Check for updates

Full Research Report

JSPR

Journal of Social and Personal Relationships
2024, Vol. 41(6) 1301–1323
© The Author(s) 2023
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/02654075231206412
journals.sagepub.com/home/spr
Sage

Couple similarity in empathic accuracy and relationship well-being

Liesbet Berlamont[1], Eva Ceulemans[2], Chiara Carlier[2], Lesley Verhofstadt[1], William Ickes[3], Céline Hinnekens[1] and Laura Sels[1]

Abstract

Are intimate partners similar in how accurately they infer each other's feelings and thoughts, and if so, does this similarity predict their relationship well-being? To answer this question, we analyzed data from two laboratory-based studies (n = 155 and n = 172 couples) in which couples participated in a conflict interaction task and afterwards reported on their own feelings and thoughts and inferred those of their partner. Relationship well-being was measured on both a global (i.e., relationship satisfaction) and a situational level (i.e., post-interaction closeness and satisfaction with the outcome of the interaction). We found that intimate partners were more similar in their empathic accuracy than randomly-paired individuals. This similarity predicted the extent to which partners reported that the conflict interaction had led to a positive outcome for their relationship, but was not associated with partners' global relationship satisfaction or their post-interaction closeness.

Keywords

empathic accuracy, intimate relationships, relationship well-being, similarity

[1]Ghent University, Belgium
[2]KU Leuven, Belgium
[3]University of Texas at Arlington, USA

Corresponding author:
Liesbet Berlamont, Department of Experimental Clinical and Health Psychology, Ghent University, Henri Dunantlaan 2, 9000 Ghent, Belgium.
Email: liesbet.berlamont@ugent.be

Accurately understanding one's partner's feelings and thoughts is important in intimate relationships because higher levels of empathic accuracy are associated with more relationship satisfaction, the provision of more effective partner support, and more accommodative behavior during conflict (Kilpatrick et al., 2002; Sened et al., 2017; Verhofstadt et al., 2016). Although the relational benefits of a partner's level of empathic accuracy have been documented, it has not previously been established whether partners are *similar* in their empathic accuracy and whether this similarity is related to important relationship outcomes.

This gap in the literature is surprising, because similarity in partners' levels of empathic accuracy can be important for the well-being of their relationship. Specifically, different levels of empathic accuracy (one partner being notably more accurate than the other one) might point to a power imbalance in the relationship, which might lead to frustration for both partners and eventually might result in greater relationship dissatisfaction and instability (Ickes & Simpson, 2001). Indeed, power imbalances due to disparity in other relationship processes, such as commitment, have already been found to be associated with poor relationship outcomes (e.g., Stanley et al., 2017). Conversely, when partners are similar in their levels of understanding, they might be less likely to feel (a) that one partner has a "mind reading" advantage over the other partner, and (b) that there is substantial inequity in the partner's feelings of being understood (Ickes & Simpson, 2001).

To address this gap in our knowledge, the present study is the first to explicitly investigate (1) the degree of couple similarity in empathic accuracy, and (2) whether this similarity is associated with relationship well-being. Addressing this question not only contributes to our scientific understanding of empathic accuracy in intimate relationships, but also addresses important clinical questions. For instance, should couples in therapy work towards higher levels of empathic accuracy or would it be sufficient to reach a between-partners match in their levels (either low, moderate, or high) of empathic accuracy?

Evidence of couple similarity

The research on couple similarity began with the question of whether individuals tend to select similar or dissimilar others as partners in the initial dating phase (referred to as assortative mating, Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). Most of the theories assume that individuals prefer similar others for several reasons. For example, self-enhancement theory suggests that individuals have a strong need for positive feedback to validate and enhance their self-image, and similar others provide such feedback (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Byrne, 1971). Many studies have shown that individuals indeed select and are attracted to objectively similar others (cf. Byrne's "law of attraction", 1971).

In addition to selecting similar partners, partners might also grow more alike over time in existing relationships, i.e., display convergence (Luo, 2017). A recent review by Luo (2017) concludes that, overall, similarity in existing relationships is the rule and complementarity is an exception, although the degree of similarity between partners depends on the specific individual characteristic studied. For instance, strong similarity between partners has been found for demographic variables and attitudes, whereas for personality

characteristics and emotional experience and expression, weak similarity was observed (see Luo, 2017; Watson et al., 2004). This similarity seems mainly due to initial assortment, as couple similarity is rarely associated with the length of the relationship (e.g., Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Watson et al., 2004).

Up to now, only one study has examined partner similarity in empathic accuracy (Simpson et al., 1995). The authors compared the similarity in empathic accuracy scores between the members of dating couples that broke up 4 months after the study with the members of dating couples who were still together. In the couples who broke up, there was a nonsignificant correlation of −.10 between the partners' empathic accuracy scores, whereas the corresponding correlation for the partners who were still together was .29. No other studies of partner similarity in empathic accuracy have been conducted, although some researchers have investigated related socio-emotional and socio-cognitive skills, showing mixed evidence for couple similarity. One study found moderate to strong evidence for similarity in partners' social skill levels, including perceptual accuracy (Burleson & Denton, 1992), and how situations are perceived (Rentzsch et al., 2022). Studies of emotional intelligence report mixed findings: evidence is found for either moderate similarity (e.g., Stolarski et al., 2011; Śmieja & Stolarski, 2018) or no similarity at all (e.g., Brackett et al., 2005; Zeidner & Kaluda, 2008; Zeidner & Kloda, 2013).

Couple similarity and relationship well-being

In addition to examining the degree of couple similarity, some researchers have addressed the question whether similarity between partners leads to better relationship outcomes. The typical prediction is that partner similarity should promote relationship well-being, because it presumably increases understanding and coordination between partners (e.g., Anderson et al., 2003; Luo, 2017; Luo & Klohnen, 2005). The available results are mixed, however. Some studies have found that actual similarity predicts relationship satisfaction and stability in existing relationships (e.g., Gaunt, 2006; Gonzaga et al., 2007; Luo & Klohnen, 2005), whereas other studies offered either limited or no support (e.g., Shiota & Levenson, 2007; Watson et al., 2004).

Concerning empathic accuracy, Simpson et al. (1995) also suggested that partners' (dis)similarity in empathic accuracy might be associated with relationship (dis)satisfaction and relationship (in)stability. They proposed a number of possible mechanisms that might underlie this association. First, and as noted in the introduction, dissimilarity in the partners' levels of empathic accuracy might reflect a power imbalance in the relationship. This power imbalance might lead less accurate partners to feel more vulnerable to exploitation, resulting in more resentment and less relationship satisfaction from their side (Ickes & Simpson, 2001). In addition, more accurate partners might feel more easily misunderstood, which could increase *their* feelings of resentment while lowering their relationship satisfaction. Second, disparity in empathic accuracy could make it more difficult for the partners to share certain experiences with each other. Third, disparity in empathic accuracy levels could lead to the feeling that different levels of commitment or investment exist in the relationship. In particular, more accurate partners might feel their partner is not motivated enough to understand them and see this as sign

that their partner is less committed to the relationship. Less accurate partners, on the other hand, might take their frequent misunderstandings as a sign of relationship problems that lead them to question their commitment to the relationship. Collectively, these processes might lead both partners to feel less satisfied with the relationship, just as (perceived) disparities in commitment have been found to be associated with poor relationship outcomes (Stanley et al., 2017).

Indeed, Simpson and colleagues' study confirmed that dating partners who were more similar in empathic accuracy during a laboratory interaction were more likely to be still dating 4 months later. However, relationship *well-being* was not assessed, nor were couples in a more established relationship included. It is important to study both of these missing elements because (1) poor relationship well-being might not always lead to the dissolution of a relationship and (2) previous research has demonstrated that some relationship processes are different in dating couples versus more established couples (e.g., Hinnekens et al., 2021).

Although no other studies exist concerning empathic accuracy, some studies have focused on processes that are related to empathic accuracy. First, Neimeyer (1984) found that spouses with similar levels of cognitive complexity reported higher levels of marital satisfaction than spouses having dissimilar levels of complexity. Second, Rentzsch et al. (2022) found that the extent to which partners perceived everyday situations in a similar manner was positively associated with relationship satisfaction. Third, Burleson and Denton (1992) compared the relationship satisfaction of couples in which both partners had low levels of social skills with couples in which both partners had high levels of social skills. They did not find any difference in relationship satisfaction between these groups, suggesting that partner similarity might be more important than scoring high on these skills. However, Brackett et al. (2005) did find that couples in which both partners scoring low on emotional intelligence reported worse relationship quality.

Current study

The goal of the current study was to examine (1) the extent of similarity in empathic accuracy between partners and (2) its association with relationship well-being. We first examined whether relationship partners are similar in their ability to accurately understand each other's feelings and thoughts. To this end, we not only computed a measure of similarity in empathic accuracy between partners but also investigated whether the observed similarity of actual intimate partners was greater than the similarity of randomly paired individuals (for a similar approach, see Gonzaga et al., 2007; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Sels et al., 2020). This is necessary to determine if actual partners are more similar than individuals are by chance. Given evidence of such similarity, we then examined whether it was attributable to initial assortment or to convergence over time, by looking at its association with relationship length (see also Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Watson et al., 2004).

Second, we tested if couple similarity in empathic accuracy predicts relationship well-being. Most research on couple similarity uses global measures of relationship well-being. However, global measures of relationship well-being tend to be biased, because (1) they

require partners to rely on memories and to aggregate over several experiences, and (2) they are influenced by normative beliefs (e.g., "Because I am in this long-term relationship, I should be happy with my relationship) (Robinson & Clore, 2002). Consequently, the present study included both global as well as situational (i.e., post-interaction) measures of relationship well-being.

To accomplish these objectives, we analyzed data from two observational studies of couples' conflict interactions, using an adapted version of the dyadic interaction paradigm (Ickes et al., 1990). Study 2 aimed to replicate our Study 1 findings and was modified to deal with some of the limitations of Study 1. A detailed account of these modifications can be found here: https://osf.io/xbytk).

Method

Ethics statement

Both studies were approved by the ethics committee of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of Ghent University, Belgium (Number of approval: 2018/12/Lesley Verhofstadt).

Participants

An initial sample of 155 couples[1] (Study 1) and a second sample of 172 couples[1] (Study 2) were both recruited through posters and social media, and within the social networks of psychology students who were involved as research assistants in the study (see https://osf.io/xbytk for previous publications on these data). The information that was given to the participants about the goal and the tasks of the study can be found on https://osf.io/xbytk. In Study 1, each couple met the following inclusion criteria: (1) involved in a mixed-gender intimate relationship[2] (2) for at least one year, (3) married/cohabiting for at least six months, and (4) adequate knowledge of the Dutch language. In Study 2, criteria differed in that all participants had to be at least 21 years old, and that the couples were not required to be married or cohabiting anymore[3]. The couples had been together for an average of 12.15 years (*Mdn* = 6.25, *SD* = 11.76 years, range = 1–47 years) in Study 1 and 11.40 years (*Mdn* = 5.79, *SD* = 11.85 years, range = 1–49 years) in Study 2. In Study 1, the men were on average 36.29 years old (*Mdn* = 29.00, *SD* = 14.05 years, range = 19–76 years) and the women were 34.21 years old (*Mdn* = 28.00, *SD* = 13.60 years, range = 19–71 years).[4] In Study 2, the participants' average age was 35.78 years for the men (*Mdn* = 29.50, *SD* = 13.30 years, range = 21–78 years) and 34.12 years for the women (*Mdn* = 28.00, *SD* = 13.31 years, range = 21–73 years).[4] The samples for each study represented a range of different education levels and occupational categories (see Table 1).

Procedure

Upon providing informed consent, both partners independently completed an online questionnaire at home, including global measures of relationship well-being. Subsequently,

Table 1. Educational level and occupational status of the participants in study 1 and 2.

	Study 1	Study 2
Educational level		
Primary school	6 (1.9%)	0 (0.0%)
Lower secondary school	29 (9.4%)	16 (4.7%)
Higher secondary school	101 (32.6%)	73 (21.2%)
Bachelor	96 (31.0%)	142 (41.3%)
Master	75 (24.2%)	106 (30.8%)
PhD	1 (0.3%)	7 (2.0%)
Occupational status		
Laborer	37 (11.9%)	23 (6.7%)
Office worker	140 (45.2%)	165 (48.0%)
Student	61 (19.7%)	79 (23.0%)
Executive	17 (5.5%)	30 (8.7%)
Self-employed	16 (5.2%)	25 (7.3%)
Stay-at-home mom or dad	3 (1.0%)	1 (0.3%)
Unemployed	11 (3.5%)	5 (1.5%)
Retired	16 (5.2%)	13 (3.8%)
Unable to work	7 (2.3%)	3 (0.9%)

an appointment was scheduled for an observational session during which couples participated in a videotaped conflict interaction task. Specifically, the partners were asked to separately identify a problem in their relationship from a list of common conflict topics in intimate relationships (Kurdek, 1994). Examples of topics that were frequently selected were *personal habits of partner* and *education/taking care of the children* (for more details, see https://osf.io/xbytk). This topic was then discussed for 11 (Study 1) or 10 (Study 2) minutes.

After this interaction task, participants filled out situational measures of relationship well-being. Finally, partners separately completed a video-review task during which they were required to write down (1) their own feelings and thoughts at different moments in the interaction and (2) their inferences of their partner's feelings and thoughts, to measure empathic accuracy. The video was stopped every 90 seconds in Study 1 (resulting in 7 stop points) and every 37.5 seconds in Study 2 (resulting in 16 stop points). After this video-review task, the participants in Study 1 also completed a standard stimulus task, in which each participant was asked to observe the video of an unknown couple engaging in a conflict interaction, and to infer the feelings and thoughts of the partner in the video of the opposite gender. At the end of their session, each couple received a monetary compensation of €40 for completing both the questionnaire and the observational session.

Measures

Global relationship well-being

Relationship satisfaction. To measure relationship satisfaction in Study 1, we used the Dutch version of the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI, Norton, 1983), which was adapted

to apply to married and unmarried couples. The measure consists of 6 items (e.g., Our relationship is strong), of which the first five items are answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= *strongly disagree*) to 7 (= *strongly agree*) and the sixth item on a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= *very unhappy*) to 10 (= *perfectly happy*). Cronbach's alpha was high (α = .94), and a sum score was calculated.

Although the QMI is a widely-used scale with evidence for its validity, it has been criticized for its inconsistent scaling (one item is rated on a 10-point scale, whereas the other items are rated on a 7-point scale, Chonody et al., 2018). Therefore, the Relationship Satisfaction subscale of the Dutch version of the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Questionnaire (PRQC; Fletcher et al., 2000) was used in Study 2. This subscale consists of 3 items (e.g., "How satisfied are you with your relationship?") that are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (= *not at all*) to 7 (= *extremely*). Cronbach's alpha was high (α = .89), and a sum score was calculated.

Situational relationship well-being

Closeness. Immediately after the conflict interaction task, the partners' self-reported level of relationship closeness was assessed in both studies with the Inclusion of the Other in the Self Scale (IOS; Aron, et al., 1992). This scale consists of a single pictorial item in the form of 7 Venn diagrams from which partners select the diagram that most accurately represents their perceived relationship closeness at that moment (Figure 1). Specifically, partners were asked: "Which of the figures below characterizes your relationship at this moment the best? In the figures below, 'you' represents yourself and X represents your partner."

Positive outcome for the relationship. Because the measure of closeness is rather abstract and is interpreted by some people in terms of independence and identity instead of

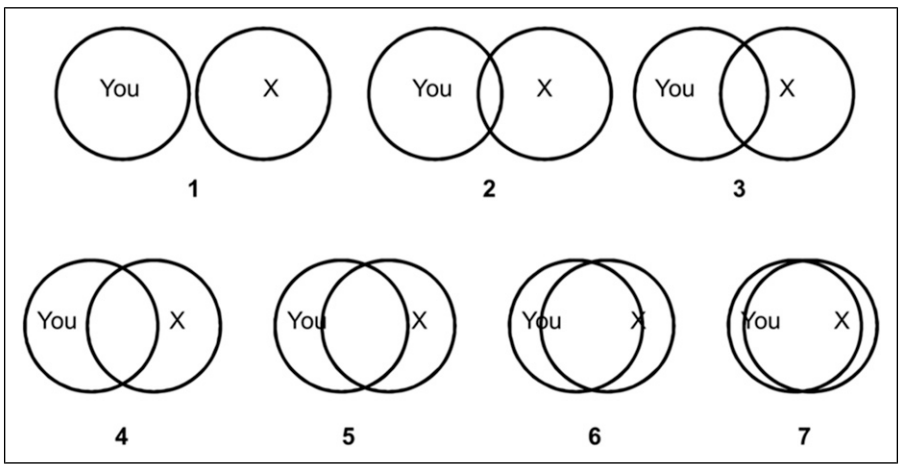


Figure 1. Inclusion of the other in the self scale.

interconnectedness (Aron et al., 1992), we used an additional situational measure of relational well-being in Study 2 that assessed relational well-being in a more concrete way, and that was specifically tied to the interaction. Partners were asked to indicate to what extent "This conversation had led to a positive outcome for the relationship" on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *completely*).

Similarity in empathic accuracy. At each stop point during the video-review task, each partner wrote down what s/he had felt and thought at that moment of the interaction, by completing the open-ended phrases "I felt…" and "I thought…". Next, they inferred and wrote down the presumed feelings or thoughts of their partner at that same moment in the interaction, by completing the open-ended phrases "My partner felt…" and "My partner thought…".

Later, four independent judges rated the degree of similarity between the actual feelings and thoughts of one partner and the corresponding inferred feelings and thoughts reported by the other partner at each of the stop points. In Study 1, a 3-point rating scale was used that ranged from zero *(= different content from the actual feeling or thought*), through 1 (= *similar but not the same content as the actual feeling or thought*) and 2 (= *essentially the same content as the actual feeling or thought*) (Ickes et al., 1990).

In Study 2, the judges used DesJardins and Hodges' (2015) modification of the original coding system developed by Ickes et al. (1990). This modification uses a 4-point scale that allows more variation in the "middle range" of rated empathic accuracy scores.

Overall empathic accuracy scores were then computed as a simple percentage measure of the number of "accuracy points" earned, divided by the total number of "accuracy points" available and multiplied by one hundred. Given the moderate to high interrater reliability for empathic accuracy (Study 1: ICC_{Men} = .69; ICC_{Women} = .71; Study 2: ICC_{Men} = .88; ICC_{Women} = .89), the scores were averaged across the four raters.

To assess similarity in empathic accuracy, an absolute difference score was computed between the partners' scores, as has been done in previous studies on couple similarity (e.g., Tidwell et al., 2013). This means that a higher score represents lower couple similarity.

Statistical analysis

To examine the extent of similarity in empathic accuracy between partners, we analyzed whether the similarity in empathic accuracy between the actual partners in our samples was greater than the similarity in empathic accuracy between randomly-paired opposite-sex individuals. To this end, we performed two analyses: one at the level of the average similarity in empathic accuracy and one at the level of the individual couples' values for each study separately. In the first analysis, we used a permutation test to compare the mean of each original sample to a sampling distribution based on 5000 permutations. First, we formed *pseudo-couples* by separating all couples per sample and pairing men and women randomly back together, yielding one permutation. Then, we computed the absolute difference scores in empathic accuracy between these randomly-paired opposite-sex individuals. Finally, the mean absolute difference score of the pseudo-couples was

computed. To obtain a highly reliable sampling distribution of mean pseudo-couple similarity, we repeated this procedure 5000 times and obtained 5000 means. We then computed the *p*-value as the proportion of resampled means lower than the mean in the original sample.

In the second analysis, we formed per sample all possible pseudo-couples by considering each possible combination of a man and woman of a different couple. We computed the absolute difference scores in empathic accuracy between the individuals in each pseudo-couple. Next, we compared the obtained distribution of absolute differences in empathic accuracy in the original sample to the distribution of absolute differences in empathic accuracy in the permuted pseudo-couples. We divided the pseudo-couple distribution in four quarters using the quartiles of this distribution and then compared the proportion of original couples that fell into these areas with a goodness-of-fit test. If the distribution of similarity in empathic accuracy would not be different in original and pseudo-couples, the proportion of original couples that fall in the different quarters of the pseudo-couple distribution should be .25 for each quarter.

To examine whether similarity in empathic accuracy is associated with relationship well-being, we analyzed the data using Actor-Partner Interdependence Models (APIM), which take into account that partners are nested within each couple (Kenny et al., 2006). For each outcome variable, we included the actor and partner effects of empathic accuracy and the absolute difference score between the actor's and partner's empathic accuracy scores[5] as predictors in the model (see Figure 2). All predictors were grand mean centered.

Because we were working with dyadic partners that are distinguishable by gender, we first fitted models in which the effects could differ across gender. Specifically, we estimated two-intercept models, which provided estimates of the effects for men and women separately as well as models that pooled across gender (for details see Kenny et al., 2006).

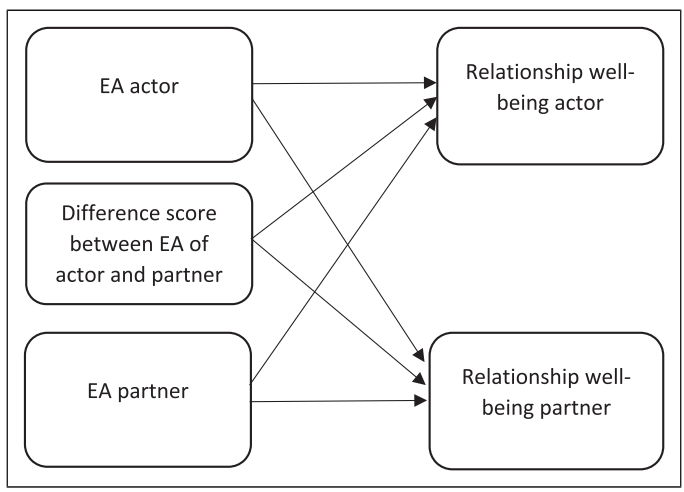


Figure 2. APIM used to assess the association between empathic accuracy and relationship well-being.

Because we found that the BIC/AIC values were lower for all the models that do not account for gender, we report the analyses pooled across gender (see https://osf.io/xbytk). Effect sizes are not reported because there is no commonly agreed-upon method to calculate these for multilevel models. However, following the recommendations of Kenny et al. (2006), we compared the residual variance of the full models to that of the empty models (models that do not include predictor variables) and calculated a pseudo R^2 (for details see Kenny et al., 2006), which provides information about the size of the effect. This information can be found on https://osf.io/xbytk. The data, analysis code and materials used in this work are available at https://osf.io/xbytk.[6]

Results

Table 2 includes the means and standard deviations of the key variables, along with tests for between-gender differences, which were not found to be present.

In both studies, a positive association was found between the empathic accuracy scores of men and women, being moderate in size (see Table 3), and providing preliminary evidence that intimate partners are similar in their empathic accuracy skills. Furthermore, the absolute difference score in empathic accuracy between partners was not associated with general relationship satisfaction nor with post-interaction reports of closeness in both studies. However, this difference score was negatively associated with the extent to which partners reported that the interaction had led to a positive outcome for their relationship. This effect was small to moderate ($r = -.17$).

Are partners similar in empathic accuracy?

We compared the observed mean absolute difference scores in our samples with the respective sampling distributions of the 5000 pseudo-couple mean differences (Figure 3). The observed mean ($M = 8.20$, $SD = 6.36$ for Study 1 and $M = 5.62$, $SD = 4.70$ for Study 2) was significantly lower than the means of the pseudo-couples ($M = 10.45$, $SD = 0.48$ for Study 1 and $M = 8.19$, $SD = 0.36$ for Study 2) in both studies ($p < .001$). This means that there was significantly more similarity in the level of empathic accuracy between the relationship partners than between the randomly-paired individuals (as higher scores represent lower similarity).

In addition, we compared the distribution of the observed absolute difference scores in our samples to the distribution of the absolute difference scores in all possible pseudo-couples ($n = 23{,}870$ for Study 1 and $n = 29{,}412$ for Study 2). For both studies, the distribution in the original sample significantly differed from the pseudo-couple distribution ($\chi^2(3) = 16.33$, $p < .001$ for Study 1 and $\chi^2(3) = 31.21$, $p < .001$ for Study 2; see Figure 4). The observed proportions of actual couples in each quarter were .35, .26, .26, and .12 for Study 1 and .40, .28, .23, and .10 for Study 2, indicating that a larger proportion of couples had a higher similarity and a smaller proportion had a lower similarity compared to pseudo-couples.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for key variables.[7]

	Study 1						Study 2					
	Men		Women				Men		Women			
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*d*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*d*
1. Empathic accuracy	20.81	9.23	20.41	9.12	0.47	0.04	16.51	6.98	17.03	7.53	−0.93	−0.07
2. Absolute difference in partners' empathic accuracy	8.20	6.36	8.20	6.36			5.62	4.70	5.62	4.70		
3. Relationship satisfaction	39.56	5.36	40.10	4.99	−1.17	−0.09	18.69	2.06	18.63	2.24	0.28	0.02
4. Closeness	5.79	1.10	5.76	1.20	0.36	0.03	5.21	1.16	5.03	1.26	1.65	0.13
5. Positive outcome for the relationship							5.51	1.25	5.65	1.28	−1.28	−0.10

Note. Theoretical range of (1) empathic accuracy: 0–100, (2) absolute difference in partners' empathic accuracy: 0–100, (3) relationship satisfaction: Study 1: 6–45; Study 2: 3–21, (4) closeness: 1–7, (5) positive relationship outcome: 1–7. *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$.

Table 3. Correlations between key variables.

	Study 1				Study 2				
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5
1. Empathic accuracy	**.36*** **	*.13*	*.12*	*.09*	**.49*** **	*.21***	*−.03*	*−.04*	*.05*
2. Absolute difference in partners' empathic accuracy	.02		*.00*	*−.08*	.11		*.01*	*−.08*	*−.08*
3. Relationship satisfaction	−.02	−.09	**.39*** **	*.47****	−.05	−.05	**.19***	*.42****	*.32****
4. Closeness	−.05	−.13	.34***	**.53*** **	−.01	−.05	.28***	**.30*** **	*.38****
5. Positive relationship outcome					.19*	−.17*	.14	.16*	.41***

Note. Correlation coefficients among men's scores on the variables below the diagonal (regular typeface); correlation coefficients among women's scores on the variables above the diagonal (*italic typeface*); and correlation coefficients between the men and women's scores on the diagonal in bold. *$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$.

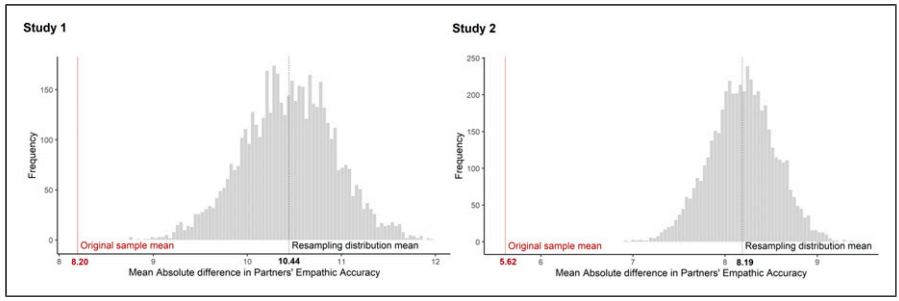


Figure 3. Mean absolute difference in partners' empathic accuracy in the original samples versus the sampling distribution of mean pseudo-couple similarity based on 5000 permutations (indicated as resampling).

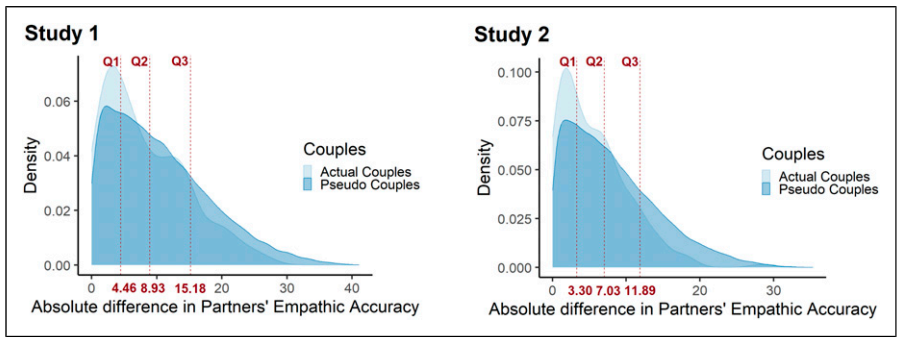


Figure 4. Distribution of absolute difference values in partner's empathic accuracy in the actual couples and all possible pseudo-couples. *Note.* The quartiles were taken from the pseudo-couple distribution (see statistical analysis).

As a follow-up, we tested a few potential explanations for the observed similarity in real couples. First, to test whether this similarity could be due to convergence over time or to initial selection, we examined its association with relationship length (cf. Luo & Klohnen, 2005). The absolute difference score was unrelated to relationship length in both studies ($r_{S1} = -.06$, $p_{S1} = .43$), ($r_{S2} = -.05$, $p_{S2} = .52$).[8] These findings suggest no convergence in empathic accuracy over time, leaving initial selection as a plausible alternative explanation.

Second, it could be that relationship partners were more similar in empathic accuracy than randomly-paired individuals simply because the relationship partners were involved in the same interaction. Indeed, the empathic accuracy scores of the randomly-paired individuals were based on inferences from two different conversations. To examine this explanation, we ran a post-hoc pseudo-couple analysis on other available data of Study 1. As mentioned in the method section, Study 1 included an additional standard stimulus task, in which each participant was asked to observe the video of an unknown couple

engaging in a conflict interaction, and then infer the feelings and thoughts of the opposite-sex partner in that video. Afterwards, empathic accuracy and similarity in empathic accuracy between partners were calculated in the same way as for the dyadic interaction paradigm.

The results showed that the observed mean absolute difference score for the actual couples ($M = 8.28$, $SD = 6.04$) was significantly lower than what would be expected from the sampling distribution based on pseudo-couples ($M = 9.03$, $SD = 0.38$, $p = .024$). This means that there was still significantly more similarity in the level of empathic accuracy for real couples than for pseudo-couples even though their empathic accuracy scores were based on the same task. With regard to the comparison of distributions of scores of single couples, we however found no significant difference between the observed proportions of couples (.29, .26, .23, .21) in between the quartiles of the pseudo-couple distribution and the expected proportions (χ^2 (3) = 2.11, $p = .55$), although there were again more actual couples situated in the first quarter than in the last. Together, these results suggest that being involved in the same interaction could play a role in the similarity between partners, but does not explain all differences between actual and pseudo-couples.

Does similarity in empathic accuracy predict relationship well-being?

Global measures of relationship well-being. Is similarity in empathic accuracy associated with more relationship satisfaction as measured by the baseline questionnaires? To answer this question, we tested whether between-partner similarity in empathic accuracy predicted relationship satisfaction beyond the empathic accuracy levels of each partner. Similarity in empathic accuracy did not predict relationship satisfaction in either study, and neither did a person's own empathic accuracy or his or her partner's (see Table 4).

Table 4. Results for the models predicting global relationship satisfaction from empathic accuracy.

	Study 1			Study 2		
	b	*SE (b)*	95% CI	*b*	*SE (b)*	95% CI
Intercept	39.87***	0.35	[39.19–40.56]	18.66***	0.13	[18.41–18.91]
EA actor	0.02	0.03	[−0.04–0.09]	−0.02	0.02	[−0.06–0.01]
EA partner	0.02	0.03	[−0.05–0.08]	0.02	0.02	[−0.01–0.06]
Absolute difference in partners' EA	−0.03	0.05	[−0.14–0.07]	−0.01	0.03	[−0.06–0.04]

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$ ***$p < .001$.

Situational measures of relationship well-being. Next, we tested whether between-partner similarity in empathic accuracy predicted reported self-reported closeness after the conflict interaction. Similarity in empathic accuracy did not predict the amount of closeness participants reported after the interaction in either of the studies, and neither did the actor's or partner's empathic accuracy (Table 5).

Table 5. Results for the models predicting post-interaction closeness from empathic accuracy.

	Study 1			Study 2		
	b	*SE (b)*	95% CI	*b*	*SE (b)*	95% CI
Intercept	5.77***	0.08	[5.61–5.93]	5.13***	0.07	[4.98–5.28]
EA actor	0.00	0.01	[−0.01–0.02]	−0.01	0.01	[−0.03–0.01]
EA partner	−0.00	0.01	[−0.02–0.01]	0.02	0.01	[−0.00–0.04]
Absolute difference in partners' EA	−0.02	0.01	[−0.04–0.01]	−0.02	0.02	[−0.05–0.01]

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001.

Finally, we examined whether between-partner similarity in empathic accuracy predicted the extent to which participants reported that the interaction had led to a positive outcome for their relationship in Study 2. The absolute difference score in empathic accuracy negatively predicted the extent to which partners judged the interaction had led to a positive outcome for their relationship (p = .02), meaning that between-partner similarity in empathic accuracy was positively associated with this measure (Table 6).[9] In addition, one's own level of empathic accuracy positively predicted the extent to which partners judged that the interaction had led to a positive outcome for their relationship. We did not find an effect of the partner's empathic accuracy on this measure.

Table 6. Results for the model predicting reported positive outcome for the relationship from empathic accuracy.

	Study 2		
	b	*SE (b)*	95% CI
Intercept	5.58***	0.08	[5.42–5.74]
EA actor	0.02*	0.01	[0.00–0.04]
EA partner	0.01	0.01	[−0.01–0.03]
Absolute difference in partners' EA	−0.04*	0.02	[−0.08–−0.01]

*p < .05 **p < .01 ***p < .001.

Additional analyses. In follow-up analyses, we controlled for emotional experience of both partners by adding emotional experience in terms of actors' and partners' self-reported valence (Study 1) or valence and arousal (Study 2) as experienced during the interaction. Controlling for emotional experience did not change our results: similarity in empathic accuracy only had an effect on the extent to which partners thought that the interaction had led to a positive outcome for the relationship. Additionally, we exploratively investigated potential different effects of empathic accuracy for feelings versus thoughts (for results and interpretation see https://osf.io/xbytk).

Discussion

The goal of this investigation was to examine (1) whether there is evidence of couple similarity in empathic accuracy and (2) whether similarity in empathic accuracy is associated with relationship well-being. Across two studies, we found that actual intimate partners were, on average, more similar in empathic accuracy than randomly-paired individuals. Follow-up analyses in Study 1 suggest that this similarity was not simply due to partners being involved in the same interaction. In addition, we found a moderate positive association between men's and women's empathic accuracy scores across the two samples. These findings are in line with, and extend those of existing studies on similarity between partners (e.g., Luo, 2017).

Because the studies were restricted to partners who were involved in a relationship for at least *one year* (the average relationship length was 12.15 years), it provides evidence of similarity in *existing* relationships, beyond the initial dating phase. We did not find an association between couple similarity in empathic accuracy and relationship length. This finding suggests that similarity in empathic accuracy might reflect an initial assortment of partners, based, at least in part, on their empathic accuracy, rather than convergence over time.

This finding is consistent with other existing findings regarding couple similarity (e.g., Simpson et al., 1995; Watson et al., 2004) and also informs us about which characteristics might matter in the search for an intimate partner. Specifically, we found moderate levels of similarity between partners' empathic accuracy, whereas only weak similarity has been found for personality and emotional experience/expression (Luo, 2017; Watson et al., 2004). Studies on similarity in other socio-cognitive skills have found evidence for moderate similarity as well (see Burleson & Denton, 1992; Rentzsch et al., 2022), suggesting that individuals tend to select partners based on similarity in empathy related skills rather than on similarity in personality or emotions. Note, however, that other processes could also lead to partner similarity in empathic accuracy, such as social homogamy (i.e., partners tend to meet each other in social settings where people already share certain characteristics) or dissimilar partners having broken up within less than a year (for more details see Luo, 2017; Watson et al., 2014). Future research should explore which of these mechanisms play a role with regard to similarity in empathic accuracy.

Based on existing literature (e.g., Simpson et al., 1995), we expected a positive association between similarity in empathic accuracy and relationship well-being. Specifically, Simpson et al. (1995) suggested that dissimilarity leads to relationship dissatisfaction because it (1) could reflect a power imbalance that creates feelings of resentment, (2) makes it more difficult for partners to share experiences (3) and could lead to the feeling that different levels of commitment exist in the relationship. However, in the current study, the partners' similarity in empathic accuracy was not associated with partners' general level of relationship satisfaction nor with feelings of closeness immediately after their conflict interaction. These findings are consistent with the results of some studies on couple similarity and relationship well-being (e.g., Watson et al., 2004), but are inconsistent with the results of others (e.g., Gaunt, 2006; Simpson et al., 1995).

It is possible that these null results reflect effects that cancel out each other. For some couples, similarity in empathic accuracy might indeed predict greater relationship well-being due to the hypothesized mechanisms. However, other couples might thrive when partners have different levels of empathic accuracy. More specifically, the partner scoring higher on empathic accuracy might compensate for the lesser empathic accuracy of the other partner, whereas the less-accurate partner might contribute to the relationship in other ways (Ickes & Simpson, 2001). In other words, whereas one partner has the most power in the domain of understanding, the other partner might exercise power in a different domain (e.g., charm, wit, beauty), in the end leading to an overall power balance in the relationship (Reis & Sprecher, 2009).

Future research should therefore examine which partner and relationship characteristics moderate a potential association between similarity in empathic accuracy and relationship well-being. Additionally, to obtain a better understanding of these findings and the role of similarity in empathic accuracy in relationships, research is needed that directly examines its underlying mechanisms. Does similarity in empathic accuracy indeed reflect a power balance in the relationship? It could be that other underlying mechanisms are at play as well, with similarity in empathic accuracy reflecting similarity in pro-relationship motivation or even commitment of partners (as pro-relationship motivation is known to influence empathic accuracy levels (see for example Berlamont et al., 2023).

Future research should also address the possibility that because our samples included mainly highly satisfied couples, thereby restricting the range of the scores, a range-restriction artifact might have reduced our chances of detecting a statistically significant association between similarity and relationship well-being. Finally, future research should examine the possibility that *perceived* similarity in empathic accuracy might be a better predictor of relationship well-being than actual similarity is (see Montoya et al., 2008; Sels et al., 2020; Tidwell et al., 2013).

We did find a positive association between the partners' similarity in empathic accuracy and the extent to which they reported that the interaction task had led to a positive outcome for their relationship, after controlling for the effects of each partner's empathic accuracy. Although this is a preliminary finding that warrants caution and needs to be replicated (especially because it seemed to be driven by one couple), it might indicate that similarity in empathic accuracy is tied more directly to outcomes of the interaction than to more global and abstract relationship well-being indicators. Perhaps partner similarity in empathic accuracy mainly acts to facilitate coordination, but does not necessarily imply that similar couples will feel more connected or more satisfied about their relationship in general.

Finally, across two large samples, only one actor effect of empathic accuracy was observed, and there were no partner effects of empathic accuracy on relationship well-being. These findings are in line with existing studies showing that the presumed association between empathic accuracy and relationship well-being is not always found (e.g., Rafaeli et al., 2017). Moreover, when actor and partner effects of empathic accuracy on relationship well-being are found, they tend to be relatively small and hard to detect (Sened et al., 2020). They are also thought to be moderated by variables such as emotion type (see Le et al., 2020) that we did not examine in the current study.

Limitations and future research directions

Being the first of its kind, the present study is not without limitations. First, both studies were not preregistered. Second, our sample did not include same-sex couples, preventing us from generalizing the results to such couples. Further, we did not assess the participants' sexual orientation in Study 1, nor did we assess race/ethnicity and disability in Study 1 and 2. Although a recent review showed inconsistent associations between empathic accuracy and sexual orientation and race/ethnicity (Hinnekens et al., 2023), it is important to explicitly rule out the possibility that these characteristics might change the observed associations.

In addition, the assumption in the literature is that similarity in empathic accuracy *leads* to relationship satisfaction. For this reason, a longitudinal study instead of a cross-sectional study would have been more optimal to examine this assumed causal ordering. Furthermore, empathic accuracy was assessed during a limited time-window in couples' lives and only in the context of conflict. However, empathic accuracy may fluctuate, depending on the timing or context (e.g., positive interaction, topic of the interaction, tiredness, …). An interesting future research avenue would be to assess empathic accuracy on several occasions and situations, and to investigate if the results generalize. Here, also more similar items for global and situational relationship well-being could be used. Another avenue for future research is to examine a different kind of similarity, namely the similarity between one's own feelings and thoughts and the inferred feelings and thoughts (i.e., assumed similarity, Atzil-Slonim et al., 2019) and its association with relationship well-being.

Finally, we chose to use absolute difference scores because this is a common method to examine between-partner similarity (e.g., Tidwell et al., 2013).[10] However, this measure introduces statistical complications, which we could only partially solve by controlling for the component measures (Edwards, 2001; Griffin, et al., 1999; Kenny, et al., 2006). Further, it might be that only partners that have similar *and high* levels of empathic accuracy are more satisfied than all the other categories, which we were not able to examine with the current analyses. To check if this is the case, a new, state-of-the-art analysis, the Dyadic Response Surface Analysis can be carried out (DRSA, Schönbrodt et al., 2018), but this method requires more data than are available to us in the present samples (although these samples are already relatively large). Future research should therefore consider using DRSA with larger samples.

Conclusion

This study investigated the extent to which relationship partners are similar in their empathic accuracy, and whether this similarity is associated with relationship well-being. A comparison of real couples and pseudo-couples showed that actual relationship partners were indeed more similar in their levels of empathic accuracy. Follow-up analyses suggested that this might be due to partners settling with someone who is similar in empathic accuracy during an early phase of the relationship. On the other hand, we found that empathic accuracy was not associated with global relationship well-being, and it was only weakly associated with one indicator of situational relationship well-being.

The fact that actual partners are more similar in their empathic accuracy than randomly-paired pseudo-partners is an important finding, as it is a first step in examining the possible benefits of the *similarity* in the partners' empathic accuracy rather than the individual partners' respective levels of empathic accuracy. Future research is needed, however, to further investigate the factors underlying similarity in empathic accuracy, and the circumstances in which it might benefit or hamper relationships.

Authors' note

This study was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Belgian Association for Psychological Sciences, UMons, Mons, Belgium in May 2023.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Both studies were funded by Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek (FWO); grant number Study 1: 11Q9516N; grant number Study 2: 3G016018. Laura Sels is funded by a postdoctoral senior Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek mandate (12ZN523N).

Open research statement

As part of IARR's encouragement of open research practices, the authors have provided the following information: This research was not pre-registered. The data used in the research can be publicly posted. The data can be obtained at: https://osf.io/xbytk. In order to minimize identifying information, the variable relationship length is not included in the publicly available dataset. This data can be obtained upon request by emailing the corresponding author (liesbet.berlamont@ugent.be). The materials used in the research can be publicly posted. The materials can be obtained at: https://osf.io/xbytk.

ORCID iDs

Liesbet Berlamont https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8638-7597
Chiara Carlier https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4985-6240
Laura Sels https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3485-9599

Notes

1. We did not conduct an a priori power analysis, but sought to maximize power by recruiting as many couples as possible, limited by the time span (one calendar year) of the data collection and practical constraints. We decided not to conduct post-hoc power analyses, because of the issues that exist concerning these analyses (Hoenig & Heisey, 2001; Levine & Ensom, 2001).
2. Same-sex couples were not included in this study mainly because of statistical reasons. In Study 2 (but not in Study 1), we included a question concerning the sexual orientation of the

participants. In this study, 98.3% of the participants self-identified as heterosexual, 1% as homosexual and 5% as bisexual. None of the participants self-identified as asexual.

3. We eliminated the inclusion criterion of being married or cohabiting for at least 6 months because, nowadays, many couples have a stable relationship without living together. However, to avoid collecting a sample of mostly young couples that are not married or do not live together, we increased the age criterion. This led us to a sample that included 58 couples (33.7%) that were neither married nor cohabiting.
4. Participants were given the options to self-identify as 'man', 'woman' or 'other' (with the possibility of specifying 'other'). None of the participants identified as 'other.'
5. When estimating effects of difference scores, it is important to also include the component scores (i.e., the scores used to compute the difference score), because they might drive the effects of the difference score due to high correlations with the outcome measure (Griffin et al., 1999; Kenny et al., 2006).
6. In order to minimize identifying information, the variable relationship length is not included in the publicly available dataset. This data can be obtained upon request by emailing the corresponding author.
7. The means of empathic accuracy are significantly different between the studies, probably because of using slightly different coding systems.
8. We also ran a correlational analysis with the natural log of relationship length to reduce the potential impact of skewness of this variable. Again, the absolute difference score in empathic accuracy was unrelated to relationship length in both studies ($r_{S1} = -.10$, $p_{S1} = .22$), ($r_{S2} = -.06$, $p_{S2} = .40$).
9. We do want to note that this effect was not significant anymore when excluding one couple that had a very high absolute difference score in empathic accuracy ($b = -.01$, $SE(b) = .02$, $p = .43$). However, this score was not due to technical problems and thus represents an actual score, which is why we decided to report these analyses with this outlier included. Excluding this outlier did not change the results of the analyses with regard to relationship satisfaction and post-interaction closeness.
10. Another common method is the use of correlations (e.g., Gonzaga et al., 2007), but this was not possible in our study, because we only had one score of empathic accuracy for each member of the couple.

References

Alicke, M. D., & Sedikides, C. (2009). Self-enhancement and self-protection: What they are and what they do. *European Review of Social Psychology*, *20*(1), 1–48. https://doi.org/10.1080/10463280802613866

Anderson, C., Keltner, D., & John, O. P. (2003). Emotional convergence between people over time. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *84*(5), 1054–1068. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.5.1054

Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of other in the self scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *63*(4), 596–612. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.63.4.596

Atzil-Slonim, D., Bar-Kalifa, E., Fisher, H., Lazarus, G., Hasson-Ohayon, I., Lutz, W., Rubel, J., & Rafaeli, E. (2019). Therapists' empathic accuracy toward their clients' emotions. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, *87*(1), 33–45. https://doi.org/10.1037/ccp0000354

Berlamont, L., Hodges, S., Sels, L., Ceulemans, E., Ickes, W., Hinnekens, C., & Verhofstadt, L. (2023). Motivation and empathic accuracy during conflict interactions in couples: It's complicated! *Motivation and Emotion*, *47*(2), 208–228. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-022-09982-x

Brackett, M. A., Warner, R. M., & Bosco, J. S. (2005). Emotional intelligence and relationship quality among couples. *Personal Relationships*, *12*(2), 197–212. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1350-4126.2005.00111.x

Burleson, B. R., & Denton, W. H. (1992). A new look at similarity and attraction in marriage: Similarities in social-cognitive and communication skills as predictors of attraction and satisfaction. *Communication Monographs*, *59*(3), 268–287. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759209376269

Byrne, D. (1971). *The attraction paradigm*. Academic Press.

Chonody, J. M., Gabb, J., Killian, M., & Dunk-West, P. (2018). Measuring relationship quality in an international study: Exploratory and confirmatory factor validity. *Research on Social Work Practice*, *28*(8), 920–930. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049731516631120

DesJardins, N. M. L., & Hodges, S. D. (2015). Reading between the lies: Empathic accuracy and deception detection. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *6*(7), 781–787. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550615585829

Edwards, J. R. (2001). Ten difference score myths. *Organizational Research Methods*, *4*(3), 265–287. https://doi.org/10.1177/109442810143005

Fletcher, G. J., Simpson, J. A., & Thomas, G. (2000). The measurement of perceived relationship quality components: A confirmatory factor analytic approach. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *26*(3), 340–354. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167200265007

Gaunt, R. (2006). Couple similarity and marital satisfaction: Are similar spouses happier? *Journal of Personality*, *74*(5), 1401–1420. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.14676494.2006.00414.x

Gonzaga, G. C., Campos, B., & Bradbury, T. (2007). Similarity, convergence, and relationship satisfaction in dating and married couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *93*(1), 34–48. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.93.1.34

Griffin, D., Murray, S., & Gonzalez, R. (1999). Difference score correlations in relationship research: A conceptual primer. *Personal Relationships*, *6*(4), 505–518. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6811.1999.tb00206.x

Hinnekens, C., Berlamont, L., Sels, L., Ickes, W., & Verhofstadt, L. (2023). *The individual, relational and interactional correlates of empathic accuracy: A systematic review*. Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Ghent University. [Manuscript in preparation].

Hinnekens, C., Ickes, W., Berlamont, L., & Verhofstadt, L. (2021). Empathic accuracy: Empirical overview and clinical applications. In M. Gilead, & K. Ochsner (Eds.), *The neural basis of mentalizing* (pp. 149–170). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-518905_8

Hoenig, J. M., & Heisey, D. M. (2001). The abuse of power: The pervasive fallacy of power calculations for data analysis. *The American Statistician*, *55*(1), 19–24. https://doi.org/10.1198/000313001300339897

Ickes, W., & Simpson, J. (2001). Motivational aspects of empathic accuracy. In G. J. O. Fletcher, & M. S. Clark (Eds.), *Interpersonal processes: Blackwell handbook in social psychology* (pp. 229–249). Blackwell.

Ickes, W., Stinson, L., Bissonnette, V., & Garcia, S. (1990). Naturalistic social cognition: Empathic accuracy in mixed-sex dyads. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *59*(4), 730–742. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.59.4.730

Kenny, D. A., Kashy, D. A., & Cook, W. L. (2006). *Dyadic data analysis*. The Guilford Press.

Kilpatrick, S. D., Bissonnette, V. L., & Rusbult, C. E. (2002). Empathic accuracy and accommodative behavior among newly married couples. *Personal Relationships*, *9*(4), 369–393. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6811.09402

Kurdek, L. A. (1994). Areas of conflict for gay, lesbian, and heterosexual couples: What couples argue about influences relationship satisfaction. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *56*(4), 923–934. https://doi.org/10.2307/353603

Le, B. M., Côté, S., Stellar, J., & Impett, E. A. (2020). The distinct effects of empathic accuracy for a romantic partner's appeasement and dominance emotions. *Psychological Science*, *31*(6), 607–622. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797620904975

Levine, M., & Ensom, M. H. (2001). Post hoc power analysis: An idea whose time has passed? *Pharmacotherapy: The Journal of Human Pharmacology and Drug Therapy*, *21*(4), 405–409. https://doi.org/10.1592/phco.21.5.405.34503

Luo, S., & Klohnen, E. C. (2005). Assortative mating and marital quality in newlyweds: A couple-centered approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *88*(2), 304–326. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.2.304

Luo, S., Zhang, Y., Zhang, W., Zheng, R., Tao, J., & Xiong, Y. (2017). Prognostic significance of spontaneous shockable rhythm conversion in adult out-of-hospital cardiac arrest patients with initial non-shockable heart rhythms: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Resuscitation*, *121*(8), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.resuscitation.2017.09.014

Montoya, R. M., Horton, R. S., & Kirchner, J. (2008). Is actual similarity necessary for attraction? A meta-analysis of actual and perceived similarity. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *25*(6), 889–922. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407508096700

Neimeyer, G. J. (1984). Cognitive complexity and marital satisfaction. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, *2*(3), 258–263. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.1984.2.3.258

Norton, R. (1983). Measuring marital quality: A critical look at the dependent variable. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *45*(1), 141–151. https://doi.org/10.2307/351302

Rafaeli, E., Gadassi, R., Howland, M., Boussi, A., & Lazarus, G. (2017). Seeing bad does good: Relational benefits of accuracy regarding partners' negative moods. *Motivation and Emotion*, *41*(3), 353–369. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-017-9614-x

Reis, H. T., & Sprecher, S. (Eds.), (2009). *Encyclopedia of human relationships*. Sage Publications.

Rentzsch, K., Columbus, S., Balliet, D. P., & Gerlach, T. M. (2022). Similarity in situation perception predicts relationship satisfaction. *Personality Science*, *3*, 1–26. https://doi.org/10.5964/ps.8007

Robinson, M. D., & Clore, G. L. (2002). Belief and feeling: Evidence for an accessibility model of emotional self-report. *Psychological Bulletin*, *128*(6), 934–960. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.128.6.934

Schönbrodt, F. D., Humberg, S., & Nestler, S. (2018). Testing similarity effects with dyadic response surface analysis. *European Journal of Personality*, *32*(6), 627–641. https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2169

Sels, L., Ruan, Y., Kuppens, P., Ceulemans, E., & Reis, H. (2020). Actual and perceived emotional similarity in couples' daily lives. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *11*(2), 266–275. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619845927

Sened, H., Lavidor, M., Lazarus, G., Bar-Kalifa, E., Rafaeli, E., & Ickes, W. (2017). Empathic accuracy and relationship satisfaction: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *31*(6), 742–752. https://doi.org/10.1037/fam0000320

Shiota, M. N., & Levenson, R. W. (2007). Birds of a feather don't always fly farthest: Similarity in big five personality predicts more negative marital satisfaction trajectories in long-term marriages. *Psychology and Aging*, *22*(4), 666–675. https://doi.org/10.1037/0882-7974.22.4.666

Simpson, J. A., Ickes, W., & Blackstone, T. (1995). When the head protects the heart: Empathic accuracy in dating relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69*(4), 629–641. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.4.629

Śmieja, M., & Stolarski, M. (2018). Assortative mating for emotional intelligence. *Current Psychology*, *37*(1), 180–187. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-016-9501-8

Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., Scott, S. B., Kelmer, G., Markman, H. J., & Fincham, F. D. (2017). Asymmetrically committed relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *34*(8), 1241–1259. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407516672013

Stolarski, M., Postek, S., & Śmieja, M. (2011). Emotional intelligence and conflict resolution strategies in romantic heterosexual couples. *Studia Psychologiczne [Psychological Studies]*, *49*(5), 65–76. https://doi.org/10.2478/v10167-010-0041-9

Thiessen, D., & Gregg, B. (1980). Human assortative mating and genetic equilibrium: An evolutionary perspective. *Ethology and Sociobiology*, *1*(2), 111–140. https://doi.org/10.1016/0162-3095(80)90003-5

Tidwell, N. D., Eastwick, P. W., & Finkel, E. J. (2013). Perceived, not actual, similarity predicts initial attraction in a live romantic context: Evidence from the speed-dating paradigm. *Personal Relationships*, *20*(2), 199–215. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.14756811.2012.01405.x

Verhofstadt, L., Devoldre, I., Buysse, A., Stevens, M., Hinnekens, C., Ickes, W., & Davis, M. (2016). The role of cognitive and affective empathy in spouses' support interactions: An observational study. *PLoS One*, *11*(2), Article e0149944. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0149944

Watson, D., Beer, A., & McDade-Montez, E. (2014). The role of active assortment in spousal similarity. *Journal of Personality*, *82*(2), 116–129. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12039

Watson, D., Klohnen, E. C., Casillas, A., Simms, E. N., Haig, J., & Berry, D. S. (2004). Match makers and deal breakers: Analyses of assortative mating in newlywed couples. *Journal of Personality*, *72*(5), 1029–1068. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.00223506.2004.00289.x

Zeidner, M., & Kaluda, I. (2008). Romantic love: What's emotional intelligence (EI) got to do with it? *Personality and Individual Differences*, *44*(8), 1684–1695. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2008.01.018

Zeidner, M., & Kloda, I. (2013). Emotional intelligence (EI), conflict resolution patterns, and relationship satisfaction: Actor and partner effects revisited. *Personality and Individual Differences*, *54*(2), 278–283. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2012.09.013