The role of ideal similarity
in partner selection and relationship satisfaction

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Abstract: This research examines the role of ideal standards (warmth-trustworthiness, vitality-attractiveness, status-resources, intimacy-loyalty and passion) in partner selection and relationship satisfaction. More specifically, we tested if the interest of hypothetical partners for an ideal trait influences participants' decision to select them as romantic partners, the role of ideal similarity in partner selection (study 1) and whether real-ideal consistency and ideal similarity predict relationship satisfaction (study 2). The results of study 1 show that, throughout the entire sample, the preferences of the assessment target in relation to the dimensions of vitality-attractiveness, status-resources and intimacy-loyalty influence the participants' decision to select them as future romantic partners. Also, ideal similarity about vitality-attractiveness, status-resources, intimacy-loyalty and passion predicts participants' partner selection. The results of study 2 show that ideal similarity on warmth-trustworthiness and intimacy-loyalty (but not vitality-attractiveness, status-resources, and passion) predicts women's relationship satisfaction. Ideal similarity does not predict men's relationship satisfaction for neither dimension. Also, when testing the relationship between real-ideal consistency (within actor-partner interdependence model), the results showed significant actor and partner effects for warmth-trustworthiness and intimacy-loyalty, significant actor effects for status-resources and passion and significant partner effects for vitality-attractiveness.

Keywords: ideal standards model, similarity, partner selection, actor-partner interdependence model, relationship satisfaction.

Introduction

Over time, research has revealed that humans tend to select similar partners in terms of a series of traits (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997; Klohnen & Luo, 2003; Little, Burt, & Perrett, 2006) and that this similarity contributes to relationship satisfaction (Lutz-Zois, Bradley, Mihalik, & Moorman Eavers, 2006). In addition, research revealed that the similarity

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between the ideal partner and the actual one predicts relationship satisfaction (Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011; Eastwick & Neff, 2012).

Based on social-cognitive and evolutionary approaches, the ideal standards model (Simpson, Thomas, Fletcher, & Giles, 1999) posits that people hold chronically accessible partner and relationship ideals and use them to evaluate current/ potential partners/relationships. The study conducted by Simpson, Thomas, Fletcher, and Giles (1999) showed that warmth-trustworthiness, vitality-attractiveness, and status-resources are qualities of an ideal partner, while intimacy-loyalty and passion are qualities of an ideal relationship.

According to the ideal standards model (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015; Fletcher & Simpson, 2000), the discrepancy between ideal standards and perceptions of the potential/current partner/relationship has three functions: (a) evaluation (quality of the partner/relationship), (b) explanation (understand relationship events), and (c) regulation (self and partner). People use ideal standards to evaluate current or potential partners/relationships (Fletcher, Kerr, Li, & Valentine, 2014; Campbell, Chin, & Stanton, 2016) and similarity between the current partner and the ideal one predicts relationship satisfaction (Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000; Simpson, Thomas, Fletcher, & Giles, 1999). Moreover, recent research by Rodriguez, Hadden, and Knee (2015) showed that not all ideals equally predict relationship satisfaction. Inspired by the ideal standards model and by the self-determination theory, the authors propose a distinction between intrinsic (warmth/ loyalty) and extrinsic (vitality/ status/ passion) ideals. According to their study, more intrinsic ideals, as compared to more extrinsic ideals, are more strongly associated with relationship satisfaction.

Another basic tenet of the ideal standards model is that, faced with real-ideal discrepancies, people use different strategies to cope with this fact (Simpson, Fletcher, & Campbell, 2001). If the partner systematically fails to fulfill important standards to the individual, then these discrepancies should determine him/her to use strategies to change the partner/relationship (Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2006). Research testing the regulation function of ideals showed that more regulation attempts are associated with lower perception-ideal consistency (Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2006) and direct strategies used to change partners predict greater change over the next year, while positive indirect strategies do not predict future change (Overall, Simpson, Fletcher, & Sibley, 2009). Further investigating discrepancies between perceived partner and ideals, Lackenbauer and Campbell (2012) propose different emotional and regulatory consequences for different partner discrepancies. They showed that, when people feel their partners don't match their ideal standards, they experience dejection-related emotions and focus on promotion strategies (e.g., concentrating on achieving positive outcomes in the relationship). Also, when people feel they don't meet their partners' ideals, they experience agitation-related emotions and

are oriented towards prevention strategies (e.g., of negative events in the relationship).

To our knowledge, research on ideal standards has not focused on the role ideal similarity plays in selecting one's partner and in the satisfaction one feels in a relationship. As a result, the present study is aimed at researching the way individuals select their partners when it comes to the similarities between them and their potential partners and the ideal partner/relationship (study 1) and whether ideal similarity contributes to the relationship satisfaction of the partners (study 2). Additionally, in study 2 we wanted to test whether the similarity between the real partner and the ideal one (real-ideal consistency) predicts the relationship satisfaction of the couple.

Study 1

Objectives

For the first study, our goals are (1) to assess the extent to which the interest of hypothetical partners for an ideal trait influences the decision to select that partner and (2) to research the influence of the ideal similarity in relation to the partner/ relationship in selecting a romantic partner. Accordingly, we hypothesized that there are differences between men and women concerning the first interrogation, with women inquiring more about status-resources and men about vitality – attractiveness. Also, similarity of ideals predicts the decision to accept/reject a potential romantic partner. Finally, the ideals potential partners desire predicts the decision to accept/reject them as romantic partners.

Method

Participants

The participants are 123 individuals from Iaşi county. The average age of the sample is 24. 69 (SD= 15 years), with 63% women and 37% men. 43% of the participants' study at various faculties in Iaşi municipality and 57% completed their studies and work for various companies, in different areas, in the same city. The participants were elected via social media (Facebook, for example) and personal emails, obtained from colleagues and friends. 70% of the participants reported being single, while 30% reported being in a relationship, with a mean length of the relationship of 2.75 years (SD=1.50).

Instruments

Ideal importance. To assess the importance that each participant associates to every ideal, Fletcher et al. (1999) developed the Partner and Relationship Ideal Scales. We requested our participants to assess each item in terms of "how important are the following aspects for the ideal partner/relationship", using a 5 point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*very*

important) to 5 *(least important)*. We used the short version (30 items) of the scales and sample items include "understanding", "supportive", "sensitive", "adventurous", "good job", "honest", "challenging".

Ideal similarity. To assess the similarity degree between the participants' ideals and those of the persons in the photos, we used the absolute scores of the differences between the preferences for the ideal partner/ relationship, based on the scores provided by the Partner and Relationship Ideal Scales.

Procedure

In order to carry out the study, an IT software was developed, where each participant could choose the people with whom he/she would like to form a couple from 30 consecutive frames that show potential partners of opposite sex. We asked friends and an acquaintance if they were willing to take part in the experiment and 60 of them (30 men and 30 women) signed consent forms explaining their role. All subjects stated their age, gender, level of study, workplace and place of residence.

For each of the 30 frames, the name of a person of opposite sex is displayed on the upper corner of the screen. The right side of the screen displays five buttons that list the traits that the person in question wishes to find in their ideal partner/relationship. For each of the 5 traits (warmth-trust, vitality-attractiveness, status-resources, intimacy - loyalty, passion), the person in the image states the level of the ideal partner/ relationship (level 1 - very high, level 2 - average, level 3 - very low). The study participants can press the button to see at what level that the person in the photography would like for their ideal partner/relationship to be; they can access as many traits as they want, as many times as they want, in whichever order, to finally decide, based on the information provided, whether they would accept that person as a potential romantic partner. In addition, the participants have been informed that they can select as many persons as they like from those presented in the photos, based on what they had declared they looked for in their ideal partner/relationship (they completed the Partner and Relationship Ideal Scales right before the experiment).

Results

The means, standard deviations and alpha Cronbach coefficients for the ideal subscales are detailed in Table 1. The internal consistency coefficients of each subscale are very good, ranging from 0.88 to 0.94.

Table 1. Means, SDs and Cronbach's Alphas for the importance of ideals

	Means		
	Men	Women	Alpha Cronbach
Warmth-trustworthiness	23.58 (4.86)	22.81 (2.79)	0.90
Status-resources	22.70 (3.81)	22.63 (3.24)	0.92
Vitality-attractiveness	23.79 (3.81)	23.08 (4.15)	0.94
Intimacy-loyalty	24.38 (2.91)	23.95 (2.85)	0.93
Passion	24.12 (3.23)	24.20 (3.08)	0.88

Note. Standard deviations appear in parentheses.

Table 2 shows how many times one of the five traits has been questioned for the first time for the 30 potential partners. Independent samples t tests show us that, as far as the dimensions of warmth-trust, intimacy-loyalty and passion are concerned, there are no gender differences when it comes to interrogations made by men and women. However, there are differences in relation to the dimensions of vitality-attractiveness and status-resources; women (as compared to men) were firstly interested in the status that the person in the photo wanted to find in the ideal partner/relation, while men (as compared to women) questioned for the first time the information about the level of attractiveness that the person in the photo wanted to find in the ideal partner/relation.

Table 2. Means for the number of times a characteristic was interrogated first when participants evaluated potential partners

Characteristic	Women	Men	Sex differences
Warmth-trustworthiness	4.49	4.95	-0.46
Vitality-attractiveness	4.37	11.43	-7.06*
Status-resources	12.00	3.66	8.34*
Intimacy-loyalty	5.10	4.59	0.51
Passion	3.79	3.58	0.21

Note. *$p < .05$

As we can notice in the sex differences column, women are primarily interested in the status that the person wants, and men in the degree of attractiveness of the desired person. Moreover, we were interested in how the preferences of the assessment target (the persons in the 30 photos) influence the decision to select that person as a potential romantic partner. Furthermore, every time a participant selects a certain target, the level at which it is ranked is added to the level of the traits of the following selected targets, with a total score for each ideal dimension (warmth - trust, vitality - attractiveness, status - resources, intimacy - loyalty and passion). For instance, let's analyze a male participant: the first woman in the photo that he will select wants a level 3 attractive men, the

second wants a level 2 attractive partner, the third wants a level 1 attractive partner, etc. Finally, we will sum up these values to determine the preferences of the person in the photo in relation to vitality-attractiveness.

By using the regression analysis, we will determine the extent to which the preferences of the persons in the photo influence the decision to be selected as potential intimate partners. Overall (Table 3), the preferences of the assessment target in relation to the dimensions of vitality-attractiveness, status-resources and intimacy-loyalty influence the participants' decision to select them as future romantic partners.

Table 3. Regression coefficients between the preferences of the persons in the images and the decision to be chosen as intimate partners

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.172	.289		4.053	.000
Warmth	.023	.018	.094	1.338	.182
Attractiveness	.039	.018	.309	2.220	.027
Status	.044	.015	.407	2.900	.004
Intimacy	-.053	.016	-.220	-3.269	.001
Passion	-.039	.024	-.115	-1.654	.100

Dependent variable: choice

For female participants (Table 4), the preferences of the men in the photos in relation to the dimensions of vitality-attractiveness, status-resources and intimacy-loyalty influence their decision to select them as future romantic partners.

Table 4. Regression coefficients between the preferences of the men in the images and the decision of women to choose them as intimate partners

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.960	.327		2.932	.004
Warmth	-.019	.025	-.069	-.751	.454
Attractiveness	.109	.022	.444	4.883	.000
Status	.091	.024	.342	3.824	.000
Intimacy	-.154	.023	-.579	-6.608	.000
Passion	-.032	.033	-.095	-.994	.322

Dependent variable: choice

For male participants (Table 5), the preferences of the female in the photos in relation to the dimensions of vitality-attractiveness, and passion influence their decision to be selected as future romantic partners.

Table 5. Regression coefficients between the preferences of the women in the images and the decision of men to choose them as intimate partners

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	3.168	.534		5.930	.000
Warmth	-.027	.030	-.116	-.899	.371
Attractiveness	-.117	.034	-.371	-3.447	.001
Status	.051	.035	.187	1.453	.149
Intimacy	-.006	.019	-.026	-.298	.767
Passion	-.088	.034	-.256	-2.662	.010

Dependent variable: choice

We were also interested in the extent to which the similarity of the ideals between participants and the assessment targets (the persons in the 30 frames) influences the decision to select them as a potential romantic partner. To make the necessary regression analyses, we calculated the absolute scores differences between the participants' preferences and those of the potential partners.

Throughout the entire sample (Table 6), the similarity about the dimensions of attractiveness, status-resources, intimacy and passion were strong predictors of the participants' decision to select the persons in the photos as potential intimate partners.

Table 6. Regression coefficients between ideal similarity and the decision to choose the women in the images as potential romantic partners

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	-1.381	.275		-5.022	.000
Warmth	-.007	.007	-.059	-.942	.347
Attractiveness	.023	.008	.198	3.031	.003
Status	.046	.011	.272	4.365	.000
Intimacy	.052	.015	.220	3.374	.001
Passion	.112	.015	.513	7.535	.000

Dependent variable: choice

For females (Table 7), the similarity about the dimensions warmth-trustworthiness, status-resources, intimacy and passion were strong predictors of their decision to select the men in the photos as potential intimate partners.

Table 7. Regression coefficients between ideal similarity and the decision to choose the men from the images as potential romantic partners.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	-1.021	.398		-2.568	.012
Warmth	-.035	.010	-.284	-3.419	.001
Attractiveness	.014	.010	.120	1.365	.175
Status	.064	.015	.369	4.270	.000
Intimacy	.062	.021	.260	3.011	.003
Passion	.119	.022	.509	5.456	.000

Dependent variable: choice

For males (Table 8), the similarity about the dimensions of vitality-attractiveness, status-resources, intimacy and passion were strong predictors of their decision to select the female in the photos as potential intimate partners.

Table 8. Regression coefficients between ideal similarity and the decision to choose the women from the images as potential romantic partners.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	-1.381	.275		-5.022	.000
Warmth	-.007	.007	-.059	-.942	.374
Attractiveness	.023	.008	.198	3.031	.003
Status	.046	.011	.272	4.365	.000
Intimacy	.052	.015	.220	3.374	.001
Passion	.112	.015	.513	7.535	.000

Dependent variable: choice

Discussion

Selecting a partner is no easy task, and in face of such a dilemma, individuals must decide which traits are important and which not. When they have a chance to assess what is important for the other person, individuals could base their decision on the feeling that the other person shares the same values and, as a result, the relationship could be a success. Inspired by the ideal

standards model (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000) and by research that proves the influence of the similarity on interpersonal attraction (Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971; Watson et al., 2004), study 1 aimed (a) to examine what information the participants forced to select an intimate partner on the basis of their preferences wish to find out, taking into account the five dimensions of the ideals: warmth-trust, vitality-attractiveness, status-resources, intimacy-loyalty and passion, (b) to what extent the preferences of the potential partners influence the decision to select them to form a romantic couple, and (c) to what extent ideal similarity influences the selection of a romantic partner.

Forced to select potential partners according to the preferences of the latter, the results show us that, as far as the dimensions of warmth-trust, intimacy-loyalty and passion are concerned, there are no gender differences in terms of men's and women's interest. There are however differences in relation to the dimensions of vitality-attractiveness and status-resources; women (as compared to men) were firstly interested in the status that the person in the photo wanted to find in the ideal partner/relation, while men (as compared to women) questioned for the first time the information about the level of attractiveness that the person in the photo wanted to find in the ideal partner/relation. According to evolutionist theories, men pay attention to indicators of attractiveness, while women pay attention to indicators of social status. Using the same method as the present study, Li, Bailey, Kenrick, and Linsenmeier (2002), in their study about preferences for romantic partners, showed that women questioned more the information about the social status, while men questioned mostly the information about the level of attractiveness.

Place, Todd, Penke, and Asendorpf (2010) claim that, in order to select a romantic partner, we need to collect information from various sources. French and Kuss (2008) stress the idea that the traits of potential partners not only influence the decision to select them as future partners, but also that the traits they want play an important part. Our study showed that the preferences of the persons in the photos influenced the decisions of the participants to take them into account as future romantic partners. Our results show that, throughout the entire sample, the preferences of the assessment target in relation to the dimensions of vitality-attractiveness, status-resources and intimacy-loyalty have influenced the participants' decision to select them as future romantic partners. In addition, for females, the preferences of the men in the photos in relation to the dimensions of vitality-attractiveness, status-resources and intimacy-loyalty have influenced their decision to select them as future romantic partners. Finally, for males, the preferences of the female in relation to dimensions vitality-attractiveness, and passion have influenced their decision to be selected as future romantic partners. This result supports the point of view of French and Kuss (2008), according to which individuals use others' preferences as a criterion to select their romantic partner. However, in the model described by the authors,

they use the dimensions used by Buss and Barnes (1986) - our study cannot be compared to others in terms of dimensions. The common trait is that both our research and that of French and Kuss (2008) highlight that, when selecting a partner, the traits he/she is looking for in a potential life partner play an important part.

In the last part of the analyses, we were interested in finding out whether the similarity in relation to the importance granted to the five dimensions of the ideals influences the decision to select a partner. Throughout the entire sample, the similarity in relation to the importance given to the dimensions of vitality-attractiveness, status-resources, intimacy and passion were strong predictors of the participants' decision to select the persons in the photos as potential intimate partners. For females, the similarity in relation to the dimensions of warmth-trust, status-resources, intimacy and passion were strong predictors of their decision to select the men in the photos as potential intimate partners. For males, the similarity in relation to the dimensions of vitality-attractiveness, status-resources, intimacy and passion were strong predictors of their decision to select the female in the photos as potential intimate partners. The results reported by Li, Bailey, Kenrick, and Linsenmeier (2002) show us that two important factors in selecting one's partner are social status (for women) and attractiveness (for men). In addition, another important factor for both sexes was kindness, an equivalent for the dimension of warmth-trust.

The results of other studies show us that men pay particular attention to attractiveness, while women pay more attention to social status (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Li, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2001). While the mentioned studies were interested in the attention paid to the traits of the person subject to assessment, our study tested the interest shown to the traits wanted by the person subject to evaluation. In addition, we showed that the interest expressed by people highlights their selection as potential intimate partners. We also showed that the similarity between the desires about the ideal partner/relationship influences the decision to select future romantic partners.

Study 2

Objectives

After we have revealed in the first study that the similarity between the participants and the potential partners about the interests expressed for the five ideal dimensions (warmth-trust, status-resources, intimacy and passion for women, and vitality-attractiveness, status-resources, intimacy and passion for men) influences the decision to select a romantic partner, in the second study we were interested in the extent to which:

(1) the similarity between the actual and the ideal partner (real-ideal consistency) predicts the relationship satisfaction of the partners and

(2) the similarity between the partners' ideals contributes to their relationship satisfaction, by using the scores obtained by both members of the couple.

We hypothesized that the similarity between real and ideal partner influences both own and partner relationship satisfaction and that ideal similarity influences both own and partner relationship satisfaction.

Method

Participants

The participants are 100 couples selected via social media (for example Facebook) and personal emails obtained through friends and colleagues. The average age of the sample is 26 years (SD = 4.03 years) and the mean length of the relationship is 3.59 years (SD=2.49).

Instruments

Goal importance. To assess the importance that each participant associates to every ideal, Fletcher et al. (1999) developed the Partner and Relationship Ideal Scales. We requested our participants to assess each item in terms of "how important do you think the following aspects are for the ideal relation/partnership", using a Likert scale in 5 points, starting from 1 (*very important*) to 5 *(least important)*. We employed the short version (30 items) of the scales and sample items include "kind", "a good listener", "outgoing", "successful", "caring", "passionate".

Perception of the romantic partner. In order to assess the perceptions on the actual romantic partner, we requested the participants to assess, on the Partner and Relationship Ideal Scales, the extent to which the partner matches the ideal partner.

Real-ideal consistency. In order to assess the degree of similarity between the real partner and the ideal one, we used the absolute scores of the differences between the importance given to each ideal and the perception of the romantic partner.

Ideal similarity. In order to assess the degree of similarity between partners' ideals, we used the absolute scores of the differences between men preferences and women preferences.

Relationship satisfaction has been assessed by using the subscale in relation to the Spanier's dyadic satisfaction within the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS – 1976). The parts of this tool are (a) consensus on the important aspects of marriage, (b) dyadic satisfaction, (c) dyadic cohesion and (d) showing affection.

Procedure

The participants were informed that they would participate in a study focused on the ideals that people have about their partner/relationship and they

received envelopes with the questionnaires, which they filled out at home, with the instruction to return them in maximum 7 days. The questionnaire return rate was 53% and we received them after a minimum of one day and a maximum of 7. We did not take into consideration the questionnaires returned after the deadline.

Results

In reporting the results, we will use the scores of the ideal subscales: warmth-trust, vitality-attractiveness, status-resources, intimacy-loyalty and passion. The means, standard deviations and alpha Cronbach coefficients for the ideal subscales and relationship satisfaction are reported in Table 9. The internal consistency coefficients of each subscale are very good, ranging from 0.80 to 0.91.

Table 9. Means, standard deviations and Cronbach's alphas for the importance of ideals, partner/relationship perception and relationship satisfaction

	Mean		
	Men	Women	Alpha Cronbach
Warmth-trustworthiness			
Importance	22.65 (3.77)	22.71 (4.41)	0.90
Perception	21.74 (4.71)	23.01 (4.47)	0.87
Status-resources			
Importance	22.97 (3.58)	22.90 (3.62)	0.91
Perception	22.31 (3.82)	22.65 (3.81)	0.83
Vitality-attractiveness			
Importance	21.81 (3.23)	21.63 (3.74)	0.82
Perception	21.44 (3.35)	21.76 (3.40)	0.89
Intimacy-loyalty			
Importance	23.93 (3.43)	24.03 (3.78)	0.83
Perception	21.63 (3.88)	21.82 (3.80)	0.80
Passion			
Importance	23.71 (2.90)	23.57 (3.61)	0.81
Perception	22.25 (3.54)	22.17 (3.46)	0.82
Relationship satisfaction	40.05 (3.09)	40.75 (2.87)	0.86

Note. Standard deviations appear in parentheses.

In order to run the analyses, the data was processed in AMOS 20, and the database was restructured so that the dyad, and not the individual, is the analysis

unit. Therefore, via SEM, we assessed the relation between the real-ideal similarity and the partner relationship satisfaction, by using the actor-partner interdependence model.

The actor-partner interdependence model (Kashy & Kenny, 1999; Kenny, 1996) was used to predict the relationship satisfaction separately for each dimension. APIM is an analysis model for dyadic data, which integrates the interdependency concept that exists between two persons involved in a relationship. The basic model, represented under Figure 1, includes two variables (similarity real-ideal for men and for women) and two criterion variables (relationship satisfaction of men and women). The relations between variables are the actor effects, the partner effects and co-variances. The actor effects, a and b, are the effect of the ideal similarity on own relationship satisfaction. To distinguish between partner effects, we label the effects by referring to the criterion variable of the dyad member (Ledermann, Macho, & Kenny, 2011). In addition, the model includes a covariance between the predictor variables to take into account the systematic variation between partners in relation to ideal similarity and a co-variance between the errors of the criterion variable to take into account the systematic variation (unexplained by the model) between partners on relationship satisfaction.
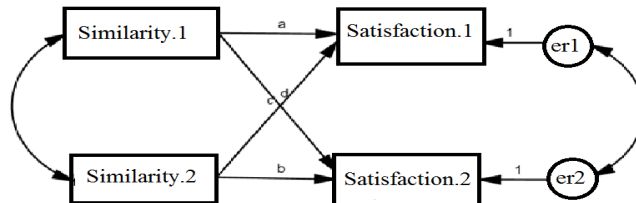

Figure 1. Model explaining the relationship between ideal similarity and relationship satisfaction

The basic actor-partner interdependency model is a saturated model (0 degrees of freedom). Kenny and Ledermann (2010) advise to test whether the actor and partner effects can be made equal (as a result there are two degrees of freedom); if the restriction model does not worsen significantly, the restricted model should be used. Before making the analysis, we standardized each variable, by using the average and the standard deviation calculated together for men and women (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006, p. 179).

As can be seen in Table 10, the indices for the dyadic models testing the relationship between ideal similarity and relationship satisfaction for each dimension of the ideals are very good (with the restriction that the actor effects and the partner effects are equal): GFI > .90, AGFI > .80, CFI > .90, RMSEA < .08, NFI > .90.

Table 10. The values of main indicators for the model ideal similarity – relationship satisfaction.

	χ^2 (p)	RMSEA (PCLOSE)	GFI	AGFI	NFI	CFI
Warmth-trustworthiness	1.60 (0.44)	0.00 (0.50)	0.97	0.93	0.98	1
Vitality-attractiveness	1.2 (0.54)	0.00 (0.59)	0.99	0.95	0.92	1
Status-resources	0.54 (0.76)	0.00 (0.79)	0.99	0.97	0.95	1
Intimacy-loyalty	0.26 (0.89)	0.00 (0.91)	0.99	0.99	0.97	1
Passion	1.27 (0.52)	0.00 (0.57)	0.98	0.94	0.96	1

For the dimension *warmth-trust* (figure 2) both actor and partner effects are significant, resulting that the real-ideal similarity of the women influences both their own relationship satisfaction, and that of the partner, and the real-ideal similarity for men influences their own satisfaction and that of the women. As a result, the more the actual partner meets the ideal about warmth-trust, the more women will feel a higher quality of the relation and will influence men on the satisfaction they felt in a relationship. Similarly, the more the current partner reaches the ideal of men on warmth-trust, the more the partner will be satisfied about the relationship and will influence in turn the women's assessment on relationship quality.
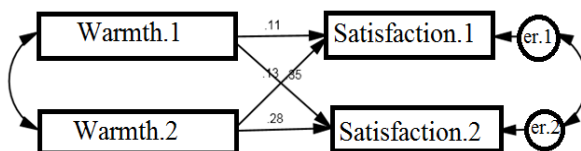

Figure 2. Model explaining the relationship between ideal similarity on warmth-trustwothiness and relationship satisfaction

For the dimension *vitality-attractiveness* (figure 3), only the partner effects are significant, suggesting that the extent to which the current partner gets closer to the real one influences the partner relationship satisfaction, but not the personal one. Therefore, the more the attractiveness degree of the current partner reaches the degree of attractiveness of the ideal partner, the more the women will influence the relationship satisfaction felt by the man. Similarly, the more the attractiveness degree of the current partner reaches the degree of

attractiveness of the ideal partner, the more the men will influence the relationship satisfaction felt by the women.
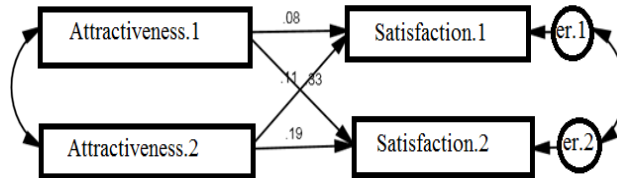

Figure 3. Model explaining the relationship between ideal similarity on vitality-attractiveness and relationship satisfaction

For the dimension *status-resources* (figure 4), only the actor effects are significant, suggesting that the extent to which the actual partner matches the real one influences personal relationship satisfaction, but not that of the partner. This shows that the similarity between the actual partner and the ideal one influences the personal relationship satisfaction of the women, and the similarity between the current partner and ideal one influences men's personal relationship satisfaction.
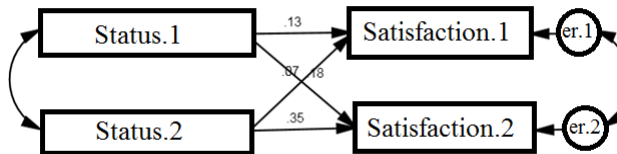

Figure 4. Model explaining the relationship between ideal similarity on status-resources and relationship satisfaction

For the dimension *intimacy-loyalty* (figure 5), there are significant actor and partner effects, resulting that the real-ideal similarity of the woman influences both their own relationship satisfaction, and that of the partner, and the real-ideal similarity for men influences their own satisfaction and that of the women. As a result, the more the current partner matches the ideal about intimacy-loyalty, the more women will feel a higher quality of the relation and will influence men on the satisfaction they felt in a relationship. Similarly, the more the current partner matches the ideal of men on intimacy-loyalty, the more the partner will be satisfied about the relationship and will influence in turn the woman's assessment on relationship quality.
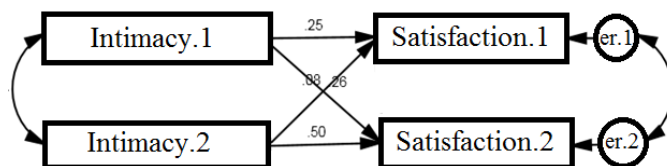
Figure 5. Model explaining the relationship between ideal similarity on intimacy-loyalty and relationship satisfaction

For the dimension *passion* (figure 6), only the actor effects are significant, suggesting that the extent to which the current partner matches to the real one influences the personal relationship satisfaction, but not that of the partner. This shows that the similarity between the actual partner and the ideal one influences the personal relationship satisfaction of the women, and the similarity between the current partner and ideal one influences men's personal relationship satisfaction.
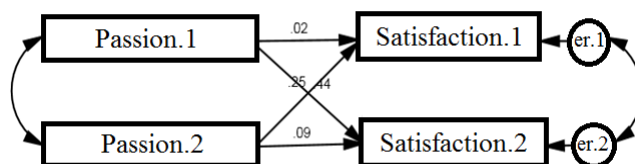

Figure 6. Model explaining the relationship between ideal similarity on passion and relationship satisfaction

In the second part of our analyses we wanted to find out whether the similarity between the partners' ideals influence their relationship satisfaction. In order to do so, we calculated the scores to determine the similarity degree of the partners by the difference between the importance paid by women and that paid by men. Therefore, we made two regression equations to determine whether the ideal similarity influences partner relationship satisfaction. In order to do so, in both equations the dependent variable was similarity, and the independent variables were (a) women's relationship satisfaction and (b) men's relationship satisfaction.

As it can be seen in Table 11, the only significant result is the one that shows that the similarity of the ideals in relation to warmth-trust and intimacy-loyalty predicts women's relationship satisfaction. The similarity of the ideals in relation to vitality-attractiveness, status-resources and passion does not predict women's relationship satisfaction. The similarity of ideals does not predict men's relationship satisfaction for neither dimension.

Table 11. Standardized coefficients for regression equations testing the influence of ideal similarity on partner satisfaction.

	Women's satisfaction	Men's satisfaction
Warmth-trustworthiness	0.36*	0.09
Vitality-attractiveness	0.03	-0.03
Status-resources	-0.04	-0.07
Intimacy-loyalty	0.22*	0.02
Passion	0.13	0.08

Note: * $p < .05$

Discussion

When people are involved in romantic relationships, they want ideal partners to help them obtain an ideal relationship (Fletcher et al. 1999). But how can we know which traits help us fulfil our goal? Research on couples' similarity sheds some light. Studies claim that the similarity between the partners on a series of traits is responsible for relationship satisfaction (Blum & Mehrabian, 1999; Caspi & Herbener, 1990). In addition, the degree to which the partners agree on the important values in a relationship influences dyadic satisfaction. Acitelli, Kenny, and Weiner (2001) showed that the similarity of the ideals about the relationship influences the dyadic satisfaction. However, in assessing ideals about the relationship, the three authors did not take into account the two dimensions proposed by Fletcher et al. (1999): intimacy-loyalty and passion. Moreover, the authors focused on the ideals about the relationship, without taking into account those related to the partner. As a result, we focused on analysing the relation between the similarity of the partners about the ideal partner/ relationship and the satisfaction they feel in their relationship.

One of the major postulates of the ideal standard model is that the similarity between the actual partner and the ideal one leads to dyadic satisfaction (Fletcher et al., 1999) and that they feel happier in relationships where they feel they rise to the partner's expectations (Campbell at al., 2001). Taking these aspects into account, one of the objectives of our study was to test whether the real-ideal similarity influences the dyadic satisfaction.

The results of the analyses show that, for the *warmth-trust* dimension, the real-ideal similarity of the women influences both their own relationship satisfaction, and that of the partner, and the real-ideal similarity for men influences their own satisfaction and that of the women. In addition, for the *vitality-attractiveness* dimension, the extent to which the actual partner matches the real one influences the relationship satisfaction of the partner, but not the personal one. For the *status-resource* dimension, the extent to which the current partner matches the real one influences their personal relationship satisfaction, but not that of the partner. For the *intimacy-loyalty* dimension, the real-ideal

similarity of the women influences both their own relationship satisfaction, and that of the partner, and the real-ideal similarity for men influences their own satisfaction and that of the women. For the *passion* dimension, the extent to which the current partner gets closer to the real one influences their personal relationship satisfaction, but not that of the partner.

These results are congruent with those of other studies (Campbell et al., 2001; Fletcher et al., 1999) in the sense of confirming the hypothesis that people assess their current partner/relationship using as criterion the real-ideal similarity and the fact that matching the real partner with the ideal one influences relationship satisfaction.

A second objective of study 2 was to test whether the similarity of the ideals predicts partner relationship satisfaction. Contrary to expectations, the results show that only the similarity of the ideals in relation to warmth-trust and intimacy-loyalty predicts women's relationship satisfaction. Men's relationship satisfaction is not predicted by the similarity with either of the ideal dimensions. However, this does not come as a surprise given the high number of studies that reject the idea that the similarity between partners influences the satisfaction they feel in relationships (Glicksohn & Golan, 2001; Shiota & Levenson, 2007). Moreover, studies show that the similarity perceived and not the real one is the one that predicts attraction (Montoya, Horton, & Kirschner, 2008; Tidwell, Eastwick, & Finkel, 2012).

Conclusions

Inspired by the ideal standards model (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000) and by research on the importance of the similarity of ideals in a relationship (Acitelli, Kenny, & Weiner, 2001), the first part of the research aimed to analyze the extent to which the similarity of the ideals influenced both the selection of the romantic partner (study 1) and the relationship satisfaction of the partners (study 2).

The results of study 1 show that the individuals select those who have similar ideals in relation to the vitality-attractiveness, status-resource, intimacy and passion dimensions. More exactly, women select partners with similar ideals in terms of warmth-trust, status-resource, intimacy and passion, while men select partners with similar ideals in terms of vitality-attractiveness, status-resources, intimacy and passion - these were strong predictors of their decisions to select the women in the photos as potential intimate partners.

The results of study 2 claim that the real-ideal similarity influences partners' relationship satisfaction (for warmth-trust and intimacy-loyalty the similarity influences their personal satisfaction and that of the partner, for vitality-attractiveness and status-resources the similarity influences the partner's satisfaction, and for passion the similarity influences personal satisfaction), but that the similarity between the ideals of the partners play a limited part in

predicting satisfaction in couple relationship (the similarity of the ideals in relation to warmth-trust and intimacy-loyalty predicts women' relationship satisfaction).

This research improves the Ideal Standards Model by examining the importance of the ideals in making decisions about the partner. In addition, it enhances one of the basic postulates of the model, in that it proves the fact that partners use similarity between the actual and the ideal partner/relationship to determine the degree of satisfaction felt in a relationship. By using the actor-partner interdependence model, we were able to analyze the influences that a member of a couple have on each other, by analyzing the actor effects and the partner effects.

However, although this study proves the importance of the similarity of ideals in selecting partners and that the real-ideal similarity influences relationship satisfaction, it also shows that the similarity in terms of ideals does not have major contributions to dyadic satisfaction. As mentioned above, this can be due to the importance that the *perceived* similarity, and not the real one, might have in predicting satisfaction. As a result, future studies should examine this topic to determine which is important: similarity of ideals or *perceived* similarity of ideals. A more comprehensive understanding of the way romantic relationships enhance/deteriorate over time could be achieved by identifying predictors of relationship satisfaction. One major role could be played by ideal similarity.

Just like any other study, this study also has limitations. The data were transversal in nature and no inferential conclusions could be drawn based on them. Experimental or longitudinal studies are required to accurately identify the effects of similarity of ideals on relationship satisfaction, as well as to clarify the role of the similarity of ideals on relationship satisfaction in time. Also, the results of our study cannot be generalized across different types of relationships. We only asked participants to state whether they were involved or not in a relationship, without inquiring about the type of relationship (living together, "friends with benefits", engaged etc.). Another limit is the fact that the participants in our research were relatively young and many of them were involved in a relationship for just a year, making it difficult to establish the level of investment in the relationship and the extent to which they knew their partner.

In spite of these limitations, this research opens new directions by including the role of the similarity of ideals in selecting one's partner and predicting relationship satisfaction. In addition, this study meets the need to study how ideals operate in their natural environment: the dyadic relationship.

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