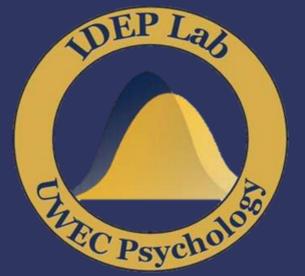




SIMILARITY BETWEEN FRIENDS AND ROMANTIC PARTNERS IN MORAL INTUITIONS

Whitney Joseph, Dana Strothenke, Gregory Sikowski, Mallory Dernbach, Emily Cox, and April Bleske-Rechek



BACKGROUND

Assortment, defined as the coupling of individuals based on their similarity, has been documented among both friends and romantic partners.^{1,2} Friends and romantic partners are similar to one another in their education 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 intuitions^{3,4,5} 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 naturalistic sampling method resulted in 87 pairs of same-sex friends, 38 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/Nurturance: "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."

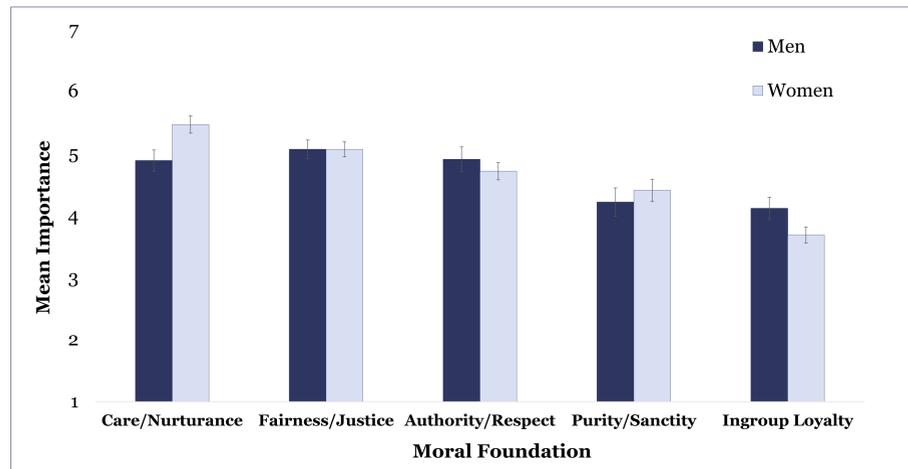
Authority/Respect: "Respect for authority is something all children need to learn."

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

Sample Overview



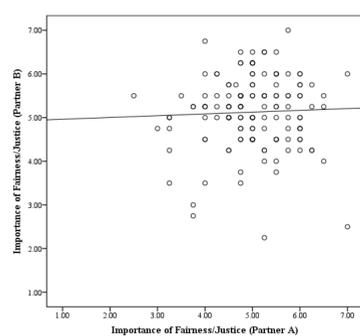
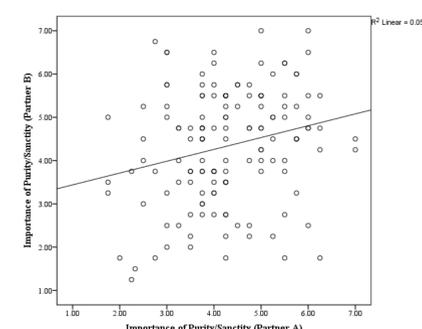
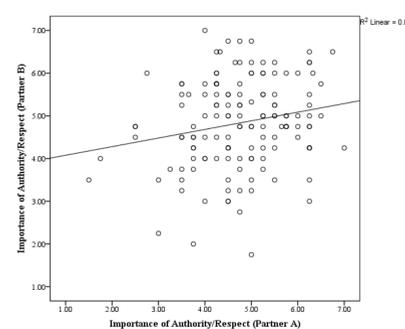
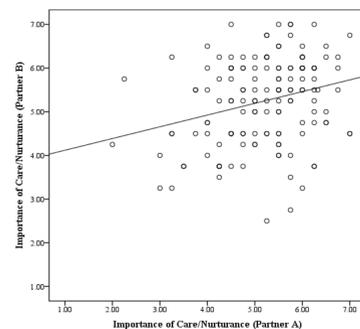
Our sample of young adults, comprised of 126 men and 160 women, showed several patterns that have been documented in other samples.⁵ First, the sample as a whole placed the most importance on Care/Nurturance and Fairness/Justice.

Second, women placed significantly more value on Care/Nurturance 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

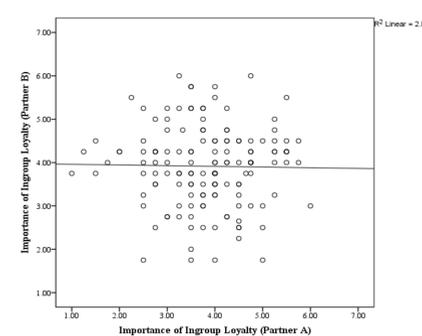
*Note: Error bars represent $\pm 2SE$

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



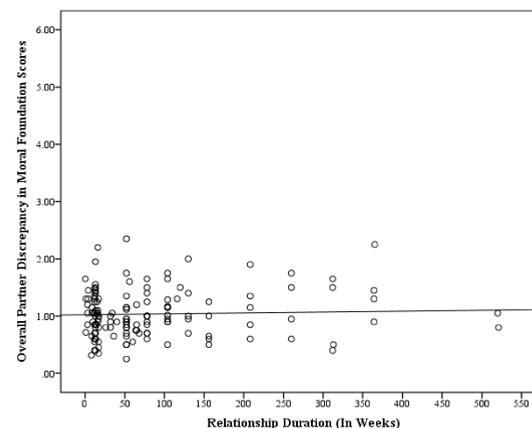
In partial support of our hypothesis, dyad members were similar in their endorsement of three of the five moral foundations: caring and protecting from harm; obedience and respect for authority; and purity and sanctity.

Similarity in importance of caring and protecting from harm was statistically significant among same-sex friends and opposite-sex friends; similarity in importance of obedience and respect for authority was significant among opposite-sex friends; and similarity in importance of purity and sanctity was significant among same-sex friends and dating couples.



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

For each dyad, we computed a discrepancy score for each moral foundation; the score indicated how much (in absolute values) the two members of the dyad differed from each other. As we expected, partner discrepancy scores were not correlated with how long dyad members had known each other.



The scatter plot to the left shows the overall degree of discrepancy between partners' moral foundation scores as related to their relationship duration. The lack of association provides evidence that the similarity we observed between partners is due to *selection*, not becoming more similar to each other over time.

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.⁴

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

- Tolson, J. M., & Urberg, K. A. (1993). Similarity between adolescent best friends. *Journal of Adolescent Research, 8*, 274-288.
- Luo, S., & Klohnen, E. C. (2005). Assortative mating and marital quality in newlyweds: A couple-centered approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88*, 304-326.
- Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 96*, 1029-1046.
- Koleva, S. P., et al. (2012). Tracing the threads: How five moral concerns (especially purity) help explain culture war attitudes. *Journal of Research in Personality, 46*, 184-194.
- Graham, J., et al. (2011). Mapping the moral domain. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 101*, 366-385.
- Bleske-Rechek, A., Remiker, M. W., & Baker, J. P. (2009). Similar from the start: Assortment in young adult dating couples and its link to relationship stability over time. *Individual Differences Research, 7*, 142-158.

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.