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A Structural Model of Marital Commitment Based on Psychological Flexibility Mediated by We-ness in Couples with Low Marital Adjustment

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to develop and evaluate a structural model of marital commitment based on psychological flexibility, with we-ness mediating the relationship, in couples with low marital adjustment.

Methods and Materials: A descriptive–correlational design was employed, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used for analysis. The statistical population consisted of married couples attending private counseling centers in Karaj, Iran, in 2024. Using convenience sampling, 300 couples (300 men and 300 women) participated. Data were collected using the Marital Adjustment Questionnaire, the Marital Commitment Questionnaire, the Psychological Flexibility Questionnaire, and the We-ness in Couple Relationship Questionnaire. Analyses were performed using SPSS and AMOS 26 to assess model fit and mediating effects.

Findings: Psychological flexibility had a significant direct effect on marital commitment (β = 0.32, p = 0.001) and on we-ness (β = 0.55, p = 0.001). We-ness directly affected marital commitment (β = 0.61, p = 0.001) and mediated the relationship between psychological flexibility and marital commitment (indirect effect β = 0.34, p = 0.001). Model fit indices indicated good fit (χ^2/df = 2.10, RMSEA = 0.05, CFI = 0.94, GFI = 0.96).

Conclusion: Enhancing psychological flexibility may improve marital commitment in low-adjustment couples by strengthening we-ness. Interventions targeting flexibility and shared relational identity can promote marital stability and satisfaction.

Keywords: Marital commitment, psychological flexibility, we-ness, marital adjustment, structural equation modeling.

Introduction

Marital adjustment is essential for successful marriages and requires couples to function as a unit and collaborate in decision-making (Eftekhari et al., 2021; Feyzabadi et al., 2025; Priyadharshini & Gopalan, 2020). Good marital adjustment not only meets the emotional needs of both partners but also provides support, comfort, and assistance in adapting to stressful events, ultimately improving health outcomes and disease management (Brigoli & Sandoval, 2023). Marital commitment is a strong predictor of marital satisfaction, love, and adjustment across diverse cultural contexts (Malm et al., 2023). Couples who display higher levels of adjustment typically show stronger commitment to their relationship (Parajuli, 2024). Marital commitment is a fundamental pillar of marital quality, stability, and adjustment, as it influences various aspects of the relationship, including communication and conflict resolution (Obodiat et al., 2025). Marital commitment can predict the likelihood of maintaining satisfaction with the marital relationship over time or, conversely, moving toward marital discord and extramarital relationships (Sharma & Suresh, 2021). Studies indicate that marital commitment is strongly associated with relationship quality (e.g., adjustment, satisfaction, happiness, cohesion, commitment, emotional and sexual intimacy, etc.) (Cordonnier, 2022).

One variable that appears to be related to marital commitment is the *we-experience*. The reciprocal I–Thou relationship was first introduced in Kant's philosophy and later developed into a "we" relationship. The we-experience can be defined as follows: an emotional connection between two people occurs immediately upon encounter, such that I move closer to your inner state and experience and understand your feelings. I then convey this understanding to you as clearly as possible, and this reflection reduces your suffering and pain. After my understanding of your feelings is reflected to you, your distress decreases. Next, the strengthened bond and your sense of satisfaction return to me, and an exchange takes place. When I receive this satisfaction, my own pain and suffering are reduced. I reflect this to you, and the cycle continues—ultimately resulting in a we-experience (Gildersleeve et al., 2017).

One of the most important predictors of marital commitment is cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility is defined as an individual's awareness of communication alternatives, willingness to adapt to the situation, and self-efficacy for flexibility (Alveal-Mellado & Giménez-Llort, 2024). Unsuccessful couples show deficits in cognitive flexibility, whereas individuals with this capacity have greater confidence in their ability to communicate effectively, especially in new situations (Cochrane, 1973). Dennis & Vander Wal (2010) identified three dimensions of cognitive flexibility: (1) perceiving difficult situations as controllable, (2) having a high ability to generate alternative explanations for life events and human behavior, and (3) offering multiple solutions in difficult situations. Dennis & Vander Wal (2010) confirmed these dimensions within two factors: perceived controllability and perceived alternatives or justification of behavior; the second factor has been labeled "problem-solving processing" in domestic validation studies (Mirzaei et al., 2025). Cognitive flexibility balances individuals' thoughts and actions in response to others and their environment, enhancing adaptive capacity and well-being (Musslick & Bizyaeva, 2024). Reports suggest that people with flexible thinking use alternative justifications, positively reframe their mindset, and accept challenging situations or stressful events (Brashear & Thomas, 2022). On the other hand, findings indicate that a large proportion of marital conflicts stem from external stressors; therefore, flexibility can play a buffering role by mediating the relationship between external stressors and marital conflicts (McDonald et al., 2020).

Designing the proposed structural model, in addition to addressing this scientific gap, enables the simultaneous, interactive examination of the effects of different variables. This model seeks to explain the direct and indirect effects of psychological flexibility on marital commitment by better understanding the we-experience. Through this model, influential pathways among the target variables can be identified, and practical policies can be developed to strengthen marital commitment in couples with low adjustment. Specifically, this model can help therapists and family counselors gain a deeper understanding of couples' underlying problems and offer evidence-based, experience-informed interventions to improve the quality of marital life. Ultimately, the designed structural model will provide a foundation for further research in this area and contribute to advancing both theoretical

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and applied knowledge in marital relationships. Accordingly, the present study aims to propose a preliminary structural model of the causal relationship between marital commitment and psychological flexibility variables, mediated by the we-experience, in couples with low marital adjustment. Beyond expanding the boundaries of knowledge in family psychology, the proposed model may facilitate the design of psychological interventions to enhance the quality of couples' relationships. Therefore, the present study examines whether a model of marital commitment based on psychological flexibility, mediated by the we-experience, fits the data well in couples with low marital adjustment.

Methods and Materials

Study Design

The present study employed a descriptive–correlational design using structural equation modeling (SEM). The statistical population comprised all married individuals with low marital adjustment who visited private counseling centers in Alborz Province (Karaj) in 2024 and were identified using the Marital Adjustment Questionnaire. A convenience sampling method was used to select the study sample. Kline (2012) suggested that at least 250 participants are required for SEM. In this study, 300 couples (300 women and 300 men) were selected as the sample.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: participants had to be between 20 and 50 years old to examine marital commitment across different stages of married life. Couples had to have been married for at least one year to ensure sufficient experience of married life. Couples also had to fall within the low marital adjustment category based on the marital adjustment questionnaire. A minimum ability to read and write, and to understand psychological concepts, was required to complete the questionnaires and participate in interviews/discussions. Participation had to be voluntary and based on informed consent.

Exclusion criteria included: couples who had been formally diagnosed with severe psychological disorders (e.g., psychotic disorders or severe depression) were excluded. Couples who lacked interest or motivation to participate or to complete the questionnaires were also excluded. Changes such as legal separation, migration to other areas, or conditions that prevented continued participation were considered grounds for withdrawal. Couples who had participated in similar studies within the past six months were excluded due to the risk of bias. Participants who completed the research instruments (questionnaires and tests) incompletely or with invalid responses were excluded.

Instruments

Spanier Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (Spanier, 1976): The Spanier (1976) Marital Adjustment Questionnaire was used in this study. This instrument includes 32 items and is scored on a 6-point Likert scale from 0 (we always disagree) to 5 (we always agree). It assesses four dimensions of the couple's relationship: marital satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression. The questionnaire yields four subscale scores and one total score representing overall relationship satisfaction. The maximum score is 160, and the minimum is 0; higher scores indicate a better, more compatible relationship. Spanier confirmed its validity and reported a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96 (Sharma & Suresh, 2021).

*Marital Commitment Questionnaire (*Adams & Jones, 1997*):* This questionnaire was developed by Adams & Jones (1997) to assess couples' commitment to their spouse and marriage. It consists of 44 items rated on a 5-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, measuring three dimensions of marital commitment: commitment to the spouse, commitment to the marriage, and structural commitment (i.e., feeling trapped). Items 11, 12, 16, 23, 28, 29, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36, and 38 are reverse-scored. Total scores range from 44 to 220, with higher scores indicating higher overall marital commitment. Adams & Jones (1997) reported reliabilities of 0.91, 0.89, and 0.86 for commitment to spouse, commitment to marriage, and structural commitment, respectively. Abbasi Molid (2009) examined the psychometric properties of this instrument and reported a content validity coefficient (kappa) of 0.90. Correlations between the subscales and the total score ranged from 0.66 to 0.81, supporting construct validity. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subscales were reported as 0.81, 0.83, and 0.79, indicating acceptable reliability. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.76.

*Psychological Flexibility Questionnaire (*Ben-Itzhak et al., 2014*):* The Psychological Flexibility Questionnaire

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was developed by Ben-Itzhak et al. (2014) and includes 20 items across five subscales: positive interpretation of change; identifying oneself as a flexible person; identifying oneself as open and creative; interpreting reality as dynamic and changeable; and interpreting reality as multifaceted. Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 6 (very much). Total scores range from 20 to 120; higher scores indicate greater flexibility. Reliability, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, was reported as 0.91. Construct and convergent validity were also examined. Using varimax rotation, five factors were identified that explained 66.8% of the total variance. The questionnaire showed positive correlations with openness and self-efficacy scales. Seyyedjafari et al. (2025) validated the Persian version and found that, with varimax rotation, five factors explained 59.83% of the variance; Cronbach's alpha for the total scale was 0.89.

We-ness in Couple Relationship Questionnaire (WCRQ): This questionnaire was developed by Cruwys et al. (2023) and consists of 47 items with four subscales: couple identity (25 items), couple bond (10 items), relationship orientation (9 items), and couple similarity (3 items). It is rated on a 7-point Likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to agree (7) strongly. Higher scores indicate greater we-ness in the couple relationship. For convergent validity, correlations with a relationship satisfaction scale were computed, yielding values of 0.71, 0.34, 0.23, and 0.27 for couple identity, couple bond, relationship orientation, and couple similarity, respectively. For divergent validity, correlations with a relationship instability scale were examined, yielding values of −0.46, −0.26, −0.10, and −0.10 for the four components, all of which were significant and supported the questionnaire's convergent validity. Reliability assessed via Cronbach's alpha was 0.97 for the total scale, and 0.96, 0.93, 0.91, and 0.79 for couple identity, couple bond, relationship orientation, and couple similarity, respectively—indicating acceptable reliability. After factor analysis, 46 items across four components were confirmed; one item was removed due to a non-significant factor loading. The final Persian version includes 46 items and four components: couple identity (25 items), couple bond (9 items), relationship orientation (9 items), and couple similarity (3 items). Convergent and divergent validity were supported via correlations with marital quality and marital instability questionnaires. Cronbach's alpha for internal consistency was 0.96 for the total scale and 0.96, 0.92, 0.89, and 0.86 for the subscales, respectively. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.84.

Procedure

In this study, data were collected through a survey using questionnaires. Standard questionnaires included the Spanier Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (Spanier, 1976), the Marital Commitment Questionnaire by Adams & Jones (1997), the Psychological Flexibility Questionnaire by Ben-Itzhak et al. (2014), and the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire by Gratz & Roemer (2004). The statistical population included married individuals with low marital adjustment who visited counseling centers in Karaj in the year 1404. Convenience sampling was used, and based on Kline's (2012) recommendation, 300 couples (300 men and 300 women) were selected as the sample.

Questionnaires were completed in person, in a calm setting, and in the researcher's presence to ensure data quality. Before completing the questionnaires, participants were informed about the study objectives and signed an informed consent form. Ethical considerations included ensuring that research officials and assistants maintained the confidentiality of participants' information; providing research reports or results to educational–treatment centers upon request; reassuring participants about the confidentiality of their data; fully explaining the research objectives; and providing participants with the study results upon completion. The present study received the ethics code IR.IAU.TON.REC.1404.082. The use of research instruments with adequate validity and reliability enabled the collection of valid and accurate data on marital commitment, psychological flexibility, emotion regulation, and the we-experience in marital life.

Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted at two levels: descriptive and inferential. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the study variables, including mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. Frequency and percentage indices were also reported for demographic characteristics. Inferential statistics were applied to generalize findings from the sample to the larger population. In this study, structural equation modeling was used to test the hypotheses and to confirm

or reject them. AMOS and SPSS (version 26) were used for data analysis.

Findings and Results

The results indicate that the mean age of participants in this study was 34.4 years (SD = 9.33). The youngest participants were 20 years old, and the oldest were 50 years old. Regarding education, 212 participants (35.3%) held a high school diploma, 198 (33.0%) had an associate degree, and 190 (31.7%) had a bachelor's degree. Descriptive findings for the study variables are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for the study variables and their subscales

Variable	Subscale	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Psychological Flexibility	Positive interpretation of change	11.8	4.02	0.056	−0.765
	Self-identification as a flexible person	14.8	4.49	0.089	−0.114
	Self-identification as open and creative	11.1	4.41	−0.123	0.111
	Interpreting reality as dynamic	12.3	3.31	0.345	1.21
Marital Commitment	Commitment to marriage	21.9	3.06	0.205	0.004
	Sense of commitment	27.2	3.64	−0.136	0.240
We-Experience (We-ness)	Couple identity	43.5	5.22	0.649	0.867
	Couple bond	33.3	4.27	−0.535	−0.065
	Relationship orientation	29.9	3.84	−0.896	−0.272
	Couple similarity	15.6	2.28	−0.341	−0.445

Table 1 presents the descriptive findings for the subscales of the variables under investigation. The reported skewness and kurtosis values fall within the range of −3 to +3, indicating approximate univariate normality. A common guideline suggests that if skewness and kurtosis fall outside the interval (−3, +3), the data deviate from normality (Kline, 2012). Based on Table 1, none of the indicators have skewness or kurtosis values outside this range; therefore, they can be considered normally distributed or approximately normal.

One of the assumptions of SEM is multivariate normality. In AMOS, this is examined using Mardia's multivariate kurtosis coefficient. Bentler (2010) suggested that Mardia values greater than **5** indicate non-normality (Byrne, 2012). In the present study, Mardia's coefficient was 2.80, indicating that the assumption of multivariate normality was met. When continuous data do not substantially deviate from normality, the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method can be used.

Another assumption of SEM is the absence of multicollinearity among predictor variables. This is assessed using tolerance and the variance inflation factor (VIF). Tolerance ranges from 0 to 1; for each independent variable, a tolerance greater than 0.10 suggests no problematic multicollinearity with other predictors. Likewise, VIF values below 10 support the absence of multicollinearity. To examine the initial model of the study (addressing the overall hypothesis that *a model of marital commitment based on psychological flexibility, mediated by we-experience, in couples with low marital adjustment shows acceptable fit*), model estimation results in the standardized solution, and key goodness-of-fit indices are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Model fit indices

Fit Index	Value	Acceptable Threshold
χ^2/df	2.10	< 3
RMSEA	0.05	< 0.10
CFI	0.94	> 0.90
NFI	0.91	> 0.90
GFI	0.96	> 0.90
AGFI	0.94	> 0.90

Overall, when working with AMOS, no single index alone confirms or rejects model fit; the indices should be interpreted collectively. The obtained values indicate that, in general, the model demonstrated an acceptable level of explanatory power and goodness of fit. Next, the measurement model indices are reported.

Table 3

Standardized factor loadings and significance levels for the measurement models

Scale	Component	Standardized Loading	p
Psychological Flexibility	Positive interpretation of change	0.87	0.001
	Self-identification as a flexible person	0.89	0.001
	Self-identification as open and creative	0.91	0.001
	Interpreting reality as dynamic	0.96	0.001
We-Experience	Couple identity	0.69	0.001
	Couple bond	0.70	0.001
	Relationship orientation	0.65	0.001
	Couple similarity	0.53	0.001
Marital Commitment	Commitment to spouse	0.77	0.001
	Commitment to marriage	0.68	0.001
	Structural commitment	0.80	0.001

As shown in Table 3, all factors had statistically significant factor loadings at the 99% confidence level ($p < 0.01$). Because the paths between variables in the tested models correspond to the study hypotheses, the direct and indirect effects were examined next.

Table 4

Standardized coefficients and significance of direct and indirect effects on marital commitment

Criterion Variable	Predictor	Effect Type	Standardized β	t	p
Marital Commitment	Psychological flexibility	Direct	0.32	3.10	0.001
Marital Commitment	We-experience	Direct	0.61	8.71	0.001
We-experience	Psychological flexibility	Direct	0.55	6.06	0.001
Marital Commitment	Psychological flexibility	Indirect (via we-experience)	0.34	4.21	0.001

Table 4 indicates that psychological flexibility had a significant direct effect on marital commitment ($\beta = 0.32$, $t = 3.10$, $p = 0.001$). We-experience also had a significant direct effect on marital commitment ($\beta = 0.61$, $t = 8.71$, $p = 0.001$). Psychological flexibility had a significant direct effect on we-experience ($\beta = 0.55$, $t = 6.06$, $p = 0.001$).

To examine the mediating role of we-experience in the relationship between psychological flexibility and marital commitment, the Sobel test was used. The Sobel (1982)test is a commonly used method for assessing the significance of an indirect (mediated) effect by evaluating the significance of *ab* against the normal distribution (Z), using the standard error of the mediator. Specifically, the product of the two unstandardized coefficients that constitute the mediation paths is divided by the standard error of this product, and the resulting ratio is compared with the normal distribution. If the obtained ratio exceeds 1.96, the mediating effect is considered significant.

The Sobel test formula is:

z-value = a*b / SQRT(b^2*sa^2 + a^2*sb^2 + sa^2*sb^2)

In this equation, a and b are the unstandardized path coefficients for paths *a* and *b*, and sa and sb are the standard errors for those paths. Therefore, unstandardized coefficients and standard errors for the two relevant paths are required. Sobel argued that this ratio asymptotically follows a normal distribution, and when it exceeds ±1.96 in large samples, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 0.05 significance level.

Based on the results, the hypothesis that psychological flexibility has an indirect effect on marital commitment through the we-experience was supported at the 99% confidence level ($p < 0.01$). Overall, the SEM results showed that the proposed model demonstrated

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acceptable fit, and all direct and indirect pathways were supported. We-experience played a significant mediating role in explaining the relationship between psychological variables and marital commitment.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings showed that psychological flexibility directly affects we-experience (we-ness) among couples with low marital adjustment. This result is consistent with previous studies by Afshani & Yoosefi (2023); Eshghi (2023); Izadi et al. (2025); Razazan (2025); Tajizadegan et al. (2021); Alea et al. (2015); Nallepalli & Murugesan (2025).

To explain this finding, it can be argued that we-experience, as a sense of "being a *we*," is not merely the product of short-term interactive behaviors; rather, it is grounded in an internal regulatory capacity that enables individuals to manage thoughts, emotions, and conflicts without disrupting the relationship. Psychological flexibility provides precisely such a capacity. We-experience emerges when both partners can simultaneously meet two seemingly conflicting needs: maintaining individuality and building a shared identity. Couples with low adjustment often overcommit to one of these poles: they either become trapped in defensive self-centeredness or dissolve into unhealthy enmeshment. By increasing the ability to observe thoughts and emotions without over-identifying with them or avoiding them, psychological flexibility supports healthy boundaries while preserving emotional closeness. In other words, the "we" becomes stable when the "I" has sufficient flexibility to remain present in the relationship.

In low-adjustment couples, conflicts are frequent, and emotions are intense. The researcher argues that if individuals cannot tolerate and re-regulate negative emotions, conflict threatens the relationship's identity, and the we-experience collapses. Psychological flexibility, by enhancing distress tolerance and enabling value-based responses rather than impulsive reactions, helps partners avoid interpreting conflict as "the end of us." This explanation aligns with evidence highlighting the role of emotion regulation in marital outcomes (Nallepalli & Murugesan, 2025; Razazan, 2025). We-experience is not a static phenomenon; it is a set of shared meanings that must be reconstructed when

Therefore, it can be concluded that strengthening couples' we-experience may enhance the positive effects of psychological flexibility and emotion regulation on marital commitment.

couples face pressures. Psychological flexibility allows couples to reframe the meanings of failure, frustration, and disagreement—so that, instead of attributing the problem to the essence of the relationship or the spouse, they perceive it as a manageable event along the path of "us." Such reframing keeps the we-experience active even when marital adjustment is low.

A key barrier to we-experience in low-adjustment couples is defensive self-centeredness, in which individuals, to reduce distress, turn the relationship into a battlefield for self-defense. Psychological flexibility reduces the shift toward chronic defensiveness by strengthening acceptance of unpleasant emotions and cognitive defusion, redirecting attention toward the relationship's goals of maintaining and nurturing the bond. This mechanism explains why psychological flexibility can directly influence we-experience: even without immediate behavioral change, the way individuals are psychologically present in the relationship is transformed. Consistent findings show that psychological flexibility is positively associated with marital adjustment and relationship quality (Eshghi, 2023; Golan Bayazy & Gur, 2025) and may play a role in causal pathways related to marital outcomes (Körük et al., 2023). From the researcher's perspective, when considered alongside the present results, these findings suggest that we-experience is an important channel through which flexibility reaches the level of meaning and relational identity.

Psychological flexibility directly affects the way we experience because both operate primarily at the level of intrapersonal processes. Attentional regulation, emotional acceptance, and value-based responding change individuals' perceptions of the relationship before these processes appear as overt behavior. Therefore, even if variables such as satisfaction or commitment are not treated as mediators, our experience can still be directly influenced by psychological flexibility. In couples with low adjustment, emotional pressure is high and regulatory resources are depleted more rapidly; in such contexts, individual differences in flexibility become more salient. The researcher argues that in a highly tense relational

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environment, only those with greater internal regulatory capacity can maintain a sense of "we-ness." This helps explain why the observed effect in this group is meaningful and robust. Evidence also suggests that our experience is related to marital stability and quality (Afshani & Yoosefi, 2023; Gildersleeve et al., 2017; Huang et al., 2020). From this perspective, the effect of psychological flexibility on we-experience is not only explanatory but also preventive: strengthening flexibility may protect shared identity from erosion even when conflicts persist. By fostering emotional tolerance (meaning reframing), healthy boundaries, and a value-oriented direction, psychological flexibility directly strengthens our experience. This effect becomes more pronounced among low-adjustment couples, in which conflicts threaten the relationship's identity. Thus, the present finding is not only consistent with prior literature but also provides a clear framework for understanding how "we-ness" can be sustained under difficult relational conditions.

The results also showed that psychological flexibility has an indirect effect on marital commitment through we-experience among couples with low marital adjustment. This finding is consistent with studies by Afshani & Yoosefi (2023); Eshghi (2023); Moslemi & Hatami (2024); Körük et al. (2023), and Huang et al. (2020).

To interpret this result, psychological flexibility can be viewed as a core construct in positive psychology and acceptance-based therapies, referring to the ability to regulate emotions, shift cognitive frameworks, and adopt behaviors aligned with long-term values even in the presence of severe difficulties and pressures (Moslemi & Hatami, 2024; Körük et al., 2023). In marital contexts, this ability enables couples to choose constructive and collaborative responses rather than defensive reactions or avoidance when facing conflict and frustration—an ability that is especially critical in low-adjustment couples. Couples with higher psychological flexibility are better able to accept differences, reinterpret negative interactions, and view challenges as opportunities for shared growth. This is both a cognitive and emotional process: cognitive, because individuals can revise rigid and negative mental frames; and emotional, because they gain greater capacity to manage or direct intense emotions. Consequently, psychological flexibility provides the necessary ground for the development of we-experience.

In this process, we experience occupies a distinctive mediating position. We-experience, or "we-ness," reflects a shared sense of identity and purpose in the relationship and has been introduced as a stabilizing factor for commitment and dyadic satisfaction in the studies of Afshani & Yoosefi (2023) and Gildersleeve et al. (2017). In practice, this sense promotes cooperation, mutual support, and emotional cohesion, which in turn make partners less likely to consider ending the relationship when facing short-term dissatisfaction. We-experience may also buffer negative effects by functioning as a psychological shield that prevents full activation of negative schemas during crises. In addition to these mechanisms, variables such as relationship beliefs (Moslemi & Hatami, 2024) and relationship maintenance strategies (Ghezelseflo & Hashemi, 2018) have been proposed in the literature as complementary factors that strengthen the overall impact of emotion regulation and psychological flexibility on marital commitment. For example, when couples not only regulate emotions effectively but also hold relationship beliefs rooted in honesty, empathy, and mutual respect, positive interaction cycles become more likely, gradually increasing relational cohesion.

Consistent with this analysis, models of marital satisfaction also emphasize commitment as a direct predictor of satisfaction. This relationship is bidirectional: higher commitment leads to greater satisfaction, and satisfaction also strengthens commitment. Studies by Burleson & Denton (1997) and Nasir & Ishak (2025) indicate that improved interaction quality, reduced conflict, and strong communication skills enhance satisfaction and commitment simultaneously through this feedback loop. Taken together, these findings explain why the main hypothesis of the present study—predicting marital commitment through psychological flexibility (and emotion regulation) mediated by we-experience—has strong theoretical and empirical support. Each of these variables functions within a complex network of psychological and social influences.

Given that the statistical population was limited to low-adjustment couples who visited private counseling centers in Karaj, it is recommended that future studies use samples from different geographical regions and

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from public, informal, or culturally diverse counseling settings. Comparing data across these contexts may help identify cultural and social differences in the roles of the study variables. To reduce bias associated with convenience sampling, future research should employ stratified random sampling or cluster sampling, which would improve representativeness and reduce unwanted variance linked to participants' self-selection into the study.

Because the instruments were **s**elf-report, and responses may be subject to distortion, future research could adopt multi-source assessment approaches. For example, combining questionnaires with semi-structured interviews, direct observation of couples' interactions in controlled settings, or third-party reports (e.g., from counselors) could provide a more accurate picture of marital adjustment and commitment. Due to the study's temporal and geographical limitations, longitudinal research across different time periods and cities is recommended to examine how economic, social, and cultural conditions influence relationships and to test the stability of findings over time. Such designs would also help identify possible changes in the psychological mechanisms examined. Finally, to minimize the confounding influence of prior participation in similar studies or previous counseling experiences, future research should implement more detailed pre-assessments of participants' histories. It may also include control groups consisting of couples with no prior counseling or similar study experience. Comparing these groups with the study group could clarify the impact of this potential confounding factor.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Ethical considerations in this study were that participation was entirely optional.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contribute to this study.

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