


Analyzing the Components of Enhancing Dyadic Ego Strength (Facilitating the Transition from "I-ness" to "We-ness" in Marital Relationships) for Married Individuals

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the present study was to analyze the components of enhancing dyadic ego strength (facilitating the transition from "I-ness" to "We-ness" in marital relationships) specifically for married individuals. The research setting included all texts related to the concept of "We-ness."

Methods: The method for selecting texts was purposive sampling from among the aforementioned texts or related constructs within the time frame of 2010 to 2025, based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The number of texts was determined according to the principle of data saturation. Data collection involved line-by-line analysis of texts based on questions relevant to the concept of "We-ness." The data obtained from the textual analysis were analyzed using the conventional content analysis method proposed by Hsieh and Shannon (2005).

Findings: Content analysis of the texts revealed that dyadic ego consists of four key concepts: (1) essence (with sub-concepts of attention to marital union and dyadic identity); (2) dimensions of dyadic ego (with sub-concepts of cognitive, positive emotional, negative emotional, and behavioral aspects); (3) pathways to achieving dyadic ego (with sub-concepts of generative meaning of the marital bond, family values, and family goals); and (4) obstacles to achieving dyadic ego (with sub-concepts of individualism, lack of self-differentiation, and insecure attachment).

Conclusion: Based on these findings, it can be concluded that dyadic ego is a mechanism that transforms the process of "I-ness" into "We-ness," and for its realization, couples must engage in pathways to attain it and overcome its obstacles.

Keywords: dyadic ego, we-ness, content analysis.

1. Introduction

The family is intended to be one of the safest and most nurturing psychological and biological environments where its members can achieve growth and flourishing. However, despite the fact that no couple initiates marriage with the intention of creating an unsafe environment, they suddenly find themselves confronted with roles, responsibilities, obligations, and expectations that they are either unaware of, unprepared for, or fundamentally fail to comprehend as constituting a different domain of life. This domain necessitates aligning personal interests, preferences, and characteristics with the overall atmosphere of family life. Familial discord can escalate to the point where, beyond explicit and implicit conflicts, the family environment becomes a setting for arguments and violence (Dehghani Sheshdehd & Yousefi, 2019).

These conditions emerge under various factors. For example, Abazari and Barati Ahmadabadi (2017) identified sexual disengagement (Abazari & Barati Ahmadabadi, 2017); Shahriari and Navah (2022) noted the routinization of love, shifting desires in fantasy, the emergence of dual love and self-destructive fantasies, and the transition to hegemonic femininity (Shahriari & Navah, 2022). Sotoudeh and colleagues (2022) pointed to physical and emotional violence and cultural and social factors (Sotoudeh et al., 2022); Balali et al. (2019) identified inadequate cognitive understanding, impulsive and immature decisions, lack of interest, and absence of attraction (Balali et al., 2019). Dehghani and Yousefi (2019) highlighted personality traits and leisure patterns as major variables exacerbating marital conflict and ultimately leading to divorce (Dehghani Sheshdehd & Yousefi, 2019). While some studies have indicated that poverty, addiction, and the incapacity of one or both spouses are significant contributors to divorce (Ebrahimi & Mohammadi, 2021; Mohamadjani & Fazeli, 2024; Safari & Golnavazi, 2022), other research has shown that the empowerment of either men or women can lead to shifts in values and disregard for the importance of family, thereby intensifying marital conflict to the point of divorce (Ghanvati et al., 2024; Molazadeh Galeh-Pardasari & Kanaani, 2024; Nafisah et al., 2024). Implicitly, these findings suggest that unless individual empowerment of spouses is directed toward familial growth and flourishing, it may become a source of control and power-seeking, leading the family into disorder (Soltanian et al., 2023).

One of the most influential perspectives in ego psychology is Freud's psychoanalytic view. In this

framework, the ego is a part of the personality that mediates between the demands of the id and the superego while also accommodating societal expectations. It aims for development and must manage internal conflicts and anxiety while preserving its regulatory role. Notably, the ego can, even without alignment with moral values or the hedonistic impulses of the id, achieve socially commendable personal growth through the use of the defense mechanism of sublimation (Gianèse-Madelaine, 2024).

In line with this, Ackerman (1960), a classical family therapist within the psychoanalytic tradition, viewed familial dysfunction through a psychoanalytic lens. He considered excessive or maladaptive use of defense mechanisms as a cause of marital conflict and asserted that internal and interpersonal conflicts between personality structures could result in deep and intense marital discord (Braverman, 2019). If individuals struggle with internal harmony among their personality structures, naturally, achieving harmony with a life partner becomes difficult. While couples are expected to attain unity, individuals who have not achieved integrated selfhood often experience inner conflict and, simultaneously, interpersonal conflict with their partner. This can escalate family conflict beyond the couple to extended families and even the larger social context (Amorin-Woods & Imber-Black, 2024).

Couples need to transition from "I-You" relationships to a state of "We-ness" and dyadic identity. If the individual ego is so dominant that accepting the presence of another ego—that of the spouse—becomes challenging, this may create a significant barrier to achieving "We-ness." Each partner might assume superior awareness and a more correct approach than the other (Cruwys et al., 2023). In such cases, a strong ego, reinforced by individual and social success, cultivates a self-centeredness that impedes the emergence of mutual goals and shared concerns. Meanwhile, "being together" and achieving "We-ness" necessitate teamwork. Excessive individualism and pursuit of personal goals can pose a critical threat to the family's survival (Alea et al., 2015). In this state, one or both partners often use language that reflects egocentrism, such as "my time," "my money," or "my opinion." Rather than enriching their relationship with their spouse, such individuals focus on strengthening personal connections aligned with individual aspirations. This kind of ego is manifested in the recurring use of "I" rather than the concept of "We." Therefore, forming a dyadic ego is essential for the family as a living organism; otherwise, such families will inevitably disintegrate. This situation is particularly prevalent among highly successful

individuals who prioritize personal values over familial ones (Fuchs, 2024).

Various approaches have been employed thus far to improve family dynamics and structures, including systemic and integrative systemic-solution-focused therapy (Babasafari et al., 2022), narrative therapy (Baradari et al., 2024), schema therapy (Sistani Pour et al., 2024), commitment-enhancement training (Ghafaralahi et al., 2021), and emotion-focused and attachment-based family therapy (Mehrabi & Khanjani Vashki, 2023). It appears that enhancing the dyadic ego could be one effective method for improving family structures. A review of databases up to the time of this study shows that no research has yet been conducted under this specific title.

Therefore, given the importance of achieving "We-ness" and togetherness in marital life and in reinforcing family cohesion, it is essential to focus on dyadic ego as a facilitating mechanism for attaining this state. The present study addressed this need and aimed to answer the question: What components constitute the educational package for enhancing the dyadic ego?

2. Methods and Materials

Given that the aim of this study was to analyze the components of the educational package for enhancing dyadic ego strength (facilitating the transition from "I" to "We" in marital relationships) specifically for married women, the existing literature on the state of togetherness and "We-ness" was examined. Therefore, the study adopted a qualitative approach, and for data analysis, the conventional content analysis method by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) was used. This method is appropriate when relevant theories and research literature are available on the topic under investigation. In the current study, such literature was accessible, and all codes and categories were extracted directly from the texts. The research setting included literature focused on "We-ness." Text selection continued until data saturation was reached. Data saturation occurred after reviewing seven sources, although the selection was extended to ten texts. These texts, ranging from 2010 to 2025, included books, articles, and theses, both domestic and international, that were most aligned with the variable of "We-ness" in couple relationships.

Inclusion criteria were: the text must be from the past ten years and contain "We-ness" as one of its core concepts.

Exclusion criteria were: the text was not published by a reputable publisher or was a bachelor's or master's thesis.

It is worth noting that a review of available databases revealed that, up to the time of writing, no published article in Persian had addressed the specific topic of this study.

Selected texts related to dyadic ego or We-ness are: (Alea et al., 2015; Cruwys et al., 2023; Fuchs, 2024; Young, 2022).

To collect data, a structured guide for textual analysis was used. The questions served as a framework that prompted the researcher to focus on dimensions of "We-ness" in the texts and take notes on key and relevant phrases. After identifying the sources to be analyzed, each text was studied line by line, followed by content review, content analysis, and coding. The coded data were then reviewed by the supervisor and advisor. At this stage, the consistency and semantic coherence of the data were evaluated, while clear distinctions between the content were also maintained. In the subsequent stage, the sources were re-examined with the help of the supervisor and advisor, and the resulting themes were revised accordingly.

It is important to note that data were analyzed simultaneously with their collection, involving a continuous interplay between what is known and what needs to be known, as well as iterative movement between the data and the analysis. This reciprocal interaction is central to achieving validity and reliability. In this study, simultaneous data collection and analysis, as well as iterative back-and-forth between data and codes, were employed.

Furthermore, the following points were considered to ensure the credibility and reliability of the findings (Abbaszadeh, 2012):

Usefulness: Usefulness is a criterion indicating that the findings of a qualitative study are helpful and enlightening for the research at hand. Given that the goal of this study was to identify the components of "We-ness," the results can be valuable for informing family counselors, psychotherapists, and clients on improving relationship quality and achieving mutual understanding.

Contextual Integrity: This criterion refers to studying the phenomenon in the context under investigation. To ensure this, all relevant variables were taken into account to provide a more comprehensive description of the research context.

Researcher Positioning: Researcher positioning refers to the researcher's awareness of their own role and its potential unconscious impact on text interpretation. In this study, the researcher sought to avoid any bias in participant selection, analysis, and interpretation by maintaining awareness of their position and by consulting with another

specialist during the analysis to avoid unintentional influence.

Reporting Style: Reporting style pertains to the clarity of results for other professionals and users. In this study, efforts were made to present qualitative findings in table and diagram formats to enhance comprehension.

Triangulation of Researchers: This refers to involving multiple individuals in coding and data analysis. In this study, the interviews were coded by the researcher, while data analysis was conducted collaboratively by the researcher, supervisor, and a specialist in qualitative research coding.

3. Findings and Results

Table 1

Content Analysis Results of Texts Related to We-ness for Developing an Educational Package to Enhance Dyadic Ego Strength

Main Concepts	Sub-Concepts	Core Concepts
Nature of We-ness	Attention to Marital Bond	Attending to spouse's needs as equally important as one's own Considering the impact of behaviors on the marital bond Reflecting on what is required to maintain the marital relationship Valuing the spouse's desires as much as one's own
	Dyadic Identity	Belief in a shared dyadic self Positive attitude toward marital unity Adhering to marital norms and expectations Managing personal interests and preferences
Dimensions of Dyadic Ego	Cognitive Dimension	Shared goals Shared coping strategies Mentalization ability Family values Optimism Problem-solving ability
	Positive Emotional Dimension	Experiencing joy Experiencing security Experiencing hope Experiencing trust and affection Experiencing love
	Negative Emotional Dimension	Acceptance of reduced positive emotions Acceptance of depression Acceptance of anxiety Distress tolerance Tolerance of ambiguity
	Behavioral Dimension of Marital Bond	Using "we" instead of "I" Prioritizing the relationship Supporting each other Relationship-centered behaviors Moderating non-couple social activities Avoiding solo travel Expressing affection Praise and attention Conflict management Acting based on shared goals Managing personal preferences Interacting according to family conditions Investing in learning more about each other

Mechanisms for Achieving Dyadic Ego	Generative Meaning of Marriage	Efforts to keep the marital relationship fresh
		Life purpose related to family
	Family Values	Life purpose related to romantic love
		Valuing parenthood
		Valuing parenting
	Family Goals	Valuing the spousal role
		Effective parenting
		Maintaining an effective family
	Family Functioning	Effective spousal relationship
		Emotion regulation based on family growth
		Behavior regulation based on family development
		Cognitive regulation based on family advancement
Obstacles to Achieving Dyadic Ego	Individualism	Spending time and resources on the family
		Prioritizing individual goals
		Prioritizing personal pleasure
		Prioritizing personal wisdom
	Insecure Attachment	Dependency
		Inability to balance closeness and distance
		Selfishness rooted in future-related anxiety
	Lack of Self-Differentiation	Emotional reactivity over rational thinking
		Enmeshment
		Dependence on the family of origin

Note. As shown in Table 1, the concept of dyadic ego, which reflects the process of becoming "we" in couples, consists of four major dimensions: (1) nature (including sub-concepts of attention to marital bond and dyadic identity); (2) dimensions of dyadic ego (including cognitive, positive emotional, negative emotional, and behavioral sub-concepts); (3) mechanisms for achieving dyadic ego (including generative meaning of marriage, family values, and family goals); and (4) obstacles to achieving dyadic ego (including individualism, lack of self-differentiation, and insecure attachment).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study was conducted with the aim of analyzing the concept of dyadic ego ("We-ness") and developing an educational package derived from it. The research method was qualitative and employed content analysis. The results indicated that dyadic ego consists of four dimensions: (1) essence; (2) dimensions of dyadic ego; (3) mechanisms for achieving dyadic ego; and (4) obstacles to achieving dyadic ego (with sub-concepts including individualism, lack of self-differentiation, and insecure attachment).

To date, no study has been conducted under this title, making it impossible to compare and contrast these findings with those of other research.

Nonetheless, numerous integrative interventions and educational programs have been introduced to improve the family climate. These include the feminine attraction training package (Hosseini Geravandi et al., 2023), the

attention-seeking modulation package for women (Khodaei & Yousefi, 2023), the power regulation package in families (Soltanian et al., 2023), and the integrated self-analysis training package for married women (Jelokhanian et al., 2022). As can be seen, none of these studies addressed the current topic.

In explaining the essence of dyadic ego, the results showed that for couples to move beyond their individual selves and reach a state of dyadic ego, they must redirect their attention and identity toward the marital bond. Thus, dyadic ego refers to the ability of spouses to attend to each other's needs as much as their own, to consider the impact of their behaviors on the relationship, to understand what is needed to maintain the marital bond, to believe in a shared dyadic self—perceiving themselves as one soul in two bodies—to value the relationship, to uphold marital norms, and to regulate their personal preferences in ways that may require modifying or adjusting them for the sake of the relationship. These findings align with previous research demonstrating that in order to achieve a state of togetherness, couples must be able to focus on each other and form a shared identity (Fuchs, 2024; Young, 2022).

In explaining the dimensions of dyadic ego, the findings revealed that for couples to reach a "We-ness" state, with dyadic ego at its core, they must regulate their cognitions, emotions, and behaviors in ways that benefit their relationship. This involves placing personal interests second to the marital bond. Such alignment is likely unachievable without cognitive coherence with dyadic ego. Accordingly,

shared goals, joint coping strategies, empathic capacity, and problem-solving skills are key cognitive capabilities needed for marital life. In parallel, couples must be able to experience positive emotions and accept and endure negative ones. Joy, security, hope, trust, affection, and love are typically experienced when couples prioritize relational growth over individuality. Likewise, accepting diminished positive emotions, occasional experiences of depression and anxiety, and tolerating distress are critical elements of marital life. These findings are consistent with previous studies highlighting the roles of emotion regulation, cognition, and behavior in marital satisfaction (Lessard et al., 2025; Nasiri et al., 2022). Therefore, the development and enhancement of dyadic ego require that spouses align their behavior, cognition, and emotions with the marital relationship.

Another key element identified in the content analysis of texts on dyadic ego was the mechanisms for achieving dyadic ego. These included the generative meaning of marriage—indicating that couples see family and love as integral to life's purpose—as well as family values, such as valuing childbearing, parenting, and the spousal role. Furthermore, their family goals emphasize marital unity and "We-ness" rather than individuality. Functional elements included investment in effective parenting, creating an effective family unit, being an effective spouse, and regulating emotions, behaviors, and cognitions in alignment with family advancement. These findings are in agreement with research emphasizing the importance of spirituality (Eghbali & Vahedi, 2023; Klausli et al., 2025), values (Kazim & Rafique, 2021; Young, 2022), goals, and actions (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022; Todorov et al., 2023) in promoting marital satisfaction.

The results also indicated that achieving dyadic ego is hindered by several obstacles, including lack of self-differentiation, insecure attachment, and individualism. These manifest through prioritizing individual goals, personal pleasure, and personal judgment; dependence; difficulty balancing closeness and distance; selfishness stemming from future-related anxiety; emotionality overriding rationality; enmeshment; and dependence on the family of origin. These obstacles prevent couples from accessing the mechanism of dyadic ego and reaching the state of "We-ness" and togetherness. These findings align with studies showing that lack of self-differentiation (Mozas-Alonso et al., 2022; Salehi et al., 2021), insecure attachment (Hashemi et al., 2024; Klausli et al., 2025; Lessard et al., 2025), and individualism are positively

associated with reduced marital satisfaction (Zhang & Chen, 2024).

Overall, based on the findings, it can be concluded that dyadic ego is a structural component of the couple system that helps partners transform from two separate individuals into a unified entity, striving not only for personal benefit but also for the relationship and the family. To achieve this, couples must be capable of constructing meaning, values, goals, and behaviors rooted in the marital bond and must address three main barriers to dyadic ego: individualism, insecure attachment, and lack of self-differentiation.

However, the content of this study must eventually be transformed into a formal educational package, and its contents should undergo validation—an opportunity that was not addressed in this article. A useful supplement to these findings could be expert opinions from family therapy specialists, which also were not examined in this study.

5. Suggestions and Limitations

One of the primary limitations of this study is its reliance on qualitative content analysis, which, while valuable for in-depth conceptual exploration, may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Additionally, the study was restricted to texts published between 2010 and 2025, possibly excluding earlier or unpublished works that could have enriched the conceptual understanding of dyadic ego. The absence of participant-based data, such as interviews or focus groups, also limits the triangulation of findings. Furthermore, the proposed educational package derived from the analysis was not empirically implemented or validated, leaving its practical effectiveness undetermined.

Future research should aim to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed educational package for enhancing dyadic ego through experimental or quasi-experimental designs involving diverse marital populations. It is also recommended to integrate qualitative interviews with married individuals to capture lived experiences and deepen theoretical insights. Cross-cultural studies could further examine the applicability of dyadic ego components in different sociocultural contexts. Moreover, collaboration with family therapists in refining and validating the content of the educational package can enhance its clinical utility and real-world impact in marital counseling and intervention programs.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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