

Similar From the Start: Assortment in Young Adult Dating Couples and Its Link to Relationship Stability Over Time

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ABSTRACT - Past research on married couples has documented positive assortment on cognitive abilities, attractiveness and physical features, attitudes and values, and, to a lesser degree, personality. In the current study, we proposed that if partners mate assortatively rather than converge over time, then assortative mating coefficients for dating couples should be similar in magnitude to those found for married couples. Second, as per filter models of relationship development, we hypothesized that similarity in dating partners' political and religious attitudes (as opposed to personality) would be associated with staying together over time. With a sample of 51 heterosexual dating couples, we found a pattern of assortative mating coefficients that mirrored the pattern found among married couples. As expected, couples still together at the 11-month follow-up had more similar attitudes at study-onset compared to those who had broken up.

In the mating game, where random circumstances and chance meetings exert an astonishing force (Lykken & Tellegen, 1993), there is one non-random tendency that humans consistently display: People prefer partners who are similar to themselves

(Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997). That is, humans mate assortatively. The evidence for assortment is abundant. Heterosexual romantic couples show moderate to substantial similarity in attitudes and values (Feng & Baker, 1994; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Nagoshi, Johnson, & Honbo, 1992), education level and cognitive abilities (Gruber-Baldini, Schaie, & Willis, 1995; Hur, 2003; Mascie-Taylor, 1989), self- and other-perceived attractiveness (Keller, Thiessen, & Young, 1996; Little, Burt, & Perrett, 2006; Murstein & Christy, 1976), and facial features (Alvarez & Jaffe, 2004). Generally, couples also show weak but positive assortment for major personality traits (Buss, 1984, 1985; Feng & Baker, 1994; Hur, 2003; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Watson, Klohnen, Casillas, Simms, Haig, & Berry, 2004), although Gonzaga, Campos, and Bradbury (2007) recently documented substantial assortment for personality in two independent samples.

Being with a partner who is similar to oneself can set up social interactions that reinforce and sustain one's initial dispositions (Caspi & Herbener, 1990). Thus, assortative mating coefficients observed among couples who are married, and who have generally been together for a number of years, are difficult to interpret. The similarity may represent initial assortment, but it also may reflect convergence over time between two individuals who spend time together and share a variety of environmental circumstances. In one longitudinal study designed to disentangle these possibilities, spouses were just as similar to each other in their first year of marriage as they were to each other 20 years later (Caspi, Herbener, & Ozer, 1992). More recently, Luo and Klohnen (2005) showed that assortative mating coefficients among newlywed couples (mean relationship duration of 3.5 years) were similar to those documented in previous samples of enduring marriages. Likewise, several studies have shown that assortative mating coefficients are of similar magnitude before and after controlling for length of relationship (Feng & Baker, 1994; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Mascie-Taylor, 1989). Because the large majority of assortative mating research has involved married couples, the first objective of the current study is to further the case for initial selection by documenting similarity in *dating* couples. In accord with the proposal that individuals actively select partners who are similar to themselves rather than converge over time, we predict that similarity coefficients for dating couples will be similar in magnitude to those found for newlyweds and longer married couples. Thus, we investigated young adult dating partners' similarity on variables commonly measured in married couples – the big five personality factors, self-esteem, self-perceived and other-perceived attractiveness, and religious and political attitudes – as well as on several personality variables not explicitly pursued in previous research: envy, jealousy, narcissism, and sexual strategy.

The second objective of the current study is to investigate links between couple similarity and relationship stability over time. Very little research has focused on this specific question. Rather, a variety of researchers have investigated the association between couple similarity and measures of *relationship quality*, and have shown with some consistency that similarity in major personality traits, emotional styles, and attachment style is positively associated with relationship satisfaction and healthy relationship functioning (Gaunt, 2006; Gonzaga et al., 2007; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; and Wilson & Cousins, 2003; but see Kenny & Aticelli, 1994, and Watson et al., 2004 for exceptions). Even the perception of similarity is linked with relationship quality: Individuals who are happy with their marriage perceive their spouses to be more similar to themselves than their spouses actually are (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002).

Other investigators have focused on predictors of *relationship stability* over time, including a lengthy history together (Hill et al., 1976), commitment to the relationship (Impett, Beals, & Peplau, 2003), feelings of love for one's partner (Hill et al., 1976), sexual satisfaction (Sprecher, 2002), fidelity (Knox, Gibson, Zusman, & Gallmeier, 1997), spending time together (Felmlee, Sprecher, & Bassin, 1990), and having family and friends who approve of the relationship (Felmlee et al., 1990). Some of these predictors – commitment, love, satisfaction – are indexes of relationship quality. Thus, as one would expect, relationship quality is positively associated with relationship stability.

Only a handful of studies have pursued the specific link between *couple similarity* and relationship stability over time, particularly among dating couples. We believe that the link between similarity and relationship stability over time is important to pursue: If similarity and relationship quality are linked (e.g., Gonzaga et al., 2007), and relationship quality forecasts relationship stability over time (e.g., Rusbult, 1983; Simpson, 1987), then it is likely that couple similarity also forecasts relationship stability over time. Further, given that researchers following dating couples over time find that a substantial portion (sometimes nearly half) of the couples break up despite high levels of love and satisfaction at point of initial data collection (Felmlee et al., 1990; Hill et al., 1976; Simpson, 1987), similarity may be an important predictor of staying together.

The limited research available supports that position. In one of the only studies to pursue the link between partner similarity and relationship stability, Hill et al. (1976) showed that disparate aspirations, disparate levels of attractiveness, and disparate levels of intelligence predicted breakup among college student dating couples over the course of two years.

Although not a study of relationship stability per se, the findings from Luo and Klohnen's (2005) study on assortment and marital quality may be especially relevant for understanding relationship stability among dating couples. In their study, married couples were similar in political attitudes and religiosity, but not in their major personality traits; in contrast, marital quality was linked to similarity in personality but not to similarity in attitudes. Luo and Klohnen speculated that, in accord with filter theories of relationship development that suggest that variables take on different levels of importance at varying points in the relationship (Kerkhoff & Davis, 1962), perhaps similar attitudes and values are important earlier on in a relationship and facilitate relationship progression; and it is only after people of similar attitudes have married that degree of similarity in personality becomes important for relationship functioning. If this analysis is correct, one prediction is that dating couples who hold dissimilar political and religious attitudes should be less likely to progress toward marriage and hence should be more likely to dissolve over time. Further, degree of similarity in *personality* should be less relevant for predicting dating couples' relationship stability. Thus, in the current investigation we followed our couples over 11 months to track their relationship progression. We charted their initial similarity in personality and attitudes as a function of their relationship status (dissolved or intact) at follow-up.

In summary, our hypotheses were as follows:

Hypothesis 1. Dating couples' similarity coefficients will be similar in magnitude and direction to those observed in past studies of married couples.

Hypothesis 2. Dating couples who are still dating at follow-up will have been more similar to each other at study-onset in political and religious attitudes than will those who have broken up.

Method

Participants

Fifty-one young adult, heterosexual couples from a public university participated. The majority of participants were Caucasian. Mean age for women was 19.47 years; mean age for men was 20.18 years. The average couple had been together for 18 months (range 2 weeks to 4 years).

Instruments: Study Onset

At the initial data collection session, individuals completed a questionnaire comprised of several scales.

Political Attitudes. Participants completed six items pertaining to their political attitudes, such as, "I consider myself a conservative," "I think abortion should be

legal in the United States,” “I consider myself a liberal,” and “I support the war in Iraq.” Participants responded on a seven-point scale ranging from “Disagree Strongly” to “Neutral” to “Agree Strongly.” For data analysis, all responses were coded so that higher values represented more conservative attitudes. Inter-item consistencies for this scale were high (male $\alpha = .79$, female $\alpha = .84$).

Religiosity. Participants responded to 16 items pertaining to their religiosity, such as, “My religion is one of the more important priorities in my life,” “I try to have friends of the same religion,” “I do not plan on raising my children under any one specific religion,” and “I attend a religious service regularly.” Participants responded on a seven-point scale ranging from “Disagree Strongly” to “Neutral” to “Agree Strongly.” For data analysis, all responses were coded so that higher values represented stronger religiosity. Inter-item consistencies for this scale were high (male $\alpha = .95$, female $\alpha = .94$).

Self-Perceived Attractiveness. Using a nine-point scale ranging from “Extremely Unattractive” to “Average” to “Extremely Attractive,” participants responded to a single item, “Compared to other men (women) your age, how physically attractive are you?”

Personality. Participants completed the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991), a 44-item measure of five major personality factors: agreeableness (e.g., “I see myself as someone who has a forgiving nature”), conscientiousness (e.g., “I see myself as someone who does a thorough job”), extraversion (e.g., “I see myself as someone who is talkative”), neuroticism (e.g., “I see myself as someone who worries a lot”), and openness to experience (“I see myself as someone who is curious about many different things”). The BFI includes between 8 and 10 items for each factor. Participants used a five-point rating scale ranging from “Disagree Strongly” to “Agree Strongly” to indicate their agreement with each item. In the current sample, inter-item reliabilities were acceptable for all factors (male coefficients $> .77$, female coefficients $> .75$).

Self-Esteem. Participants completed Rosenberg’s (1965) 10-item Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). Using a five-point scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree,” participants rated the extent to which they agreed with items such as, “I feel that I have a number of good qualities” and “I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.” Inter-item consistencies for this scale were high (male $\alpha = .84$, female $\alpha = .89$).

Envy. The Dispositional Envy Scale (DES; Smith, Parrott, Diener, Hoyle, & Kim, 1999) consists of eight items designed to assess individual differences in tendencies toward feelings of envy. Using a five-point rating scale ranging from “Disagree Strongly” to “Agree Strongly,” participants rated the extent to which they

agreed with items such as, "Feelings of envy constantly torment me" and "It is so frustrating to see some people succeed so easily." Inter-item consistencies for this scale were high (male $\alpha = .82$, female $\alpha = .89$).

Jealousy. Participants responded to eight items designed to assess the extent to which they consider themselves a jealous person. On a seven-point scale ranging from "Never" to "Neither a Lot nor a Little" to "Always," participants responded to questions such as the following: "Whenever your partner goes out without you do you worry that he or she will be unfaithful to you?", "Do people you've been intimate with consider you a jealous person?", and "How often are you troubled by jealous thoughts?" Inter-item consistencies for this scale were high (male $\alpha = .94$, female $\alpha = .93$).

Narcissism. The Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin & Terry, 1988) includes 40 items to which participants respond with a true or false. Sample items include "I am a born leader," and "I like to display my body." Inter-item consistencies for this scale were acceptable (male $\alpha = .80$, female $\alpha = .73$).

Sexual Unrestrictedness. Participants completed the Sociosexual Orientation Inventory (SOI; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), a seven-item behavioral and attitudinal measure of individuals' sexual "unrestrictedness." Individuals who are unrestricted report more behavioral experience with casual sex, fantasize more about people other than their current partner, and hold more favorable attitudes about casual sex. As part of this inventory, participants report their number of sex partners in the past year, number of "one-time only" sex partners in their life, number of foreseen sex partners in the next five years, frequency of sexual fantasy about someone other than their partner, and extent of agreement (nine-point scale) with three items such as, "Sex without love is OK." Inter-item consistencies for this scale were acceptable (male $\alpha = .78$, female $\alpha = .80$).

Relationship Commitment. We designed five items to gauge participants' level of commitment to their partner and the relationship. Using a nine-point rating scale ranging from "Disagree Strongly" to "Agree Strongly," participants responded to items such as the following: "I perceive my current partner as my partner for life," and "I feel committed to making my relationship last." Reliabilities were acceptable (male $\alpha = .72$, female $\alpha = .70$).

Procedure: Study Onset

Couples attended their initial session in small groups. After informed consent procedures were complete, the session researcher photographed participants individually, in color, against a white wall, from the shoulders up. Of the 102 participants, 99 consented to use of their picture for research purposes. After the

photographs, the researcher escorted the men and women into different rooms to complete their questionnaires. Participants took an average of 30 minutes to complete their questionnaires. Fifty of 51 couples had at least one member who provided their name, contact information, and partner's initials for the follow-up.

Instruments: Follow-up

Eleven months after the initial data collection session, we communicated via email, phone, or online survey with one or both partners from 47 couples (out of 50 couples who had provided contact information). The follow-up was brief: We asked participants if they were still dating the person of initials "XX" with whom they had attended a research session 11 months prior, and we recorded their response in a Yes/No format. If at least one partner said they were unsure or that they were no longer dating, the couple status was coded as dissolved. The three couples we were unable to contact did not differ at study onset from the 47 we did contact in either relationship duration or commitment.

Procedure: Attractiveness Ratings

Male and female photos were compiled into two slide shows of 99 pictures in each (order of pictures counterbalanced). Then, eight male and 11 female college students who were blind to the study objectives rated the physical attractiveness of each participant on a nine-point rating scale ranging from "Not at all Attractive" to "Neutral" to "Extremely Attractive." Judges' ratings of participants' physical attractiveness were highly reliable, $\alpha = .93$.

Results

Table 1 displays descriptive statistics on the male and female partners in our sample for the variables in question. Consistent with past research (Bleske-Reчек & Buss, 2006; Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), the men in our sample were more sexually unrestricted than were the women, paired $t(46) = 4.42, p < .001, d = .64$. The men also were more politically conservative, $t(50) = 2.25, p < .05, d = .32$. Although men's and women's mean levels of self-rated physical attractiveness did not differ, outside judges rated the women as more attractive than they rated the men, $t(48) = -4.14, p < .001, d = .59$. Women scored higher in neuroticism than men did, $t(50) = -4.66, p < .001, d = .65$. Notably, both men's and women's relationship commitment scores were at ceiling (on the nine-point scale, the minimum score for men was 4.40 and for women 4.60; the median score for men was 7.90 and for women 8.20).

Couple Similarity

Table 2 displays the main findings from our analyses of dating couple similarity. In support of our first hypothesis, that humans engage in initial phenotypic assortment rather than converge over time, our dating couples showed patterns of similarity that were essentially identical to those shown by married couples: substantial similarity on religiosity and political attitudes, moderate similarity in attractiveness, and overall weak but positive assortment on the major personality traits (mean r for the big five personality traits = .12). In further support of initial assortment, relationship duration was not associated with degree of similarity among couples ($ps > .05$), except that couples who had been together longer scored more similarly in self-esteem, $r(50) = .31, p < .05$.

Table 1
Male and Female Partners' Mean Scores on Measured Variables

	Men		Women	
Other-rated physical attractiveness ^a (1 to 9)	4.83	(00.80)	5.42	(01.01)
Self-rated physical attractiveness (1 to 9)	5.45	(01.51)	5.67	(01.32)
Political attitudes (conservatism) ^b (1 to 7)	4.08	(01.41)	3.63	(01.38)
Religiosity (1 to 7)	3.82	(01.46)	3.92	(01.35)
Agreeableness (1 to 5)	3.85	(00.52)	3.94	(00.56)
Conscientiousness (1 to 5)	3.38	(00.60)	3.54	(00.68)
Extraversion (1 to 5)	3.34	(00.72)	3.51	(00.66)
Neuroticism ^b (1 to 5)	2.63	(00.64)	3.33	(00.76)
Openness (1 to 5)	3.70	(00.63)	3.83	(00.53)
Self-esteem (1 to 5)	3.14	(00.47)	3.09	(00.51)
Envy (1 to 5)	2.19	(00.60)	2.22	(00.77)
Jealousy (1 to 7)	2.64	(01.26)	2.88	(01.30)
Narcissism (0 to 38)	15.60	(05.46)	15.43	(04.64)
Sexual unrestrictedness ^b	48.91	(23.86)	32.36	(20.48)
Relationship commitment (1 to 9)	7.45	(01.37)	7.78	(01.20)

Note. Value in parentheses represents standard deviation. ^aSexes differ at $p < .001$;

^bsexes differ at $p < .05$.

To determine whether the observed assortment was an artifact of homogeneous responding in the sample, we constructed twenty sets of random couples ("pseudo" couples) within the dataset.¹ The right column in Table 2 displays the near-zero mean correlations among the pseudo couples. Thus, our real couples displayed assortment; the pseudo couples did not.

Our dating couples did not demonstrate similarity in envy, jealousy, and narcissism. They did demonstrate moderate similarity in sexual unrestrictedness. In other words, men and women appeared to be with partners who pursue a sexual strategy similar to their own.

Assortment and Relationship Quality

In light of previous research on similarity and relationship quality among married couples, we conducted a series of analyses to assess the association between degree of couple similarity and participants' relationship commitment (as an index of relationship quality) at study onset, for men and women separately. Table 3 displays the results of these analyses (in the table, values represent partial correlations with relationship duration held constant). All but one coefficient was positive in direction. For men, commitment to partner was significantly associated with being similar to her in religiosity, extraversion, self-esteem, envy, and sexual unrestrictedness. For women, commitment to partner was significantly associated with being similar to him in political attitudes, self-esteem, and envy. Although this pattern of findings does not paint an unequivocal picture of a positive association between similarity and commitment to partner, the significant associations we did obtain are striking given the homogeneously high levels of commitment in the sample.

Table 2
Assortative Mating Coefficients for Dating Couples and
Randomly Constructed ("Pseudo") Couples

	Couples (<i>r</i>)	Pseudo- Couples (mean <i>r</i>)
Other-rated physical attractiveness	.41**	-.01
Self-rated physical attractiveness	.33*	-.03
Political attitudes (conservatism)	.47***	.01
Religiosity	.41**	-.03
Agreeableness	.21	.05
Conscientiousness	.30*	.01
Extraversion	.15	.00
Neuroticism	-.16	.00
Openness	.11	-.02
Self-esteem	.10	-.00
Envy	.14	.02
Jealousy	.05	-.01
Narcissism	.14	-.02
Sexual unrestrictedness	.34*	-.01

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Values for actual couples represent partial correlation coefficients, with relationship duration held constant.

Couple Similarity and Relationship Stability Over Time

Our second hypothesis was that dating couples still intact at the follow-up would have been more similar to each other at study onset in political and religious attitudes than would those who had broken up. Twenty (43%) of the 47 couples we communicated with 11 months after the study began were no longer dating by that time. As displayed in Figure 1, a graph comparing the intact and dissolved couples' mean attitude and personality discrepancy scores (including the 95% CIs of those means [Cumming & Finch, 2005]), our second hypothesis was supported. Intact couples differed less in their political and religious attitudes ($M = 2.01$, $SD = .99$) at study onset than did those who ended up dissolving ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.81$), $t(27.39) = 2.50$, $p = .02$, $d = .96$. As we expected on the basis of Luo and Klohnen's (2005) findings and filter theories of relationship progression, intact couples did *not* differ less in their major personality traits ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.06$) than did the dissolved couples ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.45$), $t(45) = 1.13$, $p = .26$, $d = .34$.

Table 3
Similarity and Relationship Quality: Associations between Partner Similarity and Commitment to the Relationship (at Study Onset)

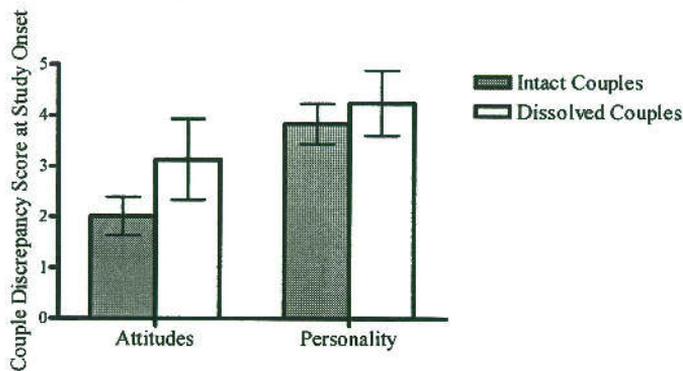
	Men	Women
Other-rated physical attractiveness	.04	-.02
Self-rated physical attractiveness	.10	.05
Political attitudes (conservatism)	.24	.41*
Religiosity	.29*	.10
Agreeableness	.26	.03
Conscientiousness	.27	.25
Extraversion	.29*	.07
Neuroticism	-.05	.14
Openness	.04	.07
Self-esteem	.44*	.33*
Envy	.34*	.39*
Jealousy	.24	.04
Narcissism	.23	.13
Sexual unrestrictedness	.36*	.12

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Values for actual couples represent partial correlation coefficients, with relationship duration held constant.

Commitment, Relationship Duration, and Relationship Stability Over Time

In replication of previous research (Impett et al., 2003), relationship duration was a strong predictor of couple status at follow-up, with each unit increase in relationship duration being associated with an increased likelihood of intact couple status at follow-up (men's OR = 1.86, 95% CI: 1.14, 3.04; $p < .05$; women's OR = 2.33, 95% CI: 1.21, 4.47, $p < .05$). Neither men's nor women's relationship commitment was a significant independent predictor of couple status at follow-up, $ps > .11$; however, couples with either one or both partners above the median in commitment at study onset were far more likely (75%) to still be together at follow-up than were couples with both partners below the median (27%), $\chi^2(1) = 9.49$, $p = .009$, Cramer's $V = .45$.

Figure 1
Couples' Personality and Attitude Discrepancy Scores as a Function of Their Status at Follow-up (Intact or Dissolved).
Bars represent the 95% CI of the mean.



Discussion

In this study we demonstrated that romantic couples are similar from the start. Like married couples in past research, dating couples in the current sample manifested significant positive associations in self- and other-rated attractiveness and in political and religious attitudes, and overall positive but non-significant similarity in personality traits. Moreover, couples who were still together at the 11-month follow-up were more similar to each other at study onset in their political and religious attitudes than were couples who had split up.

Partner Similarity

One novel component of the current study is our inclusion of several personality traits that have previously been neglected in studies of assortative mating. Given that envy, jealousy, and narcissism are associated with major personality factors (Buunk, 1997; Lee & Ashton, 2005; Smith et al., 1999), it is not surprising that our couples displayed low levels of assortment on these variables, as well as on self-esteem and the Big Five. We did find moderate couple similarity in sexual strategy, a finding that coincides with Simpson and Gangestad's (1991, Study 2) report of moderate similarity among dating couples.

Similarity and Relationship Commitment

Although a few previous studies of married couples have shown associations between couple similarity and marital quality (e.g., Gaunt, 2006; Gonzaga et al., 2007), other studies have not (e.g., Watson et al., 2004). Using relationship commitment as an index of relationship quality, we found some evidence, albeit inconsistent, that dating couple similarity is associated with relationship quality. Women who were similar to their partner in political attitudes, self-esteem, and envy were more committed to their relationship; and men who were similar to their partner in religiosity, extraversion, envy, self-esteem, and sexual strategy were more committed to their relationship. Further, these links held after controlling for relationship duration (see Table 3). Given that our typical respondent was highly committed to their partner (responding with "8"s on 9-point scales), it is somewhat remarkable that degree of couple similarity predicted relationship commitment as well as it did.

One intriguing finding is the positive link, for men, between similarity to partner in sexual unrestrictedness and commitment to partner. Confirmed via scatter plot, this relationship implies that restricted men with similarly restricted partners are highly committed to their relationships, and also that unrestricted men with similarly unrestricted partners are highly committed! Because unrestricted individuals are more likely to cheat on their partners, and tend to have relationships of less duration (Simpson & Gangestad, 1991), perhaps it is not surprising that similarity in sexual unrestrictedness was *not* a predictor of intact couple status at follow-up.

Similarity and Staying Together

In our analyses of staying together over the 11-month duration, we replicated previous research showing that commitment to the relationship (Impett et al., 2003) and relationship duration (Hill et al., 1976) predict staying together. Couples who are

committed to each other and who have already been together for a while are more likely to continue together. Our study adds to these replications by showing that, even within a sample of highly committed individuals, variation in commitment predicts staying together. Further, we showed that similarity – at least in political and religious attitudes – may be an important variable to attend to in predictions of which dating couples will stay together in the progression toward a long-term commitment. To some extent, political attitudes and religiosity can be seen as defining features of one’s prism for viewing and interacting with the world. Hence, they may shine through in discussions of nearly any topic, and at times may reveal irreconcilable differences. Likewise, they may be influential early on in a relationship, such as when discussing life plans or making sexual decisions. As Luo and Klohnen (2005) proposed, perhaps relationship development operates like a filter. Partners with similar attitudes and beliefs move through the filter; only then does the “next level” of compatibility, personality, take on importance. In light of this filter model, it is important to note that couples who stayed together were not more similar to each in physical attractiveness (either self- or other-rated) at study onset relative to those who eventually broke up. We speculate that physical attractiveness is one of the very first filters – one that decides who begins dating in the first place (Kurzban & Weeden, 2005).

Our couples’ similarity in political attitudes and religiosity is intriguing for another reason. Caspi and Herbener (1990) proposed that selecting a mate who is similar to oneself can sustain and bolster one’s initial dispositions. In the realm of dating relationships, our finding of substantial similarity in political attitudes and religiosity implies that individuals who partner up with like-minded individuals will show heightened stability over time in their own attitudes and beliefs, for better or worse. Perhaps future research will pursue this possibility.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study is a homogeneous sample. Our participants were primarily Caucasian and were all young adults attending college – they were essentially constant on those variables for which assortative mating is strongest (age, race, and education level). Additionally, our men and women were overall highly committed to their romantic partners, thus limiting our statistical variability. It seems, however, that a homogeneous sample worked to provide conservative tests of our primary hypotheses, both of which were supported.

Conclusion

Together with research on married couples and even friends (Rushton, 1989a; Rushton & Bons, 2005), our findings imply that humans seek relationship partners who are similar to themselves. Perhaps this assortment is a product of selection for information processing mechanisms that guide us to invest in and prefer those who are likely to share genes with us (Rushton, 1989b). Similarly, perhaps this assortment is a product of selection for information processing mechanisms that prompt us to interact with those who are likely to pursue similar goals and who might therefore help us meet ours (Tooby & Cosmides, 1996). Whatever its ultimate functions, assortment is a strong force in partner selection, and it is tied to relationship well-being and stability over time.

Footnote

1. Although they presented the results of 100 randomizations, Luo and Klohnen (2005) noted that 10 randomizations were just as effective in establishing a distribution of random couple similarities.

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