



Research Paper: The Mediating Role of We-ness in the Relationship between Primary Object Relations and Ego Strength with Marital Stability



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Citation: Arabsalmani, G., Vaziri, S., Monirpour, N. (2026). The Mediating Role of We-ness in the Relationship between Primary object relations and Ego Strength with Marital stability. *Journal of Modern Psychology*, 6 (1), 11-24. <https://doi.org/10.22034/jmp.2026.566048.1164>

<https://doi.org/10.22034/jmp.2026.566048.1164>

Article info:

Received date:

19 Oct. 2025

Accepted date:

04 Dec. 2026

Keywords:

Attachment, Ego Strength, Marital Correlation, Parent-Child Relationships, Marital Stability

Abstract

Objective: The present study aims to investigate the factors influencing marital stability, considering the mediating role of we-ness.

Methods: The research method was descriptive-correlational study employed structural equation modeling (SEM) and the statistical population was all married individuals residing in Varamin and Pishva cities in 2025. Using a purposive sampling method, 388 participants were selected. Data was collected using the following standardized questionnaires: the Marital Instability Index (MII), the Bell Object Relations Inventory (BORI), the Ego Strength Scale (ESS), and the We-ness Questionnaire (WQ). Data analysis was performed using structural equation modeling and correlation tests.

Results: The final model demonstrated an acceptable fit to the data, with indices such as RMSEA = 0.076 and CFI = 0.899. All observed variables loaded significantly onto their respective latent constructs, with factor loadings exceeding 0.3 ($p < .05$). In addition, the mediating role of we-ness in the indirect relationship between primary object relations and ego strength with marital stability was confirmed.

Conclusion: The results highlight the importance of primary object relations and ego strength, as well as the key role of we-ness as an influential mechanism on marital stability. Consequently, designing educational interventions for parents (particularly mothers) focusing on primary object relations and fostering a sense of we-ness could contribute to enhanced marital durability.

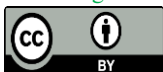
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1. Introduction

Marital stability is a critical consideration in any marriage, as identifying its contributing factors can lead to reduced divorce rates and increased marital durability and longevity (Piao et al., 2020).

Object relations theories predominantly focus on the primary child-mother relationship and its influence on the formation of the child's internal world and subsequent adult relationships. These theories are fundamentally developmental, positing that the core issue of development is the child's progression from a state of merger and dependence on the mother toward greater autonomy and differentiation. In a study by (Mortazavi Karimabad & Karam, 2025) The Roles of Object Relations, Paranoid Thoughts and Interdependence in the Stability of Married Women's Life (Mashhad City) found that the results of data analysis showed that there is a significant negative relationship between object relations, paranoid thoughts and interdependence with marital stability. In another research by (Kahraman, S., & Aktan, E. A., 2024), The Relationship Between Object Relations and Relationship Satisfaction, Marital Adjustment, and Sexual Satisfaction, The Mediating Role of Narcissistic and Borderline Personality Traits, found that object relations significantly predicted relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and marital adjustment, borderline and narcissistic personality traits partially mediated this relationship.

Findings from a study by (Abbasi et al, 2021), The relationship between the dimensions of object relations and marital satisfaction, the results of correlation analysis

showed that there is a significant negative relationship between marital satisfaction and the dimensions of object relations (egocentricity, alienation, insecure attachment and social inadequacy).

Building upon the foundational role of early relationships outlined by object relations theory, the internal psychological structure that develops from these experiences—referred to as ego strength—emerges as another critical determinant of marital outcomes. In a research done by Javadi Koma et al, (2024) Developing a causal model for predicting marital instability based on dark personality, The results showed that the total path coefficient was only between narcissistic personality and marital instability and ego strength with the mediation of empathy in married women. Characteristics of a competent self-include adequate judgment and reality testing, a sense of the reality of the world and the self, frustration tolerance, impulse control, the capacity for conceptualization and abstract thinking, appropriate use of defenses, stress tolerance, and the pursuit of engaging and pleasurable interests. Ego Strength is a fundamental element in personality formation, which, through proper development and enhanced ability to manage and confront challenges, affects the quality of marital life and dyadic relationships (Bayani et al., 2023).

While a strong internal ego structure is essential, the quality of a marital relationship is ultimately co-created in the interpersonal space between partners. This brings us to the concept of the I-You relationship and its mature form, We-ness. The I-You relationship was first introduced in Kant's philosophy and

later evolved into the concept of the We-relationship. Describing the We-ness, the emotional connection between two individuals, upon encounter, unfolds as follows: "I" approach "your" state, experience and comprehend "your" feelings, reflect this understanding back to "you" as clearly as possible, and this reflection alleviates "your" pain and suffering. The bond then strengthens, satisfaction returns from "you" to "me," and an exchange occurs. When "I" receive this satisfaction, pain and suffering diminish, and this cycle continues, ultimately leading to the We-ness (Jalovaara & Kulu, 2018). A study by (Cruwys et al., 2023) Measuring "we-ness" in couple relationships: A social identity approach concluded that couple research can fruitfully draw upon social identity theorizing in conceptualizing we-ness. Another study (Özgülük Üçok et al., 2025) We Are Together, but How Much Are We Truly 'We'? A Dyadic Approach with Turkish Emerging Adults, highlighting that women's and men's relationship satisfaction strongly predicted their commitment and we-ness.

Despite the recognition of both intrapsychic and dyadic factors in marital outcomes, a critical theoretical and empirical gap persists in understanding their integrated causal pathways. The existing literature often compartmentalizes these domains, examining object relations and ego strength as individual predictors (e.g., Kahraman & Aktan, 2024;

Javadi Koma et al., 2024) or studying we-ness as a relational outcome (Cruwys et al., 2023), without sufficiently illuminating how these internal schemas and resources manifest within the dyadic space of marriage to promote stability. This represents a "conceptual blind spot" in marital psychology: while the importance of both individual psychology and the couple's shared identity is acknowledged, the precise mechanism that translates the former into the latter to foster durability remains underexplored (Fincham & Beach, 2021). Specifically, there is a paucity of research that positions the dyadic construct of we-ness not merely as an outcome, but as the key mediating mechanism through which foundational intrapsychic variables exert their influence on marital stability. (Karney and Bradbury's, 1995) vulnerability-stress-adaptation model underscores the necessity of examining such adaptive processes within marriage, yet few studies have empirically modeled we-ness in this crucial mediating role. Consequently, no comprehensive model was found that simultaneously tests primary object relations and ego strength as antecedents, we-ness as the mediator, and marital stability as the outcome, creating a significant gap in designing interventions that effectively bridge individual predispositions and relational health. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by proposing and testing an integrated structural model to elucidate this mediating pathway.

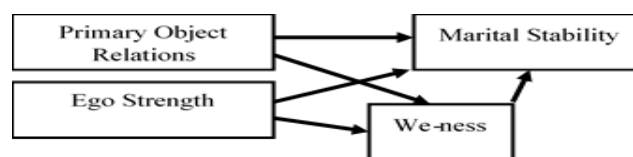


Figure 1. Relational model of the mediating role of We-ness in the relationship between Primary Object Relations, self-differentiation and marital stability

2. Methods

The present research was carried out by descriptive-correlation and structural equation modeling methods. The statistical population of this research includes married individuals living in Varamin and Pishva cities in 1404 who their marriage length is 7 years and more (The 7-year criterion was established based on research by Karney & Bradbury (1995), which identifies the first seven years of marriage as a critical period for establishing interactional patterns that predict long-term marital outcomes) 388 individuals were selected by purposive sampling method. To determine the sample size, the common rule of thumb for structural equation modeling (SEM) based on the ratio of sample size to the number of free parameters (N:q) was employed (Kline, 2010). Given the complexity of the research model, which includes one criterion variable, three predictor variables (measured by 13 subscales/indicators), and one mediating variable (measured by 6 subscales/indicators), a sample of 388 participants was selected to obtain stable and reliable parameter estimates. This sample size provides an adequate ratio (exceeding 10:1) relative to the estimated free parameters in the model and is sufficient for SEM analyses (Westland, 2010). Inclusion required individuals to be currently married and cohabiting, permanent residents of Varamin and Pishva cities, and to have a marital duration of at least 7 years. Eligible participants were also required to provide voluntary informed consent. Conversely, exclusion criteria were applied to individuals unwilling or unable to complete the study

questionnaire and singles and divorced individuals, were also excluded.

2.1. Instruments

Marital Instability Index (MII): This 14-item questionnaire, developed by Booth, Johnson et al, 1983, measures Marital stability. Each item is rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (very often). Scores were interpreted based on the following ranges: A score between 14 and 28 indicates low marital instability, A score between 28 and 42 indicates moderate marital instability, A score between 42 and 56 indicates high marital instability. Consequently, a higher total score reflects a greater propensity for separation or divorce-related thoughts. Regarding discriminant validity, the instrument developers reported in 1983 that only 3% of participants with low scores had ended their marriage permanently, whereas 27% of those with high scores had divorced (Jafari, 2009). The original scale has demonstrated strong reliability and validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for internal consistency have been reported as high (e.g., .90 for the full scale and .80 for the 4-item version). Test-retest reliability is also established (Booth et al., 1983). The scale has shown strong construct validity, correlating as expected with measures of marital happiness, conflict, and external pressures (Amato & Rogers, 1997). It has strong predictive validity for later divorce (Booth et al., 1985). The MII has been validated for use in Iranian samples. Studies have confirmed its acceptable psychometric properties. For instance, In the study by (Yaripour 2011), the split-half

reliability method was used to calculate the instrument's reliability coefficient, resulting in coefficients of 0.82 for the experimental group, 0.61 for the control group, and 0.70 for the total sample. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was calculated to be 0.892.

Bell Object Relations Inventory (BORI):

Primary object relations were assessed using the Bell Object Relations Inventory, developed by (Bell et al. 1995). This questionnaire is part of the 90-item Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI). Respondents answer each item as either true or false (scored as 1 or 0), according to the provided key. The sum of scores for items corresponding to each subscale determines the individual's score on that dimension. The inventory comprises four subscales: Alienation: Reflects the individual's capacity for trust and maintaining intimate relationships. High scores indicate a lack of trust and an inability to sustain stable, satisfying relationships. (Items 1, 15, 20, 21, 22, 29, 30, 33, 37, 41, 42). Insecure Attachment: Indicates sensitivity to rejection and hurt in relationships. High scores suggest a pathological worry about being loved/rejected and hypersensitivity to others' actions. (Items 2, 7, 12, 13, 16, 20, 23, 28, 33, 34, 36). Egocentricity: Characterizes pessimism about others' motives, viewing others as serving one's own needs, and a tendency to exploit them. High scores indicate a preoccupation with one's own goals/needs, an inability to empathize or invest emotionally, and demandingness in relationships. (Items 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 19, 22, 24, 27, 29, 31, 35, 39, 40, 41, 44). Social

Incompetence: Describes the individual's perceived ability to engage in social activities. High scores reflect difficulty making friends and anxiety in relationships, particularly with the opposite sex. (Items 6, 14, 18, 27, 28, 31, 32, 37, 38, 43). (Bell, 1995). In Iran, (Hadinejad et al., 2014) reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.68, 0.74, 0.74, and 0.85 for Social Incompetence, Egocentricity, Insecure Attachment, and Alienation, respectively. Correlations between the 90-item BORRTI symptom scales and these subscales ranged from 0.31 to 0.68. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was 0.803.

Ego Strength Scale (ESS): This is a 25-item self-report instrument designed and standardized by (Besharat, 2017) to measure an individual's perceived ability to control and manage difficult life situations. The scale assesses reactions to challenging life circumstances on a 6-point scale from 0 (very little) to 5 (very much), across five subscales: Self-Control (Items 3, 10, 13, 18, 24), Self-Resilience (Items 5, 11, 16, 23, 25), Developed Defense Mechanisms (Items 1, 4, 7, 19, 22), Problem-Focused Coping Strategies (Items 2, 8, 14, 17, 20), and Positive Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies (Items 6, 9, 12, 15, 21). The minimum and maximum scores for each subscale are 5 and 25, respectively. The total Ego Strength score, ranging from 25 to 125, is the sum of all five subscale scores. The psychometric properties of the ESS have been examined and confirmed in several studies conducted between 2005 and 2014 on clinical (n=372) and normal (n=1275) samples (Besharat, 2017). In the

present study, Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.917.

We-ness Questionnaire (WQ): Developed by [Vedes et al. \(2015\)](#), this 17-item questionnaire assesses several domains of couple functioning based on the concept of "We-ness" (we, us, our-ness) in managing shared life. It evaluates the degree of We-ness between spouses in areas such as feeling secure (Items 3, 7, 8, 14), empathy (Items 2, 6, 10,), commitment (Items 5, 13), mutual respect and understanding (Items 11, 16, 17), intimacy and enjoyment in the relationship (Items 4, 9, 15), and shared meaning/vision in life (Items 1, 12). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. Scoring is reversed for items 7, 10, 15, 16, and 17. The total score is the sum of all item scores, with a cut-off point of 43. Scores above this threshold indicate a higher degree of We-ness and marital unity. The questionnaire has six subscales, with scores for each derived from the sum of its respective items. Regarding validity, [Vedes et al. \(2015\)](#) confirmed the factorial validity of the WQ through confirmatory factor analysis. Reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients for internal consistency were $\alpha = 0.89$ for the total scale, $\alpha = 0.75$ for women, and $\alpha = 0.82$ for men. Subscale reliabilities were: Feeling Secure (0.79), Empathy (0.78), Commitment (0.81), Mutual Respect and Understanding (0.83), Intimacy in the Relationship (0.80), and Shared Meaning/Vision in Life (0.82). In Iran, [\(Cheraghi et al. 2017\)](#) confirmed the face and content validity through expert review and verified the six-factor structure via factor analysis, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95.

[\(Rahmati et al., 2020\)](#) also reported satisfactory validity and reliability for the WEQ. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for this instrument was 0.953.

This cross-sectional study received ethical approval from the Research Ethics Committee of Islamic Azad University, Qom Branch (Approval Code: IR.IAU.QOM.REC.1403.238). Data was collected over a six-month period, from December 2024 to May 2025.

All study questionnaires were consolidated into a single electronic survey using Google Forms. The survey link was distributed through targeted messaging groups on popular social media and messenger applications (e.g., Telegram, WhatsApp, Eitaa, ...) in the cities of Varamin and Pishva, Iran.

The first page of the online survey contained a detailed participant information sheet. This sheet outlined the research objectives, assured participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, emphasized the voluntary nature of participation, and stated their right to withdraw at any time without consequence.

The survey included a demographic section followed by the standardized scales measuring the study's main constructs (e.g., primary object relations, ego strength, we-ness, marital stability). No personally identifiable information was collected, preserving participant anonymity throughout the process. Data collection concluded after approximately six months, once an adequate sample size was reached

3. Results

The study sample comprised 388 participants. The majority were female ($n = 323$, 83.20%), with male participants constituting 16.80% ($n = 65$). In terms of marital duration, the largest proportion of participants (36.90%, $n = 143$) reported being married for 13 to 20 years, followed by equal percentages for the 7-12 year and 21–30-year brackets (each 29.40%, $n = 114$). A smaller segment (4.40%, $n = 17$) had been married for 31 to 40 years. Regarding age distribution, the largest group was aged 41-50 years (42.80%, $n = 166$), followed by those aged 31-40 years (37.60%, $n = 146$).

Participants aged 20-30 years and 50-70 years accounted for 8.20% ($n = 32$) and 11.30% ($n = 44$) of the sample, respectively. Most of the studied people were women, 323 individuals (83.20 percent) and the rest were men, 65 individuals (16.80 percent). Also, Most of the studied people were in the age range of 41-50 years (42.80 percent), and the least of them were in the age range of 20-30 years (8.20 percent). The most length of marriage was category of 13-20 years (36.90 percent) and the least length of marriage was category of 31-40 years (4.4 %).

Table 1.

Descriptive indices of research variables

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Egocentrism	4.89	3.80	0.97	0.46
Alienation	3.5	2.81	0.88	0.18
Insecure Attachment	6.72	3.60	0.39	-0.39
Social Incompetence	3.04	3.08	0.88	-0.22
Impulse Control	18.1	3.85	-0.86	0.72
Ego Resilience	17.98	4.19	-0.61	0.35
Mature Defense Mechanisms	16.51	3.83	-0.50	0.36
Problem Focused Coping Strategies	18.45	3.60	-0.84	1.02
Emotion Focused Coping Strategies	17.87	3.60	-0.63	0.59
Sense of Security	10.65	4.02	-0.66	-0.14
Empathy	8.5	3.20	-0.87	0.04
Commitment	5.48	2.31	-0.85	-0.12
Mutual Respect	8.32	2.98	-0.65	-0.32
Intimacy	7.99	3.00	-0.59	-0.40
Shared Vision in Life	5.23	2.13	-0.59	-0.40
Marriage Stability	21.51	7.06	1.25	0.95
Primary Object Relations	15.73	8.58	0.65	-0.21
Ego Strength	88.90	16.17	-0.86	1.22
We-ness	46.17	15.77	-0.75	0.02

Table 1 shows the descriptive information (mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis) related to the research variables.

Preliminary Analyses and Assessment of SEM Assumptions: Prior to conducting the primary structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses, the underlying assumptions for using maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS version [e.g., 28] were rigorously examined. First, the pattern of missing data was assessed. Less than 5% of the data points were missing completely at random (MCAR), as indicated by Little's MCAR test ($\chi^2 = 2.3$, $*p < 0.05$). These missing values were imputed using the series mean method to preserve the

sample size and statistical power. Second, the univariate normality of all observed variables was evaluated using skewness and kurtosis statistics (see Table 1 for descriptive indices). The absolute values of skewness for all variables ranged from 0.39 to 1.26, and the absolute values of kurtosis ranged from 0.04 to 1.22. Following the conservative guidelines by Kline (2010)—where skewness $< |3|$ and kurtosis $< |10|$ indicate no severe departure from univariate normality—the data were deemed acceptable for proceeding with SEM.

Table 2.
The model fit indices

Fit Indices	Model Value	Acceptable Criteria
Normed Chi-Square (χ^2/df)	2.9	<3
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.076	<0.08
Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)	0.640	<0.08
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.899	>0.90
Goodness of Fit Index (GFI)	0.835	>0.90
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	0.779	>0.90

Table 2 The model fit indices were as follows: Normed Chi-square (χ^2/df) = 2.90; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.076; Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = 0.640; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.899; Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.835; Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) = 0.779. While the Normed Chi-square ($\chi^2/df = 2.90$) and RMSEA (0.076) values fall within

their acceptable thresholds (<3 and <0.08, respectively), the values for SRMR (0.640), CFI (0.899), GFI (0.835), and AGFI (0.779) did not meet the conventional criteria for good fit (i.e., SRMR < 0.08, CFI > 0.90, GFI > 0.90, AGFI > 0.90). Therefore, the overall pattern of fit indices provides partial and limited support for the hypothesized model, suggesting potential areas for model misspecification.

Table 3 shows the information related to Pearson's correlation between moral identity,

self-defeating behavior and cognition, and emotional self-awareness.

Table 3
Correlation matrix of research variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	
1 Egocentrism	1																			
2 Alienation	.50**	1																		
3 Insecure_Attachment	.50**	.30**	1																	
4 Social_Incompetence	.53**	.42**	.45**	1																
5 Impulse_Control	-.27**	-.20**	-.21**	-.29**	1															
6 Ego_Resilience	-.26**	-.22**	-.20**	-.31**	.76**	1														
7 Mature_Defense_Mechanisms	-.12*	-.15**	-0.07	-.17**	.67**	.66**	1													
8 Problem_Focused_Coping_Stris	-.27**	-.20**	-.13**	-.25**	.73**	.63**	.55**	1												
9 Emotion_Focused_Coping_Stris	-.18**	-.22**	0.00	-.18**	.59**	.66**	.55**	.61**	1											
10 Sense_of_Security	-.15**	-.44**	-.13**	-.13**	.12*	.10*	0.05	0.07	-0.00	1										
11 Empathy	-.16**	-.53**	-.11*	-.19**	.17**	.11*	.10*	.14**	0.03	.78**	1									
12 Commitment	-.16**	-.56**	-.10*	-.18**	.12*	0.09	.10*	0.09	0.03	.77**	.82**	1								
13 Mutual_Respect	-.19**	-.49**	-.14**	-.19**	.163**	0.03	0.06	.13**	0.05	.75**	.75**	.74**	1							
14 Intimacy	-.14**	-.43**	-.16**	-.16**	.173**	.120*	.142**	.15**	0.04	.69**	.78**	.74**	.70**	1						
15 Shared_Vision_in_Life	-0.05	-.44**	-0.02	-0.09*	.122*	.104*	.114*	.115*	0.05	.77**	.76**	.82**	.71**	.69**	1					
16 Marriage_Stability	.27**	.50**	.18**	.16**	-.13**	-0.05	-.12*	-.12*	-.10*	-.59**	-.64**	-.64**	-.66**	-.59**	-.54**	1				
17 Primary Object Relations	.82**	.67**	.78**	.75**	-.32**	-.32**	-.17**	-.27*	-.16**	-.27**	-.32**	-.32**	-.33**	-.29**	-.20**	.36**	1			
18 Ego Strength	-.26**	-.23**	-.15**	-.28**	.89**	.88**	.81**	.82**	.80**	0.05	.13**	.10*	.10*	.15**	.12*	-.12*	-.30**	1		
19 We-ness	-.17**	-.54**	-.13**	-.18**	.16**	.10*	.10*	.13**	0.03	.90**	.91**	.90**	.87**	.86**	.87**	-.69**	-.32**	.13**	1	

According to the results of the correlation matrix, there is a negative and significant relationship between all subscales of Ego Strength and We-ness with Marital stability (Instability). Also, a positive and significant

relationship is observed between Primary object relations and Marital stability (Instability). Path coefficients are presented in [Figure 2](#).

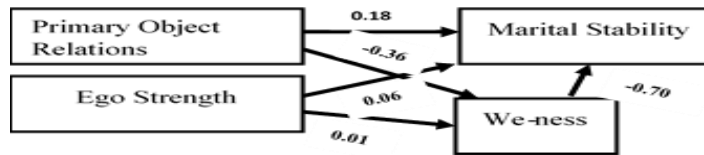


Figure 2. Path coefficients of the relational model of the mediating role of We-ness in the relationship between Primary object relations and Ego Strength and Marital stability.

In [Table 4](#), can see the standard coefficients of all paths and critical values in the proposed model.

Table 4.
Standard coefficients of the paths of the proposed model

Path	Standardized estimates	Unstandardized estimates	T	P
Primary object relations→Marital	0.23	0.52	4.07	0.001
Ego strength→Marital stability	0.42	0.89	3.5	0.0005
we-ness→Marital stability	0.5	1.1	4.2	0.0001

Direct effect of Primary object relations on Marital stability the path from Primary object relations to marital stability indicates a direct and positive influence of Primary object relations on marital stability ($\beta = 0.23, p < .001$). For each unit increase in Primary Object Relations, marital stability increases by 0.23 units. This statistically significant coefficient reflects a positive and notable effect. The results of the structural equation analysis showed that the Direct effect of Primary object relations on marital stability (marital instability) is 0.23. This positive coefficient indicates a direct and significant relationship between these two variables. This finding is theoretically and empirically logical, as Primary object relations (e.g., egocentricity,

alienation, insecure attachment, and social incompetence) can influence the quality of a couple's relationship. For instance, insecure attachment may reduce trust and intimacy within the relationship, directly impacting marital stability (instability). Direct effect of Ego Strength on Marital stability. The results of the structural equation analysis showed that the Direct effect of ego strength (equated with the self-regulation variable) on marital stability is 0.42 and is statistically significant ($\beta = 0.42, p = .0005$). This positive coefficient indicates a direct and strong relationship between these two variables. The bootstrap results for the intermediate paths of the proposed model of the current research can be seen in [Table 5](#).

Table 5
Bootstrap results for the indirect path of the proposed model

Path	Data	Boot	Bias	Error	Lower limit	Upper limit	P
object relations→We-ness→Marital	0.077	0.077	0	0.0529	-0.0267	0.180	>
Ego strength→We-ness→Marital	-	-	0	0.0399	-0.1523	0.004	>

4. Discussion

The present study proposed and tested an integrated model to elucidate the pathways through which intrapsychic factors (primary object relations and ego strength) influence marital stability, with a specific focus on the mediating role of the dyadic construct of we-

ness. The findings offer a nuanced understanding that bridges individual psychology with relational dynamics in the context of marriage. The Central Role of We-ness. The most robust finding of this study was the strong, direct effect of we-ness on marital stability ($\beta = 0.50$). This result

powerfully confirms the theoretical proposition that the quality of the marital relationship itself—encapsulated by the shared identity, intimacy, empathy, and emotional security of "we-ness"—is a paramount determinant of its endurance (Jalovaara & Kulu, 2018). This aligns with the social identity perspective on couples, which posits that a strong sense of "us" is foundational to relationship functioning (Cruwys et al., 2023). The finding underscores that marital stability is not merely the absence of conflict or the sum of two individuals' health, but is actively co-created in the interpersonal space between partners.

Direct Effects: Intrapsychic Foundations The model also revealed significant direct effects of both primary object relations and ego strength on marital stability. The positive direct effect of primary object relations ($\beta = 0.23$) supports the core tenet of object relations theory, which asserts that internalized models of early relationships profoundly shape adult relational patterns (Graziano & Trogal, 2017). Individuals with more problematic primary object relations (e.g., higher egocentricity, alienation, insecure attachment) likely import these schemas into their marriage, creating friction and instability, as evidenced in prior correlational studies (Abbasi et al., 2021; Kahraman & Aktan, 2024).

Conversely, the direct effect of ego strength ($\beta = 0.42$) highlights the protective role of individual psychological resources. As theorized by (Frederick, 2013) and (Bayani et al., 2023), ego strength equips individuals with the capacity for reality

testing, impulse control, and stress tolerance. These competencies enable partners to navigate marital challenges adaptively, manage conflicts constructively, and maintain relational equilibrium, thereby directly bolstering stability.

The Mediating Pathway: Bridging the Intrapsychic and the Interpersonal While the direct effects are significant, the proposed mediating pathway provides the most compelling contribution of this study. The results indicate that a portion of the influence of both intrapsychic variables operates *through* the enhancement or diminishment of we-ness. This mediation effect, though the specific indirect path for ego strength was not statistically significant in the bootstrap analysis, is supported by strong theoretical logic and correlational patterns. It suggests that early relational templates (object relations) and internal regulatory resources (ego strength) may affect marital stability not only directly but also by facilitating or hindering the development of a strong, unified "we." For instance, secure internal working models and strong ego functioning likely enable the reciprocal empathy and vulnerability required for the "I-You" encounter described by (Jalovaara and Kulu, 2018), which is the engine of we-ness. This dyadic quality, in turn, becomes the most immediate and potent source of marital stability. This finding addresses the conceptual gap identified by Fincham and Beach (2021), demonstrating a mechanism that translates individual predispositions into relational outcomes. It empirically supports the call to move beyond compartmentalized research by integrating

these domains within a single framework (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Limitations and Theoretical Integration
It is important to note that the model's fit indices suggested room for improvement, indicating potential misspecification. This may point to the existence of other unmeasured mediating variables (e.g., communication patterns, specific attachment behaviors) or more complex interactions between the constructs. Furthermore, the non-significant bootstrap result for the indirect effect of ego strength invites further investigation with larger samples or refined measures. Nonetheless, the integrated model provides a valuable framework. It moves the field beyond simply listing risk and protective factors for marital stability (Mohsenikabir et al., 2021; Piao et al., 2020) toward explaining *how* these factors are organized and exert their influence. It validates the necessity of focusing on the relationship itself, not just the individuals within it.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that marital stability is best understood as an outcome woven from both the threads of individual psychology and the fabric of the shared relational identity. The construct of we-ness emerges not merely as a correlate, but as a crucial conduit and active ingredient in this process, offering a clear target for clinical interventions aimed at strengthening marriages and reducing divorce rates.

5. Conclusion

In summary, this study provides empirical support for a model in which marital stability is influenced by a chain of psychological and

relational factors. The findings demonstrate that while robust intrapersonal resources like ego strength are important, their impact is substantially channeled through the dyadic construct of we-ness. Similarly, the lingering effects of early object relations on adult marriage are mediated by the quality of the shared identity formed by the couple. This highlights a crucial clinical insight: interventions aimed at enhancing marital stability should move beyond focusing solely on individual pathologies or skills. Instead, they should prioritize fostering the couple's shared sense of "we"—their intimacy, empathy, and emotional connection—as this interpersonal bond serves as the primary pathway through which both individual psychological health and early relational experiences ultimately promote a lasting and stable marriage.

Acknowledgment

The researchers appreciate all the people who contributed to this research.

Conflict of interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any organization. Also, this research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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