine the fulfillment of relatedness needs (Deci & Ryan, 1985) for the partners of those who are higher in social anhedonia.

Finally, our findings suggest that communication patterns are possible mechanisms by which social anhedonia is related to marital satisfaction. Mediation analyses revealed that communication patterns explain the link between social anhedonia and marital satisfaction via actor's communication patterns. Specifically, the effect of actor social anhedonia on their own marital satisfaction was mediated by their own mutual constructive communication, demand-withdraw communication, and avoidance-withholding communication. Hence, it does not seem that negative or destructive forms of communication are beneficial for individuals higher in social anhedonia, at least in the short-term time frame of a year, even though prior research has shown that there are contexts whereby destructive forms of communication might not always be maladaptive (e.g., Overall & McNulty, 2017). It is possible that avoidance-withholding

communication might align with disinterest in social contact and preferences to remain alone for some individuals, such that it becomes beneficial for such couples in the longer-term instead.

There were also no indirect effects on actor's level of marital satisfaction via partner's communication patterns, nor partner's level of marital satisfaction via actor's communication patterns. Again, it is possible that because social anhedonia is related to solitude seeking, avoidance of social interaction and infrequent communication in naturalistic settings (Kwapil et al., 2009), it may not be communication patterns, per se, but rather their thoughts, feelings, and other behaviors in response to social anhedonia that affects marital satisfaction instead. This could explain why our earlier model found effects of both actor and partner's social anhedonia on marital satisfaction; that is, the link between social anhedonia and marital satisfaction was driven primarily by actor communication patterns rather than partner communication patterns.

Limitations and future directions

There were several limitations to the current study. First, the sample consisted of relatively healthy different-sex newlywed couples with generally high levels of relationship satisfaction and low to average levels of social anhedonia. Newlywed samples are important for understanding how social anhedonia can impact relationship outcomes early in a marriage. This study took place before same-sex marriage was legalized in the state in which data were collected, which precluded the capture of same-sex newlywed couples. Thus, future research should examine these same processes in same-sex and LGBTQ+ couples to see how effects from this study generalize to other groups. Additionally, we obtained self-report measures of social anhedonia and marital communication patterns; future research should attempt to obtain partner-report, structured interview assessments or behavioral assessments (e.g., South et al., 2008; 2011) to examine objective measures of social anhedonia and marital communication and their

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effects on marital quality and functioning. Furthermore, we collected a sample of 100 couples; however, recent research examining associations between psychopathology and/or communication between newlywed couples (e.g., Lavner et al., 2015; 2016; Nguyen et al., 2020; Williamson & Lavner, 2020) has sample sizes ranging from 172 to 431 couples. Hence, future research examining the effects of social anhedonia could utilize larger samples with increased statistical power to determine if there might be homophily effects of social anhedonia, or if certain indirect effects of communication patterns remain significant with a multiple mediator model of the APIMeM (Ledermann et al., 2011).

Importantly, it is still an open question as to how these associations unfold over a longer period because our design only captured approximately a year after marriage. Given that some couples show fluctuations and declines in relationship satisfaction over time (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Lavner & Bradbury, 2010), the emergent distress model (Huston et al., 2001) represents a pathway that posits how personality traits could affect changes in relationship quality and functioning over time. Future studies could expand on the longitudinal design to examine whether these processes develop over a longer time as well, or if they stop after a certain time. This could allow us to better examine trajectories of marital satisfaction of both partners as a function of social anhedonia.

Future research could also examine other mediation processes that may explain the association between social anhedonia and marital satisfaction. For example, one way in which social anhedonia is likely to result in lower relationship satisfaction is the extent to which an individual perceives his or her partner as responsive. Responsiveness is a barometer of how the partner understands, cares for, and validates the self (Reis et al., 2004). Because individuals high in social anhedonia withdraw from social contact and engage in isolation, they are less

responsive to their partners. Prior research has shown that social anhedonia undermines perceptions of partner's regard to the self (Assaad & Lemay, 2018). Hence, as mentioned earlier, responsiveness (i.e., the extent to which one understands, validates, and cares for their partner; Reis et al., 2004) and perceived partner responsiveness (i.e., perceiving that one's partner understands, validates, and cares for them) could be other possible mediators. We showed that social anhedonia was positively associated with marital communication patterns, which could be operationalized as a proxy of responsiveness. It is possible that uncertainty and doubt about a romantic partner can arise in the relationship because of unresponsive partners (Reis et al, 2004; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011), thereby reducing trust and consequently marital satisfaction. The extent to which marital partners perceive responsiveness might mediate the association between social anhedonia and marital satisfaction.

Conclusion

Social anhedonia has traditionally been studied from the perspective of clinical psychology, in particular depression, schizotypy, and schizophrenia (Kwapil, 1998). Despite it having clear interpersonal implications, such as on the need to belong (Silvia & Kwapil, 2011), social anhedonia has not been extensively studied in the context of interpersonal, romantic, and marital relationships. Taken together, our results support that social anhedonia has negative impact on *both* partners in a newlywed marriage, and that self-reported communication styles partially mediated these effects but only for the actor. These findings open the door to future research linking social anhedonia to relationship dynamics by showing that although social anhedonia might be generally viewed as related to adverse outcomes, a more nuanced view should recognize its impact on both partners and from a longitudinal perspective as well.

Footnotes

¹ There was a minor error in the RSAS. Specifically, the item that participants read was, “I find that people often assume that their daily activities and opinions will be interesting to me” when it should have been “I find that people *too* often assume that their daily activities and opinions will be interesting to me”.

² For programming purposes, we made one change to the DAS. Specifically, “My relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.” was changed to “There is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.” Full details are available from the last author.

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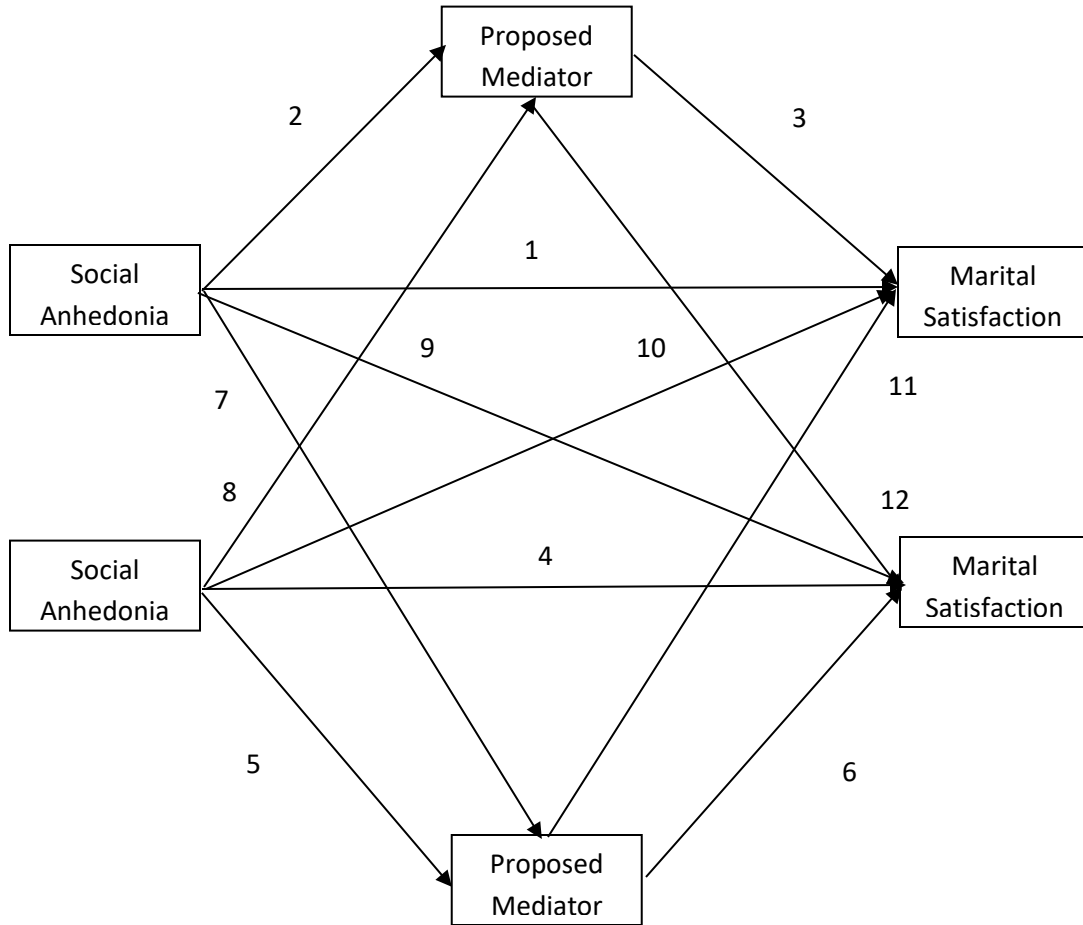


Figure 1. Conceptual Illustration of Mediation Model.

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Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for and Correlations between Social Anhedonia, Communication and Marital Satisfaction*

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1. Social Anhedonia	1					7.79	5.83
2. Constructive	-.24**	1				36.39	5.92
3. Demand/Withdraw	.27**	-.50**	1			20.15	8.49
4. Avoidance-Withholding	.20**	-.32**	.24**	1		7.95	3.71
5. Marital Satisfaction	-.26**	.58**	-.48**	-.33**	1	124.08	9.52

Note. N = 199 (100 couples).

*p < .05, **p < .01

Table 2. *Model Fit Indices for APIM Mediation Models of Social Anhedonia on Satisfaction through Communication*

<i>Model Fit Indices</i>							
Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	p-value	CFI	TLI	RMSEA (90% CI)
Constructive Communication							
Unconstrained Model	3.42	1.00	-	0.06	0.98	0.71	0.16 (0.00 - 0.35)
Parameters Constrained	14.91	7.00	11.49	0.04	0.93	0.86	0.11 (0.03-0.18)
Parameters & Variances Constrained	25.12	10.00	21.69	0.005	0.87	0.82	0.12 (0.06-0.18)
Parameters, Variances, & Means Constrained	38.77	13.00	35.34	0.0002	0.78	0.76	0.14 (0.09-0.19)
Demand/Withdraw							
Unconstrained Model	7.59	1.00	-	0.006	0.92	-0.14	0.26 (0.11-0.44)
Parameters Constrained	13.85	7.00	6.258	0.05	0.92	0.83	0.10 (0.00-0.18)
Parameters & Variances Constrained	24.72	10.00	17.13	0.006	0.82	0.75	0.12 (0.06-0.18)
Parameters, Variances, & Means Constrained	38.52	13.00	30.92	0.0002	0.69	0.66	0.14 (0.09-0.19)
Mutual Avoidance-Withholding							
Unconstrained Model	2.12	1.00	-	0.15	0.98	0.70	0.11 (0.00-0.31)
Parameters Constrained	10.58	7.00	8.458	0.16	0.93	0.86	0.07 (0.00-0.15)
Parameters & Variances Constrained	20.08	10.00	17.97	0.03	0.80	0.73	0.10 (0.03-0.16)
Parameters, Variances, & Means Constrained	36.50	13.00	34.38	0.0005	0.54	0.51	0.13 (0.08-0.19)

Note. χ^2 = chi-square statistic; df=degrees of freedom; CFI=Comparative Fit Index; TLI=Tucker Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation. Bolded models were best fitting models used.

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Table 3. *Unstandardized Parameter Estimates, 95% Confidence Intervals, and Standardized Parameter Estimates from Mediation Models of Social Anhedonia, Communication, and Marital Satisfaction*

Model	B	SE	95% CI	β
Constructive Communication				
ACTOR EFFECTS				
SA _A - DAS _A	-0.22**	0.09	-0.36 to -0.07	-0.11
SA _A -MED _A	-0.25**	0.09	-0.403 to -0.11	-0.20
MED _A - DAS _A	0.89***	0.10	0.73 to 1.05	0.52
PARTNER EFFECTS				
SA _A - DAS _P	-0.15*	0.09	-0.31 to -0.01	-0.10
SA _A - MED _P	-0.10	0.07	-0.21 to 0.02	-0.11
MED _A - DAS _P	-0.02	0.10	-0.19 to 0.14	-0.02
Demand/Withdraw				
ACTOR EFFECTS				
SA _A - DAS _A	-0.26**	0.09	-0.42 to -0.11	-0.13
SA _A -MED _A	0.36**	0.11	0.19 to 0.54	0.22
MED _A - DAS _A	-0.45***	0.07	-0.57 to -0.33	-0.36
PARTNER EFFECTS				
SA _A - DAS _P	-0.15	0.11	-0.32 to 0.03	-0.09
SA _A - MED _P	0.11	0.10	-0.06 to 0.28	0.09
MED _A - DAS _P	-0.14	0.11	-0.27 to 0.01	-0.13
Mutual Avoidance-Withholding				
ACTOR EFFECTS				
SA _A - DAS _A	-0.38***	0.10	-0.54 to -0.22	-0.18
SA _A -MED _A	0.11**	0.05	0.04 to 0.19	0.16
MED _A - DAS _A	-0.80***	0.17	-1.08 to -0.52	-0.28
PARTNER EFFECTS				
SA _A - DAS _P	-0.25*	0.12	-0.45 to -0.06	-0.16
SA _A - MED _P	0.009	0.04	-0.11 to 0.08	0.02

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MED _A - DAS _P	0.10	0.19	-0.21 to 0.41	0.04
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Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; A=Actor; P= Partner; SA=Social Anhedonia; MED=Mediator; DAS=Dyadic Adjustment Scale.

Table 4. *Unstandardized Parameter Estimates, Standard Errors, 95% Confidence Intervals, and Standardized Estimates from Mediation Models for Total, Total Indirect, and Specific Direct and Indirect Effects*

Model	b	SE	95% CI	β
Constructive Communication				
Actor Total Effect	-0.43***	0.11	-0.61 to -0.26	-0.30
Actor Total Indirect	-0.21***	0.08	-0.36 to -0.09	-0.15
SA _A - MED _P - DAS _A	0.03	0.01	-0.01 to 0.03	0.002
SA _A - MED _A - DAS _A	-0.22**	0.08	-0.36 to -0.10	-0.15
SA _A - DAS _A	-0.22**	0.09	-0.36 to -0.07	-0.15
Partner Total Effect	-0.24*	0.12	-0.45 to -0.04	-0.13
Partner Total Indirect	-0.08	0.07	-0.19 to 0.03	-0.05
SA _A - MED _P - DAS _P	0.006	0.03	-0.03 to 0.06	0.003
SA _A - MED _A - DAS _P	-0.09	0.06	-0.19 to 0.02	-0.05
SA _A - DAS _P	-0.15	0.09	-0.31 to -0.006	0.08
Demand/Withdraw				
Actor Total Effect	-0.44***	0.10	-0.61 to -0.25	-0.31
Actor Total Indirect	-0.18**	0.06	-0.28 to -0.06	-0.13
SA _A - MED _P - DAS _A	-0.02	0.02	-0.05 to 0.03	-0.01
SA _A - MED _A - DAS _A	-0.16**	0.06	-0.25 to -0.06	-0.12
SA _A - DAS _A	-0.26**	0.09	-0.42 to -0.08	-0.19
Partner Total Effect	-0.25*	0.12	-0.44 to -0.05	-0.13
Partner Total Indirect	-0.10	0.07	-0.21 to 0.007	-0.05
SA _A - MED _P - DAS _P	-0.05	0.03	-0.11 to 0.007	-0.03
SA _A - MED _A - DAS _P	-0.05	0.05	-0.13 to 0.03	-0.03
SA _A - DAS _P	-0.15	0.11	-0.33 to 0.03	-0.08
Mutual Avoidance-Withholding				
Actor Total Effect	-0.47***	0.11	-0.64 to -0.30	-0.33
Actor Total Indirect	-0.09*	0.04	-0.16 to -0.02	-0.06
SA _A - MED _P - DAS _A	0.001	0.01	-0.02 to 0.02	0.001

SA _A - MED _A - DAS _A	-0.10*	0.04	-0.16 to -0.02	-0.06
SA _A - DAS _A	-0.38***	0.10	-0.54 to -0.22	-0.26
Partner Total Effect	-0.25*	0.12	-0.45 to -0.05	-0.13
Partner Total Indirect	0.004	0.04	-0.07 to 0.08	0.002
SA _A - MED _P - DAS _P	0.01	0.02	-0.03 to 0.05	0.006
SA _A - MED _A - DAS _P	-0.007	0.04	-0.07 to 0.05	-0.004
SA _A - DAS _P	-0.25*	0.12	-0.45 to -0.06	-0.14

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; A=Actor; P= Partner; SA=Social Anhedonia; MED=Mediator; DAS=Dyadic Adjustment Scale.