AN EXAMINATION OF MODERATORS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
SIMILARITY, COMPLEMENTARITY, AND
RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION

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Abstract

An Examination of Moderators of the Relationship Between Similarity, Complementarity, and Relationship Satisfaction

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This study used an idiographic approach to examine the association between similarity or complementarity on valued characteristics and romantic relationship satisfaction. This study also examined how self-liking of a trait is related to importance of similarity or complementarity of a trait. College students and employees of a local outpatient behavioral health center (N = 96) rated their partners on perceived similarity of personality traits, attitudes, interests, and religion; the importance of similarity of these traits; the importance of complementarity of personality traits; and relationship satisfaction. The results revealed significant Similarity x Importance interactions for religion, attitudes, and neuroticism. This suggests that similarity in religion, attitudes, and neuroticism was related to relationship satisfaction only if the participant valued similarity in that dimension. The results also indicated that higher levels of self-liking of a trait were associated with participants’ ratings of importance of similarity of a trait, while lower levels of self-liking were associated with participants’ ratings of the importance of complementarity of a trait. The results suggested that an idiographic
approach may be more suitable than a nomothetic approach for some dimensions of similarity, but not for others.
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An Examination of Moderators of the Relationship Between Similarity, Complementarity, and Relationship Satisfaction

The establishment and maintenance of a satisfying romantic relationship is one of the most significant aspects of most people’s lives. Such relationships have been found to greatly contribute to a general sense of well-being and contentment (Myers & Diener, 1995; Braithwaite, Delevi, & Fincham, 2010). However, when these relationships become less satisfying, there is a general decline in the quality of life for the individuals involved. This decline in quality of life can have clinical implications. For instance, it has been found that men and women involved in highly conflict-ridden marriages are at an increased risk for emotional disorders, such as depression, compared to those in harmonious marriages (Hintikka, Koskela, Kontula, Koskela, & Viinamaeki, 1999; Tilden, Gude, & Hoffart, 2010). Children of parents experiencing intense relationship discord are also susceptible to increased risk for mental health problems and future difficulties regarding their own romantic relationships (Mahl, 2001). Such problems include conduct disorder, anxiety, antisocial behavior, and depression (Emery, 1982; Emery & O’Leary, 1984; Peterson & Zill, 1986; Grych & Fincham, 2001). As such, these findings suggest that relationship quality has far reaching effects for the quality of life and mental health of those involved in the relationship.

These findings have prompted extensive research on the factors that differentiate satisfied couples from unsatisfied ones. These factors include personality traits (Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000), attachment style (Jones & Cunningham, 1996; Klohn &
Luo, 2003), gender-role identity (Antill, 1983; Stratton, 2007), communication skills (Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998), and relationship maintenance behaviors such as behaving in a positive and cheerful manner, self-disclosure, and expressions of affection (Dainton, 2000). Among some of the most widely studied of these factors are complementarity (the degree to which differing needs or traits come together in an interlocking fashion) and similarity (Burleson & Denton, 1992; Levinger, 1964; Meyer & Pepper, 1977; Neimeyer, 1984; Markey & Markey, 2007). A review by White and Hatcher (1984) suggested that similarity is a more important predictor than complementarity in predicting relationship success. Several specific dimensions of similarity have been found to be related to relationship satisfaction and outcome such as similarity in beliefs and attitudes (Byrne & Blaylock, 1963; Chadwich, Albrecht, & Kunze, 1976; Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner, 2001), activities and interests (Flora & Segrin, 1998; Crohan, 1992; Wilson & Cousins, 2003), personality traits (Lewak, Wakefield, & Briggs, 1985; Watson et al., 2004), religion and spirituality (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993; Wilson & Musick, 1996; Gaunt, 2006), and shared experiences (Deal, Wampler, & Halverson, 1992; Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007).

Findings from the aforementioned research have illuminated many of the factors involved in establishing and maintaining satisfying romantic relationships. However, they are largely limited to nomothetic investigations (i.e., identifying the dimensions of similarity that predict relationship quality for people in general). By taking an idiographic approach (i.e., identifying the dimensions of similarity that predict relationship satisfaction for individuals) to studying these variables, more light can be
shed on the factors that specific couples value in their own relationships. This perspective adds to the specificity with which social scientists can predict whether couples will be satisfied versus distressed.

Such an idiographic approach was taken by Lutz-Zois, Bradley, Mihalik, and Moorman (2006). They found that perceived importance of a specific dimension of similarity moderated the relationship between that dimension of similarity and indices of relationship quality. For instance, participants who rated similarity in religious views as important in their romantic relationships were more likely to demonstrate a significant association between similarity in religion and relationship quality than those who did not rate this dimension of similarity as important. This lends support to an idiographic approach to the similarity-relationship quality association. The proposed study was intended to be a replication of some aspects of the study by Lutz-Zois, et al. (2006) and an extension in two ways. Specifically, it will address two key limitations of their research, as well as attempt to extend their interactional model to encompass complementarity. The remainder of the introduction will review the findings on several variables that have been linked to relationship satisfaction and outcome, and end by presenting an elaboration of the model first discussed by Lutz-Zois et al. (2006).

**Individual Difference Variables**

There are numerous variables that researchers have found to affect relationship satisfaction and outcome. These variables can be divided into two general categories: individual difference variables and relationship variables. Individual difference variables are characteristics of the individuals in the relationship, such as personality traits and self-
estee. Relationship variables are those variables that pertain to the qualities and processes of the relationship, such as communication skills and intimacy factors. This section is merely intended to provide a brief, cursory overview rather than an in-depth analysis of factors associated with relationship success.

**Personality traits.** A number of personality traits have been found to contribute to relationship satisfaction and outcome. Studies of the Big-Five personality traits have found that individuals, as well as their partners, who are high on neuroticism (i.e., prone to experience negative emotions) report greater marital dissatisfaction (Eyesenck & Wakefield, 1981; Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1984). Conscientiousness (i.e., responsible, orderly, and attentive to details), agreeableness (i.e., tender-hearted, cooperative, and sensitive to the needs of others), and extraversion (i.e., outgoing, energetic, and prone to experiencing positive emotions) have been shown to contribute positively to satisfaction in dating couples (Watson et al., 2000).

**Attachment.** In general, it has been found that men with avoidant attachment styles and women with ambivalent attachment styles rate their relationships most negatively (Collins & Read, 1990; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994). The results from a study by Jones and Cunningham (1996) have shown that secure attachment of males predicted the relationship satisfaction of both partners, while abandonment anxiety of either males or females predicted a less satisfying relationship for both partners.

**Gender-role identity.** The results of a study by Antill (1983) revealed that higher relationship satisfaction of both spouses is predicted by their partner being high on positive aspects of femininity, such as nurturance, emotional responsiveness, and
supportive behavior. Jones and Cunningham (1996) found that positive aspects of femininity in men was associated with self and partner relationship satisfaction, but positive aspects of femininity in women was only associated with the relationship satisfaction of women.

**Self-esteem.** Empirical research on self-esteem by Walster (1965) as well as Dion and Dion (1973), suggested that those with low self-esteem reported greater satisfaction in relationships due to having a special need for attention and experiencing more intense feelings of romantic love. However, those empirical findings are in contrast with the theories of Rogers (1959) and Maslow (1968), which suggested that one must have self-love (i.e., high self-esteem) in order to have the capacity to experience a satisfying romantic relationship. Several other researchers have found a positive correlation between self-esteem and relationship satisfaction (Jones & Cunningham, 1996; McCahan, 1973; Schultz & Schultz, 1989).

**Romantic beliefs.** Research has found that those who possess maladaptive romantic beliefs, such as believing that disagreement is detrimental to the relationship and that partners “should be able to read each others’ minds,” had less satisfying relationships (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981). A study by Taylor and Brown (1988) found that those with idealistic beliefs, such as exaggerating the positive aspects of their mate, had greater overall satisfaction in their relationships.

**Relationship Variables**

In this section, research findings on the contributions of relationship variables to relationship satisfaction and outcome will be discussed. These variables include problem
solving and communication skills, relationship quality, maintenance behaviors, and factors embodied by interdependence theory.

**Problem-solving and communication skills.** A number of studies have found that marital discord results from reliance on poor problem-solving and communication skills (e.g., Markman & Floyd, 1980). These studies suggest that, in the absence of effective problem-solving and communication skills, couples begin to use negative strategies (i.e., coercion) to change their partners’ behaviors. This leads to interactions with negative outcomes (i.e., feelings of resentment toward the partner and withdrawal from the partner). As these negative interactions and outcomes become more frequent, the quality of the relationship declines.

**Relationship qualities.** Relationship qualities refer to influences within a relationship (e.g., intimacy and equality) that encourage the contentment of each partner, as well as forces outside the relationship (e.g., religious pressures) that sway partners to stay together (Kurdek, 2000). The results of a study by Kurdek (2000) showed that low levels of intimacy and equality, as well as weak barriers to leaving the relationship, were correlated with termination of the relationship over a five year span.

**Maintenance behaviors.** Some studies (e.g., Canary & Stafford, 1992) have shown that relationship maintenance behaviors such as positivity (cheerful and optimistic behavior), openness (self-disclosure), assurances (communications emphasizing commitment to one’s partner), social networks (reliance on shared friends and affiliations), and sharing tasks (equivalent responsibility for tasks facing the couple) are consistent predictors of relationship satisfaction. Furthermore, the results from a study by
Dainton (2000) indicated a positive correlation between the extent to which participants perceived their partner to meet their expectations for use of maintenance strategies and participants’ level of relationship satisfaction. In other words, the more one’s expectations for the partner’s use of maintenance behaviors is met or exceeded, the more satisfied one will be with the relationship.

**Interdependence theory.** Interdependence theory posits that people engage in a continuing process of weighing the pros and cons of their relationships, and comparing them to what might be probable from alternative relationships (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The decision to continue or terminate the relationship is determined by whether or not the perceived benefits outweigh the perceived cost. The results from a study by Floyd and Wasner (1994) suggested that commitment to an intimate relationship is a result of feeling satisfied and rewarded in that relationship as well as the perception that desirable alternatives are not readily available. It has also been found that the level of satisfaction with the current relationship determines how alternative relationships are evaluated (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989).

**Similarity versus Complementarity**

In this section, research findings comparing the association between complementarity or similarity and relationship satisfaction will be discussed. Early research on complementarity and research findings involving clinical marriage samples (i.e., studies involving divorced, unstable, or therapy-referred couples) will be discussed. In addition, more recent research on these factors will be reviewed.
Early research on the complementarity hypothesis. Winch (1955), one of the earliest social scientists to investigate complementarity, defined two types of complementarity. The first, Type I, is the mutual gratification of identical needs that vary in intensity between the two mates. For instance, one partner may be low on the need to be dominant and the other high on that need. Type II complementarity is the mutual fulfillment of differing but associated needs. For instance, one partner may be high on the need for dominance and the other high on the need for self-abasement (White & Hatcher, 1984).

In a study testing his theory, Winch (1955) found that the correlation of need intensity between the two members of a couple was lower for that of married couples in comparison to randomly matched opposite sex pairs. That is to say that as one marriage partner was higher on the need for a trait (e.g., dominance), the other partner was lower on that same need. In other words, Type I complementarity appeared to operate in mate selection. Evidence for Type II complementarity was found by Winch, Ktsanes, and Ktsanes (1954). This study found a positive correlation between differing but related needs (e.g., husbands’ nurturance and wives’ support).

However, other studies (Bowerman & Day, 1956; Heiss & Gordon, 1964) were unable to replicate Winch’s results. For instance, whereas Winch et al. (1954) found 35 out of 44 same-need correlations to be negative (i.e., evidence supporting Type I complementarity), Bowerman and Day (1956) found only two of these correlations to be negative and neither were statistically significant. With respect to evidence of Type II complementarity, Bowerman and Day (1956) found that only 15 out of 32 differing-need
correlations were positive, and only one of them was statistically significant. Thus, the results from Bowerman and Day (1956) are contrary to those of Winch et al. (1954) and Winch (1955).

The results of a study by Heiss and Gordon (1964) are also inconsistent with those of Winch (1955). Heiss and Gordon (1964) suggested that disparities in the need patterns of relationship members are not associated with lower levels of relationship satisfaction. Need comparisons were performed on fifteen different traits (e.g., autonomy, succorance, exhibition, dominance, achievement, etc). The only significant complementarity result appeared with respect to the autonomy trait (e.g., when members of a couple differ in their need for autonomy, they are more likely to be mutually satisfied than when they are similar for this need). However, one significant difference out of fifteen need comparisons can be expected by chance alone. Thus, very little support was found for complementarity in this study.

Even the most significant support for complementarity from a study by Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) has since been refuted due to criticisms of the methodology of the study. Specifically, a review by White and Hatcher (1984) suggested that the ‘reciprocal compatibility’ formula employed by Kerckhoff and Davis (1962) caused difficulties in distinguishing complementarity variables from similarity variables. This led the authors to mistakenly conclude their findings as evidence for complementarity. Other criticisms of Winch’s theory were posed by Levinger (1964). He argued that Type I complementarity is to be expected for some needs (e.g., dominance) but that similarity would be a better predictor of relationship adjustment for other needs (e.g., achievement).
At best, the evidence for an association between complementarity of needs and relationship satisfaction from these classic studies is inconclusive.

**Findings from clinical marriage samples.** A number of studies involving clinical marriage samples have demonstrated that trait similarity is positively associated with marital success while trait dissimilarity is positively associated with marital discord (White & Hatcher, 1984). For instance, a study by Pickford, Signori, and Rempel (1966) investigated temperament types of three groups of 35 couples each using the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperament Survey. The first group was happily married, the second was troubled but planning to stay together, and the third group was on the verge of separation. The results indicated that couples in the happily married group were significantly similar to each other on the traits of general activity (i.e., drive, energy, enthusiasm) restraint (i.e., self-control, deliberateness), friendliness, and personal relations. Couples in the two unhappy couple groups were more likely to be different to each other with regard to the aforementioned traits. The results further suggested that differing on the traits of emotional stability and objectivity was significantly related to marital unhappiness for both of the unhappy couple groups.

Cattell and Nesselroade (1967) examined the similarity hypothesis by comparing stably married couples (i.e., those who had never sought marriage counseling) with unstably married couples (i.e., those having sought marriage counseling) using Catell’s Sixteen Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF). Of the 139 couples examined, 37 were classified as unstably married. In the unstably married group, husband-wife correlations for 2 out of 16 traits were significant and positive (e.g., evidence for similarity). In
contrast, 8 out of the 16 husband-wife correlations were significant and positive for the stably married group. These results led the authors to conclude that similarity is evident more so in successful marriages than in unsuccessful ones.

Bentler and Newcomb (1978) investigated similarity and marital success with 77 newlywed couples in a four-year longitudinal study. Using the Bentler Psychological Inventory, they measured the correlations between husbands’ and wives’ standings on personality traits (e.g., congeniality, extraversion, leadership, orderliness, trustfulness, etc.). The results suggested that the personality correlations were positive and larger in the still-married group versus those of the eventually-divorced group. No significant negative correlations (e.g., evidence of complementarity) were found for either group. These results provided evidence that similarity is a stronger predictor of marital success than complementarity. The results also indicated that similarity with respect to personality variables is a stronger predictor of marital success than similarity in demographic variables (e.g., ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, etc).

Some studies using clinical samples have found evidence for complementarity as well. For instance, Elizur and Klein (1974) administered Plutchik’s Emotional Profile Index (EPI) to 30 couples who were referred to family therapy for marital difficulties. Each participant completed the EPI twice, once rating the self and once rating one’s spouse. It was found that spouses rated their mates more negatively than they rated themselves. A general compensatory trend was also found. Specifically, the results suggested that, while couples did not manifest trait-level complementarity, one spouse’s general problematic emotional scores tended to be compensated for by the other spouse’s
general lack of problematic emotional scores. That is, when one spouse exhibited many emotional problems, the other spouse tended to exhibit fewer emotional problems.

Moss (1974) investigated complementary behavior patterns and personality similarity with 45 clinical couples. The Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis (T-JTA) was used to assess similarity/complementarity and in-depth clinical interviews were employed to measure personality variables. The results suggested evidence for complementarity. That is, 86-91% of the couples exhibited complementary behavior patterns on at least six of the nine T-JTA scales. Support was also found for the personality similarity hypothesis.

The studies cited have thus far been of a historical nature. More recent research has also been conducted regarding the association between relationship satisfaction and complementarity or similarity. The next section will briefly review more recent contributions to this debate.

**Recent research on complementarity versus similarity.** A study by Dryer and Horowitz (1997) examined the influence of similarity and complementarity on satisfaction with dyadic interactions. Participants were assigned to either a similarity interaction or a complementarity interaction. A complementarity interaction involved the pairing of a participant’s self-reported submissive interpersonal style with a dominant interpersonal style of a confederate, or vice versa. A similarity interaction involved the pairing of a participant’s self-reported submissive style with a submissive interpersonal style of a confederate or pairing a dominant participant with a dominant confederate. The results suggested that the partners in complementary interactions (e.g., a submissive
participant with a dominant confederate or vice versa) reported greater satisfaction than did partners who were similar (e.g., a submissive participant paired with a submissive confederate). The results suggested that, with regard to dominance, complementarity is positively associated with satisfaction.

Klohnen and Luo (2003) examined the association between attraction and either similarity or complementarity in attachment style. Correlations were computed between similarity in six attachment variables (i.e., secure, preoccupied, fearful, dismissing, avoidant, and anxious) and attraction for corresponding partners. The results suggested strong evidence for similarity in that the correlations were positive and significant. In other words, it was concluded that participants were more attracted to partners with similar attachment styles. No support for complementarity of attachment style was found for initial attraction of romantic partners.

Gattis, Berns, Simpson, and Christensen (2004) examined the relationship between similarity on personality traits and marital satisfaction in 180 married couples seeking treatment. The results suggested weak associations between partners’ similarity on the Big-Five and marital satisfaction. However, the findings did reveal that satisfied couples were similar to each other with respect to higher levels of agreeableness, while unhappy couples were similar to each other regarding higher levels of neuroticism and lower levels of openness.

The aforementioned studies support the argument that similarity is a more consistent predictor of marital success than complementarity. However, while supporting similarity, the studies do not decisively rule out complementarity. As evidenced by both
Elizur and Klein (1974) and Moss (1974), complementarity seems to play a role in stabilizing troubled couples (White & Hatcher, 1984). Additionally, with respect to dominance, there is evidence for need complementarity (Dryer & Horowitz, 1997). The apparent differences in findings could be accounted for by a number of factors. One factor is the lack of a unified operational definition of complementarity shared by researchers. This lack of a unified operational definition of complementarity contributes to the contradictory findings regarding complementarity. Also, correlational procedures and dyadic indices may fail to recognize complementarity. That is, correlational procedures used with dyadic indices may not measure differences in need intensity, thereby overestimating similarity and overlooking genuine complementarity. For example, a couple in which both members scored high on the need for submissiveness is not distinguished from a couple who scored low on that need. In such a statistical procedure only the similarity of the scores is evident, not the varying intensity of the need(s). In addition, the evidence for complementarity may be obscured due to the possible existence of a non-linear relationship between need patterns and marital adjustment. Winch (1958) suggested that the most content couples should have ‘middling complementarity.’ Thus, satisfied couples will tend to have a certain level of complementariness, above which satisfaction levels will tend to decline. Nevertheless, similarity has been shown to be the stronger predictor of romantic relationship satisfaction and longevity. Consequently, researchers in this area have begun to examine which specific dimensions of similarity are important predictors of satisfaction. A review of the research findings regarding specific dimensions of similarity is presented in the
following section.

**Specific Dimensions of Similarity**

Numerous studies have examined the specific dimensions of similarity that are associated with relationship satisfaction. Frequently studied dimensions include similarity in personality (Lewak et al., 1985; Nemechek & Olson, 1999; Schmitt, 2002), beliefs and attitudes (Byrne & Blaylock, 1963; Hendrick, 1981), activities and interests (Flora & Segrin, 1998; Swim & Surra, 1999), and religious affiliation (Wilson & Musick, 1996). Additional factors such as the cognitive aspects of each member of the relationship (Neimeyer, 1984; Mathew, 1996) and perceptual similarity of each member of the relationship (Deal et al., 1992) have also been shown to be positively correlated with relationship satisfaction.

**Belief and attitude similarity.** One of the first social scientists to examine the association between belief and attitude similarity and attraction was Byrne (1961). He administered an attitude scale to 64 students in which participants indicated which issues were most versus less important to them. Participants were then given attitude scales filled out by other students that fell into one of four categories (i.e., exactly the same, exact opposite, similar on most important issues, different on most important issues). Participants rated how well they would like the other person based on their attitude scale. The results indicated that those with similar attitudes were viewed more positively than those with different views on the issues. Those with similar views were also rated as more intelligent and well-adjusted than those with different views (Byrne, 1961).
In another early study, Byrne and Blaylock (1963) examined the association between relationship satisfaction and similarity in political attitudes of 36 married couples responding to Rokeach’s Left Opinionation and Right Opinionation scales. Additionally, attitudes about religion, self, and other people were assessed using Rokeach’s Dogmatism scale. Their results indicated a strong positive correlation between husbands and wives on all three scales. In other words, husband and wife responses were highly similar to one another. Another interesting facet of this early research is the finding that perceived similarity of spousal attitudes was significantly higher than objective similarity of spousal attitudes as measured by the ‘self’ and ‘other’ sub-sections of the Dogmatism scales. This suggests that there may be an inclination for members of a couple to distort the actual level of objective similarity in order to gain more validation of their own views from their partner.

Based on the aforementioned research, Byrne put forth his similarity-attraction theory. It specifies that any aspect of a target person to be judged (i.e., another individual’s appearance, personality characteristics, attitudes, etc.) is evaluated based on the amount of positive and negative feelings it elicits in the perceiver. Therefore, whether or not an individual will be deemed attractive will depend on the automatic feelings brought forth by another individual and the automatic responses associated with those feelings (Byrne, 1997). As this theory applies to belief and attitude similarity, Byrne suggests that similarity in attitudes confirms one’s own opinions, thereby eliciting positive feelings. Thus, similarity in attitudes will tend to elicit a greater ‘liking’ of the target person.
While this conceptualization and model seem logical and has amassed a good deal of empirical support (i.e., Clore & Gormly, 1974; Fisher & Byrne, 1975) there have been criticisms of the research on belief and attitude similarity. Results of studies by Sunnafrank and Miller (1981) and Cappella and Palmer (1992) suggest that an intervening, informal conversation can attenuate the effect of attitude similarity on attraction. In the study by Sunnafrank and Miller (1981), the effects of attitude similarity were negated when the partners had a chance to interact. However, the effects remained for those who did not interact with each other. It was postulated that, in general, people tend to be polite and downplay the existence of attitude differences in order to save face. This tendency is most pronounced when people first meet each other. Consequently, this finding would suggest that the attraction paradigm does not act independently of social interaction and that social interaction can attenuate, or even eliminate, the effect of attitude similarity/dissimilarity on attractiveness.

Despite criticisms of Byrne’s theory of attraction, further evidence of the association between similarity in beliefs/attitudes and marital satisfaction comes from Hendrick (1981). The relationship between self-disclosure, similarity in attitudes (i.e., moral, political, and social attitudes) and marital satisfaction in a sample of 51 couples was examined in this study. The results suggested that self-disclosure of both spouses was related to marital satisfaction. Additionally, results indicated high similarity between husband and wife responses, as well as a strong positive correlation between attitude similarity and marital satisfaction as measured by the Marriage Adjustment Inventory. Again, it was found that actual and perceived similarity were strong predictors of marital
satisfaction. It should also be noted that, in this study, similarity (either perceived or actual) was not correlated with self-disclosure. As such, similarity appeared to be a strong and independent predictor of marital satisfaction.

Gaunt (2006) examined the association between relationship members’ similarity and marital satisfaction in a sample of 248 couples. The dimensions of similarity examined were value priorities (e.g., the importance of achievement, stimulation, self-direction, benevolence, and conformity), role attitudes (e.g., attitudes towards the role of men and women in the family), gendered personality traits (e.g., masculine traits such as self-reliant and analytical as well as feminine traits such as compassionate and tender), and religiosity (e.g., the importance of religion in one’s life). The results suggested that similarity in gendered personality traits and values priorities were strongly correlated with marital satisfaction. Role attitudes and religiosity were also associated with marital satisfaction, but to a weaker degree. Specifically, similarity in attitudes was weakly related to marital satisfaction for the husbands, but unrelated for the wives. Thus, the relationship between attitude similarity and marital satisfaction was not strongly supported in this study. However, this could be due to the small range of specific attitudes that were assessed. Gaunt (2006) suggested that examining a wider range of attitudes (i.e., family roles, parenting, finance management, etc.) might have yielded stronger support for the association between similarity in attitudes and marital satisfaction.

Activities and interests. Another aspect of similarity that has been positively linked to relationship satisfaction and outcome is similarity in activities and interests.
Orthner and Mancini (1991) described three different types of couple leisure activity patterns including individual, parallel, and joint. Individual activity refers to those activities done alone or with people other than one’s spouse. Parallel activity refers to participation in an activity at the same time (i.e., watching a movie with spouse) in which little or no interaction takes place. Joint activity refers to activities in which both partners are engaged and interacting with each other at high levels. Orthner and Mancini (1991) found that high levels of individual activity predicted marital distress and was negatively correlated with marital satisfaction. It was also found that parallel activity patterns were moderately associated with marital satisfaction. However, Orthner and Mancini (1991) suggested that parallel activity patterns were associated with marital discord if they are the predominant activity pattern of the couple. Finally, high levels of joint activity patterns were shown to be highly correlated with marital satisfaction, suggesting that couples with similar interests were more satisfied than those who did not share similar interests, as long as those interests lead to some form of interaction with each other.

A study by Flora and Segrin (1998) examined the link between leisure activities and marital satisfaction as well. More specifically, they examined specific qualitative variables that affect the reward value of joint leisure activities for 104 dyads. The findings indicated that perceived positivity in leisure activities was correlated with relationship satisfaction. Flora and Segrin (1998) also found that engaging in shared activities can increase couples’ communication, possibly explaining the link between joint activities and relationship satisfaction.
Religious affiliation. Similarity in religious affiliation has been shown to be positively associated with relationship satisfaction and outcome. Heaton and Pratt (1991) administered measures of marital satisfaction and stability, denominational affiliation, frequency of church attendance, and attitudes about the Bible to 9,643 couples. The results indicated that couples who were similar to each other with respect to religious affiliation and church attendance were more likely to report having a happy and stable marriage than couples who were different in these regards. Similarity in religious affiliation was more highly associated with marital satisfaction and stability than similarity in church attendance. Similarity in attitudes about the Bible was not shown to be associated with marital satisfaction and stability.

Wilson and Musick (1996) examined the association between similarity in religion and marital dependency (i.e., the extent to which either spouse believes his or her life would be worse should the marriage end). Their results revealed a positive relationship between similarity in religious affiliation and marital dependency. Those who were married to a spouse of the same denomination, especially one that places a high value on marital stability, and who are actively involved in church life, reported a higher level of marital dependency than those who were not of the same denomination and were not actively involved in church life.

A study by Chinz and Brown (2001) examined the association between religious affiliation and marital discord and stability. Adult offspring of Jewish and interfaith couples reported on the religious beliefs and behaviors of their parents. In addition, the participants completed the Children’s Perception Questionnaire (CPQ) to obtain a
measure of parents’ marital conflict. The results revealed a positive correlation between religious similarity and marital stability. This relationship was found to be mediated by marital conflict. That is, as religious similarity increased, marital conflict decreased, which in turn was related to increased marital stability.

**Personality.** Several studies have shown an association between similarity in personality and romantic relationship satisfaction. A study by Lewak et al. (1985) investigated how personality similarity of members of a couple was associated with marital satisfaction. A sample of 81 couples, both clinical and non-clinical, was assessed using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and a marital adjustment scale. The results indicated that both groups of couples showed strong similarity on a number of personality variables. However, the dimensions were different for the different groups. For example, similarity on the Depression scale of the MMPI-2 was related to the satisfaction of both husbands and wives in the non-clinical sample. In the clinical sample, similarity on the Fake Bad Scale (a scale of the MMPI which measures general maladjustment and a tendency to exaggerate one’s psychological problems) was associated with both partners’ satisfaction.

Nemchek and Olson (1999) examined the relationship between similarity of couple members on the five factor model of personality, measured by the NEO-PI-R, and marital satisfaction. The results suggested that spousal similarity on several personality domains was related to marital satisfaction. Specifically, spousal similarity on the dimensions of Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism were positively related to marital satisfaction. Interestingly, similarity with regards to Conscientiousness
was the only dimension found to be related to satisfaction for both husbands and wives. Similarity on Agreeableness was related to marital satisfaction for husbands, while similarity on Neuroticism was associated with marital satisfaction for wives. Partner similarity in Extraversion and Openness to Experience were not related to marital satisfaction.

A study by Han, Weed, and Butcher (2003) examined couple similarity on the MMPI-2. A total of 1024 couples, 841 normative (e.g., those couples who are not in treatment) and 183 clinical (e.g., couples who have sought marital counseling), completed the MMPI-2 as well as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The results indicated fairly low, but consistently positive, correlations between couples’ scores on the MMPI-2. The results also showed that couple similarity was higher for the normative couples than for the clinical couples. This finding may be interpreted as evidence that higher levels of similarity are associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction. Data regarding an association between couple similarity on the MMPI-2 and scores on the DAS was not reported.

**Cognitive aspects.** Similarity in cognitive aspects of each couple member (e.g., complexity and social cognitive communication skills) has also been investigated by several researchers. Neimeyer (1984) examined the relationship between cognitive complexity and marital satisfaction. Twenty married couples were assessed using the Area of Changes Questionnaire (ACQ) and the Role Construct Repertory test (RCR). The ACQ is a 34 item scale that asks spouses to rate how much change they want from their partners across a range of content areas. The RCR is a measure of the complexity versus
simplicity in which one organizes information about oneself and other people (Neimeyer, 1993). The results of Neimeyer (1984) indicated that greater levels of marital satisfaction were associated with greater similarity in couples’ cognitive structure, regardless of the degree of cognitive skill (i.e., high complexity or low complexity). These results were replicated in a study by Mathew (1996). Eighty non-clinical married couples were assessed using the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (LW), Areas of Change Questionnaire (ACQ), Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (MCSD), and Grid Matrix. As with the study by Neimeyer (1984), couples’ degree of similarity in cognitive structure was found to predict marital satisfaction.

Burleson & Denton (1992) examined the similarity of social-cognitive skills, communication skills, and marital adjustment in 60 couples. The results indicated that similarity in social-cognitive skills (e.g., skills related to receiving and interpreting social cues) and communication skills (e.g., the ability to convey thoughts and feelings so that they are received and understood) was positively associated with marital satisfaction. Again, results indicated that low-skilled and high-skilled couples reported similar levels of satisfaction, while couples with different skill levels tended to report less satisfaction than couples with similar skill levels. This suggests that the similarity, not the degree, of social-cognitive or communication skill is the more important predictor of marital satisfaction.

**Perceptions of the relationship.** In addition to the aforementioned dimensions of similarity, several researchers have examined the association between couple members’ similarity in perceptions of the relationship (e.g., the interpretations and evaluations
couple members make about shared experiences) and satisfaction. A study by Deal et al. (1992) examined such perceptual similarity between spouses in 119 married couples. The results indicated that couples that shared more similar perceptions of their marital relations reported greater levels of satisfaction. It was also shown that couples with similar perceptions of their relationships tended to have similar perceptions of other facets of their lives, such as family structure (e.g., viewing the family as consisting of a mother, father, and kids) and children.

Hojjat (2000) examined the relation between similarity in perceptions of conflict management and relationship satisfaction in 60 couples using the Conflict Management Questionnaire and Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The term, ‘perceptions of conflict management’ refers to the way in which the conflictive situation is interpreted and evaluated by couple members (e.g., indirect vs. overt conflict, and positive vs. negative outcome strategies). The results indicated that perceptual similarity was correlated with satisfaction. That is, the more similarly spouses perceived each other’s conflict management style (e.g., both correctly interpreted each other’s style as overt and positive), the higher the satisfaction level of the couple.

In sum, several dimensions of similarity have been found to predict relationship satisfaction and outcome. Although identifying the types of similarity that are associated with positive relationship characteristics is a valuable pursuit, these studies have all relied on a nomothetic approach. That is, all of the above reviewed studies in this section pertain to between, rather that within groups differences. As will be discussed in the next section, an idiographic approach to the similarity-satisfaction relationship may enable
psychologists to make even more fine-grained distinctions in factors that predict contented and discontented couples.

**An Idiographic Approach**

Much of the research in the areas of personality and social psychology has traditionally been conducted from a nomothetic perspective (i.e., investigating differences between groups). However, theories espousing an idiographic approach (e.g., focusing on differences within groups) have existed for quite some time (Allport, 1937; Allport, 1966; Lewin, 1935). One of the main benefits of an idiographic approach to personality and social judgments is that it focuses the lens of research in such a way as to reveal specific processes occurring within individuals. Such specific individual processes are often masked when using a nomothetic methodology. In contrast, the idiographic approach seeks to preserve the unique characteristics of that individual (Falk, 1956). For example, it may be shown that similarity in conscientiousness is significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction for those who are highly conscientious, but not significantly related for those who are merely moderately conscientious. Therefore, a nomothetic methodology in such an instance may underestimate, or fail to capture entirely, the relationship between similarity in conscientiousness and satisfaction. Consequently, research on similarity and positive relationship characteristics would benefit by using an idiographic approach. Such an approach would focus on the specific dimensions of similarity that are associated with relationship satisfaction for a given individual as opposed to the dimensions that are associated with satisfaction for people in general.
Theoretical and empirical precursors to an idiographic approach to similarity. One of the first theorists to evaluate similarity from an idiographic perspective, and was discussed in previous sections, was Byrne (1971). Byrne’s theory of attraction is idiographic in that it assumes that individuals vary in the specific attitudes that they deem as important. For example, one individual may deem political attitudes and beliefs as important and not value religious attitudes, while another individual may deem religious attitudes as important and not value political beliefs.

Other researchers that have taken an idiographic approach include Lewak et al. (1985), Jamieson, Lydon, and Zanna (1987), as well as Hassebrauck and Aron (2001). As previously mentioned, Lewak et al. (1985) examined how personality and intelligence similarity of couple members, both in clinical and non-clinical samples, was associated with marital satisfaction. Their results suggested strong similarity for couples in both groups. However, the specific dimensions of similarity were different for both groups. For instance, similarity on the Fake Bad scale was related to husbands’ and wives’ satisfaction in the clinical sample, while similarity on the Depression scale of the MMPI-2 was associated with satisfaction of husbands and wives in the non-clinical sample.

Jamieson et al. (1987) tested the hypothesis that self-monitoring moderates the relation between attraction and similarity. Their results indicated that attitude similarity was more strongly associated with attraction for low self-monitors than was activities similarity. Conversely, activities similarity was more highly related to attraction for high self-monitors than attitude similarity. They concluded that low and high self-monitors attend to different stimuli when making first impressions, thereby basing attraction on
different variables. More specifically, Jamieson et al. (1987) stated that the ‘friendship world’ of low self-monitors tends to be fairly homogenous, committed, and affect-leaden. In contrast, the friendship worlds of high self-monitors tend to be heterogeneous, non-committed, and activity based. As such, low self-monitors seek out those who share similar moral fiber while engaging in a variety of interests, while high self-monitors tend to seek out those with a variety of dispositions with whom they can engage in a more specific set of activities.

Research by both Lewak et al. (1985) and Jamieson et al. (1987) demonstrated that the importance of similarity dimensions to relationship quality varies as a function of individual differences. Specifically, Lewak et al. (1985) found that the importance of different dimensions of similarity varied as a function of mental health status. Likewise, Jamieson et al. (1987) found that importance varied as a function of self-monitoring level. Both studies illustrate the fruitfulness of attempting to identify factors that moderate the relationship between a given dimension of similarity and relationship quality.

A study by Hassebrauck and Aron (2001) examined whether individual differences in the relationship characteristics deemed as important to one’s own relationship would predict relationship satisfaction beyond relationship characteristics that have been found to be associated with relationship success in general. The results indicated that there was little advantage in taking an individual’s personal weightings into account. While Hassebrauck and Aron (2001) did not find a significant increase in predictive power using an idiographic approach, their study provided an important
methodological and conceptual framework for assessing individual weightings of importance for different relationship characteristics, including similarity.

The Proposed Model

The current study was based on the idiographic model put forth by Lutz-Zois et al. (2006). Such a model allowed for individual differences to be measured and preserved in analyses with the use of moderator variables (e.g., importance) while integrating these differences into the larger theoretical findings regarding relationship satisfaction variables. Their model assumed that individuals differ in their preferences for different dimensions of similarity. Therefore, they predicted that relationship satisfaction would be a function of their partners’ similarity on those preferred dimensions. Conversely, partner similarity on a dimension deemed unimportant to the individual would be irrelevant to relationship success. For example, a person who prefers a mate who is similar in religious affiliation will tend to be satisfied in a relationship in which his/her partner has similar religious beliefs. Alternatively, similarity regarding political beliefs may be entirely irrelevant to such a person’s level of relationship satisfaction. In contrast, one who considers similarity in political beliefs to be important would be satisfied if his/her partner had similar beliefs, whereas similarity in religious beliefs would be unrelated to his/her degree of relationship satisfaction. In other words, Lutz-Zois et al. (2006) predicted that the degree to which a person values a dimension of similarity would moderate the association between perceived similarity on that dimension and various indices of relationship success. Specifically, for high levels of perceived importance of a given dimension, there would be a significant association between similarity on that
given dimension and relationship success. In contrast, for low levels of importance on a
given dimension, there would not be a significant association between similarity on that
given dimension and relationship success.

To test this hypothesis, Lutz-Zois et al. (2006) had 247 college students rate their
current significant other on perceived similarity in attitudes, interests, personality, and
religious affiliation, as well as the importance of similarity in these dimensions from the
participants’ perspective. Participants also rated their relationship satisfaction level using
a modified version of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). After a period of six weeks,
the relationship status of the participants was assessed by asking whether or not the
couple was still together.

Consistent with their hypotheses, significant Similarity x Importance interactions
were found for some of the study variables. Specifically, they found Similarity x
Importance interactions for religious affiliation and interests in the prediction of
relationship satisfaction and for attitudes in the prediction of relationship outcome at the
end of six weeks. That is, for participants who rated similarity in religious affiliation or
similarity in interests as important to them, there was a positive association between
similarity in that dimension and relationship satisfaction. In contrast, for participants who
did not value similarity in these dimensions, there was not an association between
similarity in religious affiliation or similarity in interests and relationship satisfaction.
The same pattern of results held true for similarity in attitudes and relationship outcome.
Participants who valued similarity in attitudes were more likely to be together after six
weeks if they did, in fact, see their partner as similar to themselves in attitudes. In
contrast, similarity in attitudes was unrelated to outcome for individuals who did not rate similarity in this dimension as being important to their relationships. No Similarity x Importance interactions were found for the personality traits.

Building on the conceptual model articulated by Lutz-Zois et al. (2006), the proposed study further explored an idiographic model of similarity and positive relationship characteristics. However, the proposed study examined complementarity as well. One possible reason that Lutz-Zois et al. (2006) did not find significant Similarity x Importance interactions regarding the Big-Five is that personality is one area in which individuals may value complementarity rather than similarity. The proposed study extended the model put forth by Lutz-Zois et al. (2006) in that distinct predictions were made about which classes of people will value similarity (or complementarity) in a specific dimension and which will not. Specifically, the hypothesis tested was that the dimensions of similarity or complementarity that the participant deems as important in their relationship will depend on their liking of their own standing on the trait. If an individual likes their own standing on a particular trait, they will be more likely than individuals who don’t like their standing on a particular trait to view similarity in this trait as important. For instance, if an individual is conscientious, and likes that about him/herself, this person will value similarity with their partner in this trait. Conversely, if an individual is conscientious, and dislikes that about him/herself, this person will not value similarity with their partner in this trait, but rather will value complementarity on that trait.
The assumption that self-liking of a trait determines whether similarity or complementarity would be associated with partner selection was studied first by Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998). They used ‘self-liking’ as one of the bases for attraction. They hypothesized that one will seek in a partner those aspects of him or herself which are favorable. For example, if a man views his independent nature as favorable, he may tend to seek out a mate with the same independent nature (i.e., evidence for the importance of similarity determining relationship satisfaction). However, if the same man does not favor his independent nature, he may tend to see that trait as a negative aspect of a prospective mate, thereby not finding a partner who is independent attractive. Thus, in such an example, complementarity on this trait, rather than similarity, would be associated with relationship satisfaction.

From a methodological stance, Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998) took a couple-centered approach instead of a traditional variable-centered approach. They calculated similarity indices for each couple instead of simply calculating the overall degree of partner similarity across all couples. This method allowed for a more precise measurement of specific couples’ personality descriptions and their degrees of similarity that was independent of the personality descriptions of the rest of the participants. Klohnen and Mendelsohn’s (1998) results indicated that those who were satisfied with themselves had mates who were similar to them, while those who were dissatisfied with themselves had mates who were different to them.
The Proposed Study

As stated previously, the proposed study was intended to be a replication and extension of the study by Lutz-Zois et al. (2006). As such, the methods and hypotheses of the two are similar. One difference is that the proposed study did not employ a six-week follow-up to determine the status of the relationship. The current study also addressed two limitations of the Lutz-Zois et al. (2006) study. One of the limitations addressed is the lack of behavioral descriptors in the personality scales used in their study. Because personality is an abstract concept, it may have been difficult for participants in the Lutz-Zois et al. (2006) study to accurately report on the extent to which they valued similarity in different aspects of personality. It may be easier for participants to make judgments based on behavioral descriptors of personality traits, instead of the specific traits themselves. For example, a participant might find it easier to rate partner similarity in the tendency to be socially outgoing and talkative than to rate partner similarity in level of extraversion.

Another limitation that was addressed is the measure of relationship satisfaction used in Lutz-Zois et al. (2006). The current study employed the Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) instead of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). The RAS is a general satisfaction measure that has wide utility for personal relationship researchers (Hendrick, Dicke, & Hendrick, 1998). It is a 7-item scale measuring, among other items, general satisfaction and problems in the relationship. The RAS has some distinct advantages over the DAS. One such advantage is the relative brevity and ease of administration of the RAS. While Lutz-Zois et al. (2006) used an abbreviated form of the DAS, little reliability
or validity information is known for such shortened forms of the DAS as compared to the RAS (Hendrick et al., 1998). The RAS also has a consistent response format, unlike the DAS in which different subscales are on different metrics. Further, the RAS is appropriate for a wide array of relationships that are of interest to researchers and clinicians. This is in contrast to many other pertinent assessment tools, the DAS included, that measure marital relationships specifically. Finally, the DAS has been criticized for content overlap with some similarity measures. This may yield a spuriously high relationship between the predictor and criterion variables (Hendrick, 1988).

The hypotheses for the proposed study were as follows: 1) Perceived importance of a specific dimension of similarity or complementarity will moderate the relationship between similarity or complementarity in the dimension and relationship satisfaction, 2) The dimensions of similarity versus complementarity that the participant deems as important in their relationship will depend on their liking of their standing on the trait. It should be noted that this second hypothesis applied specifically to the Big-Five personality traits, but not to attitudes, interests, or religious affiliation.
Method

Participants

A total of 96 participants (Males = 35, Females = 61) were recruited for the study. Fifty-nine participants were undergraduate students from introductory psychology courses, as well as other upper-level courses (i.e., ‘christian marriage’, ‘social psychology’, ‘interpersonal relationships’, and ‘marriage and family’) having content relevant to the study. Thirty-seven participants were employees at a local community mental health organization. All student participants did so in exchange for class credit. All employee participants did so for a chance to win a gift certificate to a local restaurant. Ninety-two participants were involved in one romantic relationship at the start of the study. All participants were involved in opposite-sex relationships. The average length of relationship was 42 months. The average age of participants was 25 ($SD = 9.1$) years; the average age of partners was 26 ($SD = 9.6$) years. Further, the vast majority of participants were Caucasian (92%); 6% were African-American, 1% were Native-American, and 1% were from other ethnic groups.

Measures

Demographic information. A nine-item measure included demographic variables such as length of relationship, self and partner age, self and partner sex, and self ethnic background (see Appendix A).
**Personality and self-liking.** A two section, 30-item measure of personality assessing each of the Big-Five personality traits and self-liking was constructed for the purpose of this study. The personality measure was developed using items from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP). The IPIP is a broad-band personality inventory measuring the lower-level facets of the Big-Five personality models (Goldberg, 1999). The average Coefficient alpha for the IPIP scales is .80, and the IPIP scales demonstrate convergent validity with the NEO-PI-R with an average correlation of .73 between the corresponding scales of the NEO-PI-R and the IPIP (Goldberg, 1999).

The Big-Five personality traits were assessed with six items for each trait. Given that the NEO-PI-R is a measure that is widely considered to accurately represent the five-factor model of personality, one item for each of the six facet scales represented in the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) was drawn from the IPIP. Cronbach’s alpha for the Big-Five traits ranged from .49 (Agreeableness) to .76 (Extraversion), with an aggregate alpha of .66. The six Neuroticism facets are Anxiety, Angry Hostility, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Impulsiveness, and Vulnerability. The six Extraversion facets are Warmth, Gregariousness, Assertiveness, Activity, Excitement-Seeking, and Positive Emotions. The six Openness to Experience facets are Fantasy, Aesthetics, Feelings, Actions, Ideas, and Values. The six Agreeableness facets are Trust, Straightforwardness, Altruism, Compliance, Modesty, and Tender-mindedness. Finally, the six Conscientiousness facets are Competence, Order, Dutifulness, Achievement Striving, Self-Discipline, and Deliberation. Possible responses ranged from 1 (Very Uncharacteristic of Me) to 5 (Very Characteristic of Me). Scores for each of the five traits
range from 6 to 30. It should be noted that these personality scores were not used in the analyses. Rather, they were used as a platform from which a participant could judge the degree to which they possessed a trait, thereby enabling them to rate how much he/she likes that trait about him/herself (i.e., the second section of this measure). It is the degree of self-liking of a trait, rather than the existence of that particular trait, which was the variable of interest in the primary study analyses.

Self-liking is also measured on this newly-created questionnaire using the same items as mentioned above. However, the instructions are changed such that participants were asked to rate whether they like that aspect of themselves. Cronbach’s alpha ranged from .50 (Openness) to .71 (Extraversion), with an overall alpha of .79. Possible responses range from 1 (Not at All) to 5 (Very Much). Possible scores range from 6 to 30 for self-liking of each trait (see Appendix B).

**Perceived similarity and complementarity.** A 39-item measure, with a five-point Likert-scale format, was developed for this study. Possible responses ranged from 1 (Not at all similar) to 5 (Very Similar). This measure assessed eight dimensions of perceived similarity: each of the Big-Five personality traits, attitudes, interests, and religious affiliation. The Big-Five personality items are the same ones described above but with instructions modified to have the participants rate similarity in personality rather than possession of the characteristic in question. A measure of Complementarity of personality traits was obtained by recoding the perceived similarity variables. For example, a similarity score of 1 (e.g., low similarity) was recoded into a complementarity
score of 5 (e.g., high complementarity), a similarity score of 2 was recoded into a complementarity score of 4, and so forth.

Cronbach’s alpha for the personality items ranged from .50 (Neuroticism) to .73 (Conscientiousness), with an overall internal consistency of .86. The similarity in attitudes and interests, as well as the perceived similarity of religious affiliation, comprised the nine items (four each for attitudes and interests, and one item for religious affiliation) used by Lutz-Zois et al. (2006). The possible scores for similarity on the Big-Five personality traits range from 6 to 30. On the attitudes sub-scale, items measured similarity in political attitudes, financial and economic attitudes, child-rearing, and moral and religious attitudes. Internal consistency for the attitudes scale was .66. For the interests scale, items measured similarity in music preference, interest in the arts, socializing in groups, and interest in sports. Cronbach’s alpha for the interests scale was .52. Possible scores for the attitudes and interests subscales ranged from 4 to 20. Possible scores for the religious affiliation sub-scale ranged from 1 to 5 (see Appendix C). The internal consistency for the scale as a whole (e.g., personality, attitudes, interests, and religion) was .89.

**Perceived importance.** A measure of perceived importance of similarity was assessed using a 39-item, Likert-scale created for the purpose of this study. Participants rated the importance of similarity with their romantic partner on personality, attitudes, interests, and religious affiliation items. All of the items on this measure are the same items on the perceived similarity measure with the exception that participants rated how important it was for their partner to be similar to them in the particular characteristic.
Possible responses ranged from 1 (Not at all Important) to 5 (Very Important). The range of possible scores for each of the Big-Five personality traits was 6 to 30. Cronbach’s alpha for the personality traits ranged from .61 (Openness) to .76 (Neuroticism), with overall internal consistency for personality as .86. The possible scores for attitudes ($\alpha = .71$) and interests ($\alpha = .64$) each ranged from 4 to 20. Cronbach’s alpha for the entire scale is .89. The possible scores for the importance of religious similarity ranged from 1 to 5 (see Appendix D).

A measure of perceived importance of complementarity was also constructed for this study. It is identical to the measure of perceived importance of similarity regarding response range, total score, and format. The one difference is that participants were instructed to rate the importance of *dissimilarity* instead of similarity. Further, items relating to attitudes, interests, and religion were not included in this measure, making it 30 items. These items were deleted due to the fact that the proposed hypothesis pertaining to complementarity pertains only to personality variables, and not to attitudes, interests, or religious affiliation (see Appendix E). Cronbach’s $\alpha$ ranged from .77 (Neuroticism) to .84 (Extraversion). The overall $\alpha$ for the scale was .93.

**Relationship satisfaction.** Relationship satisfaction was measured using the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988). The Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) is a seven-item general measure of relationship satisfaction with a five-point Likert scale. Response options ranged from A (Unsatisfied) to E (Extremely Satisfied) or A (Never) to E (Very Often). The total scores ranged from 7 to 35. The RAS assesses general satisfaction, regrets about the relationship, and love for partner (see appendix E).
The RAS has a mean inter-item correlation of .49 and an alpha of .86 (Hendrick, et al., 1998). It also correlates well with other measures of relationship satisfaction such as the full Dyadic Adjustment Scale (.80) and the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale (.74). The overall alpha for the scale was .89. (see Appendix F).

**Procedures**

For data collection, participants were run in groups of approximately 8 each. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire and measures of personality and self-liking, similarity, importance of similarity, importance of complementarity, and relationship satisfaction. The demographic measure, and then the personality and self-liking measure, always came first in the questionnaire packet. The remaining questionnaires were counterbalanced using a random starting order with rotation (e.g., ABCDEF, ABDEFC, ABDEFC, etc.) Participants were thanked and debriefed upon completion of the entire questionnaire packet.
Results

Preliminary Analyses

The percentages and frequencies for the nominal and ordinal variables for the current study are summarized in Table 1. In order to ensure that there was no restriction of range, Table 2 summarizes the means, standard deviations, and ranges for the continuous variables in this study. Preliminary analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between the criterion variable (i.e., relationship satisfaction) and participant demographic variables in order to assess for the possibility of any confounding variables. Specifically, zero-order correlations were calculated between the criterion variable and participant age and length of relationship. No significant associations were found between participant age and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.19, p = .06$) or for length of relationship and relationship satisfaction ($r = -.06, p = .58$).

The association between participant race and relationship satisfaction was analyzed using a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The results revealed no significant differences between participant race and relationship satisfaction. Aside from race, the nominal level demographics (i.e., participant gender, proximity of relationship, and data collection source) and relationship satisfaction were analyzed using independent sample t-tests. The results revealed no significant differences between participant genders, proximity of relationship (i.e., whether the relationship was long distance or not), or data collection source (i.e., student or co-worker) on relationship satisfaction.
Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Nominal and Ordinal Level Study Measures*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Continuous Study Measures*

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<td>4.58</td>
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<td>8-30</td>
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<td>6-23</td>
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<td>13.43</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>6-25</td>
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<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>13.01</td>
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<td>6-24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
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<td>4.97</td>
<td>6-27</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Liking</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>19.68</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>11-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>22.81</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>13-30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>22.59</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>14-30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>23.32</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>17-30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>21.81</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>12-29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to further investigate the possibility of differences between the two data collection sources, the association between data collection source and the eight similarity variables (i.e., one for each of the Big-Five traits, religion, attitudes, and interests) was analyzed using a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). The Wilks’ Lambda procedure indicated a significant overall effect for data collection source, $F(8, 85) = 4.07, p = .00$. The simple one-way ANOVAs were examined to determine the variables on which data collection source had a significant effect. The results indicated significantly higher average scores for the student group versus employee group, respectively, on the following similarity variables: neuroticism ($M = 17.67, SD = 3.62$), ($M = 14.72, SD = 4.24$, $F(1, 93) = 12.89, p = .00$); extraversion ($M = 20.25, SD = 4.53$), ($M = 16.61, SD = 5.46$, $F(1, 93) = 12.27, p = .00$); openness ($M = 19.31, SD = 3.92$), ($M = 16.88, SD = 5.06$, $F(1, 93) = 6.74, p = .01$); agreeableness, ($M = 20.77, SD = 3.43$), ($M = 18.05, SD = 5.03$, $F(1, 93) = 9.69, p = .00$); and interests, ($M = 13.29, SD = 2.92$), ($M = 11.41 , SD = 3.42$, $F(1, 93) = 8.02, p = .00$).

The association between data collection source and the eight importance of similarity variables (i.e., one for each of the Big-Five traits, religion, attitudes, and interests) was also analyzed with a MANOVA. Again, the Wilks’ Lambda procedure revealed a significant overall effect for data collection source, $F(8, 86) = 4.52, p = .00$. Once more, the simple one-way ANOVAs indicated significantly higher average scores for the student group versus the employee group. Significantly higher scores were found for students versus employees, respectively, on the following importance of similarity variables: neuroticism, ($M = 17.02 , SD = 5.06$), ($M = 15.05 , SD = 4.34$, $F(1, 94) = $
4.45, \( p = .03 \); extraversion, \((M = 19.44, SD = 3.27), (M = 16.94, SD = 5.20), F (1, 94) = 8.26, p = .00\); agreeableness, \((M = 20.83, SD = 4.51), (M = 18.86, SD = 4.56), F (1, 94) = 4.22, p = .04\); and interests, \((M = 10.77, SD = 3.07), (M = 9.33, SD = 3.02), F (1, 94) = 4.77, p = .03\).

Additionally, the simple relationship between the similarity or complementarity variables and relationship satisfaction was examined with the use of zero-order correlations in order to determine the consistency regarding main effects of similarity and complementarity with previous studies. Tables 3 and 4, respectively, summarize the results of these analyses. Consistent with previous research findings, perceived similarity in each of the Big-Five personality traits was significantly and positively correlated with relationship satisfaction while perceived complementarity was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction. That is, participants who scored higher on relationship satisfaction were more likely to score higher on perceived similarity in personality traits and lower on perceived complementarity in personality. Also consistent with previous findings was the positive association between relationship satisfaction and similarity in attitudes, similarity in interests, and similarity in religion. As with similarity in personality traits, participants who scored higher on relationship satisfaction were more likely to score higher on similarity in attitudes, interests, and religion.

**Hypothesis 1**

The first hypothesis stated that perceived importance of a specific dimension of similarity or complementarity would moderate the relationship between similarity or
Table 3

Zero-Order Correlations Between Similarity Variables and Relationship Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Relationship Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Similarity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>.42**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>.38**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>.61**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>.51**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interests</td>
<td>.31**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Importance of Similarity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>-.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>.13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
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<td>Attitudes</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<td>Interests</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* $p < .05$  ** $p < .01$. 
Table 4

Zero-Order Correlations Between Complementarity Variables and Relationship Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Relationship Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complementarity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>-.20*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>-.42**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>-.38**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>-.61**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>-.51**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Importance of Complementarity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>-.26*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>-.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.  **p < .01.
complementarity in that dimension and relationship satisfaction. In other words, Similarity x Importance interactions or Complementarity x Importance interactions would predict relationship satisfaction above main effects for either of those two variables alone. Hierarchical regressions were used to test this hypothesis.

**Similarity x Importance interactions.** Four two-step hierarchical regressions were conducted to test the hypothesis that Similarity x Importance interactions would predict relationship satisfaction above main effects for either of those two variables alone. For the first equation, the main effects for similarity and importance of the personality variables were entered in the first step. On the second step, the Similarity x Importance interactions for personality variables were entered into the equation. Support for the hypothesis would be indicated by significant $R^2_\Delta$ value on the second step. All of the Big-Five personality traits were included in the first equation (e.g., neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness). The results yielded no significant Similarity x Importance interactions for the Big-Five traits as a set ($R^2_\Delta = .04$, $p = .27$). However, a significant interaction was observed regarding similarity in neuroticism and relationship satisfaction ($\beta = 1.16$, $p = .03$).

Three additional and identical regressions were conducted regarding interests, attitudes, and religion. The only differences in the subsequent equations were the variables entered on the first and second steps. For example, in the first step of the regression pertaining to interests, the main effects for similarity and importance in interests, not personality variables, was entered. Additionally, the Similarity x Importance interactions for interests, not personality traits, was entered on the second step. The same
equation structure was used for attitudes and religion, respectively. The results regarding Similarity x Importance interactions for interests were non-significant as well ($R^2\Delta = .01$, $p = .45$). However, the results revealed significant Similarity x Importance interactions for attitudes ($R^2\Delta = .07$, $p = .00$), and religion ($R^2\Delta = .16$, $p = .00$). See Tables 5-8 for a summary of these results.

To determine whether Similarity x Importance interactions of attitudes, religion, or neuroticism on relationship satisfaction were in the expected direction, a median split was calculated on importance of similarity in attitudes, religion, and neuroticism. This resulted in the creation of three dichotomous importance variables (i.e., high importance and low importance of similarity in attitudes, religion, and neuroticism). Next, the correlation between similarity of attitudes, religion, or neuroticism and relationship satisfaction was calculated separately for both high and low levels of importance of similarity. As hypothesized, the results indicated a significant correlation between similarity in attitudes and relationship satisfaction for those reporting high importance of similarity in attitudes ($r = .60$, $p = .00$), but not low importance of similarity in attitudes ($r = .18$, $p = .20$). In other words, similarity in attitudes was associated with relationship satisfaction only for individuals who reported relatively high levels of importance of similarity in attitudes.

In terms of religion, once again as hypothesized the results indicated a significant correlation between similarity in religion and relationship satisfaction for those reporting high importance of similarity in religion ($r = .60$, $p = .00$), but not low ($r = -.07$, $p = .60$) importance of similarity in religion. That is, similarity in religion was associated with
Table 5

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Similarity x Importance Interactions for Personality Traits*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>-1.39</td>
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<td>.16</td>
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<td>Imp. conscientiousness</td>
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<td>-1.45</td>
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<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
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<td>S x I conscientiousness</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.*  
R² = .52 for step 1; R² = .56 for step 2; Sim.= similarity; Imp.= importance of similarity; S x I= similarity x importance interaction.
Table 6

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Similarity x Importance Interactions for Interests*

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>$R^2_\Delta$</th>
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<td>.10</td>
<td>.01</td>
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<td>-.93</td>
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<td>S x I Interests</td>
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<td>.75</td>
<td>.45</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $R^2 = .10$ for step 1; $R^2 = .11$ for step 2; Imp. = importance of similarity; S x I = similarity x importance interaction.
Table 7

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Similarity x Importance Interactions for Religion*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>R^2Δ</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Similarity in Religion</td>
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<td>.06</td>
<td>.04</td>
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<td>-.11</td>
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<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
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<td>.16</td>
<td>.00</td>
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</table>

*Note.* R^2 = .06 for step 1; R^2 = .22 for step 2; Imp. = importance of similarity; S x I = similarity x importance interaction.
Table 8

*Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Similarity x Importance Interactions for Attitudes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>p</th>
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<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imp. Attitudes</td>
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<td>-1.23</td>
<td>.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S x I Attitudes</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* $R^2 = .16$ for step 1; $R^2 = .23$ for step 2; Imp. = importance of similarity; S x I = similarity x importance interaction.
relationship satisfaction only for individuals who reported *high levels* of importance of similarity in religion. A significant correlation was found regarding similarity in neuroticism and relationship satisfaction for those reporting high importance of similarity in neuroticism \((r = .32, p = .02)\), but not low \((r = .12, p = .40)\) importance of similarity in neuroticism. Thus, similarity in neuroticism was associated with relationship satisfaction only for individuals who reported *high levels* of importance of similarity in neuroticism.

**Complementarity x importance interactions.** For ease of interpretation, the Complementarity variables were obtained by recoding the Similarity variables, such that the direction of the variable scores was reversed. Next, a hierarchical regression equation identical to that used for Similarity x Importance interactions regarding personality traits was conducted. The results revealed no significant interaction effects for either the Big-Five traits as a set \(R^2\Delta = .05, p = .22\), or for any of the individual traits. These results suggested that Complementarity x Importance interactions did not predict relationship satisfaction above the main effects for either variable alone. The results of the regression are summarized in Table 9.

**Hypothesis 2**

The second hypothesis stated that the dimensions of personality similarity versus complementarity deemed as important will depend on the participants’ liking of their standing on the trait. For example, if an individual is introverted and likes that quality about oneself, that individual will value importance of similarity in introversion in a mate. On the other hand, if an individual is introverted and *does not like* that quality in himself or herself, then that individual will value the importance of complementarity of
Table 9

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Relationship Satisfaction from Complementarity x Importance Interactions for Personality Traits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>R²Δ</th>
<th>p</th>
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<td>Step 1</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>.50</td>
<td>.00</td>
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<td>Com. extraversion</td>
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<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. neuroticism</td>
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<td>.14</td>
<td>.89</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Com. conscientiousness</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-2.17</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imp. agreeableness</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.72</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imp. extraversion</td>
<td>.32</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Imp. neuroticism</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.75</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imp. openness</td>
<td>-.36</td>
<td>-2.83</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imp. conscientiousness</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C x I agreeableness</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C x I extraversion</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C x I neuroticism</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.55</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C x I openness</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C x I conscientiousness</td>
<td>-.32</td>
<td>-.67</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R² = .50 for step 1; R² = .55 for step 2; Com. = complementarity; Imp. = importance of complementarity; C x I = complementarity x importance interaction.
introversion in a mate. This hypothesis was tested by calculating the correlations between five self-liking variables (i.e., one each for the Big-Five traits) and the importance of similarity and complementarity of the respective trait.

**Similarity and self-liking.** As hypothesized, the results revealed significant correlations between the self-liking variables and the respective importance of similarity and complementarity variables (see Table 10 for these results). The results indicated a positive association between self-liking of extraversion and the importance of similarity in extraversion \((r = .41, p = .00)\), self-liking of agreeableness and the importance of similarity of agreeableness \((r = .28, p = .01)\), self-liking of openness and similarity of openness \((r = .26, p = .01)\), and self-liking of conscientiousness and the importance of similarity of conscientiousness \((r = .48, p = .00)\). These results suggested that as self-liking of extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness increased, the importance of similarity of extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness increased as well.

**Complementarity and self liking.** The results also demonstrated that self-liking of neuroticism was negatively associated with the importance of complementarity of neuroticism \((r = -.21, p = .03)\), such that as self-liking of neuroticism decreased, the importance of complementarity of neuroticism increased. A similar pattern was found regarding the association between self liking of openness and the importance of complementarity in openness \((r = -.29, p = .00)\). That is, as self-liking of openness decreased, the importance of complementarity of openness increased. Self-liking of conscientiousness was also negatively associated with the importance of complementarity
Table 10

Zero-Order Correlations Between Self-liking Variables and Importance of Similarity and Complementarity Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self-Liking Variables</th>
<th>Importance Variables</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>Complementarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neuroticism</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>.41**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>.26*</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.29**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conscientiousness</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.26*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.   **p < .01.
of conscientiousness ($r = -.26, p = .01$), such that, as self-liking of conscientiousness decreased, the importance of complementarity of conscientiousness increased.
Discussion

The current study sought to increase the specificity with which relationship satisfaction could be predicted by couples’ perceived similarity and complementarity. As such, this study represents a replication and extension of a previous study by Lutz-Zois et al. (2006). While previous studies have taken an idiographic approach regarding broad traits such as self-monitoring levels and mental health status (i.e., Jamieson et al., 1987; Lewak et al., 1985), the current study examined individual preference for similarity or complementarity on a given dimension. It was hypothesized that the association between a given dimension of similarity or complementarity and relationship satisfaction would be moderated by the importance of the specific dimension of similarity or complementarity. In other words, the importance of the attribute itself, as was emphasized by Byrne and Clore (1967), was not as relevant as the perceived level of importance of similarity or complementarity of the attribute. Support for the first hypothesis was found regarding Similarity x Importance interactions for attitudes, religion, and neuroticism.

In extending the aforementioned study, the concept of complementarity was examined in addition to similarity, and some key limitations of the Lutz-Zois et al. (2006) study were addressed. The concept that personality trait similarity in a mate could be undesirable, if such traits were ones that an individual did not like in oneself, was first postulated by Klohn and Mendelsohn (1998). Consistent with their supposition, the
second hypothesis of this study was confirmed. Specifically, those who demonstrated higher levels of self-liking of a trait tended to view similarity in such traits as important in a romantic partner. For example, there was a positive correlation between importance of similarity and self-liking of four traits: extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness. On the other hand, those who demonstrated lower levels of self-liking in a trait tended to view complementarity, rather than similarity, in the traits as important in a romantic partner. This association was found for the traits of neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness.

In order to address some limitations of Lutz-Zois et al. (2006), two key differences between the two studies should be noted. First, the personality measure employed in the current study included more behavioral descriptors rather than abstract concepts of personality traits (e.g., ‘I start tasks right away’ versus ‘I am conscientious’). The current study also employed a different measure of relationship satisfaction, the Relationship Assessment Scale, instead of an abbreviated form of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. The remainder of this section will discuss the implications of the current findings as well as limitations and future directions for research.

**Hypothesis I**

The first hypothesis was that perceived importance of a trait would moderate the association between similarity or complementarity and relationship satisfaction.

**Similarity x Importance interactions.** Some support for this hypothesis was found regarding the significant Similarity x Importance interactions for the dimensions of similarity in attitudes, religion, and neuroticism. However, no support was found for
Similarity x Importance interactions for interests. Consistent with the study by Lutz-Zois et al. (2006), no such support was found regarding Similarity x Importance interactions for the Big-Five personality traits as a set. As such, the prediction that importance attenuates the association between similarity and relationship satisfaction was consistent with prior research (Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Lutz-Zois et al., 2006) for some factors (i.e., similarity in religion, attitudes, and neuroticism), but not others.

The failure to find Similarity x Importance interactions regarding the Big-Five personality traits as a set in either the current study or the study by Lutz-Zois et al. (2006) could be interpreted multiple ways. One interpretation relates to the small number of participants in the current study ($N = 96$). The original power analysis called for a total of 250 participants. However, time constraints and relatively low student enrollment and participation at the time this study was conducted greatly reduced the sample size. As such, the interaction effects may not have been identified simply due to the small sample size. On the other hand, two observations seem to argue against this interpretation. First, interactions were found in the current study for other variables (e.g., similarity in attitudes, similarity in religion, similarity in neuroticism) despite the small number of participants. Second, Similarity x Importance interactions for the Big-Five personality traits combined were absent in both the study by Lutz-Zois et al. (2006), which had 247 participants, and the current study. Another interpretation for the lack of an interaction for the Big-Five personality traits as a set is that, as suggested by Lutz-Zois et al. (2006), no such interactions exists. Given that, in the current study, similarity in personality variables of the Big-Five traits combined accounted for 47% of the variance, it may be
that personality similarity alone is so important that it overshadows the role of any interactions. An additional interpretation involves the effect of the relatively low \textit{alphas} of the personality items. Such low \textit{alphas} likely introduced a great deal of error in the measurements, possibly obscuring the results regarding Similarity x Importance interactions.

These findings seem to beg the question: Why were such interactions found for similarity in religion, attitudes, and neuroticism but not for the other four personality traits? Finding significant Similarity x Importance interactions for religion, attitudes, and neuroticism may suggest that some people value those traits while others do not. Hence, an idiographic perspective may be more applicable to the study of these aspects of similarity. In contrast, the lack of Similarity x Importance interactions in the Big-Five traits aside from neuroticism may signify that the vast majority of participants value similarity in extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness. Thus, for these four traits, a nomothetic perspective where the main effect for similarity in the prediction of relationship satisfaction dominates may be the best approach.

\textbf{Complementarity x Importance interactions.} The hypothesis regarding Complementarity x Importance interactions pertained only to the Big-Five personality traits. No support was found for this hypothesis. Since there were no significant Similarity x Importance interactions for the Big-Five as a set, this result is not surprising. This is due to how complementarity was defined in the current study. Specifically, complementarity was viewed as existing on a continuum with similarity, such that a high amount of perceived similarity directly corresponded to a low amount of perceived
complementarity on each trait. For example, a similarity score of 1 (e.g., low similarity) was recoded into a complementarity score of 5 (e.g., high complementarity) on the same trait. In essence, complementarity was defined as the opposite of similarity.

**Hypothesis II**

The second hypothesis stated that the importance of similarity or complementarity of a trait will depend on a participant’s self-liking of that trait. The second hypothesis was confirmed.

**Self-liking and Importance.** Specifically, we found that traits individuals liked about themselves tended to be correlated with *importance of similarity* of the respective traits in their mates. On the other hand, traits individuals did not like about themselves tended to be correlated with *importance of complementarity* of the respective traits in their mates. This finding appears to confirm the supposition made by Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998) that variations in similarity are associated with levels of self-liking of personality traits. It should be noted that Klohnen and Mendelsohn’s (1998) findings did not pertain to either relationship satisfaction or to how self-liking was associated with perceived importance of similarity or complementarity. Rather, their findings regarding self-liking related only to partner selection. Specifically, they found that participants who were satisfied with themselves (e.g., demonstrated self-liking of their own personality traits) tended to have partners who were perceived to be similar to them, whereas those who were discontent with themselves had partners who were perceived to be dissimilar to them. Findings from the current study extended those of Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998) by explicitly examining *how* self-liking of a given trait is associated with perceived
importance of similarity or complementarity. In any case, both the current study and the study by Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998) suggest that similarity and complementarity play a role in romantic relationship satisfaction and mate preference.

A study by Watson et al. (2004) found an association between relationship satisfaction and similarity regarding Openness, Conscientiousness, and Positive Emotions (i.e., traits that are viewed positively by the participants). They also found dissimilarity in satisfied couples regarding the trait of Negative Emotions. It is interesting to note the connection here between dissimilarity and satisfaction regarding a trait in oneself that is inherently negative (e.g., negative emotions). While self-liking was not specifically studied by Watson et al. (2004), the association between similarity in positive traits (i.e., Openness, Conscientiousness, and Positive Emotions) and relationship satisfaction, as well as dissimilarity in negative traits (i.e., Negative Emotions) and relationship satisfaction may indicate the potential role of self-liking in mate preference. Additionally, such findings demonstrate the role of both similarity and complementarity in relationship satisfaction.

A study by Barelds & Dijkstra (2008) also found a preference for personality similarity in each of the Big-Five traits in a romantic partner. Interestingly however, 85% of the study respondents stated a preference for a romantic partner who is complementary, rather than similar, to themselves. Barelds & Dijkstra (2008) offered two possibilities for this inconsistency. One explanation was that people simply did not know what they wanted, or were confused about their own wants due to popular lay-theories of romantic preferences (e.g., ‘opposites attract’). Another explanation was that respondents
may have applied the similarity/complementarity question to factors other than personality (e.g., intelligence, religion, age, physical attractiveness). In the latter case, again, there is evidence for both similarity and complementarity in mate selection.

The current study further extended previous findings regarding the association between similarity or complementarity and relationship satisfaction to shed light on under what circumstances similarity or complementarity are associated with self-liking of trait preferences in a romantic partner. Confirmation of the second hypothesis in the current study further suggests that theories regarding both similarity and complementarity are, essentially, correct. The catch is that whether similarity or complementarity is active depends on an individual’s self-liking of a particular trait. Thus, the confirmation of the second hypothesis serves to further increase the specificity with which relationship satisfaction can be predicted. The findings of the current study also can assist researchers further with a basis for the integration of the often mutually exclusive notions of similarity and complementarity.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

One obvious limitation of the current study is the small number of participants. As mentioned previously, such a small number of participants may have decreased the possibility that additional effects of Similarity x Importance interactions for the Big-Five personality traits could be detected. However, there is a plan to collect additional data to supplement the current study. The current study also did not differentiate married/long-term relationships from short-term/unmarried relationships. While similarity and relationship quality has been proven to be associated, numerous studies (Klohnen & Luo,
2003; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Barelds & Dijkstra, 2007) indicate overly positive perceptions in the early stages of relationships, such that a romantic partner is perceived to be more similar than he or she is in reality. Such illusions may change or disappear over longer periods of time (i.e., when couples are married versus dating), possibly leading to differing perceptions of personality similarity and complementarity of one’s spouse. It is possible that married couples, versus dating couples, may show more evidence of the kind of complementary (e.g., ‘you complete me’) perception versus the relatively high rates of similarity reported by couples during the early stages of a romantic relationship. Whatever the case may be, specifying and directly testing for possible differences between married versus unmarried couples would be a valuable endeavor for future studies.

An additional limitation is the fact that over 90% of the respondents were Caucasian. When compared to African Americans, for example, Caucasians tend to report higher overall levels of marital/romantic relationship satisfaction in general (Trent & South, 2003). Additionally, Tucker & Mitchell-Kernan (1995) found that the expectation for a romantic relationship to lead to marriage is significantly lower among African Americans versus Caucasians. Such relatively low reported satisfaction levels and lower expectations of marriage may obscure associations between the factors associated with relationship satisfaction for African Americans. Future studies would do well to expand research to include the factors related to romantic relationship satisfaction for ethnicities other than Caucasian.
Another limitation is the fact that the current study analyzed data combined from two different populations (e.g., undergraduate students and employees at a mental health center). While independent samples t-tests revealed no significant difference regarding the data collection source and its association with the criterion variable (i.e., relationship satisfaction), it is possible that undergraduates and professional employees may place different emphasis on the factors involved in relationship satisfaction. The results from the MANOVAs clearly demonstrated that the two groups had differing perceptions regarding similarity and the importance of similarity of some study variables. Thus, differences between the two data collection sources in both the dimensions of perceived similarity and importance of these dimensions may have diminished the likelihood of finding support for the study hypotheses.

An additional limitation of the current study is the possibly simplistic definition of complementarity (e.g., the opposite of similarity) used in the current study. Complementarity may not exist on a continuum with similarity. Rather, complementarity could be defined as a completely different construct than similarity. Such variations in the definition and examinations of complementarity have likely confounded efforts to study its association with relationship satisfaction.

For example, Winch (1955) posited two types of complementarity. Type I was defined as the mutual gratification of identical needs that vary in intensity between the two mates. Type II complementarity was defined as the mutual fulfillment of differing but associated needs. Carson (1969) defined complementarity as occurring when individuals are opposite on the dominant dimension of the Interpersonal Circumplex
For example, dominant ‘person A’ would be complemented by submissive ‘person B.’ Wiggins (1979), using the IPC as well, defined complementarity as being behaviorally based. For example, a person who is assured and dominant will elicit complementary behavior from an individual whose personality tends to be warm and agreeable (Markey & Markey, 2007). Dryer and Horowitz (1997) defined complementarity as the pairing of a participant’s self-reported submissive interpersonal style with a dominant interpersonal style of a confederate, or vice versa. Klohnen and Luo (2003) measured complementarity of attachment styles, and found no evidence of complementarity as a basis for attraction.

An additional possibility regarding complementarity is that there may be a non-linear relation between complementarity and relationship satisfaction. For instance, Winch (1958) proposed that satisfied couples should have a ‘middling complementarity.’ This suggests that satisfied couples should possess a particular amount of complementarity, beyond which their satisfaction levels would decline.

The aforementioned studies examined complementarity as a main variable alone, not as it interacts with importance of complementarity. The key point here is simply that the current study failed to find Complementarity x Importance interactions while defining complementarity as simply the opposite of similarity. Perhaps interactions may have been discovered had complementarity been defined or examined in a different fashion as described above. At any rate, consistent operational definitions regarding the study of complementarity, as well as its interactions with importance, are possible topics for future studies regarding the variables associated with relationship satisfaction. Perhaps future
researchers could further refine and specify a definition of complementarity to help tease out and measure its association with relationship satisfaction more clearly.

Future researchers would also benefit from the further examination of other types of similarity, with respect to Similarity x Importance interactions, regarding relationship satisfaction. For example, Hojjat (2000) found that couples with perceived similarity regarding conflict resolution strategies tended to have high satisfaction levels. Additionally, Matthew (1996) found that couples who were similar regarding cognitive aspects of each couple member (i.e., complexity and social cognitive communication skills) tended to report greater satisfaction levels than couples who were dissimilar. Gaunt (2006) found evidence for the association between similarity and higher satisfaction in married couples regarding value priorities (e.g., importance of self-direction, conformity, stimulation) and gendered personality traits (e.g., masculine traits such as self-reliant and analytical; feminine traits such as compassion and tenderness).

Since the aforementioned similarity variables appear to be significantly associated with relationship satisfaction, further examining these topics in the context of Similarity x Importance interactions would be worthwhile for future research.

As mentioned above, the research involving similarity, complementarity, and relationship satisfaction has been steadily growing more specific with regard to individuals’ preferences and the type of similarity or complementarity (Klohnen & Mendelsohn, 1998; Klohnen & Luo, 2003; Watson et al., 2004; Lutz-Zois et al., 2006; Markey & Markey, 2007; Dijkstra & Barelds, 2008). We believe that the current study has provided successful replication, confirmation, and extension of recent research.
involving individuals’ preferences for dimensions of similarity and complementarity as they relate to relationship satisfaction. The finding that Similarity x Importance interactions, while found only for some dimensions, is a progression of the current knowledge of the role of similarity regarding relationship satisfaction. Additionally, as mentioned previously, the confirmation of the second hypothesis of this study serves to increase the specificity of satisfaction predictions. This finding not only adds to the existing knowledge base of how individual preferences for similarity or complementarity are associated with satisfaction, but it also provides a basis for the integration of similarity and complementarity regarding relationship satisfaction—a worthwhile topic for future studies.
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doi:10.1037/00223514.45.1.145


doi:10.1177/0265407507079235


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Appendix A

Demographic Information

1. Please indicate the initials of your partner in the space provided.
   __________

2. Please indicate the length of your relationship with the person mentioned above in number of years and/or months. For example, if it has been 3 months, write ‘0’ on the Years line and ‘3’ on the Months line.
   _____ Years       _____ Months

3. Please indicate whether your romantic partner is the same or opposite sex as you.
   _____ Opposite Sex       _____ Same Sex

4. Please indicate whether or not the relationship is long distance.
   _____ Long Distance       _____ Not Long Distance

5. What is your sex?
   _____ Male       _____ Female

6. What is your age?
   _____

7. What is your partner’s age?
   _____

8. Which of the following best describes your ethnic background? Choose one.
   ___ African American
   ___ Latino/Latina
   ___ Caucasian
   ___ Asian/Pacific Islander
   ___ Native American
   ___ Other: (Please Specify) _____________

9. Are you currently involved with one, and only one, romantic relationship?
   _____ Yes       _____ No

If you answered ‘No’ to question #9, please make your ratings in the rest of the packet based on your most significant past relationship.
Appendix B

Personality and Self-Liking

There are two sections on this questionnaire. On the first section (left side), please choose one response (1-5) from the 1st section response options to describe how accurately each statement describes you. Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future. On the second section (right side), choose one response (1-5) from the 2nd section response options to describe how much you like that about yourself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st Section Response Options</th>
<th>2nd Section Response Options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Very Uncharacteristic of Me</td>
<td>1: Extremely Dislike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Moderately Uncharacteristic of Me</td>
<td>2: Dislike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Neither Characteristic nor Uncharacteristic of Me</td>
<td>3: Neither Like nor Dislike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4: Moderately Characteristic of Me</td>
<td>4: Somewhat Like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5: Very Characteristic of Me</td>
<td>5: Very Much Like</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. ___ I worry about things.                      I ___ this about myself.
2. ___ I get angry easily.                         I ___ this about myself.
3. ___ I often feel blue.                          I ___ this about myself.
4. ___ I am afraid to draw attention to myself.   I ___ this about myself.
5. ___ I do things I later regret.                I ___ this about myself.
6. ___ I get overwhelmed by emotions.             I ___ this about myself.
7. ___ I warm up quickly to others                I ___ this about myself.
8. ___ I talk to a lot of different people at parties. I ___ this about myself.
9. ___ I try to lead others.                      I ___ this about myself.
10. ___ I am always on the go.                     I ___ this about myself.
11. ___ I love excitement. I ___ this about myself.
12. ___ I radiate joy. I ___ this about myself.
13. ___ I have a vivid imagination. I ___ this about myself.
14. ___ I believe in the importance of art. I ___ this about myself.
15. ___ I experience emotions intensely. I ___ this about myself.
16. ___ I prefer variety to routine. I ___ this about myself.
17. ___ I enjoy thinking about things. I ___ this about myself.
18. ___ I believe that there is no absolute right or wrong. I ___ this about myself.
19. ___ I trust others. I ___ this about myself.
20. ___ I stick to the rules. I ___ this about myself.
21. ___ I love to help others. I ___ this about myself.
22. ___ I value cooperation over competition. I ___ this about myself.
23. ___ I seldom boast about my own accomplishments. I ___ this about myself.
24. ___ I sympathize with those who are worse off than me. I ___ this about myself.
25. ___ I complete tasks successfully. I ___ this about myself.
26. ___ I like order. I ___ this about myself.
27. ___ I keep my promises. I ___ this about myself.
28. ___ I set high standards for myself and others. I ___ this about myself.
29. ___ I start tasks right away. I ___ this about myself.
30. ___ I think carefully before I choose a course of action. I ___ this about myself.
Appendix C

Similarity

To what extent do you believe that your partner is similar to you in the following areas? Choose one response for each item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not at all similar</td>
<td>Slightly similar</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Moderately similar</td>
<td>Very similar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on worrying about things.

2. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on getting angry easily.

3. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on often feeling blue.

4. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on being afraid to draw attention to oneself.

5. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on doing things that are later regretted.

6. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on getting overwhelmed by emotions.

7. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on warming up quickly to others.

8. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on talking to a lot of different people at parties.

9. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on trying to lead others.
10. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on always being on the go.

11. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on loving excitement.

12. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on radiating joy.

13. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on having a vivid imagination.

14. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on believing in the importance of art.

15. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on experiencing emotions intensely.

16. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on preferring variety to routine.

17. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on enjoying thinking about things.

18. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on believing that there is no absolute right or wrong.

19. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on trusting others.

20. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on sticking to the rules.

21. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on loving to help others.

22. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on valuing cooperation over competition.

23. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on seldom boasting about one’s own accomplishments.
24. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on feeling sympathy for those who are worse off than oneself.

25. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on completing tasks successfully.

26. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on liking order.

27. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on keeping promises.

28. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on setting standards for oneself and others.

29. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on starting tasks right away.

30. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on thinking carefully before choosing a course of action.

31. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on political attitudes.

32. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on financial and economic attitudes.

33. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on attitudes regarding children and family.

34. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on moral and religious attitudes.

35. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on interests in music preferences.

36. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on preference for socializing in groups.

37. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on interest in the arts.
38. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you on preference for sports.

39. ___ The degree to which you feel that your partner is similar to you in religious orientation.
Appendix D

Perceived Importance of Similarity

People differ in terms of what dimension(s) they view as important to have in common with their romantic partner. To what extent do you believe it is important for your partner to be similar to you in the following areas? Choose one response for each item.

<table>
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22. ___ The degree to which you feel it is important for him/her to be similar to you on valuing cooperation over competition.

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25. ___ The degree to which you feel *it is important for him/her to be similar to you* on completing tasks successfully.

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30. ___ The degree to which you feel *it is important for him/her to be similar to you* on thinking carefully before choosing a course of action.

31. ___ The degree to which you feel *it is important for him/her to be similar to you* on political attitudes.

32. ___ The degree to which you feel *it is important for him/her to be similar to you* on financial and economic attitudes.

33. ___ The degree to which you feel *it is important for him/her to be similar to you* on attitudes regarding children and family.

34. ___ The degree to which you feel *it is important for him/her to be similar to you* on moral and religious attitudes.

35. ___ The degree to which you feel *it is important for him/her to be similar to you* on interests in music preferences.

36. ___ The degree to which you feel *it is important for him/her to be similar to you* on preference for socializing in groups.

37. ___ The degree to which you feel *it is important for him/her to be similar to you* on interest in the arts.
38. ___ The degree to which you feel it is important for him/her to be similar to you on preference for sports.

39. ___ The degree to which you feel it is important for him/her to be similar to you in religious orientation.
Appendix E

Perceived Importance of Complementarity

People differ in terms of what dimension(s) they view as important for their romantic partner to be *different to themselves*. To what extent do you believe it is *important for your partner to be different to you* in the following areas? Choose one response for each item.

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30. ___ The degree to which you feel it is important for him/her to be different to you on thinking carefully before choosing a course of action.
Appendix F

Relationship Satisfaction

Please circle the letter for each item that best answers that item for you.

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?
   A  B  C  D  E
   Poorly     Average     Extremely Well

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
   A  B  C  D  E
   Unsatisfied     Average     Extremely Satisfied

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?
   A  B  C  D  E
   Poor           Average        Excellent

4. How often do you wish you hadn’t gotten in this relationship?
   A  B  C  D  E
   Never         Average        Very Often

5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?
   A  B  C  D  E
   Hardly at all     Average        Completely

6. How much do you love your partner?
   A  B  C  D  E
   Not Much         Average        Very Much

7. How many problems are there in your relationship?
   A  B  C  D  E
   Very Few        Average        Very many