

# The mediating role of self-perception in the relationship between object relations and loneliness levels in adults

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## ABSTRACT

**Aims:** The present study aims to examine the mediating role of self-perception in the relationship between object relations patterns and loneliness levels in adults. In line with psychodynamic theories, the study emphasizes the pivotal role of early object relations in shaping an individual's self-structure and interpersonal bonding capacity.

**Methods:** This research employed a quantitative and correlational survey design. The sample consisted of 437 adults (232 women and 205 men) aged between 18 and 65, none of whom had a psychiatric diagnosis. Data were collected using the Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI), the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the UCLA Loneliness Scale. Statistical analyses were conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient and Hayes' PROCESS macro (Model 4).

**Results:** The correlation analysis revealed significant positive associations between the subdimensions of object relations and levels of loneliness. A significant positive correlation was also found between scores on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and loneliness. Given that higher scores on this scale indicate lower self-esteem, the results imply that individuals with lower self-esteem tend to experience higher levels of loneliness. Mediation analysis demonstrated that the subdimensions of alienation ( $\beta=.10$ ), insecure attachment ( $\beta=.09$ ), egocentrism ( $\beta=.09$ ), and social incompetence ( $\beta=.08$ ) had significant indirect effects on loneliness through self-esteem.

**Conclusion:** The findings indicate that impaired object relations significantly increase loneliness both directly and indirectly via diminished self-esteem. From a clinical standpoint, the results highlight the critical importance of interventions aimed at enhancing self-esteem as a strategy for mitigating loneliness. The study is expected to contribute to the literature by reinforcing the theoretical framework and empirical evidence supporting the mediating role of self-perception in the relationship between object relations and loneliness.

**Keywords:** Loneliness, self-perception, self, object relations

## INTRODUCTION

Loneliness is a universal experience that arises when an individual feels inadequate, disconnected, and lacking in meaning in their relationships with their social environment. While it may appear to be related to social isolation, psychodynamic theories suggest that loneliness is fundamentally based on internal object relations patterns and self-structure rooted in early childhood experiences. According to the tenets of object relations theory, the relationships an individual forms with caregivers during early childhood are internalized and transformed into representations of the self and the other. The establishment of healthy object relations serves as the foundational element for an individual to perceive self-worth, self-sufficiency, and affection. Conversely, pathological relationships have the potential to result in the dissolution of self-boundaries and the cultivation of an unstable and insecure trust in others. This phenomenon often results in experiences of emotional distance, disconnection, and feelings of loneliness within interpersonal relationships. Self-perception is defined as an emotional and cognitive structure

that includes an individual's evaluations of themselves and is greatly influenced by early object relationships. Consequently, dysfunction in object relationships has been demonstrated to directly impact feelings of loneliness. However, it is postulated that this phenomenon frequently manifests itself through self-perception. A weak self-perception can result in feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness in social relationships, thereby increasing an individual's sense of loneliness. In this context, the hypothesis is put forth that self-perception may play a mediating role in the relationship between object relations and loneliness.

Loneliness is a multifaceted phenomenon that impacts individuals across various psychological, social, and physiological domains. Despite the advancement of discourse on the diagnosis and treatment of loneliness in psychology, its conceptual foundations remain underdeveloped.<sup>1</sup> The following text is intended to provide a comprehensive overview of the subject matter.

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Loneliness offers a significant opportunity to gain insight into an individual's social existence and sense of self. The phenomenon of experiencing an inability to establish meaningful connections with others can manifest in a variety of forms, ranging from transient distancing to enduring disconnection.<sup>2</sup> Zahavi<sup>3</sup> posits that the concept of the self is not a static entity from birth, but rather a dynamic process shaped by social interaction. According to the aforementioned theorist, an individual's subjective experience of self is shaped within the context of social relationships and interactions with others. According to Hawkley and Cacioppo's model<sup>4</sup> of loneliness, social isolation has been demonstrated to erode an individual's sense of security, thereby amplifying their perception of environmental threats. This phenomenon can engender feelings of alienation in individuals, leading them to perceive the social realm as a potential threat to their well-being. Consequently, it can precipitate a disruption in their internal psychological equilibrium. According to the tenets of object relations theory, an individual's internal representations are shaped by the relationships established during childhood.<sup>5,6</sup> Kernberg asserts that when these relationships are disrupted, pathological experiences such as loneliness, emptiness, and meaninglessness may develop. Kohut<sup>7</sup> posits that the establishment of a positive self-image is contingent upon the cultivation of healthy object relations.

From an existential perspective, loneliness is not merely a consequence of failed social bonds but a fundamental feature of the human condition. Yalom<sup>8</sup> outlines three types of loneliness: interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential. Existential loneliness, in particular, refers to the inescapable separation of the individual from others and from life itself—a solitude rooted in the realization of one's ultimate aloneness. Heidegger<sup>9</sup> viewed such solitude as an ontological structure, in which authentic being emerges only when one confronts the angst of their isolated existence. Kierkegaard,<sup>10</sup> similarly, considered loneliness as a spiritual awakening, confronting the individual with the 'self before God.' These philosophical views suggest that loneliness is intimately linked with self-awareness, self-worth, and meaning-making processes—aligning closely with the psychodynamic premise that internal structures guide how we relate to both ourselves and others.

Building on these theoretical perspectives, Fairbairn<sup>11</sup> emphasized that individuals are motivated not solely by drives but by the need to establish object relationships. He proposed that internalized object relations serve as templates for later relationships and psychic organization. Winnicott<sup>12</sup> introduced the concept of "capacity to be alone," which he argued is contingent upon early experiences with a 'good-enough mother.' The presence of a responsive and reliable caregiver facilitates the development of a stable self, enabling the child—and later the adult—to tolerate solitude without distress. These foundational contributions underscore the deep-seated interplay between early relational experiences and adult capacities for self-containment and intimacy.

Furthermore, the concept of loneliness can be differentiated into emotional and social subtypes, as proposed by Weiss.<sup>13</sup> Social loneliness stems from the absence of a broader social network, whereas emotional loneliness arises from the absence of close emotional attachments. Disruptions in

early object relations are more closely linked to emotional loneliness, which reflects unmet attachment needs rather than the mere lack of social contact. This distinction allows for a more nuanced understanding of how internal dynamics translate into subjective experiences of disconnection and how self-perception mediates these experiences.

The current study situates itself at the intersection of these conceptualizations, aiming to explore how early internalized relational templates influence the adult experience of loneliness, particularly through the lens of self-perception. In this context, the study aims to examine the mediating role of self-image in the relationship between object relations patterns and loneliness.

## METHODS

The study was reviewed and approved by the Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University Ethics Committee (Date: 29.05.2025, Decision No: 355043). All procedures were conducted in accordance with ethical principles and the Helsinki Declaration. The objective of the present study is to investigate the mediating role of self-perception in the relationship between object relations patterns and loneliness levels in individuals aged 18-65 on a voluntary basis. The study was conducted using a quantitative and correlational survey design, and Hayes' PROCESS tool was employed to examine direct and indirect relationships between variables. The study sample consisted of a total of 437 participants, 232 of whom were female and 205 of whom were male. Individuals who reported having a psychiatric diagnosis were excluded from the study. The participants were administered a series of instruments designed to assess various aspects of their psychosocial functioning. These instruments included the Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI),<sup>14</sup> the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Inventory,<sup>15</sup> and the UCLA Loneliness Scale.<sup>16</sup> The statistical analyses of the data obtained in the study were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27 software. Pearson Correlation Analysis was employed to ascertain the relationships between variables, contingent upon the fulfillment of the assumptions inherent to parametric tests.<sup>17</sup> This analytical method is often favored in the context of discerning the direction and magnitude of the linear relationship between two continuous variables. In accordance with the primary objective of the study, a mediation analysis was conducted to assess the impact of four independent variables (X1, X2, X3, X4) on a dependent variable (Y) via a mediator variable (M). In this context, the PROCESS Macro v4.2 add-on running in SPSS was utilized, and the Model 4 structure developed by Andrew F. Hayes<sup>18</sup> was preferred.

## Demographic Information Form

The form developed by the researcher asked participants about their age, gender, marital status, income, education level, and psychiatric diagnosis.

## Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory (BORRTI)

The validity and reliability studies of the inventory developed by Bell<sup>19</sup> in 1995 were completed by Uluç et al.<sup>14</sup> in 2015. The

scale consists of a total of 90 items, with 45 items testing object relations and 45 items testing the capacity to assess reality, in a two-dimensional true-false response format. The object relations dimension consists of four sub-dimensions: alienation, insecure attachment, egocentrism, and social incompetence. The reality testing dimension consists of three sub-dimensions; distortion of reality, perceptual uncertainty, and hallucinations and delusions. The object relations dimension and its subdimensions were used in the study. The object relations subdimension of the scale had Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients between .70 and .80, while the reality testing subdimension had Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients between .54 and .77.

### UCLA Loneliness Scale

The scale developed by Russel, Peplau, and Ferguson<sup>20</sup> consists of a total of 20 items, 10 of which are coded in a positive direction and 10 in a negative direction, using a four-point Likert Scale. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale, which was adapted into Turkish by Demir,<sup>21</sup> was found to be .96, and the test-retest reliability was found to be .94.

### Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

The Turkish adaptation of the scale developed by Morris Rosenberg<sup>22</sup> in 1965 was completed by Çuhadaroglu<sup>23</sup> in 1986. The scale's validity coefficient was found to be .71 and its reliability coefficient was found to be .75. A high score on the scale indicates a decrease in self-esteem, while a low score indicates an increase in self-esteem.

### Statistical Analysis

Model 4 is a direct mediation model that permits the examination of the indirect effect of an independent variable (X) on a dependent variable (Y) through a mediating variable (M). In this study, multiple independent variables were included in the model simultaneously, and the direct and indirect effects of each independent variable were analyzed together. In the model, the effect of each independent variable on both the mediator variable and the dependent variable was tested. The significance of the indirect effects was assessed through the implementation of the bootstrap resampling method, employing 5,000 samples and establishing a 95% confidence level. The non-zero values observed in the confidence intervals indicate a statistically significant indirect effect. All statistical tests were conducted based on a 95% confidence level, and  $p < .05$  was accepted as the significance level. This comprehensive analysis strategy was developed to enhance the scientific consistency and reliability of the research findings.

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for participants are presented below (Table 1). An examination of the gender distribution of participants, as presented in Table 1, reveals that 53.1% ( $n=232$ ) are female and 46.9% ( $n=205$ ) are male. When examining age groups, 39.1% ( $n=171$ ) of the subjects fall within the 31-45 age range, 37.8% ( $n=165$ ) are between the ages of 18 and 30, and 23.1% ( $n=101$ ) are 46 years of age and older. In the course of evaluating the distribution of marital status, it was ascertained that 67.0% ( $n=293$ ) of the participants were unmarried, while

33.0% ( $n=144$ ) were married. When examining educational levels, 47.1% of the data set included 206 university graduates, 10.1% individuals with a master's degree, 44 high school graduates, 9.6% doctoral degree graduates, and 8.0% elementary school graduates, representing 1%, 25.2%, 10.1%, 9.6%, and 8.0% of the sample, respectively. With respect to perceived income level, 62.2% ( $n=272$ ) of the participants were classified as middle-income, 19.7% ( $n=86$ ) as low-income, and 18.1% ( $n=79$ ) as high-income. The statistical values of the measurement tools utilized in the study, along with the skewness and kurtosis coefficients of the obtained data, are presented in Table 2. These values are essential for the analysis, as they provide a quantitative foundation for the subsequent statistical analysis. As indicated by the descriptive statistics presented in Table 2, the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients of the scales utilized in the study ranged from .71 to .90, suggesting a high degree of reliability. The values obtained from the data set are statistically consistent, as indicated by their location above the generally accepted threshold of .70. Furthermore, the skewness and kurtosis coefficients remained within the range of -2 to +2,<sup>24</sup> indicating that the measurements met the assumption of normal distribution and that parametric analyses were applicable. These findings serve to reinforce the validity of the analyses. The findings of the correlation analysis indicate that loneliness and self-esteem variables exhibit positive and generally low to moderate significant relationships with all other variables (Table 3). The findings revealed a moderate relationship between Alienation and Insecure Attachment, with a corresponding  $r$  value of .35. Similarly, a moderate relationship was observed between Alienation and Self-Esteem, with an  $r$  value of .30. Additionally, lower-level significant relationships were identified with variables such as egocentrism, social incompetence, distortion of reality, perceptual ambiguity, and hallucination/delusion, with  $r$  values ranging from .19 to .33. Furthermore, a moderate relationship was identified between loneliness and self-esteem ( $r=.38$ ,  $p<.01$ ).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of sociodemographic variables ( $n=437$ )

Sociodemographic variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	232	53.1
	Male	205	46.9
Age	18-30	165	37.8
	31-45	171	39.1
	46 and above	101	23.1
Marital status	Married	144	33.0
	Single	293	67.0
Education level	Primary school	35	8.0
	High school	44	10.1
	University degree	206	47.1
	Master's degree	110	25.2
	Doctorate	42	9.6
Perceived income level	Low	86	19.7
	Moderate	272	62.2
	High	79	18.1

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for the scales and subscales

Scale/subscale	Min	Max	M	SD	Kurtosis	Skewness	$\alpha$
BORRTI-alienation	0	21	8.19	5.41	-0.77	0.51	.88
BORRTI-insecure attachment	0	15	7.36	3.88	-1.07	0.30	.82
BORRTI-egocentrism	0	11	4.51	3.15	-0.89	0.43	.82
BORRTI-social incompetence	0	6	2.43	2.17	-1.25	0.43	.84
BORRTI-reality distortion	0	11	2.56	2.47	0.94	1.28	.73
BORRTI-perceptual uncertainty	0	9	2.27	2.07	1.66	1.29	.71
BORRTI-hallucination and delusion	0	11	2.32	2.71	0.54	1.28	.83
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	0	6	3.19	1.64	-1.08	-0.21	.71
UCLA Loneliness Scale	20	71	38.88	9.70	0.04	0.60	.90

BORRTI: Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory; Min: Minimum, Max: Maximum, SD: Standard deviation

Table 3. Correlation matrix of scale subscales

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. BORRTI-alienation	1								
2. BORRTI-insecure attachment	.86**	1							
3. BORRTI-egocentrism	.84**	.79**	1						
4. BORRTI-social incompetence	.84**	.79**	.62**	1					
5. BORRTI-reality distortion	.54**	.46**	.42**	.52**	1				
6. BORRTI-perceptual uncertainty	.54**	.53**	.46**	.50**	.67**	1			
7. BORRTI-hallucination and delusion	.53**	.53**	.40**	.53**	.85**	.60**	1		
8. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	.30**	.32**	.29**	.25**	.22**	.20**	.24**	1	
9. UCLA Loneliness Scale	.35**	.39**	.33**	.30**	.25**	.19**	.24**	.38**	1

BORRTI: Bell Object Relations and Reality Testing Inventory; \*\*p&lt;.01 (2-tailed)

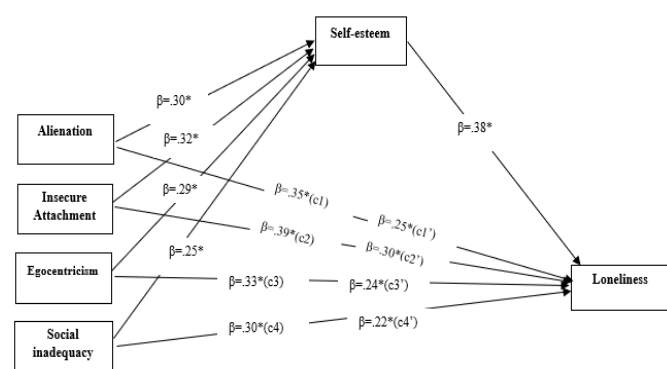
The results of the mediation analysis conducted on the mediating role of self-perception between object relations and loneliness levels are presented in Table 4 and Figure. The findings of the mediation analysis show that self-esteem plays a partial mediating role in the effect of various dimensions of object relations on loneliness.

The findings of the mediation analysis indicated that the variables of alienation, insecure attachment, egocentrism, and social incompetence predicted self-esteem at a positive and significant level ( $\beta=.30$ ,  $\beta=.32$ ,  $\beta=.29$ ,  $\beta=.25$ , respectively;  $p<.001$ ). However, the study also found that self-esteem had a significant and positive predictive effect on loneliness ( $\beta=.38$ ,

Table 4. Mediating role of self-esteem in the relationship between object relations and loneliness

Pathway	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p	95% CI (LL-UL)
Alienation $\rightarrow$ self-esteem	0.09	0.01	0.30	6.65	<.001***	(0.06, 0.12)
Insecure attachment $\rightarrow$ self-esteem	0.14	0.02	0.32	7.10	<.001***	(0.10, 0.17)
Egocentrism $\rightarrow$ Self-esteem	0.15	0.02	0.29	6.31	<.001***	(0.10, 0.20)
Social incompetence $\rightarrow$ self-esteem	0.19	0.04	0.25	5.41	<.001***	(0.12, 0.26)
Self-esteem $\rightarrow$ loneliness	2.26	0.26	0.38	8.61	<.001***	(1.74, 2.77)
Total effect ( $c_1$ ): alienation $\rightarrow$ loneliness	0.62	0.08	0.35	7.68	<.001***	(0.46, 0.78)
Direct effect ( $c_1'$ ): alienation $\rightarrow$ loneliness	0.45	0.08	0.25	5.63	<.001***	(0.30, 0.61)
Indirect effect ( $c_1$ ): via self-esteem	0.17	0.03	0.10			(0.10, 0.24)
Total effect ( $c_2$ ): insecure attachment $\rightarrow$ loneliness	0.97	0.11	0.39	8.77	<.001***	(0.75, 1.19)
Direct effect ( $c_2'$ ): insecure attachment $\rightarrow$ loneliness	0.74	0.11	0.30	6.61	<.001***	(0.52, 0.96)
Indirect effect ( $c_2$ ): via self-esteem	0.23	0.05	0.09			(0.15, 0.33)
Total effect ( $c_3$ ): egocentrism $\rightarrow$ loneliness	1.02	0.14	0.33	7.32	<.001***	(0.75, 1.29)
Direct effect ( $c_3'$ ): egocentrism $\rightarrow$ loneliness	0.74	0.14	0.24	5.36	<.001***	(0.47, 1.01)
Indirect effect ( $c_3$ ): via self-esteem	0.28	0.06	0.09			(0.17, 0.40)
Total effect ( $c_4$ ): Social incompetence $\rightarrow$ loneliness	1.36	0.20	0.30	6.67	<.001***	(0.96, 1.76)
Direct effect ( $c_4'$ ): social incompetence $\rightarrow$ loneliness	1.00	0.20	0.22	5.00	<.001***	(0.60, 1.39)
Indirect effect ( $c_4$ ): via self-esteem	0.36	0.08	0.08			(0.21, 0.53)

SE: Standard error; CI: Confidence interval; \*\*\*p&lt;.001



**Figure.** The mediating role of self-perception in the relationship between object relations and loneliness

$p < .001$ ). Furthermore, the total, direct, and indirect effects of all four independent variables on loneliness were found to be significant in the model. The total effect of alienation on loneliness was  $\beta = .35$ , while the direct effect was  $\beta = .25$  and the indirect effect through self-esteem was  $\beta = .10$ . In a similar vein, the total effect of insecure attachment was found to be  $\beta = .39$ , the direct effect was  $\beta = .30$ , and the indirect effect was  $\beta = .09$ . For egocentrism, the total effect was  $\beta = .33$ , the direct effect was  $\beta = .24$ , and the indirect effect was  $\beta = .09$ ; for social incompetence, the total effect was  $\beta = .30$ , the direct effect was  $\beta = .22$ , and the indirect effect was  $\beta = .08$ . It is noteworthy that all of the identified pathways exhibited statistical significance at the  $p < .001$  level. The findings suggest that self-esteem partially mediates the relationship between loneliness and the four variables.

## DISCUSSION

The study's findings indicated a positive correlation between object relationship patterns and loneliness levels. This finding aligns with the conclusions of clinical studies documented in the extant literature. A recent systematic review found that more than 60% of individuals diagnosed with personality disorders or exhibiting significant symptoms in this direction also reported significant levels of loneliness.<sup>25</sup> Individuals diagnosed with borderline and avoidant personality disorders have been reported to experience high levels of loneliness along with low levels of perceived social support.<sup>26</sup> The extant literature on the subject generally agrees that disturbances in object relationships predispose individuals to feelings of loneliness.<sup>26,27</sup> The present study found a negative relationship between self-perception and loneliness levels in adults. This finding aligns with the results of other studies in the literature, which demonstrate that a decline in self-esteem is associated with an increase in feelings of loneliness. A study conducted on abandoned children in China found a negative relationship between loneliness and self-esteem.<sup>28</sup> A similar finding was reported in a study conducted on elderly individuals in Poland, which found that self-esteem plays a moderating role in the relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction.<sup>29</sup> These findings suggest that self-esteem may be a universal protective factor. Notwithstanding the existence of cultural differences, individuals who perceive themselves as worthless are more likely to experience feelings of vulnerability and loneliness in social settings. According to the 24-item loneliness cycle model developed by Cacioppo and Hawkley,<sup>30</sup> the experience

of loneliness engenders cognitive and behavioral cycles that culminate in a decline in self-esteem. This, in turn, facilitates the emergence of new experiences of loneliness. Indeed, a study on the protective role of self-esteem found that feelings of loneliness increase cognitive biases in conjunction with low self-esteem. Furthermore, the study found that individuals with high self-esteem have fewer negative thought patterns even if they experience loneliness.<sup>31</sup>

In this context, there are numerous studies examining the relationship between parental attitudes and self-esteem. A significant relationship was identified between a paucity of emotional approval in childhood and low self-esteem in adulthood in a study conducted by Yöyen and Kılıç.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the study indicated that critical and rejecting parental attitudes in early life are associated with an increased tendency toward alexithymia in later life. However, the presence of high self-esteem in early life appears to mitigate some of the adverse effects of these parental attitudes. Conversely, an additional study that examined the relationship between early emotional neglect and self-development found that early emotional neglect increases the risk of anxious attachment in adulthood. The most significant variable explaining this effect is low self-organization.<sup>33</sup> The findings suggest that emotional neglect experienced during childhood can have long-lasting consequences on an individual's psychosocial development, particularly with regard to the formation of object relations and the subsequent impact on self-esteem. A salient finding of the present study was the revelation that self-perception (self-esteem) functions as a mediating factor in the relationship between object relations and loneliness. In essence, the presence of adverse object relations has been demonstrated to diminish self-esteem in individuals. Consequently, heightened levels of loneliness are observed, thereby establishing an indirect mechanism through which these effects manifest. This finding is consistent with the extant literature on the subject. A substantial body of recent research has demonstrated that self-esteem functions as a mediating factor between diverse psychosocial variables.

In a study with Chinese adolescents, Chen and Hu<sup>34</sup> found that children who experienced feelings of loneliness at home were more likely to experience social anxiety at school. The researchers also found that low self-esteem was a factor that partially explained this relationship. A similar finding was reported in a study conducted with university students in Turkey. The study revealed that perceived social support increases positive emotions, and that self-esteem partially mediates this effect.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, students with high self-esteem appear to reflect the social support they receive in their self-worth perceptions and exhibit a greater prevalence of positive emotions. The positive effect of social support is observed to be limited in students with low self-esteem. Several studies have been conducted in the extant literature that evaluate self-esteem as a mediating variable. For instance, the mediating role of self-esteem and social support in the relationship between loneliness and life satisfaction, as well as the mediating and moderating role of self-esteem in the relationship between social support and depression, have been previously reported.<sup>36,37</sup> A comprehensive review of

extant studies in this area suggests that self-esteem is a pivotal variable in psychological functioning. However, the extant literature suggests that the mediating effect is, in many cases, only partial. In this study, it was observed that self-perception does not fully explain the relationship between object relations and loneliness, but it does significantly weaken it.

### Limitations

This study is limited to participants aged 18-65, and participants who reported having a psychiatric diagnosis were excluded from the study. The relevant data in the study are limited to values measured by scales. It is believed that collecting data from a larger sample would yield more reliable results.

### CONCLUSION

From a clinical standpoint, the findings derived from the mediation models presented in this study offer significant implications for both assessment and intervention. Specifically, the data suggest that disruptions in object relations contribute to heightened experiences of loneliness, and that this association is mediated by diminished levels of self-esteem. In other words, the sense of loneliness experienced by individuals with impaired object relational functioning does not arise solely from deficits in social interaction or external validation but is deeply intertwined with how these individuals perceive, evaluate, and relate to themselves. This insight aligns with longstanding psychodynamic perspectives suggesting that early relational templates-particularly those marked by instability, inconsistency, or emotional unavailability-shape the internal working models of the self and others. When such internalizations are negative or fragmented, individuals may come to view themselves as unworthy of love or incapable of meaningful connection, thereby reinforcing both low self-worth and social withdrawal. Clinically, these findings underscore the importance of conceptualizing loneliness not merely as a behavioral or interpersonal issue but as a phenomenon rooted in intrapsychic processes. Thus, interventions that aim solely to increase social skills or promote external connection may fall short unless they also target the individual's underlying self-perception and core beliefs about relational worthiness. If, as the model suggests, enhancing self-esteem in individuals with maladaptive object relations can lead to a reduction in perceived loneliness, this has direct therapeutic relevance. Treatment modalities-whether psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, or integrative-should consider placing greater emphasis on interventions that rebuild a coherent, stable, and affirming sense of self. This may involve working through internalized relational trauma, challenging dysfunctional self-schemas, or fostering corrective emotional experiences within the therapeutic relationship itself.

### ETHICAL DECLARATIONS

#### Ethics Committee Approval

The study was carried out with the permission of the Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University Ethics Committee (Date: 29.05.2025, Decision No: 355043).

### Informed Consent

All participants signed free of charge and informed consent form.

### Referee Evaluation Process

Externally peer-reviewed

### Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

### Financial Disclosure

The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

### Author Contributions

The author declares that they participated in the design, execution, and analysis of the manuscript and approved its final version.

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