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I AM NOT 'MARRIAGE MATERIAL': SELF-IDENTITY, PERCEIVED SOCIAL INADEQUACY, AND GAMOPHOBIA AMONG NEVER-MARRIED ADULTS

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Abstract
Never-married adults increasingly experience internalized beliefs of being "not marriage material," shaped by fragile self-identity and heightened perceptions of social inadequacy in sociocultural contexts where marriage is highly valued. The present study was conducted to investigate the relationship among self-identity, perceived social inadequacy, and gamophobia among never-married adults. It was a correlational research-based study and purposive sampling strategy was employed to recruit sample. Three self-reported measures were used to collect data. The results revealed that positive self-concept was significantly and negatively associated with negative self-concept, perceived social inadequacy, and Gamophobia, whereas negative self-concept showed positive associations with both inadequacy and gamophobia. Regression analysis indicated that positive self-concept negatively predicted gamophobia, while negative self-concept and feelings of inadequacy emerged as significant positive predictors; additionally, women reported higher levels of gamophobia than men. The findings highlight those vulnerabilities in self-identity and heightened perceived social inadequacy play a critical role in the development of Gamophobia among never-married adults. Addressing these underlying cognitive and self-concept distortions may help reduce fear of marriage and promote healthier relational readiness, particularly among women.

Keywords. self-identity; perceived social inadequacy; gamophobia; positive and negative self-concept; never-married adults.

Introduction
Marriage is widely regarded as a significant developmental milestone in many cultures, particularly in collectivistic societies where it is closely tied to identity, social status, and psychological wellbeing (Fatima et al., 2023). However, a growing number of individuals, especially in urban contexts, increasingly express ambivalence or resistance toward marriage (Rashid, 2006). This phenomenon is often reflected in self-perceptions such as *"I am not marriage material,"* which may signify deeper psychological processes involving self-identity, perceived inadequacy, and fear of commitment.

One emerging construct relevant to this phenomenon is gamophobia, commonly defined as an intense and persistent fear of marriage or long-term commitment (Jarwan & Abu-Al-Rub, 2024). Unlike normative pre-marital anxiety, gamophobia involves irrational fear, avoidance of committed relationships, and difficulty sustaining intimacy. Individuals experiencing gamophobia often anticipate negative outcomes in relationships, withdraw emotionally, or terminate relationships prematurely, thereby impairing their ability to form stable interpersonal bonds. Although not classified as a distinct disorder in diagnostic manuals, it is recognized as a form of interpersonal anxiety with significant implications for social functioning (Alguzo, 2025).

The development of gamophobia has been linked to multiple psychological and contextual factors, including early exposure to dysfunctional family environments, insecure attachment patterns, traumatic relationship experiences, and negative beliefs about marriage (Afzal & Akhtar, 2025). Empirical evidence suggests that individuals who witness parental conflict or experience relational trauma are more likely to develop maladaptive schemas regarding

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commitment, which may manifest as avoidance of marriage in adulthood (Diamond & Muller, 2004).

Closely associated with gamophobia is the construct of self-identity, which refers to an individual's perception, evaluation, and understanding of the self within a social context (Chang, 2024; Sana et al., 2021). Self-identity plays a critical role in shaping interpersonal decisions, including readiness for romantic commitment. Individuals who internalize negative self-beliefs such as perceiving themselves as inadequate partners may develop a fragmented or conflicted identity that discourages long-term relational engagement (Cinoğlu, & Arıkan, 2012). In such cases, the statement *"I am not marriage material"* may reflect an identity narrative rooted in self-doubt, fear of rejection, and perceived incompetence in fulfilling relational roles.

Another important variable is perceived social inadequacy, which encompasses feelings of insufficiency, incompetence, or lack of desirability in social and relational domains. Individuals with heightened perceived inadequacy often anticipate rejection or failure in intimate relationships, which can reinforce avoidance behaviors. (Shin, 2025). This aligns with cognitive-behavioral perspectives suggesting that maladaptive beliefs about the self contribute to anxiety and avoidance patterns in interpersonal contexts (Wong & Moulds, 2011).

The interplay between self-identity and perceived social inadequacy is particularly salient among never-married adults, a population increasingly represented in urban societies. Changing socio-cultural dynamics, including delayed marriages, shifting gender roles, and increased emphasis on individual autonomy, have contributed to evolving attitudes toward marriage (Athiambo et al., 2025). While some individuals voluntarily choose to remain single, others may experience involuntary singlehood accompanied by psychological distress, self-stigmatization, and fear of relational commitment (Adamczyk, 2017). In collectivistic cultures such as Pakistan, where marriage is often socially expected, remaining unmarried may intensify self-evaluative concerns and perceived inadequacy, further exacerbating fear-based avoidance of marriage.

Never-married adults may experience a range of psychological challenges, including identity confusion, perceived social inadequacy, and heightened fear of marital commitment such as Gamophobia. Mental health, defined as a state of well-being in which individuals realize their abilities, cope with life stressors, work productively, and contribute to society, can be significantly compromised when individuals internalize beliefs of being "not marriage material" (Khizer et al., 2024; Tariq et al., 2024; Sadaf et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2021; Sabri et al., 2021). These psychological vulnerabilities may hinder overall functioning, subjective well-being, and quality of life (Iqbal & Ijaz, 2025).

Quality of life, reflecting satisfaction with psychological state, social relationships, and daily functioning, may also be adversely affected when individuals perceive themselves as socially inadequate or relationally undesirable (Hameed et al., 2022; Gillani et al., 2022). However, protective factors such as strong social support networks and self-compassion can buffer these negative effects by fostering acceptance, reducing self-criticism, and enhancing emotional resilience (Zulfiqar et al., 2025; Iqbal et al., 2025; Umar et al., 2024; Kazmi et al., 2023; Javed et al., 2021; Javed et al., 2022). Together, these factors may facilitate adaptive coping, improve self-identity, and reduce fear and avoidance of marriage, promoting healthier psychosocial adjustment among never-married adults (Iqbal et al., 2025).

Despite the growing recognition of gamophobia, limited research has examined its relationship with identity-based constructs and perceived inadequacy, particularly in non-Western contexts. Most existing studies focus on clinical or relational aspects of commitment fear, with insufficient attention to the subjective identity narratives that underlie such fears. Moreover, the psychological meaning of self-labels such as *"not marriage material"* remains

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underexplored, especially among never-married adults navigating sociocultural expectations and personal insecurities.

Therefore, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between self-identity, perceived social inadequacy, and gamophobia among never-married adults. By integrating these constructs, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms that contribute to fear of marriage. It is anticipated that negative self-identity and heightened perceived social inadequacy will be positively associated with gamophobia, offering insights into both theoretical frameworks and practical interventions for individuals struggling with commitment-related fears.

Objectives of the Study

- To find out the relationship among self-identity, perceived social inadequacy, and gamophobia among never-married adults.
- To investigate the predicting role of self-identity and perceived social inadequacy in gamophobia among never-married adults.
- To determine the demographic differences (Gender and Age) on gamophobia among never-married adults.

Hypothesis of the Study

- It is hypothesized that positive self-concept would likely to be negatively correlated with perceived social inadequacy and gamophobia among never-married adults.
- Negative self-concept would likely to be positively correlated with perceived social inadequacy and gamophobia among never-married adults.
- Perceived social inadequacy would likely to be positively correlated with gamophobia among never-married adults.
- Negative self-concept and perceived social inadequacy would be the significant positive predictors of gamophobia while positive self-concept would be the negative predictor of gamophobia among never-married adults.
- Women would likely to face more gamophobia as compared to the men.

Material and Methods

A correlational research design with a non-probability purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed to recruit a sample of 200 never married adults, aged between 30 to 50 years. Professional ethics outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA) were rigorously followed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and their confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. Demographic questionnaires were used to obtain participants' information, including age, gender, and family system. Along with this, three standardized self-report questionnaires were used to gather data which are as follows.

Self-Perceived Identity Scale (Ersanlı & Şanlı, 2015).

The Self-Perceived Identity Scale was used to assess individuals' perceptions and evaluations of their own identity. It was developed by Ersanlı and Şanlı (2015) and consists of 19 items with two subscales i.e., Positive self-concept (9 items) and negative self-concept (10 items). The scale demonstrated excellent internal consistency, reliability analysis for the negative perception of identity and positive perception of identity factors were .87 and .86, respectively.

Feelings of Inadequacy Scale (Fleming & Watts, 1980).

The Feelings of Inadequacy Scale was used to assess individuals' subjective sense of inadequacy, including perceptions of low self-worth, lack of confidence, and self-evaluative concerns. The scale consists of 28 items measured on a 7-point Likert scale and comprises three subscales: Social Confidence, School Abilities, and Self-Regard. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency, with reliability coefficients of .90 for Social Confidence, .76 for

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School Abilities, and .83 for Self-Regard, while the overall scale reliability was reported as .90.

Gamophobia Scale (Qaqah et al., 2023)

The Gamophobia scale was a 22-item scale measures fear of commitment and avoidance of long-term romantic relationships. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The scale demonstrated good internal consistency in the current study with a Cronbach's alpha of .86.

Results

Descriptive analyses were conducted to examine the psychometric properties of the scales used in this study (Table 1). Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was performed to assess the relationships among self-concept, feelings of inadequacy, and gamophobia among never-married adults (Table 2). Multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the predictive role of self-concept and feelings of inadequacy on gamophobia (Table 3). Additionally, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in gamophobia among never-married adults (Table 4).

Table 1

The Cronbach's alpha Values for the used Scales in this Study

Variable	*K*	*M*	*SD*	*α*
Positive Self-concept	9	12.99	9.05	.81
Negative Self-concept	10	25.31	9.05	.83
Feelings of Inadequacy	28	42.82	10.77	.85
Gamophobia Scale	22	57.72	23.22	.79

Note. *K= Number of items, M= Mean, SD= Standard deviation,* α= Cronbach's Alpha

The internal consistency of the scales used in the present study was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, indicating acceptable to good reliability across all measures. The Positive Self-concept subscale (9 items) yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .81 ($M = 12.99$, $SD = 9.05$), while the Negative Self-concept subscale (10 items) demonstrated a slightly higher reliability of .83 ($M = 25.31$, $SD = 9.05$). The Feelings of Inadequacy Scale (28 items) showed good internal consistency with an alpha value of .85 ($M = 42.82$, $SD = 10.77$). Similarly, the Gamophobia Scale (22 items) exhibited acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .79 ($M = 57.72$, $SD = 23.22$). Overall, these findings suggest that all instruments used in this study possess satisfactory psychometric properties and are reliable for assessing the respective constructs.

Table 2

Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Positive Self-concept, Negative Self-concept, Feelings of Inadequacy, and Gamophobia among Never Married Adults

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Positive Self-concept	-	-.43**	-.41**	-.21*
2. Negative Self-concept		-	.52**	.35**
3. Feelings of Inadequacy			-	.39**
4. Gamophobia				-

Note. *N*= 200, **p<.05, **p<.01*

The Pearson product–moment correlation analysis revealed significant relationships among the study variables in the expected directions. Positive self-concept was found to be significantly and negatively correlated with negative self-concept ($r = -.43$, $p < .01$), feelings of inadequacy ($r = -.41$, $p < .01$), and gamophobia ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$). In contrast, negative self-concept

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showed significant positive correlations with feelings of inadequacy ($r = .52, p < .01$) and gamophobia ($r = .35, p < .01$), suggesting that higher negative self-perceptions are associated with greater inadequacy and fear of marriage. Additionally, feelings of inadequacy were positively correlated with gamophobia ($r = .39, p < .01$), indicating that individuals who perceive themselves as inadequate are more likely to experience fear or avoidance of marriage. Overall, these findings highlight the central role of self-concept and perceived inadequacy in understanding gamophobia among never-married adults.

Table 3

Multiple Regression Analysis for the Prediction of Self-concept and Feelings of Inadequacy on Gamophobia among Never Married Adults

Predictors	*B*	*SE B*	*β*	*t*	*p*
Positive Self-concept	-0.28	0.09	-0.19	-3.11	.002**
Negative Self-concept	0.41	0.08	0.33	5.12	.001***
Feelings of Inadequacy	0.36	0.10	0.25	3.60	.001***

Note. N= 200, $R^2 = .26$, $p < .001$

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine whether positive self-concept, negative self-concept, and feelings of inadequacy significantly predict gamophobia among never-married adults. The overall model was statistically significant, $F(3, 196) = 22.94$, $p < .001$, explaining 26% of the variance in gamophobia ($R^2 = .26$). Among the predictors, positive self-concept emerged as a significant negative predictor of gamophobia ($\beta = -.19, p < .01$), indicating that individuals with higher positive self-concept are less likely to experience fear of marriage. In contrast, negative self-concept was found to be a significant positive predictor ($\beta = .33, p < .001$), suggesting that higher levels of negative self-perception are associated with increased gamophobia. Similarly, feelings of inadequacy also significantly and positively predicted gamophobia ($\beta = .25, p < .001$), indicating that individuals with greater perceived inadequacy are more likely to report fear of marriage. Overall, these findings support the proposed hypothesis, demonstrating that negative self-concept and feelings of inadequacy increase the likelihood of gamophobia, whereas positive self-concept serves as a protective factor among never-married adults.

Table 4

Independent Sample t-test for Mean and Standard Deviation of Gamophobia Based on Gender Differences among Never Married Adults

Variable	Men (n=100)		Women (n=100)		*t*	*p*	Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Gamophobia	52.14	21.87	63.30	24.11	-3.41	.001***	0.43

Note. ****p < .001.*

Table 4 presents the results of the independent samples t-test comparing gamophobia between men and women never married adults. The findings revealed that women *($M = 63.30, SD = 24.11$)* reported significantly higher gamophobia than men *($M = 52.14, SD = 21.87$), $t(198) = -3.41$, $p < .001$*, with a medium effect size (Cohen's d = *0.43)*.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the role of self-concept (positive and negative) and feelings of inadequacy in predicting gamophobia among never-married adults, along with gender differences in the experience of gamophobia. Overall, the findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed hypotheses and align well with the existing body of psychological literature on self-concept, self-evaluation, and interpersonal fears.

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The correlational findings revealed that positive self-concept was negatively associated with negative self-concept, feelings of inadequacy, and gamophobia. This suggests that individuals who possess a coherent and positive sense of self are less likely to experience internalized inadequacy and fear of intimate commitments such as marriage. These findings are consistent with the theoretical assumptions of self-concept proposed by Carl Rogers (1951), who emphasized that a positive self-concept fosters psychological adjustment and reduces vulnerability to anxiety-related conditions. Similarly, research has shown that individuals with higher self-esteem and positive self-views tend to exhibit greater relational confidence and lower avoidance in close relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

In contrast, negative self-concept demonstrated significant positive relationships with both feelings of inadequacy and gamophobia. This indicates that individuals who perceive themselves negatively are more likely to internalize feelings of incompetence and develop fears related to marital commitment. These findings are in line with cognitive theories of emotional disorders proposed by Aaron T. Beck, which suggest that maladaptive self-schemas contribute to anxiety and avoidance behaviors. Individuals with negative core beliefs about themselves may anticipate rejection, failure, or dissatisfaction in marital relationships, thereby increasing their likelihood of experiencing gamophobia.

Furthermore, feelings of inadequacy were positively correlated with gamophobia, highlighting the role of perceived personal deficiencies in shaping fears of marriage. This finding is supported by earlier work on inadequacy and self-evaluation (Fleming & Watts, 1980), which suggests that individuals who doubt their abilities and worth are more prone to social anxiety and avoidance of evaluative situations. Marriage, being a socially and emotionally demanding institution, may be perceived as a threatening context by such individuals, leading to avoidance tendencies.

The regression analysis further strengthened these findings by demonstrating that positive self-concept, negative self-concept, and feelings of inadequacy significantly predicted gamophobia, collectively explaining 26% of the variance. Notably, negative self-concept emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by feelings of inadequacy, while positive self-concept acted as a protective factor. This pattern is consistent with previous empirical studies indicating that negative self-evaluations have a stronger psychological impact than positive ones (Baumeister et al., 2001). The findings suggest that interventions aimed at reducing gamophobia should primarily target maladaptive self-beliefs and feelings of inadequacy while fostering a more positive self-concept.

In addition to psychological predictors, the study also examined gender differences in gamophobia. The results indicated that women reported significantly higher levels of gamophobia compared to men, with a medium effect size. This finding can be understood within the socio-cultural context, particularly in collectivistic societies such as Pakistan, where marriage carries substantial social expectations and pressures, especially for women. Women often face greater scrutiny regarding marital roles, compatibility, and family responsibilities, which may increase anxiety and fear related to marriage. Previous research has also suggested that women tend to report higher levels of anxiety and relationship-related fears due to heightened emotional sensitivity and socialization patterns (McLean & Anderson, 2009).

Moreover, societal expectations and gender norms may contribute to women's increased fear of negative marital outcomes, such as lack of autonomy, marital dissatisfaction, or role overload. From a psychosocial perspective, these pressures may amplify existing insecurities related to self-concept and inadequacy, thereby increasing vulnerability to gamophobia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study highlights the significant role of self-concept and perceived inadequacy in understanding gamophobia among never-married adults. Negative self-concept

and feelings of inadequacy were found to increase the likelihood of gamophobia, whereas positive self-concept served as a protective factor. Additionally, women were found to be more susceptible to gamophobia than men. These findings underscore the importance of addressing self-perception and cognitive vulnerabilities in interventions aimed at reducing fear of marriage and promoting healthier relational outcomes.

Data Sharing Statement

The data is available with the corresponding author with a rationale demand.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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