Ideal Mate Personality Concepts and Compatibility in Close Relationships: A Longitudinal Analysis

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How 2 personalities may be best combined in a couple has often been answered in terms of similarity in partner's personality characteristics. However, results have been inconsistent. The present study proposed that relationship outcomes should depend more on the similarity between individuals' ideal mate personality concepts (IMPCs) and their partner's personality as both perceived by the self and self-reported by the partner. Study 1 introduces a new Q-sort to assess IMPCs and provides evidence for the interindividual variability and the short-term consistency of IMPC. By following nonmarried couples over a 9-month period, Study 2 replicated findings from Study 1 and demonstrated that, overall, the current concept of congruence predicts relationship outcomes better than both personality similarity and the partner's individual personality traits.

Keywords: personality, complementarity, ideal, couples, Q-sort, Big Five

The study of personality effects in couple relationships can be traced to Terman (1938). Since those early days, over 470 studies have been carried out in this area of research, as recently highlighted by a review of the literature (see Cooper & Sheldon, 2002). Inspired by Terman's work, a vast part of this impressive body of research has been variable centered; that is, it has examined the relationship effects of a select number of personality variables (e.g., extraversion, anxiety). It has also been largely individualistic or intrapersonal because it examined the relationship effects of the personality of one or both individuals separately, paying less attention to particular combinations of personality dispositions between partners. Findings from this line of inquiry suggest a consistent influence of personality on close relationships. For example, a recurrent finding has been that neuroticism is a risk factor for marital relationships. Conversely, some evidence suggests a slightly protective role for extraversion and conscientiousness, although findings have been stronger in general and more consistent for neuroticism compared with other traits (e.g., Neyer & Asendorpf, 2001; Robins, Caspi, & Moffit, 2000, 2002; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000).

Terman's individualistic view of the effects of personality on close relationships was challenged when Winch (1958) proposed that principles of need complementarity in the couple are more important than the traits of one or both individuals taken separately. Research along these lines investigated "algorithms of fit," that is, particular combinations of personality characteristics be-

tween partners (e.g., similarity, complementarity) as a basis of attraction and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Hinde, 1997; Huston & Houts, 1998; Klohnen & Mendelsohn, 1998). Whereas the complementarity principle states that differences, sometimes opposites, in needs and personality characteristics drive mating and satisfaction (e.g., Winch, 1958; see also Hinde, 1997), the similarity principle claims that the more similar the partners' personalities, the happier their relationship ought to be (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Luo & Klohnen, 2005). I refer to these as *compatibility* models because the search for optimal trait combinations is in the focus of attention.

In contrast to Terman's (1938) approach, the history of compatibility models has been far less successful, as recently noted by Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998): "Given the unhappy history to obtain compelling empirical support for either the similarity or the complementarity hypothesis in the domain of personality variables. . .the temptation to throw in the towel, to conclude that personality does not systematically and importantly influence partner selection is understandable" (p. 269). Although this conclusion referred to effects of personality combinations on attraction and partner selection, results for the influence of similarity or complementarity on relationship satisfaction have been equally sobering (e.g., Gattis, Berns, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004; Glicksohn & Golan, 2001; Robins et al., 2000; Watson et al., 2004). As much as our intuitions may tell us that mating and happiness in close relationships must be somehow related to the "chemistry," that is, the compatibility between the dispositions of both partners, the empirical literature offers little or inconsistent data to support this view. In other words, how two personalities may be best combined in a relationship remains at present an unresolved issue.

Personality Compatibility as Congruence With Ideal Mate Personality Concepts (IMPCs)

One of the possible difficulties with current conceptions of compatibility is that they focus on combinations in actual personality attributes. However, already implicit in Winch's concept of

mate preference based on needs (Winch, 1958) was the idea of an ideal partner to which individuals aspire. More recently, there has been growing recognition that ideals are powerful psychological forces in relationships because they provide an evaluative and interpretative context for our views of the self and of our intimates (e.g., Cross & Markus, 1991; Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999). Based on this line of reasoning, Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998) recently proposed that assortative mating in personality should differ substantially across couples and, more important, that this variability should be associated with self–ideal-self congruence, which is an indirect measure of self-esteem (e.g., Block & Robins, 1993). More specifically, Klohnen and Mendelsohn anticipated that people with a high self–ideal-self congruence would tend to be mated with partners who are similar to their personality. Conversely, people with low self–ideal-self congruence would tend to be mated with partners who are dissimilar to their personality. Their findings supported these hypotheses: Those who like their own personality will aspire to a partner with similar personality attributes; conversely, those who dislike their own personality will look out for complementarity in a partner. The general lesson to be learned from this research is that the current impasse of compatibility research may be overcome by paying more attention to ideals. Unfortunately, Klohnen and Mendelsohn's study was limited to an analysis of partner selection and did not consider relationship satisfaction and duration. More important, even though the finding of associations between self–ideal-self congruence and partner similarity pointed to the mediating role of mate ideals, the latter were not considered in the study.

Just how important it may be to examine mate ideals in the context of research on personality compatibility is indirectly suggested by recent social–cognitive research on ideal standards in intimate relationships. Specifically, Fletcher et al. (1999; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000); Murray, Holmes, and Griffin (1996); and Ruvolo and Veroff (1997) demonstrated that large discrepancies between partner ideals and partner perceptions are associated with dissatisfaction with the current relationship or partner. Conversely, congruence between partner ideals and perceptions were found to be associated with relationship satisfaction. Murray et al., in particular, interpreted proximity between partner ideals and perceptions as a form of positive illusion or idealization and concluded that positive illusions are critical for relationship satisfaction.

In summary, there is reason to believe that the degree to which two personalities match should be influenced not only by their actual characteristics but also by their ideal mate concepts. Unfortunately, how, and to what extent, this might be the case remains at present unclear. Even though Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998) examined the role of ideals from a personality compatibility perspective, their study did not consider partner ideals or associations with relationship satisfaction. In turn, even though social–cognitive studies on ideals in intimate relationships have longitudinally examined partner ideals and relationship satisfaction, these studies were not set up to address questions regarding personality compatibility. Consequently, the concepts and findings of the latter line of inquiry cannot be directly compared or related to the vast literature on the role of personality in close relationships. The overarching goal of the present research was to investigate the nature and consequences of ideal mate concepts and of personality factors in a unified conceptual framework. This goal was achieved by (a) creating a common assessment language to measure both personality and ideal mate concepts, (b) taking a person-centered approach to measure different types of congruence between individuals' ideal mate concepts and their partners' personalities, and (c) examining the incremental validity of these types of congruence versus individual partners' personality factors and personality profile similarity. All these issues were addressed in (d) a cross-lagged longitudinal study, which was designed to address unanswered questions regarding the causal linkage between congruence and satisfaction.

I use the term *ideal mate personality concept* (IMPC) to designate the personality pattern that individuals desire, value, and seek out in a potential mate. As is elaborated in more detail below, I predicted that relationship outcomes should depend less on the personality of each partner or the similarity between partners' personalities than on the congruence between the self's IMPCs and their mate's personality. This view of the role of personality in close relationships differs from both the intrapersonal and the traditional compatibility approach because it asserts that it is a person's ideal mate personality template that ultimately determines the value and consequence of his or her partner's personality traits.

Extensions of Previous Research

These general aims and predictions extend earlier research in five important ways. First, little is known to date about the extent to which people differ in their views of the personality of an ideal mate. However, investigating this issue is important for two reasons. First, if ideal mate concepts turn out to be highly similar across individuals, they are more appropriately considered as a cultural constant rather than an individual disposition. If so, extending definitions of personality compatibility by IMPCs would make limited sense: As a near constant they cannot add to prediction, and as cultural stereotype they contribute little to personality as a domain concerned with the study of individual dispositions. Social–cognitive research on partner ideals, even though providing rich information about the content and structure of partner ideals, has not examined individual differences in partner ideals (Fletcher et al., 1999). Research in evolutionary psychology, in turn, has reported a high degree of similarity in mate preferences across cultures (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Consequently, examining individuals' unique IMPCs might in the end be of little interest because there is little that is unique to any person's IMPC.

However, there are two reasons to question this conclusion. First, even though individual differences in mate preferences were initially declared to be an important area of study by Buss and Barnes, their research subsequently focused on differences across gender and cultures. Second, their research typically included several positively valenced items that are unrelated to personality, such as intelligence, beauty, earning power, housekeeping skills, and so forth. When defined in a narrow sense, personality characteristics are more ambivalent. Some people may seek out partners who are reliable and hardworking, whereas other individuals prefer those who are daring and adventurous. Because of the more ambivalent nature of personality traits, I expect that individual variation in IMPCs is substantially higher than what previous research on mate preferences has suggested. Within the present framework, which focuses on person-centered profile correlations,

I explicitly examined the question of interindividual variability in IMPC by computing mean random similarity in IMPCs. In addition, I explored random similarity across the Five Factors separately to assess whether interindividual variability in IMPCs is higher for certain factors than for others. For IMPCs to be potentially influential factors in long-term relationships, they do not only have to exhibit substantial variability, but they also have to exhibit stability over time. Within the present framework, I asked to what extent ipsative stability in IMPCs would exceed the random similarity in IMPCs.

A second contribution of examining individuals' personality characteristics and their IMPC within a unified conceptual framework is that it resolves inconsistencies in previous compatibility research. For example, past research tended to hypothesize a link between partners' overall similarity in personality characteristics and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Hinde, 1997). However, recent research suggests that beneficial effects of similarity may be restricted to specific subdomains of personality that seem more important for compatibility. For example, on the basis of a large sample of newlyweds, Luo and Klohnen (2005) showed that most variance in relationship satisfaction could be predicted by similarity on Agreeableness (A) and Openness (O) factors alone (see also Blum & Mehrabian, 1999; Botwin, Buss, & Shackleford, 1997; Thornquist, Zuckerman, & Exline, 1991, for related findings). These findings are paralleled by the person-centered research noted earlier, which showed that low–self-esteem individuals seek out dissimilar partners while high–self-esteem individuals prefer similar partners. Taken together, these findings indicate that for similarity models to perform optimally, they require qualifications about the specific traits and the specific kinds of individuals for which similarity does work.

However, how can we systematically identify these traits and individuals? A distinct advantage of examining personality self-concepts and partner ideals within a unified Five-Factor model is that we can obtain valuable information about (a) the degree to which individuals aspire to a partner who is similar to the self's personality as defined in a holistic sense and (b) the extent to which this aspiration for similarity in personality differs across subdomains of personality. In addition, it is also possible (c) to characterize individuals who aspire to a partner who is similar to the self in terms of their Five-Factor scores. More specifically, information about (a) is obtained by analyzing the overall self–ideal mate association and about (b) by examining the associations between the self and the ideal mate for specific subdomains of personality.

From previous research that indicated that similarity in certain personality subdomains may be more important than in others I predicted, first, that the strength of the self–ideal partner correlations should vary across the Five Factors in a statistically significant way. In addition, in the light of the importance of couple similarity on Agreeableness and Openness to satisfaction, I also predicted that self–ideal mate similarity on Agreeableness and Openness should be particularly desirable. Information about (c) was obtained from person-centered analyses. Bearing in mind that there is variation in personality similarity across couples, I predicted that overall self–ideal partner similarity should vary accordingly across individuals. In addition, because high–self-esteem individuals seek out similar partners, whereas low–self-esteem individuals seek out dissimilar partners, I predicted that the degree to which individuals aspire to a similar partner with regards to personality should be negatively related to Neuroticism (N) as a "low-esteem" personality factor and be positively related to the "high-esteem" personality factors Extraversion (E), Conscientiousness (C), Openness, and Agreeableness (see Robins, Tracy, Trzesniewski, Potter, & Gosling, 2001, for personality correlates of self-esteem).

The considerations of the previous paragraph indicate why traditional similarity, which is the overall trait similarity between two partners, has rarely been shown to be a consistent predictor of relationship satisfaction.[1] Therefore, the third and central contribution of the present study is to propose alternative conceptualizations of similarity that are based on congruence with intimates' IMPCs. Specifically, I propose to examine and compare predictions of relationship satisfaction from three types of congruence, traditional personality similarity, as well as proximal and distal congruence with IMPCs. The distinction between proximal and distal congruence is related to the distinction between alpha and beta person–environment fit (i.e., fit with a consensually defined, "objective" environment and fit with a perceived environment; for a review of this literature, see Roberts & Robins, 2004). Specifically, *proximal congruence* is similar to beta fit and is based on an understanding of IMPC as a lens through which the personality of the partner is viewed and evaluated, thereby influencing one's satisfaction with the partner. This kind of congruence is referred to as proximal here because, as a perceptual measure, it resides in the eye of the beholder. As noted earlier, Fletcher et al. (1999) and Murray et al. (1996) have reported consistency between partner ideals and partner perceptions to be positively related to relationship satisfaction.

However, firm conclusions about the congruence–satisfaction link are hampered by two limitations of previous work. First, because the extent to which mate ideals are similar across individuals is to date unknown, it remains unclear whether a congruence index based on an individual's unique ideal partner concept will predict relationship outcomes better than a congruence index that is simply based on an average ideal partner prototype. On the basis of my earlier premise that IMPCs vary substantially across individuals, I did expect that this should be the case. Second, previous findings regarding the direction of effects between proximal congruence and satisfaction have not been conclusive (see Fletcher et al., 2000, footnote 4). If congruence, rather than determining liking, were determined by liking, this would mean that if one likes his or her partner (whatever the reason) that person will idealize him or her, leading to more congruence between perceptions and ideals. Even though this can be considered an interesting finding in itself, it also means that congruence does not even partially explain relationship outcomes. To further illuminate this important issue, the present research was designed to pit one hypothesis against the other using a cross-lagged design.

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[1] An overall personality similarity to relationship satisfaction link was recently reported by Luo and Klohnen (2005). However, the cross-sectional nature of their findings does not permit one to conclude that similarity in personality characteristics actually predicts relationship satisfaction over time. Furthermore, the concurrent similarity–satisfaction link was almost entirely carried by similarity in Agreeableness and Openness.

In addition to proximal congruence, I studied distal congruence. *Distal congruence* refers to the similarity between the self's personality and the partner's IMPC. This kind of congruence, which is related to alpha fit, is referred to as distal, because the self responds to "distant" information, that is, information provided independently by the partner. Predictions for distal congruence are based on an important premise of interdependence theory, according to which "the well-being of the self is influenced not only by the self's preferences and behavior but also by the preferences and behavior of the partner." As a consequence, a "close partner . . . may possess dispositions or motives, the display of which make it desirable for the self to cultivate some dispositions or motives while extinguishing others" (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999, p. 294; see also H. H. Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). On the basis of this notion, I predict that mismatch between the self's personality and the partner's IMPC will deter the self's personality from being fully expressed. Over time, chronic deterrence from the possibility to express one's personality should negatively affect the self's sense of adequacy and comfort and, as a consequence, decrease satisfaction with the partner and the relationship. Of the two kinds of congruence, effects for proximal congruence were expected to be stronger than for distal congruence. This is because the proximal frame of one's perceptions of reality are usually more powerful predictors of affective states than the distal frame of an objective or, at least, a consensually defined "reality" (e.g., Scherer, Schorr, & Johnstone, 2001).

Fourth, what is the advantage of these elaborate conceptions of congruence relative to predictions that can be based on each partner's score on the Big Five factors or on the couple's profile similarity in personality characteristics? Clearly, the value of conceptual innovations remains limited if these innovations are not matched by incremental validity relative to earlier (and simpler) conceptions. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first research that longitudinally examines the incremental value of matched personality ideals compared with the effects of personality and profile similarity in partners' personality characteristics.

Fifth, the present study is methodologically distinctive in applying both variable-centered and person-centered analyses to the study of personality in close relationships. To date, the estimated ratio of variable-centered to person-centered studies in the domain of personality and close relationships is 25:1 (Luo & Klohnen, 2005, p. 305). The variable-oriented approach has provided extensive information about the role of personality in close relationships, but it has limitations. The disadvantages include that it can only be applied to examining the effects of component parts of personality (e.g., extraversion, anxiety) but it cannot capture the influence of personality as defined in terms of the overall configuration of personality characteristics. Furthermore, aspects of personality congruence are difficult to assess within a variable-centered approach because it requires the computation of either absolute difference scores or interaction terms that are based on both partners' scores, which have both been criticized (see Luo & Klohnen, 2005). In contrast, person-centered analyses assess partners' profile-based congruence and capture similarity in the unique ordering and configuration of personality characteristics rather than similarity in scores on separate traits. To benefit from the advantages of person-centered analyses without losing the benefits of variable-centered analyses, I combined both types of analyses in

the present study. To exemplify, congruence was first computed in each individual couple (person-centered analysis). The resulting congruence index, which contains rich idiographic information about the extent to which each intimate's personality matches his or her partner's IMPC, was then used as a variable to make nomothetic predictions about relationship outcomes (variable-centered analysis).

Overview of the Present Studies

To recapitulate, the present research draws from the premise that individuals vary in the kind of personality they desire in a mate and examines the way that IMPCs influence intimate relationships over time. More specifically, I predict that relationship satisfaction and stability should depend less on the personality of each partner or the similarity between partners' personalities than on the congruence between the self's IMPC and the partner's personality. Study 1 has two parts: Study 1A and Study 1B. The objective of Study 1A was to create an adequate instrument to assess IMPCs. With this new instrument at hand, I asked to what extent IMPCs (a) vary across individuals and (b) are stable across time. For reasons explained later in the text, Study 1B was added to examine whether the variability estimates for IMPCs obtained through Q-sort ratings could be replicated using a standard rating scale. Study 2 is a longitudinal study, in which nonmarried couples were studied over 9 months. The goals of this study were to replicate and to extend findings from Study 1 regarding interindividual variability and temporal stability in IMPC and to address the three remaining hypotheses of this research in the following order: first to test the hypothesis according to which associations between IMPCs and personality self-concepts vary depending on the particular trait and the kind of individuals being studied; second, to investigate the hypothesis according to which proximal and distal congruence should both concurrently and longitudinally predict relationship satisfaction and dissolution; and third, to examine the incremental validity of congruence scores relative to more direct and traditional measures of personality, such as the Five Factors and personality similarity.

Study 1A

Study 1A describes the development of an instrument to measure IMPCs that was designed to satisfy two criteria: (a) to be person centered and (b) to be based on a widely used, standardized instrument of personality so that the findings could be compared with previous research on personality and relationships. To respond to these requirements, I created a novel Q-sort that is based on the most widely used instrument to measure the Five-Factor model, the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R). The NEO-PI-R is a 240-item personality inventory that measures 30 facets of personality that can be organized under a five-superfactor structure, including Neuroticism or N (the general tendency to experience negative affects), Extraversion or E (the tendency to be sociable, assertive, active, and talkative), Openness or O (measuring active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, intellectual curiosity, and independence of judgment), Agreeableness or A (tendency to be altruistic, sympathetic, and eager to help others), and Conscientiousness or C (the tendency to be planful, organized, strong-willed, and purposeful). For the sake of brevity, I shall refer to

these as the Five Factors or, alternatively, as the Big Five and use the abbreviations for each factor (N, E, O, A, C; Costa & McCrae, 1992). The Q-sort technique was chosen, first, because it is a time-honored method of person-centered assessment that captures the unique ordering and configuration of personality characteristics within the person being described rather than scores on separate traits. Second, its forced-rating format eliminates response sets, assuring that two profiles provided by different individuals or by the same individual on different occasions are commensurate. Third, the Q-sort limits responses that result from a social desirability bias, which is very important when many options are desirable as is the case with ideals (see Block, 1961/1978; Ozer, 1993). To answer the question about extent of interindividual variability in IMPCs, each individual's IMPC Q-sort was correlated with the IMPC Q-sort of each other individual in the sample, yielding a value for the mean random similarity in IMPCs.

Two aspects were considered in interpreting this value in terms of extent of variability. First, the mean random similarity in IMPCs was compared with the mean base similarity in personality. Two recent studies, one of which used Q-sort ratings (Klohnen & Mendelsohn, 1998) and the other conventional unforced rating scales (Luo & Klohnen, 2005), provided mean base similarity estimates of .27 and .31, respectively. These findings show that individuals tend to be more similar to each other than dissimilar because of shared cultural values and social desirability, as noted long ago (e.g., Cronbach, 1955). Second, mean random similarities for self-ideals in the range of .7 appear sufficiently low for individual differences in self-ideals to add to prediction (e.g., Harter & Whitesell, 2001; Klohnen & Mendelsohn, 1998). Consequently, I considered any value lower than .7 the base similarity value for personality, itself a model for an individual difference construct. To examine the temporal stability over time, stability was examined in terms of ipsative stability by computing profile correlations (Q correlations) between Time 1 and Time 2, testing the average stability against the mean random similarity (i.e., the stability that can be expected by chance), and comparing the findings with temporal consistency estimates for personality.

Study 1B

Study 1B was conducted to examine a potential artifact. Recall that the Q-sort imposes strict limits to the number items that can be rated as highly desirable or undesirable. Standard Likert scales, in contrast, allow the rater to rate as many items as highly desirable as the rater wants. Thus, it is possible that the Q-sort's obligation to discriminate could have artificially reduced the IMPC base similarity estimates. Using an unforced standard rating format might have led to a different and presumably higher mean base similarity in IMPC. In order to examine this possibility, a second study (Study 1B) was conducted in which, all other things being equal, a traditional unforced Likert-rating response format was used.

Study 1A

Method

Participants

Forty-one undergraduate students (26 women, 15 men), enrolled in an introductory psychology course, participated for partial fulfillment of their course credit.

Measure

Q-sort descriptions of the personality of the ideal partner. The Q-sort was based on the French adaptation of the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992; French version by Rolland, 1998). The original 240 items were reduced to 90 for two reasons, one practical and the other substantive. The practical constraint is the difficulty in sorting more than 100 cards without becoming fatigued or distracted. The substantive criterion for reduction was the applicability of the items to partner descriptions, both perceived and ideal. For example, a pretest showed negative phrases such as "is rarely frightened or nervous" to be confusing as descriptions of one's ideal partner. Therefore, negatively keyed items were kept at a minimum.

A limitation of the Five-Factor model is that it lacks items that tap individual differences in love- and sexuality-related behaviors (see Schmitt & Buss, 2000). Thus, three items concerning attraction and affection were added. The three items were as follows: "Is physically very attractive" (*est physiquement très attirant*); "Is tender, gives me a lot of affection" (*est tendre, me fait beaucoup de câlins*); and "Is not a charmer" (*n'est pas un séducteur/séductrice*). In turn, the scale for Openness to Values (O6) was dropped because of its poor psychometric properties in the French adaptation (Cronbach alphas of .48 and .31 in the two validation samples; see Rolland, Parker, & Stumpf, 1998), resulting in 90 items. The items were printed on 9.5-cm $\times$ 4.3-cm cards, using black characters on a white background. The same cards were used for personality descriptions of the actual and the ideal partner.

Procedure

Participants were tested in group sessions and instructed to sort the 90 items at two different sessions, which were held at the university 5 weeks apart. When explaining the Q-sort, the experimenter said, "Imagine that you had the possibility to construct the partner of your dreams! In front of you are 90 cards, each of which represents a personality characteristic. Think of a partner, which corresponds to your ideal, and then 'compose' his or her personality with the cards at your disposal!" According to this general criterion, participants were then instructed to sort the 90 personality characteristics into a forced, approximately normal, nine-category distribution that ranged from 1 (*not at all desired*) to 9 (*highly desired*). The number of cards in the nine categories was 7, 8, 10, 12, 16, 12, 10, 8, and 7.

Results and Discussion

To examine the interindividual variability in IMPCs, each participant's ideal mate Q-profile was correlated with all of the other participants' ideal mate Q-profiles, yielding a matrix of 820 similarity indexes at Time 1.[2] The means across these coefficients were as follows: Time 1, .40 (range = −.10 to .74); Time 2, .38 (range = −.12 to .74); and across Time 1 and Time 2, .40 (range = −.17 to .89). Additional values for each gender separately are presented in the first column of Table 1. These highly consistent mean base similarity values are far from perfect similarity (which would be 1.0) and, thus, intuitively indicate an appreciable degree of interindividual variability. In addition, because these values are relatively close to the mean base similarity value of approximately .30 that has been previously reported for personality, it seems appropriate to consider personality traits and ideal mate concepts in similar individual difference terms. Conse-

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[2] The number of random similarity coefficients is always equal to ($N \times N - 1$)/2. Thus, because the N at Time 1 was 41, the N of all random combinations is (41 $\times$ 40)/2 = 820.

Table 1

Average Random Similarity in Ideal Mate Personality Concepts (IMPCs) and in Personality in Studies 1 and 2

Group	Ideal mate personality (Q-sort): Study 1A	Ideal mate personality (Likert): Study 1B	Ideal mate personality (Q-sort): Study 2	Personality self-report (Likert): Study 2	Personality perceptions (Q-sort): Study 2
Women	.45 (.01 to .72)	.53 (.23 to .82)	.45 (−.04 to .81)	.33 (−.22 to .81)	.20 (−.42 to .67)
Men	.35 (−.07 to .74)	—	.38 (−.09 to .71)	.23 (−.15 to .81)	.22 (−.63 to .66)
Total	.40 (−.10 to .74)	.53 (.23 to .82)	.41 (−.09 to .81)	.26 (−.28 to .69)	.20 (−.67 to .68)

Note. Study 1A, $N = 41$; Study 1B, $N = 53$; Study 2, $N = 98$. Values in parentheses are ranges from the smallest to the largest of all possible cross-individual correlations. Values in Columns 2 and 4 are based on the intraclass correlation (see text). Only findings for Time 1 are reported in this table because results for IMPCs were highly similar at Time 2 in both studies (see text for details). Study 1B comprised only women; therefore no values are provided for men.

quently, Study 1 lends support to the notion that IMPCs vary substantially across individuals.

To assess the test–retest reliability of the Q-sort, for each individual, Q correlations between the profile of the ideal mate were computed across both times of assessment. The median correlation was $r_{tt} = .79$ (range $r = .34–.89$). Even though this value seems satisfactory at first sight, test–retest reliability of the present instrument can only be rigorously established if the coefficient of .79 significantly and substantially exceeds the across-time mean random similarity of .40 reported earlier. A one-sample t test comparing both values indicated that this was the case, $t(40) = 20.99$, $p < .001$. On the basis of the standard deviation of the real intraindividual stability coefficients, I also computed the associated effect size and the r equivalent to d (see Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1991, for details). I obtained a Cohen's d value of 3.28 and an equivalent r to d of .85.

Study 1B

Method

Because the method in this study was an exact replica of Study 1A, I refer to the *Method* section of Study 1A. The new sample consisted of 53 female undergraduates, who were asked to rate, on the basis of the identical instruction as in Study 1A, the degree to which they found the same personality characteristics as in Study 1A desirable. The only difference from Study 1A was that the answer format consisted of a 9-point Likert scale ranging from *extremely desirable* (9) *to extremely undesirable* (1).

Results and Discussion

Using the same computational procedure as described for Study 1A, the mean random similarity was .56. Although the Q-sort assures that within-subject means and standard deviations are always the same, with standard rating scales, the within-subject means and standard deviations can differ substantially. Because Pearson's r is not sensitive to these mean differences, the overall correlation does not accurately reflect the true degree of variability. Therefore, I also computed the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), which is sensitive to both the order and the magnitude of the scores (see Gonzalez & Griffin, 1997). The ICC was .53. (Note that in the Q-sort, the mean base similarity value is always identical to the ICC because within-subject means are standardized.) Because this value was based on women, it appears appropriate to compare it with the mean random similarity value for women of .45 (see Table 1, Column 1). The difference of .08

indicates that if the Q-sort overestimated variability, it would only be by a small amount.

To corroborate this conclusion, I added a second analysis that was based on a comparison of standard deviations across both rating methods. To achieve this, I regrouped the 90 items into its component Five Factors. Then, I computed the mean for each ideal factor and compared the respective standard deviations. The average standard deviation across the ideal five factors was .72 for the Q-sort study (range = .53 to .86), and .69 for the Likert study (range = .61 to .83). To see whether the order of magnitude of the standard deviations across the Five Factors was similar for the Likert ratings and the Q-sort ratings, I computed the correlation between the standard deviations in the Q-mode and in the Likert-mode. The correlation was .79, demonstrating that the standard deviations for the ideal Five Factors are not only similar in terms of their overall sizes but also covary across the two assessment methods. This result concurs with the previous finding in suggesting that estimates of interindividual variability provided by the Q-sort method are not dramatically different from the estimates that are based on unforced standard rating scales.

In summary, Study 1 provided support to the notion that IMPCs vary substantially across individuals. In addition it also showed that the novel Q-sort is a trustworthy instrument in terms of test–retest reliability. However, there are limitations to Study 1. One important limitation is that, because it included only a small sample of men, it is difficult to ascertain whether the heterogeneity in IMPC is the same within gender as it is across all individuals. A second limitation of Study 1 is that the mean base similarity in actual personality, to which IMPC variability was compared with, was based on two studies only. Therefore, in Study 2, I generated additional mean base similarity estimates in actual personality that were based on the personality data collected in Study 2. Finally, an interval of 5 weeks is appropriate to establish the test–retest reliability of the instrument, but it is too short to venture strong statements about the temporal consistency of IMPC.

Study 2

Study 2 was a longitudinal study, in which nonmarried couples were studied over a period of 9 months. The goals of this study were to replicate and to extend findings from Study 1 regarding interindividual variability and temporal stability in IMPC and to address the remaining questions of this research. Specifically, I examined within-gender variability in IMPCs on the basis of a larger sample of both men and women and investigated temporal

continuity of IMPCs across an appreciably larger time interval compared with Study 1 (9 months vs. 1 month). In addition, and on the basis of the considerations of the introduction, I tested the hypothesis that desire for self–ideal partner similarity differs significantly across the Five Factors and is particularly strong for Agreeableness and Openness. In addition, I also tested the person-centered hypothesis that overall self–ideal partner similarity should reveal positive associations with positively valenced traits (E, O, A, C) and negative associations with negatively valenced traits (N). Furthermore, Study 2 tested the hypothesis that relationship satisfaction can be predicted concurrently and longitudinally from proximal congruence. To substantiate the longitudinal predictions with a behavioral outcome, I also hypothesized that breakup could be predicted by proximal congruence. To directly examine whether participants' IMPCs are sufficiently heterogeneous to add to prediction, I tested the hypothesis that proximal congruence that is based on participants' unique IMPC should predict relationship satisfaction above and beyond congruence of partner perceptions with the average ideal partner prototype. Study 2 also tested the presumed directionality of effects (proximal congruence → satisfaction) using cross-lagged regressions. Furthermore, I also examined the hypothesis that relationship satisfaction can be predicted from distal congruence. Last, I examined whether both congruence measures exhibit incremental validity compared with the Big Five and personality similarity.

Method

Participants

Ninety-eight participants comprising 49 heterosexual couples composed the target sample. Participants for the target sample were recruited by advertising the research at two large Swiss universities. The advertisements indicated that the study was being conducted using couples who had been together for at least 9 months. This criterion was established to ensure, first, that the relationship was serious in nature and, second, that the partners knew each other reasonably well. The mean age of participants was 24.0 years ($SD = 4.8$) and the mean duration of the relationship was 3.4 years ($SD = 3.7$). Four couples were married. As a token of appreciation for their participation, participants were offered the possibility of obtaining personal feedback on one of the tests (NEO-PI-R; see below) and winning prizes (first prize: dinner for two; second prize: a gift certificate for two compact disks [CDs]; third prize: a gift certificate for one CD). The sample was Caucasian, with the majority of participants originating from the region (western Switzerland).

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. This questionnaire asked a variety of basic questions such as date of birth, the time together as a couple, nationality, mother tongue, religious affiliation, professional status, and living arrangements (with parents, alone, with partner), as well as questions concerning marital status or marital plans for the future.

Q-sort descriptions of the personality of the ideal and the actual partner. The Q-sort developed for Study 1 was used to obtain descriptions of both the personality characteristics ideally desired and those perceived in the partner. For the descriptions of their actual partner, the participants were instructed to sort the same items from 1 (*not at all characteristic*) to 9 (*highly characteristic*) of their actual partner, using the same distribution as for the sorting of the ideals.

Personality self-report. A personality self-report was also obtained from both partners to relate their IMPCs to their own personality self-

concept. For this profile, the full 240-item NEO-PI-R was administered in its original rating-scale format (Rolland, 1998). Previous research concerning personality effects on relationships almost invariably has used personality self-reports that were based on inventories with standard rating scales. Because comparability with these prior findings was considered important, the original, nonipsative rating format was retained for the self-report. Descriptive statistics of the key measures were similar to those reported in the French validation sample by Rolland et al. (1998). Specifically, the means and standard deviations (shown in parentheses) for the Five Factors were as follows: N, 100.5 (24.2); E, 113.4 (19.1); O, 131.6 (15.8); A, 118.3 (18.8); and C, 111.2 (20.0). For comparative reasons to be explained later, it was necessary to create a short version of the five scales that was based on the same subset of items used in the other ratings. Cronbach's alphas for the shorter scales were adequate (N, .80; E, .73; O, .68; A, .77; C, .84). Intercorrelations between the long and the short scales were consistently high (N, $r = .92$; E, $r = .92$; O, $r = .87$; A, $r = .92$; C, $r = .94$, all $ps < .001$), suggesting that the shorter scales captured the essence of the longer scales.

Relationship satisfaction. Spanier's (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale was used to measure perceived relationship quality and satisfaction. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale is a widely used instrument providing a global score of dyadic adjustment and four subscale scores for Consensus, Satisfaction, Cohesion, and Affectional Expression. An impressive number of studies have documented its excellent psychometric properties (e.g., Heyman, Sayers, & Bellack, 1994; Spanier, 1988). The same instrument has also been successfully used in francophone populations (e.g., Baillargeon, Dubois, & Marineau, 1986; Sabourin, Lussier, Laplante, & Wright, 1990). The version I used was based on the French adaptations of the questionnaire. A few items were slightly reworded for use with nonmarried couples. The mean score across all items was used as an index of perceived relationship quality. Means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients corresponded to those reported in previous research: Time 1 DAS, $M = 115.02$ ($SD = 11.84$), and Time 2 DAS, $M = 115.20$ ($SD = 13.25$). Cronbach's alphas were .86 at Time 1 and .90 at Time 2 (see Baillargeon et al., 1986). As has been found in previous investigations, women's and men's relationship adjustment scores were sizably correlated (ICC = .62), suggesting agreement in partners' perceptions of the quality of their relationship.

Procedure

Time 1. Data gathering at Time 1 occurred in two sessions, separated by a minimum of 7 days. Each session lasted about 2 hr, although time needed to complete the procedures varied across individuals. Participants were tested in small groups of 4–8 couples. Each couple was separated for the duration of the testing session to prevent communication and exchange of information between the partners. In the first session, the participants completed the demographic questionnaire, the DAS, and the Q-sort description of their ideal partner (see Study 1 for the precise wording of the oral instruction). Assessments of the ideal and the perceived personality qualities took place a week or more later to prevent carryover. In this second session, participants completed the Q-sort describing their actual partners, as well as the NEO-PI-R. Following completion of the sessions, participants were informed that they would be recontacted at a later time to collect follow-up data and provide them with personal feedback.

Time 2. Approximately 9 months later, participants were recontacted and invited to the university to participate in the follow up and receive their personal feedback. Of the original 49 couples, 10 couples (20%) had dissolved their relationship and 1 couple had lost interest in the study. The remaining 76 individuals (38 couples) were asked to complete the Q-sort describing the ideal partner, the Q-sort describing the perceived partner, and the DAS. Administration of the tasks followed the same order as at Time 1. Because participants were familiar with the Q-sort procedure by now, they were allowed to complete the second Q-sort, relating to the perception of their mate, at home. However, to ensure comparability with

the procedure at Time 1, and to minimize carryover and memory effects, participants were instructed to allow a minimum interval of 7 days between the two Q-sorts. They were asked to send the descriptions of their actual partners back in a prestamped envelope.

Results and Discussion

Individual Differences and Temporal Stability in IMPCs

Individual differences in IMPCs. As in Study 1A, interindividual variability in IMPCs was calculated by correlating every individual's ideal Q-sort profile with each of the other participants' ideal Q-sort profile and averaging across the resulting Q correlations. The same procedure was repeated for both genders separately. The results for Time 1 are presented in Table 1. The mean random similarity for Time 2 was .42 (range = −.09 to .81) and the across Time 1 and Time 2 mean random similarity was .40 (range = −.27 to .83). These average random similarity values were compared against the mean random similarity values for personality self- and partner ratings in the present study as reported in Table 1. To improve the reliability of the personality assessments, I aggregated individuals' self-ratings with ratings of the self as provided by the partner into a composite and I recomputed the mean random similarity, which was .31. Overall, the present findings are consistent with the mean random similarities in personality of approximately .30 found in previous research. Thus, because the random similarity in IMPC profiles and in personality profiles are not dramatically different from each other as already found in Study 1, it seems reasonable to consider both constructs in similar individual difference terms. Consequently, Study 2 lends further support to the notion that views about the personality of an ideal mate differ substantially across individuals.

In addition to an examination of random similarity in overall personality mate ideals, the mean random similarity was also computed for each of the Five Factors separately. However, computing correlations across subsets of items can lead to distorted similarity estimates.[3] Thus, for estimates of subsets of items, mean random similarities were based on a different metric, average squared difference scores (D^2). Low average differences across individuals indicate little variability in ideal mate templates for a given trait, whereas high average difference scores indicate high variability in the ideal mate template for a given trait. The findings are presented in descending order of variability: (a) Agreeableness, overall, 7.11 ($SD = 2.64$); women, 6.61 ($SD = 2.51$); men, 7.23 ($SD = 2.53$); (b) Openness, overall, 6.17 ($SD = 2.79$); women, 5.52 ($SD = 2.44$); men, 6.75 ($SD = 3.00$); (c) Extraversion, overall, 6.17 ($SD = 2.33$); women, 5.61 ($SD = 2.08$); men, 6.52 ($SD = 2.44$); (d) Conscientiousness, overall, 5.81 ($SD = 2.49$); women, 5.44 ($SD = 2.23$); men, 6.24 ($SD = 2.73$); and (e) Neuroticism, overall, 5.68 ($SD = 2.12$); women, 5.50 ($SD = 2.04$); men, 5.83 ($SD = 2.21$). These findings essentially replicated when I used absolute differences instead of squared differences. Two important conclusions can be drawn from these findings. First, ideal mate concepts vary most strongly for Agreeableness and least strongly for Neuroticism. Second, interindividual variability in both overall and domain-specific IMPCs appears to be generally higher in men compared with women (see also Table 1).

Longitudinal stability of IMPCs. For each participant, Q correlations between the profile of ideal partner ratings at the beginning and the end of the study were computed and then averaged,

yielding a median stability of .72 (range $r = .29$ to .83). As in Study 1A, this value exceeds the average expected across-time value for ideal Q profiles of .40 by a significant and a large amount, $t(57) = 16.47$, $p < .001$ (Cohen's $d = 2.16$; r equivalent to $d = .73$). The findings are consistent with estimates for ipsative stability in personality that are based on Q-sort ratings (e.g., Caspi & Herbener, 1990; Ozer & Gjerde, 1989) and data for rank-order stability (Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000). Even though estimates of ipsative stability cannot be directly compared with rank-order stability (Ozer & Gjerde, 1989), this restriction does not apply to the effect size correlation of .73. In summary, Studies 1 and 2 suggest that IMPCs exhibit a temporal continuity that can be compared with the stability of personality traits. However, it is important to note that stability does not imply rigidity. Indeed, an unexpected finding was that the unhappier that partners became with their relationship, the more their IMPCs tended to change, as indicated by a correlation between a residualized change index for relationship satisfaction and the stability of ideals over time ($r = .29$, $p < .05$).[4]

Does Self–Ideal Mate Similarity Differ Across Personality Subdomains and Individuals?

In what follows, I analyze associations between individuals' personality self-reports and their IMPCs. The similarity between the two is referred to as self—ideal partner similarity. This similarity can be seen as an index of preference for a partner that is similar to the self. Three hypotheses were articulated in regard to these self—ideal partner associations: I predicted (a) that they should differ significantly across the Five Factors and that self—ideal partner similarity should be particularly high for A and O; (b) that the overall self—ideal partner association should vary across individuals; and (c) that N, as a low-esteem personality factor, should be negatively associated with desire for overall self—ideal partner similarity, whereas positively valenced personality factors (E, O, A, and C) should be positively associated with self—ideal partner similarity.

The self-report and ideal mate ratings for each of the Five Factors were based on the subset of items that was common to both sets of ratings. Participants' correlations between IMPCs and personality self-concepts are reported for the total sample because no significant differences in correlations were found between men and women. The second value in the parentheses is disattenuated

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[3] As noted before, Pearson's r is not sensitive to differences in magnitude. Computations on the overall Q profiles are immune to this problem because within-means and standard deviations are always the same in the Q-sort. However when computations are performed on subsets of Q items, two profiles with values of 1, 2, 3, and 7, 8, 9 yield a misleading r equal to 1. Because difference scores do not center or scale, this problem is avoided.

[4] The residualized change index was obtained by regressing Time 2 satisfaction on Time 1 satisfaction and retaining the residuals. This residual change index provides a directional measure of individual differences in satisfaction change from Time 1 to Time 2, which is independent of each participant's initial level of satisfaction.

for measurement error on the basis of coefficient alpha.[5] Little to moderate preferences for similarity emerged for Neuroticism (rs = .28/.40); moderate to strong preferences emerged for Extraversion (rs = .35/.43), Conscientiousness (rs = .45/.52), and Openness (rs = .46/.71); and a very strong preference emerged for Agreeableness (r = .70/.99). To formally test whether these values differ significantly, Steiger's (1980) recommendations for testing differences in a correlation matrix were followed, showing that the self–ideal partner correlations across the Five Factors differed significantly, $\chi^2(4, N = 96) = 19.4$, $p < .001$. Thus, clear support was found for the hypothesis that preference for similarity between the self and partner should differ significantly across the Five Factors. The prediction that desire for similarity should be particularly strong for A and O received partial support. Self–ideal partner similarity was distinctively high for A but less so for O.

To test the second hypothesis, within-person correlations were computed between the entire profile of self-reported traits and the profile of desired partner traits for each individual. These correlations ranged from .12 to .74 ($M = .50$, $SD = .13$), indicating sizable interindividual variability in preference for personality similarity. These (Fisher-transformed) "desire-for-personality-similarity" scores were correlated with participants' scores on the Five Factors, yielding the following results: $r = -.26$ for Neuroticism ($p = .01$); $r = .19$ for Extraversion ($p = .06$); $r = .39$ for Openness ($p < .01$); $r = .14$ for Agreeableness ($p = .15$); and $r = .16$ for Conscientiousness ($p = .11$). These results are consistent with the prediction, even though for A and C only trends were found. It is noteworthy that, in comparison with the previous analyses, the highest association now emerged for O. Thus, the hypothesized special role for A and O in preference for personality similarity was supported though through different analytic approaches. In typological terms, these findings suggest that the typical individual aspiring to a partner with a similar personality profile is likely to be one who is low on Neuroticism and high on Openness. Conversely, the typical individual looking for a partner with a relatively dissimilar or complementary personality profile is likely one who is high on Neuroticism and low on Openness.

Prediction of Relationship Quality From Three Types of Congruence

Before turning to the primary analyses of effects of congruence on relationship satisfaction, I first provide an overview of the three different types of congruence being tested and how each of these congruence scores was computed.

Traditional personality similarity equals profile similarity between the actual traits of both partners. Because of shortcomings in earlier measures of profile similarity such as Pearson's r or D^2 (e.g., McCrae, 1993; McCrae, Stone, Fagan, & Costa, 1998), I used the Index of Profile Agreement (IPA; see McCrae et al., 1998) to compute couples' similarity on the Big Five. The most important advantage of this index relative to previous indexes of profile similarity is that it takes into account both the difference among the ratings and the extremeness of their mean. I computed an IPA for each couple, which was then converted, for ease of interpretation, to its correlational analog, the r_{pa} (see McCrae, 1993). The average r_{pa} was .10 (range −.79 to .59). This value is similar to earlier estimates of assortative mating, which have been

typically positive but low, ranging from .05 to .15 (e.g., Robins et al., 2000; Watson et al., 2004).

Proximal congruence equals congruence between the ideal and the perceived personality profile of the partner. A person-centered index of congruence between IMPC and actual mate personality perceptions was derived by computing the correlation between the numerical value assigned to each item in the ideal Q-sort placement and the value assigned to the perceived Q-sort placement, following the procedure for comparing Q-sorts discussed by Block (1961/1978) and used by many others since (e.g., Bem & Funder, 1978; Klohnen & Mendelsohn, 1998). The correlations were subjected to a Fisher's r to z transformation. The resulting index quantitatively expresses the degree to which the self's perception of his or her partner's personality matches the self's IMPC. The mean level of proximal congruence was .42 (range = −.20 to .80; $SD = .23$). There were no significant gender differences for proximal congruence.

Distal congruence equals congruence between the self's personality self-report and their partner's IMPC. To arrive at this index, I computed within-couple correlations between each subject's personality NEO-PI-R self-report and his or her partner's IMPC from the items that were common to both ratings. This index quantitatively expresses the degree to which the self's personality matches the partner's IMPC. The mean level of distal congruence was .32 (range = −.07 to .65; $SD = .16$). Men's (M) distal congruence scores were higher than women's (W) scores, even though the difference reached significance at Time 2 only: Time 1, $M = .34$ versus $W = .29$, $t(95) = 1.58$, $p = .12$; Time 2, $M = .38$ versus $W = .28$, $t(57) = 2.27$, $p = .03$. This finding indicates that, on average, men's personality self-reports tended to be somewhat closer to the IMPCs of their female partners than vice versa. The association between proximal and distal congruence was sufficiently modest ($r = .29$) to run analyses separately for the two types of congruence.

Prediction of relationship quality from traditional personality similarity. The IPA was correlated with both men's and women's dyadic adjustment scores at both times of assessment. As predicted, and consistent with previous research (Robins et al., 2000; Watson et al., 2004), relations were negligible both concurrently and longitudinally (women, rs = .15 and .05, at Times 1 and 2, respectively; men, rs = −.07 and .03, at Times 1 and 2, respectively; all correlations ns).

Prediction of relationship quality from proximal congruence. First, the proximal congruence index was examined for its correlation to the relationship measure. The congruence scores were transformed into z scores following Fisher's (1921) r to z transformation. As hypothesized, congruence at the beginning of the study was significantly and sizably correlated with relationship quality at both Time 1, $r(98) = .50$, $p < .001$, and Time 2, $r(76) = .41$, $p < .01$. As the analyses were carried out at the individual level, significance tests were adjusted for dependence following the procedures recommended by Gonzalez and Griffin (1997). More specifically, the overall correlation between congruence and satisfaction yielded a z of 4.44 ($p < .01$) at Time 1 when corrected

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[5] Cronbach's alphas for the ideal mate Five Factors were: N, .62; E, .80; O, .72; A, .65; and C, .82 (see the *Method* section for the psychometric details regarding the self-report scales).

for dependence. The z value for the correlation from Time 1 to Time 2 was 3.20 ($p < .01$) when adjusted for dependence (see Gonzalez & Griffin, Equation 5). There was also some evidence for partner effects suggested by a significant partial cross-intraclass correlation, but these effects vanished over time (Time 1: $z = 2.67$, $p < .01$; Time 1 to Time 2: $z = 1.31$, $p = .10$; see Gonzalez & Griffin, Equation 6). The individual level correlation remained significant when the dyad-level correlation was controlled for, (partial $r = .34$), $p < .01$ (see Gonzalez & Griffin, Equation 9). Taken together, these findings indicate that individual level effects play the important part in the overall congruence–satisfaction relationship.

Because relationship satisfaction and ideal–perceived mate congruence were substantially correlated at Time 1, the predictive relations between congruence and later quality of the relationship could be due to the sizable autocorrelation of dyadic adjustment over time (see Figure 1). To determine the pure predictive contribution of congruence scores at Time 1, cross-lagged regressions between Time 2 dyadic adjustment and Time 1 congruence were computed, while controlling for Time 1 dyadic adjustment. The result provides information about the amount of change in dyadic adjustment that can be attributed to congruence (see Kenny, 1979). By virtue of the present design, it was also possible to examine the inverse relationship, that is, the extent to which changes in ideal–perceived partner fit can be attributed to dyadic adjustment at the beginning of the study. As can be seen from Figure 1, ideal–perceived mate personality congruence was predictive of dyadic adjustment at Time 2, when controlling for Time 1 relationship quality. In contrast, Time 2 ideal–perceived partner congruence could not be predicted from Time 1 dyadic adjustment, when Time

1 ideal–perceived congruence was statistically controlled for. This finding supports the hypothesized direction of effects from congruence to satisfaction.

Last, I also hypothesized that proximal congruence that was based on participants' unique IMPC should predict relationship satisfaction above and beyond congruence of partner perceptions with the average ideal partner prototype. To test this hypothesis, I created an average ideal mate prototype by averaging across the 90 items of all participants and then computing, for every individual, a score that was based on congruence of partner perception with the average ideal mate. I then ran a regression predicting relationship satisfaction at Time 2 from congruence of partner perception with the individual ideal, controlling for both congruence with the average ideal and satisfaction at Time 1. Prediction of Time 2 relationship quality by congruence with the individual's unique IMPC remained significant ($\beta = .19$, $p < .05$). This result provides additional evidence for the interindividual heterogeneity of IMPCs.

Prediction of breakup from proximal congruence. I hypothesized that participants who dissolved their relationship should have had lower congruence scores at the time of the initial assessment compared with the couples who stayed together. During the course of the study, 10 couples dissolved their relationship. As hypothesized, these couples who broke up had significantly lower congruence values at the initial assessment (M separated $= .26$ vs. M together $= .46$), $t(96) = 3.43$, $p < .001$. Whereas the t statistic is based on Fisher's r to z transformation, the means and standard deviations reflect untransformed scores for ease of interpretation. When the prediction controlled for dyadic adjustment scores at Time 1, the difference was marginal, $F(1, 96) = 2.07$, $p = .15$
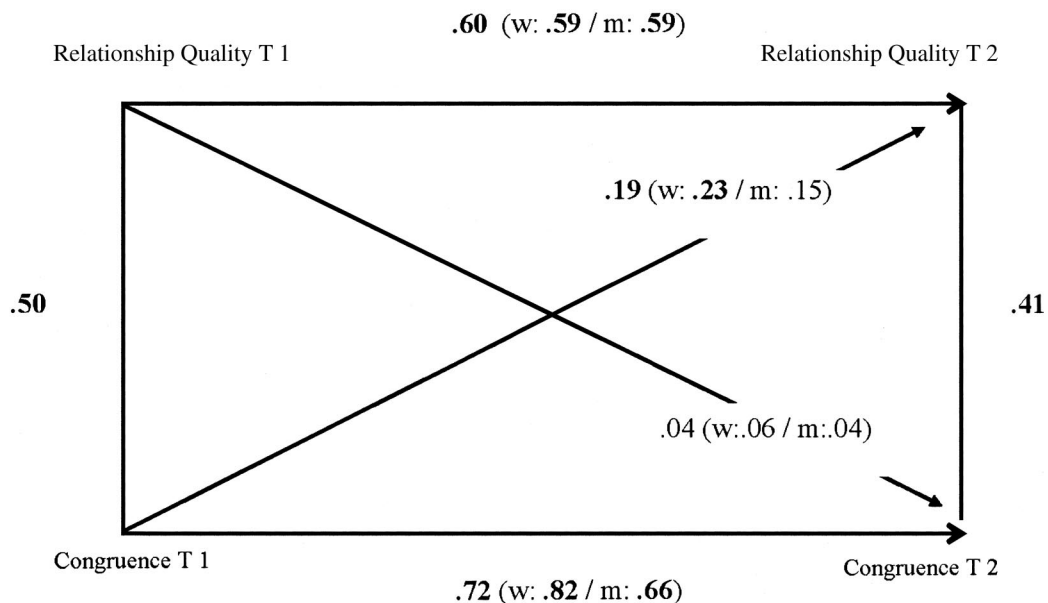

.60 (w: **.59** / m: **.59**)

Relationship Quality T 1   Relationship Quality T 2

.19 (w: **.23** / m: .15)

.50   **.41**

.04 (w:.06 / m:.04)

Congruence T 1   Congruence T 2

.72 (w: **.82** / m: **.66**)

Figure 1. The effects of proximal congruence between ideal mate personality concept and perceived partner personality characteristics and dyadic adjustment (relationship quality). Diagonal values are standardized beta weights from multiple regression analyses in which Time 1 (T 1) scores were used to predict Time 2 (T 2) scores while holding the alternate score at Time 1 constant. Values at the top and bottom of the rectangle are standardized beta weights, reflecting the temporal stabilities of the key constructs. Values for concurrent relationships are correlations. Coefficients printed in bold are significant at $p \leq .05$. w = women; m = men.

(Cohen's $d = 0.45$). These findings support the notion that congruence is predictive of both perceptions of relationship quality and also of behavioral choices (separate vs. staying together).

Prediction of relationship satisfaction and breakup from distal congruence. The relationships of this congruence index with the self's ratings of relationship satisfaction at Time 1 and Time 2 were as follows: For women, Time 1 $r = .23$ ($p = .12$), and Time 2 $r = .07$ (*ns*); for men, Time 1 $r = .32$ ($p < .05$), and Time 2 $r = .51$ ($p < .005$). When Time 1 relationship satisfaction was held constant, these fit scores predicted Time 2 satisfaction for men ($\beta = .29$, $p < .05$) but not for women ($\beta = -.05$, *ns*). Thus, congruence between the self's personality and the partner's IMPC predicted the self's overall satisfaction with the relationship and changes in satisfaction over time for men only. In contrast to proximal congruence, breakup could not be predicted by distal congruence over this period of time (*M* separated $= .29$ vs. *M* together $= .32$), $t(94) = 0.76$, *ns*. In summary, the findings for distal congruence were in general less consistent than for proximal congruence as expected. Interestingly and unexpectedly, the findings also suggest gender-specific outcomes for distal congruence.

Incremental Predictive Contribution of Congruence Compared With Personality Alone

Because all findings regarding traditional personality similarity were nonsignificant, as reported earlier, the subsequent tests omit personality similarity and focus on incremental validity of proximal and distal congruence with IMPCs relative to the Big Five. First, I simply asked to what extent relationship satisfaction can be explained by the self-reported Five Factors. In these computations, I used the short Five-Factor scales, which were based on the same subset of items that were used in the congruence ratings (see the *Method* section). For women, actor and partner effects taken together explained 28% of the variance in relationship satisfaction at both Time 1 and Time 2. For men, actor and partner effects taken together explained 23% of the variance in relationship satisfaction at Time 1 and 30% of the variance at Time 2. These findings are consistent with the broader literature, which has shown that "a few general traits reliably account for 25–35% of the variance in relationship satisfaction for both men and women" (Watson et al., 2000, p. 429).

To examine whether proximal and distal congruence could predict variance in relationship satisfaction above and beyond the Five Factors, I computed regressions predicting relationship satisfaction from congruence while controlling for the Big Five scores. When I controlled for actors' and partners' Big Five scores, the concurrent effects of proximal congruence held up both for women ($\beta = .54$, $p < .01$) and for men ($\beta = .67$, $p < .01$). The longitudinal effects also held up for women ($\beta = .47$, $p < .05$) and for men ($\beta = .44$, $p < .05$). When I controlled for actors' and partners' Five-Factor scores, the effects of distal congruence for men remained significant at Time 1 ($\beta = .48$, $p = .01$) and at Time 2 ($\beta = .71$, $p < .01$). For women, the effect was significant at Time 1 ($\beta = .43$, $p = .05$) but declined to nonsignificance at Time 2 ($\beta = .07$, *ns*). In summary, even though the Five Factors explained a substantial amount of variance in relationship quality, as found in numerous previous studies, congruence explained variance in relationship quality above and beyond the Five Factors.

Because proximal congruence is a perceptual measure, which is based on perceived deviations from ideals, I also tested the relative explanatory contribution of men's and women's proximal congruence scores versus the perceptions of their partners' Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, as well as their own partner ideals for the Five Factors. These scales were based on the average of the Q items pertaining to each factor, so as to yield a perception score and an ideal score for each of the Big Five. A first hierarchical regression was run to determine whether proximal congruence adds to prediction relative to the Big Five. As described in detail in Table 2, when the perceptions and ideals of the Five Factors were controlled, proximal congruence still explained significant additional amounts of variance in relationship satisfaction for both men and women at Time 1. At Time 2, the incremental effects held up marginally for women but not for men. The identical hierarchical regressions were run for distal congruence, which indicates the degree to which the self's personality matches the partner's ideals. Distal congruence had an incremental longitudinal effect for men only, which is in agreement with the previous gender-specific outcomes for distal congruence.

General Discussion

The studies reported here support the notion of IMPCs as individually variable and temporally consistent features of the personality system with considerable influence in close relationships. Specifically, the degree of match between the self's IMPC and the partner's personality characteristics was both a sensitive concurrent indicator and a longitudinal predictor of relationship satisfaction and dissolution, though the results were particularly consistent when congruence was defined in proximal terms. In addition, congruence had a modest degree of incremental validity relative to the Big Five and personality similarity. Last, the associations between individuals' IMPCs and their personality self-concepts suggest that preference for similarity in personality characteristics varies substantially across traits and individuals.

Personality Traits and Personality Tastes

Previous research and standard wisdom hold that certain partner characteristics are generally desirable, leading most people to seek out and choose similar partners—if they could (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993). This belief is challenged by the present findings. The base similarity found for ideal partner ratings in personality characteristics exceeded the base similarity found for personality characteristics by only a small amount, suggesting that people clearly do have different conceptions of the personality of an ideal mate. As demonstrated in Study 1B, this finding is unlikely to be an artifact of the Q-sort method. It is also important to note that the heterogeneity in IMPC was as large within each gender as it was across individuals from both genders. Two explanations can be offered for this finding. One is methodological and relates to the comprehensive measure of personality used here, which goes beyond ideals such as beauty, wealth, and intelligence, for which less variability may exist. A second explanation for the variability in ideal mate personality traits is that such differences evolved because they are adaptive. If most individuals desired the same personality type, then only a minority of lucky individuals with the

Table 2
Predicting Relationship Quality at Times 1 and 2 From the Big Five Personality Factors and Congruence: Hierarchical Regression Results

Independent variable	Women: Time 1	Men: Time 1	Women: Time 2	Men: Time 2
Proximal congruence model				
1. Block: perceptions of Five Factors				
Change in R^2	.28	.19	.34	.38
Change in F	3.34*	1.95	3.30**	3.89**
2. Block: ideal Five Factor models				
Change in R^2	.14	.16	.07	.04
Change in F	1.75	1.92	<1	<1
3. Block: proximal congruence				
Change in R^2	.07	.09	.07	.03
Change in F	4.61*	6.07*	3.23†	1.58
Overall R^2	.48	.44	.34	.38
Overall F	3.10**	2.66*	2.11†	1.97†
Distal congruence model[a]				
1. Block: perceptions of Five Factors				
Change in R^2	.28	.18	.34	.38
Change in F	3.34***	1.87**	3.30**	3.89**
2. Block: ideal Five Factors				
Change in R^2	.14	.17	.07	.04
Change in F	1.75	1.88	<1	<1
3. Block: distal congruence				
Change in R^2	.08	.02	.00	.16
Change in F	5.82*	1.15	<1	10.28**
Overall R^2	.49	.43	.41	.38
Overall F	3.29**	1.90†	1.62	3.34**

[a] For 1 man, distal congruence could not be computed because he missed his personality self-report. This is why the results for men differ slightly in the first two blocks.
† $p \leq .10$.   * $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.   *** $p < .001$.

"right" personality characteristics would have a good chance of mating, to the detriment of a miserable majority with the "wrong" ones. Variability in ideal mate personality schemas, in contrast, ensures that there is a relational niche for a maximum of individuals.

Another important finding of this research is that IMPCs are more than fugitive dreams: Their temporal consistency compares favorably with the stability of actual personality traits (e.g., Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000). However, like personality, IMPCs are not fixed or rigid. Indeed, the present findings suggest that change in ideal partner concepts over time is clearly possible and that, when it occurs, it is related to a decrease in relationship satisfaction. This fascinating finding deserves to be followed up with future work that should investigate the patterns of continuity and change of IMPCs over time and across relationships.

Do People Desire Partners With a Personality Like Their Own?

It has been repeatedly shown that assortative mating in personality characteristics tends to be low (e.g., Watson et al., 2004). However, the magnitude of the relationship between self-concepts and ideal partner concepts is .5 in the present study, a finding that is consistent with previous research (e.g., Botwin et al., 1997; Murray et al., 1996). How can we explain, then, that people seem to want to find partners whose personalities are similar to theirs but for some reason fail to do so? I see three possible explanations.

First, discrepancy between what we desire and what we can have is nothing unusual. One can call it a fact of life that may apply in particular to the fragile domain of dating and mating. Second, considerations of similarity in personality characteristics, though existent, may end up influencing mate choice less than other, perhaps more important or salient similarity considerations regarding wealth, education, or physical attraction (e.g., Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Finally, previous research has shown that, when encounters are satisfying, partners tend to be perceived as being more similar to the self than they really are (e.g., Dryer & Horowitz, 1997; see also Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002). Consequently, it may be that individuals believe they choose partners that are similar to them, without this being actually the case.

One further implication of the analyses regarding the associations between personality self-concepts and IMPCs is that they offer valuable insights into the poor performance of similarity and complementarity models. Specifically, the present data demonstrate a highly significant variation in the magnitude of the self–ideal partner association across personality traits, ranging from .28 to .70 for the Big Five. In these analyses, Agreeableness was the trait for which similarity was considered most important. In the person-centered analyses, in turn, the best predictor of desire for overall personality similarity was Openness. These findings are consistent with recent work that found similarity in A, and to a lesser extent O, to have the most beneficial effects on relationship

satisfaction (Luo & Klohnen, 2005). It is also interesting to look at the results from a typological point of view. Because the best predictor of desire for personality similarity was Openness and for dissimilarity Neuroticism, the individual who is high on O and low on N is likely to be a typical "similarity seeker." Conversely, the individual with low O and high N scores is likely to be a typical "complementarity seeker."

Taken together, these findings suggest three important conclusions: first, that similarity models of personality compatibility do not perform well when formulated as universal algorithms of compatibility but acquire predictive power when defined as specific algorithms applied to selected personality traits and to types of individuals. Second, and more specifically, similarity on Agreeableness and Openness appears to be more important in determining compatibility than similarity on other traits. Third, the traits in which people subjectively desire to be similar appear to be the same traits in which similarity matters in actual relationships.

Differential Effects of Different Types of Congruence

Because of described difficulties with traditional congruence, this study conceptualized congruence in terms of both levels, the actual and the ideal. More specifically, two types of personality congruence with ideals, proximal and distal, were tested and compared. Overall, the effects for proximal congruence were impressive. First, proximal congruence was sizably related to relationship satisfaction both concurrently and longitudinally, indicating that previous findings regarding the effects of ideal–perceived partner consistency on relationship satisfaction (e.g., Fletcher et al., 1999; Ruvolo & Veroff, 1997) can be reproduced when an entirely different assessment language (Five-Factor model) and method (Q-sort) is used. Second, and more important, the effects of proximal congruence held up nicely even when challenged by several alternative explanations: Would the effects hold up longitudinally if relationship satisfaction at Time 1 was held constant? Yes, they would. Would they also hold up when predictions based on individuals' unique IMPCs controlled for the effects of the average ideal mate personality? Clearly, they did. Would the effects of proximal congruence hold up when all of the variance associated with the Five Factors was first taken away? In general, they did.

However, a critic could still remain unimpressed. With good reason, he or she could point out that even longitudinal predictions controlling for initial satisfaction levels do not indicate that congruence actually augments satisfaction. Congruence may simply be a consequence, or a facet, of satisfaction. I addressed this important concern by computing cross-lagged regressions. The findings showed that although congruence could not be predicted by liking, liking could be predicted by congruence (see Figure 1). These findings contradict the alternative explanation, according to which congruence is a consequence of liking. Thus, these findings point to a genuinely predictive and explanatory role for proximal congruence.

Compared with proximal congruence, the effects of distal congruence were more fragile. This was to be expected. Note that although proximal congruence is entirely in the eye of the beholder, distal congruence is based on ratings that are independently provided by two individuals. Thus, even if there is a large distance between "John's" personality and "Mary's" IMPC, negative effects for John cannot be readily inferred because we cannot know, nor systematically predict, how John is going to perceive, interpret, and respond to this distance. The only thing we know from the present findings is that men apparently react more negatively to distal mismatch than women. How can this unexpected and theoretically provocative finding be explained? One possible explanation is that compared with men, women may be better at coping with a situation in which the self does not correspond to the partner's ideal.

A second possibility is that men might be more affected by a distal mismatch because women's IMPCs carry more weight in close relationships than men's. In other words, compared to women, men tend to be confronted with partners that have more powerful and incisive IMPCs. As a result, not living up to women's ideal standards may be particularly consequential. Three types of evidence support this interpretation. First, it is known that women are in general more focused on relationships than men are. Consequently, they develop more influential views about their partners and their relationships (e.g., Kelley & Burgoon, 1991; Martin, 1991; Ross & Holmberg, 1992). Second, evidence from evolutionary psychology indicates that women tend to place more importance on their partners' personality traits than men, who, in turn, value primarily attractiveness (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993). Last, the view of IMPCs being more influential in women than men is also consistent with the findings for proximal congruence, which were slightly but consistently stronger for women than men.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present study has several limitations. First, the samples comprised young adults almost exclusively. It is possible that the present findings will not generalize to older adults or to long-term marital relationships. A second limitation lies in the relatively small samples and the limited duration of time. Although this limitation makes the finding of cross-lagged effects of congruence on satisfaction particularly notable, we cannot extrapolate from this finding to longer periods of time. Third, analysis of cross-lagged paths can help rule out alternative explanations but cannot provide conclusive evidence of causal effects. Fourth, the present research represents an initial in-depth look at concepts of personality congruence with IMPCs. Clearly, much needs to be done to refine and extend the present concepts of congruence as markers and predictors of satisfaction in close relationships. Future work could examine, for example, whether effects for distal congruence may come out more clearly when the components of distal congruence are based on the same rating format or on a different operationalization. Fifth, the present research focused on IMPCs that are consciously accessible. Future work should explore whether certain facets of IMPCs are not readily accessible to conscience and whether these implicit IMPCs carry their own weight in determining compatibility. Last, the present findings were based on measures of personality, leaving out other individual differences such as attitudes, values, attachment styles, and so forth. Although this circumstance testifies to the powerful role that personality plays in determining relationship outcomes, it also suggests that effects of congruence may be even stronger when additional individual characteristics are included in congruence algorithms.

Concluding Comment

How two personalities may be best combined in a relationship is one of the most intriguing and complex questions that scholars have attempted to answer. In considering a myth by Aristophanes, Plato speculated in his dialogue *The Symposium* that men and women were once a unified entity until Zeus, in anger, separated them. Since then everyone has searched for his or her ideal mate. This yearning for our severed ideal halves, in turn, is what leads to love. Traditionally, researchers have focused on similarity, complementarity, and statistical interactions between women's and men's personalities to understand optimal personality combinations. Consistent with Plato's speculations, the studies reported here strongly suggest that an understanding of how two personalities may be best combined in a relationship must include ideal mate personality concepts.

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