SIMILARITY BETWEEN FRIENDS AND ROMANTIC PARTNERS IN MORAL INTUITIONS
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BACKGROUND
Assortment, defined as the coupling of individuals based on their similarity, has been documented among both friends and romantic partners.1,3 Friends and romantic partners are similar to one another in their educational levels, interests and hobbies, attractiveness, and social and political attitudes. In this study, we tested the hypothesis that individuals select relationship partners who are similar to themselves in the moral intuitions3-5 that underlie political attitudes. The five moral intuitions (foundations) refer to individuals' concern for (1) caring and protecting from harm; (2) fairness and justice; (3) obedience and respect for authority; (4) purity and sanctity; and (5) loyalty and patriotism. We expected friends and romantic partners to hold similar views on these moral intuitions. In addition, because various studies suggest that people choose similar others as their relationship partners rather than become similar to their relationship partners over time,2,6 we expected that friends and partners' relationship duration would not be associated with how similar they are.

METHOD
We approached male-male, male-female, and female-female dyads in a high-traffic lounging area of a public university campus. This nonnaturalistic sampling method resulted in 87 pairs of same-sex friends, 98 pairs of opposite-sex friends, and 18 heterosexual dating couples. Upon consent, we independently assessed each dyad member's standing on the five moral foundations as well as their perceptions of their friendship/relationship. The Moral Foundations Questionnaire consists of 20 items, to which people respond using a 7-point scale (Strongly disagree to Strongly agree). One sample item for each moral foundation is listed below:

Care/Nurture: "Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.
Fairness/Justice: "When the government makes laws, the number one priority should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly." Authority/Respect: "Respect for authority is something all children need to learn." Purity/Sanctity: "I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural or disgusting." Ingroup Loyalty: "Loyalty to one’s group is more important than one’s individual concerns."

RESULTS
Our sample of young adults, comprised of 126 men and 160 women, showed several patterns that have been documented in other samples.5 First, the sample as a whole placed the most importance on Care/Nurture and Fairness/Justice. Second, women placed significantly more value on Care/Nurture while men placed more on Ingroup Loyalty. Our participants did place more importance on Purity/Sanctity than what has been observed in broader samples.5

Hypothesis 1 was partially supported:
Relationship partners placed similar value on Care/Nurture, Authority/Respect, and Purity/Sanctity

Hypothesis 2 was supported:
Relationship duration was not associated with degree of similarity between relationship partners

DISCUSSION
We conducted this study to test the primary prediction that relationship partners hold similar moral intuitions. The most consistent and strong assortment was in attitudes toward purity, a moral foundation that accounts for significant variance in people's stance on issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and immigration.7 We found no links between relationship duration and degree of similarity between partners, which suggests that individuals select relationship partners who are similar to themselves rather than become similar to their relationship partners over time. We might expect that individuals who are more similar to their partner show more individual stability over time in their moral attitudes, relative to those who are less similar to their partner.

We are now preparing to begin a 6-month follow-up of our participants. To the extent that holding similar morals enhances friends' and romantic partners' compatibility, we expect that friends and romantic partners who are more similar to each other will be more likely to still be together or report an increased level of relationship closeness since the original data collection.

REFERENCES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
This research was supported by the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at UWEC. We thank the many UWEC students who volunteered to participate in this study during their free time.