

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# The Relationship Between Object Relations and Relationship Satisfaction, Marital Adjustment, and Sexual Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Narcissistic and Borderline Personality Traits

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to elucidate the psychological dynamics of marital relationships, which are among the most significant structures of society. The purpose of research was to examine the mediating roles of borderline and narcissistic personality traits in the relationship between object relations and marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. The study group consisted of adult individuals aged 18 and older. Of the total 809 participants, 407 (50.3%) are female and 402 (49.7%) are male, all of whom are married. 320 participants are in the 18-30 age range, 318 are in the 31-45 age range, and 171 are 45 years old and above. Marriage Adjustment Scale, Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSS), Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale (GRSS) Female-Male Form, Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI), Borderline Personality Inventory, and Narcissistic Personality Inventory were used as data collection instruments in the study. The data were analyzed using SPSS 27 program. Pearson Correlation Test and Process Macro 4.2 analysis methods were used. According to the research findings, a negative relationship was found between object relations and relationship satisfaction, marital adjustment, and sexual satisfaction. A positive relationship was identified between object relations and borderline and narcissistic personality traits. Furthermore, negative relationships were found between borderline and narcissistic personality traits and marital adjustment, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction. Finally, the mediation analyses conducted within the framework of the main purpose of the research, determined that object relations significantly predicted relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and marital adjustment, borderline and narcissistic personality traits partially mediated this relationship. Thus, the proposed model was supported.

**Keywords:** Object Relations, Relationship Satisfaction, Marital Harmony, Sexual Satisfaction, Narcissistic Personality, Borderline Personality.

## Öz

Bu çalışma toplumun en önemli yapılarından biri olan evlilik ilişkilerine dair psikolojik dinamikleri açıklamayı hedeflemiştir. Araştırmanın amacı nesne ilişkileri ile evlilik uyumu, ilişki doyumu ve cinsel doyum arasındaki ilişkide borderline ve narsistik kişilik özelliklerinin aracı rollerinin incelenmesidir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu 18 yaş ve üstü yetişkin bireyler oluşturmaktadır. Tümü evli olan 809 katılımcının 407'si kadın (%50,3), 402'si (%49,7) erkektir. Katılımcıların 320'si 18-30, 318'i 31-45 ve 171'i 45 ve üzeri yaş aralığındadır. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak Evlilikte Uyumu Ölçeği, İlişki Doyumu Ölçeği (İDÖ), Golombok-Rust Cinsel Doyum Ölçeği (GRCD) Kadın-erkek Formu, Bell Nesne İlişkileri ve Gerçeği Değerlendirme Ölçeği (BORRTI), Borderline Kişilik Envanteri ve Narsistik Kişilik Envanteri kullanılmıştır. Veriler, SPSS 27 programı ile analiz edilmiştir. Pearson Korelasyon Testi ve Process Macro 4.2 analiz yöntemleri kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre nesne ilişkileri ile ilişki doyumu, evlilik uyumu ve cinsel doyum arasında negatif yönlü ilişki tespit edilmiştir. Nesne ilişkileri ile borderline ve narsistik kişilik özellikleri arasında ise pozitif yönlü ilişki belirlenmiştir. Ayrıca borderline ve narsistik kişilik özellikleri ile evlilik uyumu, cinsel doyum ve ilişki doyumu arasında negatif ilişki saptanmıştır. Son olarak araştırmanın temel amacı çerçevesinde yapılan aracılık analizlerine göre nesne ilişkilerinin ilişki doyumu, cinsel doyum ve evlilik uyumunu anlamlı düzeyde yordadığı ve borderline ve narsistik kişilik özelliklerinin bu ilişki kısmi aracılık rolünün olduğu belirlenmiştir. Buna göre ortaya konulan model desteklenmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Nesne ilişkileri, İlişki Doyumu, Evlilik Uyumu, Cinsel Doyum, Narsistik Kişilik, Borderline Kişilik

## Introduction

Romantic relationships can may culminate in marriage (TÜİK, 2023). Marriage is of great importance for the continuation of the human race and for physiological and psychological well-being. According to Robert J. Sternberg (2019), marriage is a combination of three elements: intimacy, sexuality and commitment. While these three elements may be sufficient for the initiation of marriage, additional factors are necessary for its sustainability. It is crucial of great importance for couples to form emotionally healthy attachments and be sensitive to each other's needs for attention in order for the marriage to endure (Estroff & Flora, 2004). Object relations theory is one of the theories that broadly explains the bonds we form with others. Object relations theorists see the mother-child dyad as the building blocks of psychological formation. This relationship is both interpersonal and intrapsychic. Object relations theory, the experience of romantic relationships cannot be separated from early mental representations. In contrast to Freud, Fairbairn (1940) argues that the need for attachment is not merely a by-product of basic instincts, but a fundamental drive in itself. By referring to the unifying power of sexual intimacy, Fairbairn also emphasises that partners are confronted with the need to satisfy each other's unconscious needs.

Object relations, which are formed during early development through the process of introjection, are among the most significant factors that shape the nature of romantic relationships. Melanie Klein's theory of object relations, based on psychoanalytic principles, suggests that the choices, experiences and patterns of intimate relationships established by an infant from the earliest stages are reflected in his or her adult relationships. In contrast to Freud's pleasure principle and instinctual theory, object relations theorists emphasise the attachment formed by the infant. This attachment is a basic need for security and satisfaction. Sensitivity, love, respect and the fulfilment of needs demonstrated by the object become positive psychological structures in the infant (Scharff & Scharff, 1991). Ideally, these needs are met during the caregiving process,

although sometimes they may remain unmet (Bowlby, 1969). The non-fulfilment of needs, they can result in psychological collapse, as described by Spitz (1965), or a state of psychological deprivation. According to Klein (1923), pathologies arise from deficiencies in the satisfaction of these needs. Identification and projective identification defences, developed to cope with deficiencies and conflicts in introjected object relations, are determinants of sexual attitudes. Sexuality is a psychosomatic experience. It is not just a physiological urge, but has a subjective cognitive meaning. In marriage, the typical or perhaps even stereotypical presentation of the spouses' negatively internalised objects leads the initially idealised relationship progressing through inevitable stages of disillusionment and conflict, then finally to a form of equilibrium before entering a cycle of repeated contradictions. Borderline and narcissistic personalities are among those who experience this cycle.

Kernberg asserts that the mental representations formed through introjection during early development, particularly those related to the relationship with the mother, form the psychological structures of ego, superego and id (Clarkin et al., 2006; St. Clair, 2004). This primary object relationship is associated with libido and aggressive impulses. According to Kernberg (1999), Borderline Personality Disorder arises from innate or genetic pregenital aggression and/or inhibitory object relationship experiences during developmental processes. Kernberg suggests that these intense feelings of aggression interfere with the integration of positive and negative self and object representations in the child and result in the use of primitive defences to protect and separate the positive self and object image from aggressive feelings associated with the negative self. Primitive defences are employed to resolve intense anxiety associated with intrapsychic conflict by distinguishing between conflicting views of self and object. Kernberg (1999) also suggests a relationship between attachment, affect, and the development of borderline personality disorder, arguing that individuals who experience consistently psychologically distressing and

distressing self and object experiences in early development contribute to increased negative affect or aggression associated with intrapsychic conflict. He claims that early attachment failures contribute to the development of borderline personality disorder by reducing the individual's ability to experience, regulate and control a range of affective experiences (Clarkin et al., 2006; St. Clair, 2004). In the narcissistic organisation, the main problem lies in the impairment of self-esteem in the object relationship. From this perspective, the development of the self is seen as dependent on the pre-oedipal period (Fairbairn, 1949, 1952; Kohut, 1971, 1977). Summers (1999) discusses two important roles for the caregiver in the psychological development of the child. The first is to enjoy the baby's immediate joy and pleasure and the second is to allow the child to experience painful emotions and learn to cope with them when negative situations arise. Casement (1990) states that "the baby can discover the caregiver's ability to enlighten and thus form the basis of self-esteem through the caregiver's facial expressions". This foundation forms the basis for the individual's feelings, self-confidence and ability to develop emotions. Kohut (1971, 1972, 1977) suggests that the structure of the infant's psyche depends on the nature of the caregiver's responses. This means that the infant's narcissism can develop in two ways. The method is to be accepted with the reflection of admiration in the eyes of the significant other, usually the mother. This is how the baby learns whether it is valuable or worthless. This reflection is internalised, forming a healthy sense of self-esteem and defining "I am perfect". The second way is to admire someone else, usually the father. In this way the baby learns that he too is part of the idealised and perfect. This experience of idealisation is internalised and so the 'ideal parent' is formed and becomes part of the baby. This helps to develop the baby's self-esteem and self-worth. Normal narcissism provides healthy motivation up to a certain point. Conversely, if the child has not had sufficient experience of self-reflection, there is a developmental arrest in grandiosity or idealisation, which damages the self. Such children believe that they are internally inadequate. Such individuals exhibit a lack of interest in sharing their thoughts and feelings with others. They are

surrounded by feelings of inadequacy and shame. They describe this damage to their self as a fundamental flaw or as if it were their own fault (Summers, 1999). Feelings of inadequacy hide behind shame, grandiosity and exhibitionism, which can manifest as feelings of emptiness, jealousy and anger. In the absence of this internalised sense of self, the adult narcissist becomes dependent on the approval of others.

As previously indicated, object relations formed in early childhood experiences, which can shape individuals' relationships with others, can influence both personality traits in adulthood and the satisfaction and harmony derived from relationships established with others during this period. One of the most important relationships to consider when it comes to relationships with others is individuals' romantic relationships or marriage experiences. Within this framework, the compatibility of object relations, which can shape the quality of relationships and personality traits, has become crucial in determining relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and overall marital harmony. Moreover, borderline personality traits and narcissistic personality traits, expressed as personality characteristics, are seen as important variables in explaining marital relationships when determining their mediating roles. In this context, the present study aims to examine the relationship between married individuals' relationship satisfaction, sexual satisfaction, and marital harmony with object relations, and to investigate the mediating roles of borderline and narcissistic personality traits that can be shaped by object relations in this relationship. A view of the relevant literature is reviewed, it is observed that while there are numerous studies on marriage and romantic relationships, there is a paucity of comprehensive research examining the relationships between borderline and narcissistic personality traits, object relations thought to be related to these variables, marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Given that many variables, rather than a single variable, might influence the marital experience, this study can be seen as a significant contribution to the literature. The existing literature frequently emphasises the impact of early life experiences with one's parents, on the formation of object

relations, affect later relationship experiences. This suggests that these variables, by influencing personality traits, may be related to marital relationships. In this context, this study is considered an important piece of research due to its potential to make a significant contribution to the (existing) literature and to offer a perspective that explains the discord and dissatisfaction that arise during the marriage process.

## Method

### Research Model

This research is designed in accordance with the relational survey model, which aims to examine the mediating role of borderline and narcissistic personality traits in the relationship between object relations of married individuals and marital harmony, sexual satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction. The relational survey model is suitable for this research objective as it focuses on determining the presence, degree, and direction of the relationship between multiple variables (Karasar, 2012).

### Sample of the Study

The sample of the study consisted of married individuals aged 18 and above who were literate and volunteered to participate in the research. The scales used in the study were delivered to the participants via online methods, and the data were collected accordingly. Care was taken to ensure that the sample size was adequate in representing the population in terms of representativeness. For the sake of research reliability, a sampling error of  $\pm 0.05$  was considered. At the outset of the study, data were collected from 846 individuals. However, 37 individuals who did not meet the research criteria or left the data collection instruments incomplete were excluded from the study, resulting in a total of 809 participants. The incomplete and incorrect data were discarded by the researcher. A total of 407 (50.3%) female participants and 402 (49.7%) male participants participated in the study, resulting in a total of 809 individuals. 39.6% of participants between the ages

of 18-30, 39.3% were between the ages of 31-45, and 21.1% were 45 years and above. All participants were married. Predominantly (64.5%), the duration of marriage falls within the range of 3-10 years.

### Data Collection Instruments

**Socio-Demographic Form:** The socio-demographic form is designed to gather information about the participants' age, gender, marital status and duration, education level, and overall health status.

**The Marriage Adjustment Scale:** This scale is a 15-item scale developed by Locke and Wallace (1959) and adapted into Turkish by Tutarel and Kışlak (1999). The scale, which is of the Likert type, is evaluated with scores ranging from 0 to 6. The highest score on the scale is 60, and the lowest score is 0. The cutoff score for the scale is 43. Individuals scoring 43 and above are considered harmonious in marriage, while those below 43 are considered disharmonious. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale is 0.84.

**The Relationship Satisfaction Scale:** The Relationship Satisfaction Scale was developed by Hendrick (1988) with the aim of measuring satisfaction in romantic relationships. It is a Likert-type scale (Sarı, 2008). The 7-item relationship satisfaction scale has the 7th and 4th items reverse-scored. Increasing scores on the scale indicate higher satisfaction derived from the relationship. It was adapted into Turkish by Curun (2001). The internal consistency coefficient of the Relationship Satisfaction Scale is .86 (Curun, 2001).

**The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale:** The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale was developed by Rust and Golombok in 1986 to assess individuals' sexual relationship characteristics. It comprises 28 items and is divided into two separate forms for measuring the sexual function and satisfaction levels of both men and women. The scale comprises a total of 7 subscales, including Communication (2 items), Avoidance (4 items), Touch (4 items), Satisfaction (4 items), and

Relationship Frequency (2 items), which are common to both forms. In addition to these common subscales, the women's form includes questions about vaginismus (4 items) and orgasm disorder (4 items), while the men's form includes questions about premature ejaculation (4 items) and erectile dysfunction (4 items) (Rust & Golombok, 1986). The scale employs a 5-point Likert-type scale with items scored between 0 never and 4 always. In the scale, questions are reverse-scored. An increase in scores indicates a decrease in sexual satisfaction. The reliability of the scale is .87 for the women's form and .94 for the men's form. The validity and reliability studies of the scale for the Turkish population were conducted by Tuğrul and colleagues in 1993 (Tuğrul, Öztan & Kabakçı, 1993).

**The Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory:** The Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory was originally developed by Bell in 1995. The Turkish adaptation was conducted by Uluç and colleagues in 2015. The BORTTI is designed to assess the structuring in psychotic organization, personality disorders, and eating disorders. The scale consists of 90 items, which are answered as true or false. The inventory comprises two dimensions: the object relations dimension and the reality testing dimension. The object relations dimension, encompasses dimensions such as social inadequacy, insecure attachment, alienation, and egocentrism. In the reality testing dimension, there are dimensions such as uncertainty of perceptions, delusions, hallucinations, and distortion of reality. Additionally, the scale incorporates three validity indices in the scale: *FREQ* (frequency of inconsistent responses), *INFREQ* (infrequency of inconsistent responses), and inconsistent responding. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the subtests within the object relations dimension were calculated as follows: 0.80 for alienation, 0.74 for insecure attachment, 0.70 for egocentrism, and 0.73 for social inadequacy. For the subtests within the reality testing dimension, the coefficients were calculated as 0.77 for distortion of reality, 0.54 for uncertainty of perceptions, and 0.70 for hallucinations and delusions (Uluç et al., 2015). In

this study, the dimension of object relations in the scale has been utilised.

**Borderline Personality Inventory:** The scale was originally developed by Leichsenring (1999) and consists of 53 items. The Turkish adaptation was conducted by Aydemir et al. in 2006. Despite the title is "Borderline Personality Inventory," the name was changed to "Personality Inventory" so as not to influence individuals. The scale is categorical with "True" and "False" response options. Responses marked as "False" are scored as 0 points, while those marked as "True" are scored as 1 point. Items 52 and 53 are not included in the calculation. The highest score that can be obtained from the inventory is 51. The cutoff score was determined as "15/16" based on criterion validity. The Cronbach's alpha value for the Borderline Personality Inventory was determined to be 0.92.

**Narcissistic Personality Inventory:** Raskin and Hall developed the Narcissistic Personality Inventory in 1979 with the aim of assessing individuals' narcissistic personality traits. The inventory consists of 40 items and includes 7 subscales: "leadership," "exploitativeness," "authority," "self-sufficiency," "vanity," "entitlement," and "exhibitionism." Furthermore, a 16-item abbreviated version of the inventory has been prepared (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the inventory is 0.84. The Turkish adaptation was conducted by Atay in 2009. An increase in scores obtained from the inventory indicates narcissism (Atay, 2009).

## Process

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee (Number: E-49846378-302.14.1-2300015296. Date: 15.12.2023). Subsequently, informed consent forms, socio-demographic forms, the Marriage Adjustment Scale, the Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSS), the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale (GRSS) Female-Male Form, the Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI), the Borderline Personality Inventory, and the Narcissistic Personality Inventory were utilised. The total of 809 participants were administered the instruments via online methods.

### The analysis of the data

Data were analysed using SPSS 27 software. Firstly, the reliability coefficients for the scales were calculated, and it was determined that they were higher than 0.60. The Skewness and kurtosis values for the scales were found to be within the recommended reference range of +2 to -2 (HahsVaughn & Lomax, 2020).

**Table 1. Skewness and Kurtosis Coefficients, and Cronbach's Alpha Values of the Marriage Adjustment Scale, Relationship Satisfaction Scale, Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale, Object Relations Inventory, Borderline Personality Inventory, and Narcissistic Personality Inventory**

	Kurtosis	Skewness	Cronbach Alpha (α)
<b>The Marriage Adjustment Scale</b>	-0.02	-0.66	0.92
<b>The Relationship Satisfaction Scale</b>	-0.52	-0.05	0.88
<b>The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale</b>			
The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale – Male	-0.02	0.87	0.97
The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female	1.70	1.38	0.97
<b>Object Relations Inventory</b>	-0.76	0.65	0.95
<b>The Borderline Personality Inventory</b>	-0.13	0.66	0.92
<b>The Narcissistic Personality Inventory</b>	-1.00	0.18	0.88

The level and direction of correlation between the scales were investigated using Pearson correlation analysis. Recently, discussions regarding the validity of Baron and Kenny's causal steps technique, commonly used in the analysis of mediation models, have led to the adoption of a new approach in psychological research. This new approach includes a methodology proposed by Gürbüz in 2019, which is based on the bootstrap technique. For role analysis, the Process Macro 4.2 program was used. All statistical analyses were conducted with a 95% confidence interval and a significance level of  $p < .05$ .

### Results

**Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

		n	%
Gender	Female	407	50.3
	Male	402	49.7
Marital Status	Married	809	100.0
Age	18-30	320	39.6
	31-45	318	39.3
	45 and above	171	21.1
Length of Marriage	0-1 year	23	2.8
	1 year – 3 year	94	11.6
	3 year – 10 year	522	64.5
	More than 10 years	170	21.0
Total		809	100.0

Upon reviewing the results of the above findings, it can be observed that 50.3% of the participants are female, while 49.7% are male. 100% of the participants are married. The age distribution is as follows: 39.6% are between 18 and 30 years old, 39.3% are between 31 and 45 years old, and 21.1% are 45 years of age or older. With regard to their spouses, 50.6% are in the age range of 18-30, 34.6% are in the age range of 31-45, and 14.8% are 45 years and above. A total of 2.8% of the participants have been married for a period of 0-1 years, 11.6% for 1-3 years, 64.5% for 3-10 years, and 21% for more than 10 years.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of the Marriage Adjustment Scale, Relationship Satisfaction Scale, Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale, Object Relations Inventory, Borderline Personality Inventory, and Narcissistic Personality Inventory**

	N	Min	Maks	X̄	SS
<b>The Marriage Adjustment Scale</b>	809	2	58	33.80	11.99
<b>The Relationship Satisfaction Scale</b>	809	7	49	29.81	10.49
<b>The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale</b>					
The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale – Male	402	0	112	30.36	26.82
The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female	407	0	95	26.53	22.34
<b>Object Relations Inventory</b>	809	0	52	18.68	12.81
<b>The Borderline Personality Inventory</b>	809	0	50	15.97	10.04
<b>The Narcissistic Personality Inventory</b>	809	0	16	7.58	4.60

Upon reviewing the results of the above findings, the mean score for the Marriage

Adjustment Scale is ( $\bar{X}=33,80$   $SS=11,99$ ), for the Relationship Satisfaction Scale is ( $\bar{X}=29,81$   $SS=10,49$ ), for the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale - Male is ( $\bar{X}=30,36$   $SS=26,82$ ), for the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale - Female is ( $\bar{X}=26,53$   $SS=22,34$ ), for the Object Relations Inventory is ( $\bar{X}=18,68$   $SS=12,81$ ), for the Borderline Personality Inventory is ( $\bar{X}=15,97$   $SS=10,04$ ), and for the Narcissistic Personality Inventory is ( $\bar{X}=7,58$   $SS=4,60$ ).

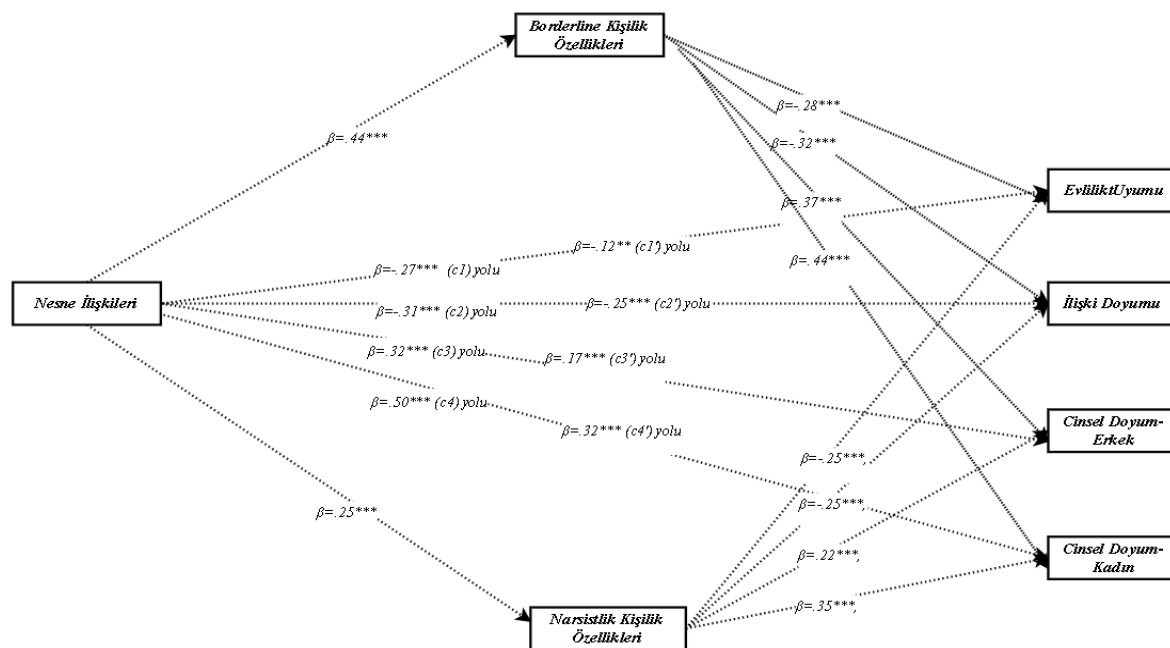
**Table 4. The Relationship between the Marriage Adjustment Scale, Relationship Satisfaction Scale, Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale, Object Relations Inventory, Borderline Personality Inventory, and Narcissistic Personality Inventory**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1- The Marriage Adjustment Scale	1						
2- The Relationship Satisfaction Scale	.52**	1					
3- The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale - Male	-.39**	-.33**	1				
4- The Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale- Female	-.32**	-.43**	-	1			
5- Object Relations	-.27**	-.38**	.32**	.50**	1		
6- The Borderline Personality Inventory	-.28**	-.32**	.37**	.44**	.44**	1	
7- The Narcissistic Personality Inventory	-.25**	-.25**	.22**	.35**	.45**	.25**	1

\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$  The name of the test conducted is: Pearson Correlation Test

Upon examination of the results, it were observed that there are low to moderate negative correlations between the Object Relations Inventory and the Marriage Adjustment Scale ( $r = -.27$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), between the Borderline Personality Inventory and the Marriage Adjustment Scale ( $r = -.28$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Marriage Adjustment Scale ( $r = -.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

It was observed that there were low to moderate negative correlations between the Object Relations Inventory and the Relationship Satisfaction Scale ( $r = -.38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), between the Borderline Personality Inventory and the Relationship Satisfaction Scale ( $r = -.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Relationship Satisfaction Scale ( $r = -.25$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It was observed that there are low to moderate positive correlations between the Object Relations Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Male ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), between the Borderline Personality Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Male ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Male ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). It was observed that there were moderate positive correlations between the Object



\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$  The test used: Process Macro 4.2

**Figure 1. Mediating Role of Emotional Borderline Personality Traits and Narcissistic Personality Traits in the Relationship Between Object Relations and Marital Adjustment, Relationship Satisfaction, and Sexual Satisfaction**

Relations Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale-Female ( $r=.50, p<0.01$ ), between the Borderline Personality Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale - Female ( $r=.44, p<0.01$ ) and between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Golombok-Rust Sexual Satisfaction Scale – Female ( $r=.35, p<0.01$ ). It was observed that there were moderate positive correlations between the Borderline Personality Inventory and the Object Relations Inventory ( $r=.44, p<0.01$ ) and between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Object Relations Inventory ( $r=.45, p<0.01$ ). It was observed that there was a low positive correlation between the Narcissistic Personality Inventory and the Borderline Personality Inventory ( $r=.25, p<0.01$ ).

As illustrated in Figure 1, object relations demonstrate a significant predictive capacity with regard to marital adjustment (path c1). ( $\beta=-.27, t=-8.06, p<.001$ ). Subsequently, when borderline personality traits and narcissistic personality traits were included as mediating variables in the model, a decrease in the  $\beta$  value of object relations (path c1) was observed ( $\beta=-.12, t=-3.08, p<.01$ ). These findings indicate the presence of partial mediation and that the mediation relationship is significant ( $\beta=-.15, \%95 \text{ GA } [-.19, -.09]$ ). It is observed that object relations significantly predict relationship satisfaction (path c2) ( $\beta=-.38, t=-11.54, p<.001$ ). Subsequently, when borderline personality traits and narcissistic personality traits were included as mediating variables in the model, a decrease in the  $\beta$  value of object relations (path c2) was observed ( $\beta=-.25, t=-6.56, p<.001$ ). These findings indicate the presence of partial mediation and that the mediation relationship is significant. ( $\beta=-.13, \%95 \text{ GA } [-.14, -.06]$ ). It is observed that object relations significantly predict male sexual satisfaction (path c3) ( $\beta=.32, t=6.81, p<.001$ ). Subsequently, when borderline personality traits and narcissistic personality traits were included as mediating variables in the model, a decrease in the  $\beta$  value of object relations (path c3) was observed ( $\beta=.17, t=3.09, p<.01$ ). These findings indicate the presence of partial mediation and that the mediation relationship is significant. ( $\beta=.15, \%95 \text{ GA } [.18, .47]$ ). It is observed that object relations significantly predict female sexual satisfaction

(path c4) ( $\beta=.50, t=11.60, p<.001$ ). Subsequently, when borderline personality traits and narcissistic personality traits were included as mediating variables in the model, a decrease in the  $\beta$  value of object relations (path c4) was observed ( $\beta=.32, t=6.16, p<.001$ ). These findings indicate the presence of partial mediation and that the mediation relationship is significant ( $\beta=.18, \%95 \text{ GA } [.18, .46]$ ).

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present study, aimed to investigate the relationship between borderline and narcissistic personality traits, object relations, marital satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. The research aimed to examine the mediating role of borderline and narcissistic personality traits on marital satisfaction and sexual satisfaction. Initially, findings regarding the relationship between research variables were obtained. The results indicated a negative relationship between object relations and marital satisfaction, as well as relationship satisfaction. Similarly, findings regarding the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction indicated a negative correlation between borderline and narcissistic personality traits with marital satisfaction and relationship satisfaction. The set of personality traits, represented by borderline and narcissistic personality traits, showed similar levels of association with marital satisfaction.

Marital harmony is a multifaceted construct influenced by various factors. Object relations shaped by individuals' experiences with their primary caregivers significantly impact marital harmony. Research has shown that factors such as self-esteem, coping strategies, psychological aspects, attachment styles, defense mechanisms, emotional intelligence, and social skills, which can be explained by object relations, can affect marital harmony (Bélanger et al., 2014; Chiş et al., 2022; Navid et al., 2023; Jalil & Muazzam, 2013; Nasri & Babae, 2014). Furthermore, factors such as conflict resolution, communication patterns, and gender-role orientations in marriage also play a role in marital harmony (Heene et al., 2007; Barry, 1970; Davidson & Sollie, 1987). Research has highlighted



the significance of individual characteristics such as personality traits, levels of anxiety, and depressive symptoms in influencing marital harmony (Chis et al., 2022; Dehle & Weiss, 2002; Hamamcı, 2005; Nwakanma & Ofoedu, 2016).

When examining the relationship between object relations, borderline, and narcissistic personality traits with sexual satisfaction, a positive and significant correlation was found between object relations and sexual satisfaction scores for both men and women. The elevated scores suggest that object relations are not at a healthy level, indicating a higher presence of borderline and narcissistic personality traits, which are associated with sexual dysfunction. These results obtained are consistent with previous studies. Previous research has suggested the impact of specific conditions such as infertility, fibromyalgia, PTSD, and erectile dysfunction on marital satisfaction. (Navid et al., 2023; Calandre et al., 2021; Dekel et al., 2008; Nwakanma & Ofoedu, 2016). Relationship flexibility, subjective well-being, and sexuality have been defined as factors influencing marital harmony (Cihan, 2020; Scorsolini-Comin & Santos, 2012; Kazemi-Saleh et al., 2008).

Object relations based on early attachment experiences can significantly influence sexual satisfaction in relationships. Research has demonstrated that sexual satisfaction is closely associated with various factors including individual sexual desire, discrepancies in desire between partners, sexual function, and relationship satisfaction (Mark, 2012; Dundon & Rellini, 2010; Lazar, 2016). Studies have shown that sexual satisfaction and relationship satisfaction tend to change together and have a mutually influential relationship (Dundon & Rellini, 2010; Zare et al., 2020). Furthermore, sexual satisfaction has been linked to various factors, including sexual self-esteem, sexual awareness, and sexual self-schema (Ebrahimkhani et al., 2017). Additionally, the impact of external factors on sexual satisfaction has been explored. For example, studies have indicated that the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction is significant in the context of conditions such as ovarian cancer, gestational

diabetes, and prostate cancer (Aktaş & Bahar, 2022; Nelson et al., 2007; Zerach et al., 2010).

In line with the findings regarding the relationship between object relations and borderline and narcissistic personality traits, it has been observed that elevated scores indicative of dysfunctional object relations are significantly associated with higher scores indicating more frequent occurrence of borderline and narcissistic personality traits. Recent studies investigating the relationship between object relations and narcissistic and borderline personality traits have provided valuable insights. It has been demonstrated that narcissistic and borderline personality traits are interrelated and share common characteristics from various perspectives (Mustač & Marčinko 2020; Weise & Tuber, 2004). Research indicates that individuals with borderline personality traits often exhibit impulsivity and difficulties in emotion regulation, which are also commonly found in narcissistic personality traits (Koenigsberg et al., 2001). Additionally, studies highlight the relationship between specific areas of shame associated with narcissistic vulnerability, narcissistic grandiosity, and borderline-related features. In this regard, it is anticipated to be connected with object relations (Théberge & Gamache, 2022). Additionally, the correlation between borderline personality traits and various psychological constructs has been explored through comprehensive research. For example, studies have investigated the relationship between borderline personality traits and cognitive functioning, social maladjustment, aggression, and impulsivity (Kar, 2023; Underwood et al., 2011; Aslan et al., 2023). These studies shed light on the complex interaction between borderline personality traits and other psychological dimensions. Additionally, the influence of object relations on the formation of narcissistic and borderline personality traits has been an intriguing topic of investigation. Research has examined the impact of early attachment experiences on the development of narcissistic and borderline personality traits in both children and adults (Weise & Tuber, 2004; Gacono, 1990).

When examining the predictive and mediating roles, it was found that object relations negatively and significantly predicted marital adjustment.

Conversely, it was determined that borderline and narcissistic personality traits played a partial mediating role. A review of previous research, indicates that the findings of this study are consistent with those of previous studies that have reached similar conclusions. For example, Bodenmann et al. (2006) conducted a longitudinal study on dyadic coping and marital quality, revealing that the dyadic coping behaviors of both partners are significant predictors of marital adjustment, with women's coping behaviors being particularly influential. Karaman (2021) investigated marital adjustment and sexual satisfaction in couples with sexual dysfunction, emphasizing a bidirectional relationship between sexual and marital satisfaction, indicating that sexual satisfaction predicts marital satisfaction and vice versa. Another study exploring the relationship between self-esteem, coping efforts, and marital adjustment highlighted the significant predictive role of withdrawal or avoidance-focused coping strategies in reducing marital satisfaction (Bélanger et al., 2014). Kumcağiz et al. (2020) conducted a study examining the relationship between marital adjustment and psychological well-being, finding that marital adjustment significantly predicts psychological well-being. Onabamiro and colleagues (2017) investigated self-esteem, emotional intelligence, and coping skills as predictors of marital adjustment among couples in Nigeria, demonstrating the importance of these factors in determining marital adjustment. While the mentioned studies do not directly examine the relationship between object relations and marital adjustment, variables that could be considered in the context of object relations may have a predictive effect on marital adjustment. In this regard, the partial mediating role of borderline and narcissistic personality traits supports significant connections observed in the aforementioned research.

When examining the predictive and mediating roles related to relationship satisfaction, it was found that object relations negatively and significantly predicted relationship satisfaction. On the other hand, borderline and narcissistic personality traits were found to have a partial

mediating role. Various studies investigating the determinants of relationship satisfaction provide valuable insights. For example, a longitudinal study by Rusbult (1983) on the investment model showed that increases in rewards over time were associated with increases in satisfaction, highlighting the impact of external factors on relationship satisfaction. Additionally, Velten and Margraf (2017) found that overall life satisfaction positively predicted sexual satisfaction, indicating that life satisfaction has a broader impact on relationship well-being. Furthermore, Banse (2004) examined the link between adult attachment prototypes and relationship satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of attachment styles in predicting relationship satisfaction. Moreover, a study by Boesch and colleagues (2007) on long-term male couples' relationship satisfaction and commitment demonstrated that predictors of satisfaction encompass both personal and interpersonal factors, while predictors of commitment are primarily personal.

A study of the predictive and mediating roles related to levels of sexual satisfaction in women and men, Revealed that object relations negatively and significantly predicted relationship satisfaction. Conversely, borderline and narcissistic personality traits were found to have a partial mediating role. In order to explore the role of object relations as determinants of sexual dysfunction, it is important to consider various factors that could affect sexual satisfaction. While previous research provides valuable insights into the determinants of sexual dysfunction, the direct relationship between object relations and sexual dysfunction has been limitedly addressed in these studies. However, by synthesizing the information from these studies, we can establish connections between psychological, physiological, and relational factors that could impact sexual functioning. For example, McCool-Myers et al. (2018) emphasize the multifaceted nature of predictors of female sexual dysfunction by highlighting the influence of psychological and physiological factors. Similarly, Enzlin et al. (2009) address sexual dysfunction in the context of diabetes, indicating the role of medical conditions in affecting sexual well-being. Additionally, Nobre

& Pinto-Gouveia (2006) and Nowosielski et al. (2010) examine the emotional aspects of sexual dysfunction, highlighting the significant impact of psychological factors on sexual well-being.

The results of the research indicate a significant relationship between object relations and sexual satisfaction, marital adjustment, and relationship satisfaction. Borderline and narcissistic personality traits mediate this relationship. Therefore, it can be concluded that object relations play a role in the development of borderline and narcissistic personality traits, and these traits are related to the satisfaction of married individuals with their marital experiences. However, it is thought that there are some limitations stemming from the research. One significant limitation is that individuals diagnosed with borderline and narcissistic personality disorders were not included in the study. Including these individuals along with the normal population and making comparisons could increase the generalizability of the research results. Similarly, it is considered a limitation that object relations were not measured using a subjective method oriented towards the psychodynamic approach in addition to the objective scale used. Therefore, it would be beneficial to conduct a study that includes these variables using different measurement tools. Another limitation is that, due to the cross-sectional nature of the research, it is not possible to emphasize a strong cause-and-effect relationship from the obtained results. The study conducted correlation and mediation analyses of the main variables, but did not consider the relationships between the demographic characteristics of the participants, such as duration of marriage, type of marriage, and whether they have children, and the research variables. The failure to control for these variables, which could have confounding effects on the levels of satisfaction and adjustment in marital life, represents a limitation of the study. It would be beneficial to repeat this study with a homogeneous group in terms of these variables. Finally, the relationship between object relations and personality traits with marital experiences was emphasized, but only borderline and narcissistic personality traits were considered. Expanding studies to include different personality traits is

thought to provide a more comprehensive perspective on marital experiences.

### **Recommendations**

In accordance with the findings of this study, it can be concluded that object relations exert a significant and negative impact on marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. Furthermore, it was found that borderline and narcissistic personality traits partially mediate this effect. When considering the relevant literature, although not directly addressing object relations, it emphasizes the complex interaction of psychological, physiological, and medical factors in predicting marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual dysfunction. To comprehensively understand the role of object relations as predictors of sexual dysfunction, future research could benefit from integrating insights from studies on attachment styles, interpersonal dynamics, and emotional well-being. Researchers could conduct further studies considering the broader context of individual psychological functioning and relational dynamics to explore how object relations may influence marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction, as well as contribute to the development or perpetuation of sexual dysfunction. In conclusion, while previous research provides meaningful findings regarding predictors of marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and sexual dysfunction, further research focusing on the relationship between object relations and relationship satisfaction, particularly considering the role of early attachment experiences in shaping individuals' sexual functions and satisfactions, is warranted. (An) Understanding the complex interaction among object relations, individual characteristics, and external factors can provide a comprehensive understanding of predictors of relationship satisfaction. It is recommended that researchers and practitioners develop interventions aimed at enhancing relationship satisfaction and promoting overall relationship well-being by considering these diverse factors.

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