



# From Strangers to Spouses: Exploring Dyadic Effects of Insecure Attachment and Responsiveness on We-Ness in Indian Arranged Marriages

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## Abstract

Dyadic studies have shown that insecure attachment styles, anxiety and avoidance, influence relationship outcomes such as relationship satisfaction, quality, and well-being. However, most of these studies have involved couples in choice-based marriages. Few dyadic studies have investigated the actor-partner effects of insecure attachment in arranged marriages. The present study ( $N = 96$  dyads, 192 individuals) explored the mediating effects of perceived partner responsiveness (PPR) on the relationship between attachment insecurities and an individual's sense of we-ness. Strong statistical support emerged for actor effects; however, partner effects were only partially supported. While wives' avoidance attachment was indirectly and negatively associated with husbands' we-ness through wives' and husbands' PPR, the vice-versa was not supported. Moreover, husbands' anxious attachment was indirectly and negatively associated with wives' we-ness, and wives' anxious attachment was indirectly and negatively associated with husbands' we-ness through husbands' and wives' PPR, respectively. The study attempts to unfold the complexity emerging from partners' interactions in Indian arranged marriages.

## Keywords

arranged marriages, couple identity, dyadic study, interpersonal relationships, intimacy, mediation analysis

Relationship science has grown multifold in recent years. However, two salient limitations remain in this “greening field” (Reis, 2007). Firstly, the field has overwhelmingly focused on the WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) samples (Henrich et al., 2010). Exploration of intimate relationship processes in non-WEIRD



samples, particularly on marital unions different from the choice-based marriages is less studied. Application of the theories, models, and processes developed for choice-based marriages in the Western context requires testing those assumptions before being applied to non-WEIRD contexts. Secondly, although an intimate marital bond consists of two interdependent entities, the field has focussed on studies where interdependence is largely ignored, and the data is collected and analyzed independently. Dyadic exploration of the intimate relationship provides us with a detailed view of the complex processes of the marital union (Kenny et al., 2006). The present study aims to fill these gaps by exploring the dyadic associations among key relationship constructs—attachment, responsiveness, and we-ness in Indian arranged marriages.

Marriages in India are predominantly arranged. The opinions and views of parents and relatives play an important role in mate selection. In several communities, particularly in rural northern India—Bihar and Uttar-Pradesh, the couples often meet each other only at the time of marriage, and courting is forbidden. Although the recent surge of technological advancement has made it possible for the future bride and groom to connect electronically, such meetings are often supervised and surveilled. Post-marriage, the partners bring their attitudes, attributes, characters, and predispositions into the relationship, which influences relationship outcomes. The present study explores the concept of we-ness and its antecedents in Indian arranged marriages.

### ‘We-Ness’—You and Me as ‘US’

“A marriage is a dynamic psychological process of considerable complexity—not just a contractual arrangement. For a marriage to work well, it is necessary for each partner to develop and maintain an identity within the relationship” (Reid et al., 2006, p. 243).

Reid et al.’s quote aptly captures the critical function of a key relationship variable—the ‘US’ identity or the We-ness in the relationship. We-ness is the tendency to perceive oneself more as an interdependent relational being than an independent entity. A married couple’s sense of ‘US’ plays an important role in commitment, satisfaction, and relationship quality (Emery et al., 2021). Intimate relationships are characterized by harmony, disharmony, and repair, and a strong ‘we’ identity helps the couple repair their relationship appropriately, healthily, and quickly (Real, 2022). Individuals with a strong sense of we-ness in the relationship find the conflicts troublesome and overwhelming. Walsh and Neff (2018) have evidenced in their study that the blending of identities of spouses leads to “reduced vigilance for relationship threats and enact more coping responses to relationship conflict.”

A strong sense of we-ness is linked with the quality of psychological health of individuals. Ahmad’s (2017) findings support the influential role of couple identity in enhancing the coping self-efficacy of cancer patients. Badr et al. (2007) found that couple identity mediated the relationship between stressors and the psychological health of

caregivers. These studies support the idea that a couple's identity is essential for the well-being of both—the relationship and the individual members.

## We-Ness in Indian Arranged Marriages

The idea of self-in-relationship has been explored more from the broader familial perspective in the Indian context than from the standpoint of conjugal unit (see Roland, 1988). As in other collectivistic cultures, an individual's identity in India is strongly tied to familial and group interpersonal ties (Roland, 1988). Nevertheless, the picture is quite complex when it comes to conjugal interdependence. Scholars have debated whether or not spouses in Indian arranged marriages share intimacy. Some scholars have emphasized that the intimacy couples share in India is often controlled by the larger family (Lahiri-Roy, 2016). Roland (1988) writes that family members in India find closeness and affection among newlyweds threatening. It could damage interdependent familial bonds, leading to conflicts and erosion of familial primacy and values. Emotional interdependence and bonding in arranged Indian marriages have been rebuked, with scholars calling "the idea of couple a fantasy and the desire of intimacy as wishful thinking" (Kakar, 1981, as cited in Sandhya, 2009, p. 79).

However, this does not mean there is no closeness, intimacy, or a sense of we-ness in Indian arranged marriages. Intimacy could be present even when its explicit expression is absent. For instance, Sandhya (2009) distinguishes the presence of affection and its expression as two separate entities. Gupta and Singh's (1982) study found no significant difference between Indian arranged marriages and the West's choice-based marriages. In contrast to Western marriages, where intimacy decreases after childbirth (O'Brien & Peyton, 2002), Jaiswal (2014) argues that affection, intimacy, and love tend to emerge and grow gradually in India.

These few studies have explored intimate relational bonding in Indian arranged marriages, but there is a lack of scholarly focus on the antecedents of these concepts. An exploration into the predictors of we-ness would inform both theory and practice. It could provide insights into the relational processes of Indian arranged marriages and suggest strategies to strengthen the we-ness in the relationship.

## Antecedents of We-Ness In Intimate Relationships

The adult attachment activation model (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003) and the interpersonal process model of intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 2018) are two models that have been well explored for the emergence and maintenance of intimate relational bond in WEIRD samples (Finkel et al., 2017). However, a replication of the functioning of these models in non-weird samples has yet to be explored. The former model explains how individual differences play an essential role in the co-creation of intimacy and closeness in relationships by explaining the functioning of secure and insecure attachment styles; the latter

illustrates the role of partner and relationship-related variables in the development and maintenance of closeness in the relationship. Attachment and perceived partner responsiveness allow the exploration of individual and partner-related constructs' influences in determining the we-ness in the marriage.

The attachment system activation model claims that attachment styles predict the level of closeness sought or avoided in an intimate relationship. Individuals with secure attachments have a balanced need for being distinct and close. On the other hand, anxiously attached individuals desire a high level of closeness, and avoidant individuals desire low intimacy in the relationship. Mikulincer and Shaver (2016) write that the attachment system can influence interpersonal regulatory factors such as intentions of intimacy, perceptions or enactments of responsiveness, and synchronizing one's steps to match the partner's steps. The interpersonal regulatory aspect of attachment style becomes crucial for developing and maintaining we-ness in the relationship.

The Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy (IPMI) states that self-based disclosures by the individual and the responsiveness of the partner, comprising of support, care, and validations for those shared aspects, are essential ingredients for a strong intimate bond in the relationship (Reis & Shaver, 2018). In their review, Reis et al. (2008) have provided evidence from previous studies on the association between perceived partner responsiveness (PPR) and the development of intimate relational bonds.

Both attachment and responsiveness play a crucial role in the emergence and maintenance of a strong sense of we-ness in intimate relationships. Constant et al. (2021), in their study, explored the predictive role of attachment on the relational bond shared by partners. Their study showed that anxious and avoidant attachment styles were negatively associated with relational intimacy. Similar results have been reported by Brassard et al. (2018), who found strong negative relationships between avoidant and anxious attachment styles and the various domains of "intimacy—emotional, social, sexual, intellectual, and recreational." In their large-scale survey, Hudson and Fraley (2017) report that attachment styles predict the level of closeness desired in intimate relationships and how individuals define closeness and perceive closeness in the relationship. Their findings suggest that compared to secure individuals, anxiously attached individuals take more time creating intimacy, and they perceive less intimacy in case vignettes. In contrast, avoidant individuals take less time to build familiarity, and they perceive more intimacy in case vignettes.

Attachment styles can influence the perception of responsiveness in two ways. Insecure attachment can directly influence an individual's cognition and, thus, their perception of their partner's behavior. Alternatively, attachment-related behaviors of the individual could influence the partner's behavior, thus influencing the perception of support from partners. Sarason et al. (1990) evidenced that attachment styles play a significant role in coloring perceptions of the support and responsiveness individuals receive from their partners. Furthermore, Shallcross et al. (2011) found that avoidant indi-

viduals underestimate the support and care provided by their partners and themselves. These individuals were relatively less responsive toward their partners in the study. Also, Segal and Fraley (2016) report an inverse link between insecure attachments (anxious and avoidant) and perceived partner responsiveness. Overall, the results of several studies indicate that insecure attachment, both avoidance and anxiety, are negatively associated with the perceptions and provision of responsiveness from the partner. The low perception and provision of support and care, in turn, hampers the intimacy in the relationship, creates distance between partners, and reduces the chances of strengthening their sense of we-ness in the relationship.

A direct link between responsiveness and we-ness in the relationship is provided by Bar-Shachar and Bar-Kalifa (2021). These authors showcased the influential role of perceived partner responsiveness (PPR) in constructing a shared reality among romantic couples. One pathway through which PPR influences the we-ness is by encouraging individuals to partake in the support provided to their partner. Pauw et al. (2021) have evidenced that the perception of support from partners initiates the provision of support. This could lead to a cyclic flow of care and support from one member to the other in the intimate relationship. Johnson et al. (1993) have evidenced that receiving social support is significantly associated with intimacy in the relationship. The partners in the close relationship thus enter into a mutual dance where their perception of responsiveness from their partner encourages them to respond in similar terms leading to a gradual strengthening of relational bond and blurring of the boundaries of self and partner.

## Dyadic Studies Exploring Inter-Relationships Among Study Variables

The dyadic exploration of we-ness and related variables needs to be explored more in the relationship science literature. The dyadic exploration of attachment and intimacy by Wendołowska et al. (2022) and Dandurand and Lafontaine (2013) reported that men's and women's avoidance of attachment was negatively associated with their partner's sexual and emotional intimacy. These authors found that avoidant attachment of both men and women significantly and negatively influenced their partners' intimate relational bonding. Karantzas et al. (2014) investigated the actor-partner interdependence mediation model (APIMeM) for the mediating role of individuals and their partners' support provision on the association of attachment and relationship closeness. Their findings evidenced significant actor effects but provided only partial support for partner effects. Specifically, the findings revealed that the support and care provided by women mediated the inverse relationship between men's avoidance and women's intimacy. In contrast, the responsiveness provided by men mediated the inverse relationship between women's anxiety and men's relationship closeness.

Hadden et al. (2016) explored the influence of insecure attachments and relatedness in the relationship. The APIM exploration was consistent with the findings of other schol-

ars. Avoidance attachment pattern of the individual negatively influences the partners' relatedness in the relationship. Overall and Simpson (2016) writes that partners play a very influential role in regulating the relationship processes of insecure individuals. This regulation of relational processes is essential to strengthening the relational bond in intimate relationships. In their study, Campbell et al. (1987) have evidenced the significant role of insecure attachment in supporting partners. The authors found that avoidantly attached individuals were unsupportive and negative to their partners. In turn, their partners, too, behaved unsupportively toward them. The non-provision of responsiveness by avoidant individuals becomes a deterrent for emotional bonding among partners. The relationship, however, was not statistically significant for anxious attachment.

These dyadic studies suggest that avoidant attachment negatively influences one's partner's perception of responsiveness and the intimacy and closeness experienced in the relationship. However, the relationship between anxious attachment, responsiveness, and intimacy is more complex. In the present study, we aimed to explore whether the attachment insecurities of husbands and wives would indirectly influence their own and their partner's sense of we-ness through their perceived partner responsiveness (PPR) and their partners' PPR. We hypothesized that:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Husband's PPR mediates the relationship between:

- a. Husband's insecure attachment and husband's we-ness (actor effect)
- b. Husband's insecure attachment and wife's we-ness (partner effect)
- c. Wife's insecure attachment and wife's we-ness (partner effect)
- d. Wife's insecure attachment and husband's we-ness (partner effect)

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Wife's PPRS mediates the relationship between:

- a. Wife's insecure attachment and wife's we-ness (actor effect)
- b. Wife's insecure attachment and husband's we-ness (partner effect)
- c. Husband's insecure attachment and husband's we-ness (partner effect)
- d. Husband's insecure attachment and wife's we-ness (partner effect).

## Method

### Participants

The sample ( $N = 96$  dyads; 192 individuals) for the present study came from a larger community sample ( $N = 311$  individuals) collected from the north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The authors' institutional review board provided ethical approval for data collection. Cross-sectional, non-random sampling methods (purposive and snowball techniques) were used to collect data. We used the records of individuals who belonged to a dyad in the larger dataset to study non-independence and actor-partner effects. All

participants were literate. In about 76 dyads, only the husband was employed; in 3 dyads, only the wife was employed; and in 17 dyads, both husband and wife were employed. The men's ages ranged from 25 to 63 years ( $M = 40.39$ ;  $SD = 6.812$ ), and the women's ages ranged from 22 to 60 years ( $M = 34.08$ ;  $SD = 7.114$ ). The marriage duration ranged from 0 to 30 years ( $M = 13.99$ ;  $SD = 7.251$ ). Fifty (52.1%) dyads belonged to rural regions, while 46 (47.9%) were from urban areas.

## Measures

Our sample came from the north Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where Hindi is the popular language of communication. Before administering them to the participants, we translated the items of all the scales into Hindi—three forward and one backward translation. Four volunteers having university-level education and fluent in both English and Hindi translated the study scales. These translated items were pilot-tested on a small Hindi-speaking sample ( $N = 30$ ). Modifications were made as per the suggestion of participants in the pilot test. The measures thus developed were finally used to collect data.

### Experiences in Close Relationships—Revised (ECR-R)

ECR-R (Fraley et al., 2000) is the most widely used attachment scale. It is a self-administered five-point Likert scale comprising 36 items, with 18 items measuring the anxiety dimension and the other 18 items measuring the avoidance dimension. An example of an avoidant item is "I prefer not to show my husband/wife how I feel deep down." An example of anxiety is, "I often worry that my husband/wife does not really love me." We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to check the internal consistency and dimensionality (CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.91, RMSEA = 0.05). The Cronbach's alpha for the avoidance dimension was 0.82, and for the anxiety dimension, it was 0.85.

### Perceived Partner Responsiveness (PPR) Scale

PPR (Reis et al., 2017) is an 18-item self-administered Likert scale consisting of two domains—understanding and validation. An example of an item is "My partner really listens to me" and "My partner is responsive to my needs." We conducted CFA to check the internal consistency and dimensionality (CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06). The Cronbach's alpha for the perceived partner responsiveness (PPR) scale was 0.92.

### We-Ness

Walsh and Neff (2018) used three instruments—inclusion of others in self scale (IOS), "We" stories, and "Me" to "Us" scale to measure we-ness in marital union. Agnew et al. (1998) measured cognitive interdependence with the help of IOS, couples' use of plural pronouns such as "We" and "Us" in communication, and the relationship centrality questionnaire. For the present study, we similarly operationalized couple identity. We used

the IOS scale (Aron et al., 1991), Relational Interdependent Self-Construal (RISC) scale (Cross et al., 2000), and Relationship Centrality (Agnew et al., 1998) scale to measure the we-ness among participants. Since these constructs share similarities, we speculated the presence of one dimension. The CFA analysis supported our speculation. One common dimension emerged (CFI = 0.91, TLI = 0.89, RMSEA = 0.06). The Cronbach's alpha value for we-ness was 0.83.

## Procedure

The dataset consisted of a community sample recruited through non-random sampling techniques, utilizing the purposive and snowball techniques to meet the study requirements. Data collection started from the urban regions of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Participants were briefed about the study, and their consent for participation was sought. When participants agreed, they were provided with a questionnaire. Ethical guidelines were followed during the data collection. We did not collect any identifiers of the participants. Participants had the right to withdraw from participating in the study at any point during the data collection process.

## Results

The data was restructured into pairwise data (see Kenny et al., 2006; West & Dumitru, 2020) to reflect the scores of both actors and partners for each dyad. Thus, each case reflected the measures of husband and wife in the same row. This enables the exploration of APIMeM effects using path analysis in AMOS. Table 1 shows the bivariate correlations among different variables of actors and partners, separately. We also tested the bivariate correlations between the scores of actors and partners. The results were statistically significant across all variables, indicating non-independence of data.

**Table 1**

*Bivariate Correlations Between Husbands' Variables and Wives' Variables*

Variable	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Avoidance	1.91 (0.61)		0.22*	-0.34***	-0.56***
2. Anxiety	2.03 (0.67)	0.40***		-0.32***	-0.26**
3. PPR	4.01 (0.67)	-0.48***	-0.46***		0.58***
4. We-ness	5.24 (0.81)	-0.60***	-0.41***	0.63***	

Note. *N* = 96 dyads (192 individuals). PPR is perceived partner responsiveness; Scores on the upper right side are of wives and on the lower left are of husbands.

\**p* < .05. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

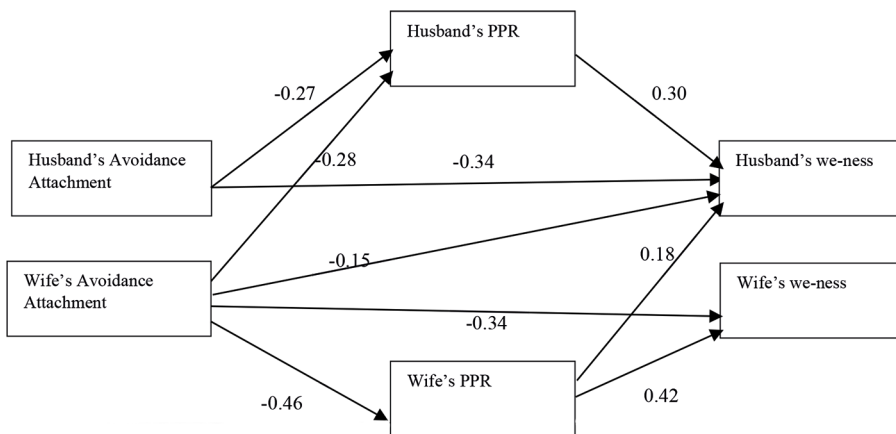


## Dyadic Analysis Involving Avoidance Attachment

The estimates of APIMeM analysis for avoidance attachment conducted using path analysis in AMOS are presented in Figure 1, Figure 2 and Table 2. The estimates suggest that avoidant husbands perceived less responsiveness from their partners ( $b = -0.34$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the same was true for wives ( $b = -0.45$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Also, perceived responsiveness by husbands was significantly and positively associated with husbands' we-ness ( $b = 0.36$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and this association was similar for wives ( $b = 0.52$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The direct effects for both husbands and wives remained statistically significant (for husbands  $b = -0.50$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and for wives  $b = -0.41$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effects of husband's attachment avoidance on husband's we-ness through husband's PPR ( $b = -0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ , 95% CI [-0.37, -0.01]) as well as the indirect effects of wife's attachment avoidance on wife's we-ness through wife's PPR ( $b = -0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ , 95% CI [-0.50, -0.08]) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples did not contain zero, suggesting statistically significant mediation effects. The results support the claim that the husband's PPR mediates the relationship between husband's avoidance and husband's we-ness, and the wife's PPR mediates the relationship between wife's avoidance and wife's we-ness, respectively. In other words, the actor effects were statistically significant.

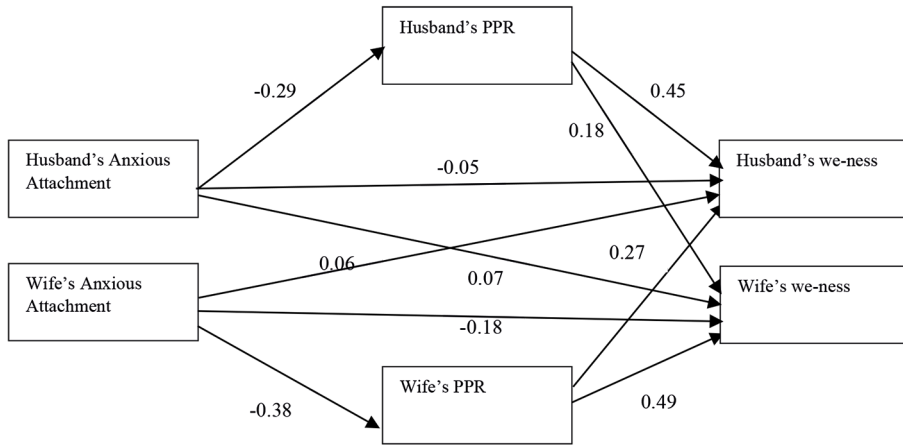
**Figure 1**

*Depicting the Statistically Significant Standardized Estimates for Different Effects Involving Avoidant Attachment*



**Figure 2**

Depicting the Statistically Significant Standardized Estimates for Different Effects Involving Anxious Attachment



**Table 2**

Statistically Significant Indirect Actor-Partner Mediation Effects for Avoidance Attachment

Predictors, mediators, and outcome variables	Indirect Effect (SE)	LL	UL	p
Hus. avoidance → Hus. PPR → Hus. we-ness	-0.12* (0.09)	-0.37	-0.01	.02
Wife avoidance → Wife PPR → Wife we-ness	-0.24*** (0.09)	-0.50	-0.08	< .001
Wife avoidance → Wife PPR → Hus. we-ness	-0.12** (0.06)	-0.28	-0.02	< .01
Wife avoidance → Hus. PPR → Hus. we-ness	-0.11* (0.07)	-0.31	-0.01	.02
Hus anxiety → Hus. PPR → Hus. we-ness	-0.18** (0.08)	-0.38	-0.04	< .01
Wife anxiety → Wife PPR → Wife we-ness	-0.20** (0.11)	-0.46	-0.04	< .01
Hus anxiety → Hus. PPR → Wife we-ness	-0.06** (0.04)	-0.21	-0.003	.04
Wife anxiety → Wife PPR → Hus. we-ness	-0.13** (0.07)	-0.315	-0.028	< .01

Note. SE = standard error; PPR = perceived partner responsiveness.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Besides the two actor effects, only two of the six mediation effects involving partner effects were statistically significant, both for husbands. None of the partner effects were statistically significant for wives. Wives' avoidant attachment was negatively associated with the perception of responsiveness of husbands ( $b = -0.32$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Wives' perception of responsiveness was positively and significantly associated with husbands' we-ness ( $b = 0.25$ ,  $SE = 11$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ). The direct effect of wives' avoidance attachment to husbands' we-ness ( $b = -0.21$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ , 95% CI [-0.44, 0.04]) and from husbands' avoidance of wives' we-ness ( $b = -0.09$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ , 95% CI [-0.24, 0.06]) was statistically

non-significant. From Table 2, it is evident that the bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effects of wife's attachment avoidance on husband's we-ness through wife's PPR ( $b = -0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , 95% CI [-0.28, -0.02]) as well as the indirect effects of wife's attachment avoidance on husband's we-ness through husband's PPR ( $b = -0.11$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ , 95% CI [-0.31, -0.01]) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples did not contain zero, suggesting statistically significant mediation effects. The results support the claim that husbands' PPR and wives' PPR mediate the relationship between wives' avoidance attachment and husbands' we-ness.

## Dyadic Analysis Involving Anxious Attachment

Table 2 depicts the various estimates for the APIMeM analysis involving anxious attachment as predictors, PPRS as mediators, and we-ness as the outcome variables for both husbands and wives. When husbands were anxiously attached, they perceived their partners to be less responsive ( $b = -0.33$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the same was true for wives ( $b = -0.35$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Husbands' perception of responsiveness was significantly and positively associated with husbands' we-ness ( $b = 0.53$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and again this association was similar for wives ( $b = 0.60$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The direct effects for both husbands and wives from their respective anxious attachment to we-ness were not statistically significant (for husbands  $b = -0.08$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $p = 0.56$ ; and for wives  $b = -0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.10$ ,  $p = 0.06$ ). The bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effects of husband's attachment anxiety on husband's we-ness through husband's PPR ( $b = -0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ , 95% CI [-0.38, -0.04]) as well as the indirect effects of wife's attachment anxiety on wife's we-ness through wife's PPR ( $b = -0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ , 95% CI [-0.46, -0.04]) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples did not contain zero, suggesting statistically significant mediation effects. The results support the claim for statistically significant actor effects, i.e., husband's PPR mediates the relationship between husband's anxiety and husband's we-ness, and wife's PPR mediates the relationship between wife's anxiety and wife's we-ness, respectively.

Besides the two actor effects, two of the six mediation effects involving partner effects were statistically significant. One of the statistically significant partner effects was for the husbands, and the other was for the wives. As discussed in the above paragraph, when husbands were anxiously attached, they perceived their partners to be less responsive ( $b = -0.33$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the same was true for wives ( $b = -0.35$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The perception of responsiveness by husbands was in turn positively and significantly associated with the we-ness of their wives ( $b = 0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.09$ ,  $p < .03$ ), and the perception of responsiveness by wives was positively and significantly associated with the we-ness of their husbands ( $b = 0.38$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The direct effects of wife's anxious attachment to her husband's we-ness were statistically non-significant ( $b = -0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $p < .55$ ), and husband's anxious attachment to wife's we-ness was also statistically non-significant ( $b = 0.08$ ,  $SE = 0.11$ ,  $p < .45$ ). The

bootstrap confidence interval for the indirect effects of wife's attachment anxiety on husband's we-ness through wife's PPR ( $b = -0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ , 95% CI [-0.31, -0.02]) and the indirect effects of husband's attachment anxiety on wife's we-ness through husband's PPR ( $b = -0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , 95% CI [-0.21, -0.003]) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples did not contain zero, suggesting statistically significant mediation effects. The results support the claim that husband's PPR and wife's PPR mediate the relationship between husband's anxious attachment and wife's we-ness and wife's anxious attachment and husband's we-ness, respectively.

## Discussion

In the present study, the actor effects were statistically significant. In addition, the findings suggest that when avoidance attachment was the predictor, the partner effects were statistically significant only for husbands. Wives' attachment avoidance was indirectly associated with husbands' we-ness through husbands' PPR and wives' PPR. When wives were avoidant in their behaviors, they provided their husbands with less validation, understanding, and care. This resulted in lowered PPR for husbands, thus influencing their we-ness. Additionally, because of their unique cognitive styles, avoidant wives perceived lower responsiveness from their husbands, which in turn was negatively associated with their provision of care, validation, and understanding to their husbands and the lowered sense of we-ness in the relationship.

Interestingly none of the partner effects were statistically significant for wives when their husbands were avoidantly attached. This finding is not consistent with the findings reported in WEIRD samples. One of the reasons for this finding could relate to cultural norms and gender stereotyping. Since gender norms are highly salient for North Indian arranged marriages, these norms likely influence individuals' expectations, assumptions, and behaviors significantly (Basu et al., 2017). For instance, conventionally, men are expected to be avoidant and less indulgent in the marital relationship, which could call for ridiculing and shaming from other family members (Bumiller, 1991; Lahiri-Roy, 2016). Thus, if a man is avoidant, it could negatively influence their own couple identity because of its influence on PPR. However, it would not influence their wife's couple identity since, as per conventional narratives, that behavior is expected of him.

On the other hand, such avoidant behaviors are conventionally not expected from women. Women are expected to desire intimacy and connection (Kakar, 1989). Kakar writes how a wife's anxiety for an avoidant husband who would find solace in another woman's embrace is widely present in Indian folktales. Nevertheless, when women behave contrary to these expectations, it affects their partners' PPR and, consequently, their sense of we-ness in the relationship. Both men and women strongly internalize these social expectations, influencing their behaviors and relationship processes.

Another possible reason for this inconsistent finding could relate to how a couple's identity is understood in the Indian context. The idea of we-ness in Indian arranged marriages likely incorporates the family within it, i.e., the inclusion of partners and the larger family within one's self-concept. Since a woman in a north Indian arranged marriage translocates to her husband's natal family, she becomes an object of constant scrutiny and observation. Her avoidant behaviors towards her partner and his family will likely become more salient in these circumstances, resulting in a lowered sense of PPR for their husbands and thus influencing men's we-ness.

The dyadic analysis also reveals that anxiously attached husbands and wives perceived their partners as less responsive. Moreover, this, in turn, was negatively related to their partners' we-ness. Past studies support the claim that anxiously attached individuals not only perceive less responsiveness from their partners but also provide less care, validation, and understanding to them (Karantzas et al., 2014). The perception of less responsiveness and care received from either dyad member is likely to influence their behaviors negatively towards their partners. They may reciprocate their partners' acts by reducing their support and care in the relationship, thus creating a toxic interaction where neither member prioritizes their partner's well-being.

The findings suggest that when individuals enter into arranged marital unions in India, they bring certain personal attributes and predispositions to the relationship. These predispositions have a significant role in determining their perceptions, cognitions, and behaviors. In turn, these psychological variables are responsible for the development and progress of the relationship. When a newlywed wife travels to her husband's household, she is surrounded by unfamiliar people. In this novel environment, she has little to no authority or power and thus finds herself vulnerable (Jeffery & Jeffery, 1996). Developing we-ness or a relational identity partly depends on individuals' predispositions to the union and how they perceive their partners' responsiveness. If a man or a woman is anxiously attached to his/her partner, s/he would desire and demand closeness in the relationship. No matter how supportive the partner is, more is needed. S/he would not only perceive the partner to be less responsive but may also indulge in less supportive and caring behaviors, which could be detrimental to the relationship.

On the other hand, if s/he is avoidantly attached, they would desire less interdependence and more independence in the relationship, thus, providing less support and responsiveness to the partner. Such behaviors could become more pronounced depending on how they perceive their partner.

Factors associated with relationship duration, such as dividing a larger family household into smaller ones, the birth of a child, and relationship age, are also likely to influence marital relationships. The we-ness would likely be lower until the separation of households occurs. However, we-ness intensifies post-separation from parental households, or it becomes the cause of separation from parental households. However, the effect is likely more complex than this. For women who are usually deprived of power

after marriage due to translocation to a new family, the natal family becomes a weapon that can be used to negotiate power in the new household. The arranged marital unions could also be influenced by other factors, such as the birth of a child, and marriage duration, besides separation from the larger family. Jaiswal's (2014) and Sandhya's (2009) study suggests that, unlike in the West, where affection and closeness in the relationship tend to decline after the birth of a child, affection and closeness in Indian arranged marriages tend to strengthen.

A theoretical implication of the present study is that it garners support for the adult attachment model (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003) and the Interpersonal process model of intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 2018). The study supports the universality principle of attachment theory. There are limited studies that have explored dyadic effects in arranged marital contexts. The study shows the dyadic dance in North Indian arranged marriages. The present study contributes to the debate in the literature regarding the presence of affection and intimacy in Indian arranged marriages. The study evidences the presence of intimacy and closeness in Indian arranged marriages by providing support for the presence of we-ness among married couples. It also argues that individuals in Indian arranged marriages reorient their sense of self, similar to Western choice marriages.

The present study's findings also have practical implications, especially for couple counseling in the Indian context. The divorce rates in India are low; however, the rates are gradually increasing, particularly in metropolitan areas (Maitra & Gayathri, 2015). The low divorce rates mean couples choose to stay in marriages even when the trade-off is high on separation. The findings of the present study can be used in marital counseling. Enhancing couples' sense of we-ness is likely one way to ensure a strong and healthy relationship.

## Strengths, Limitations, and Recommendations

Although relationship studies have proliferated recently, most of these studies have focused on WEIRD samples. The present study aims to fill a significant gap in relationship science literature by investigating the marital processes in a non-WEIRD sample. Moreover, even though interdependence is defined as an intimate relationship, single-partner datasets have been more widely explored in literature. The present study contributes to filling this gap by conducting a dyadic analysis.

Despite these crucial strengths, the study has several limitations. To begin with, the sample size for the study is relatively small. Secondly, snowball sampling may not be an appropriate technique for data collection to make generalizations about large populations. The sampling technique could have influenced the study findings. Besides, India is culturally diverse and huge in terms of population. The study's findings need further support from other studies before generalizing the findings. The study findings would likely best apply to north Indian arranged marriages from rural and urban regions. Although the study attempts to unfold the dyadic dance between partners in north

Indian arranged marriages, it is unclear how the larger family would influence the sense of we-ness of the couples. Indian arranged marriages should be viewed as embedded in the larger familial system and not disjointed.

The sample for the present study consisted of individuals living in arranged marriages and not seeking separation or divorce. Different types of relationships could provide deeper insight into the relationship functioning of Indian marriages. Future studies can include participants seeking divorce or separation, individuals in alternate family systems, couples with disabilities and terminal illnesses, or couples facing childbearing difficulties. These distressing factors are expected to create variability in relationship processes different from this study's findings. Future studies can also explore the role of perceived responsiveness from in-laws, power-sharing, and emotion regulation in influencing a couple's identity. Moreover, a multifaceted, multilevel, and holistic study incorporating different family members could provide detailed and richer information about the relational processes of arranged marriages in India.

## Conclusion

This dyadic study used APIMeM (Actor Partner Interdependence Mediation Model) analysis to shed light on the associations among attachment styles, PPR, and we-ness in Indian arranged marriages. The relationship processes in Indian arranged marriages have received limited attention in the literature. Our findings suggest that attachment insecurities, particularly avoidance and anxiety, can have significant effects not only on individuals' sense of we-ness but also on their partners' sense of we-ness in the marriage. We found support for wives' avoidant attachment style being indirectly and negatively associated with husbands' we-ness and also for both husbands' and wives' anxious attachment being indirectly and negatively associated with their partners' sense of we-ness through PPR. The study underscores the complex interplay of relationship variables that give rise to an interdependence among marital partners which is not just physical but also cognitive in nature. This cognitive interdependence (Agnew et al., 1998) can play a determinant role in predicting relationship outcomes. Despite filling up an essential gap in relationship science literature, this study had several limitations. Future research could further explore these dynamics and investigate additional factors that may influence relationship outcomes in arranged marriages.

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**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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**Data Availability:** The data for the present study is available upon request from the authors through email.

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## Supplementary Materials

The supplementary files contain additional results of APIMeM analyses (see Kumar & Singh, 2024).

### Index of Supplementary Materials

Kumar, R. M., & Singh, R. M. (2024). *Supplementary materials to "From strangers to spouses: Exploring dyadic effects of insecure attachment and responsiveness on we-ness in indian arranged marriages"* [APIMeM analyses results]. *PsychOpen GOLD*.  
<https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.15818>

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