Is long-term relationship satisfaction in couples correlated with similar partner self-schema or similarity of partner's self-schema to ideal-partner schema?

James R. Rowley
IS LONG-TERM RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION IN COUPLES CORRELATED WITH SIMILAR PARTNER SELF-SCHEMA OR SIMILARITY OF PARTNER'S SELF-SCHEMA TO IDEAL-PARTNER SCHEMA?

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Psychology

by
James R. Rowley

December 1995
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ABSTRACT

The importance of similarity of self-schemata and ideal-schemata in long-term relationships was examined. Schemata of 84 couples who had been together for at least 6 months were measured with a modified Revised Interpersonal Adjective Scales checklist, and relationship satisfaction was measured. The results indicated that both males' and females' relationship satisfaction were related to the similarity between their own and their partner's self-schema. Only for male participants was relationship satisfaction related to the similarity between their ideal partner schema and their actual partner self-schema. No gender difference between the similarity and relationship satisfaction was found. Results of couples self-schemata similarity were congruent with Byrne's (1971) similarity research on the law of attraction. Ideal-schema results were incongruent with previous research, and previously found gender differences were not replicated. Implications for use of actual and ideal schemas in relationship research are discussed.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1980's, psychology saw an increased interest in close relationship research. At present, the field merits two handbooks on the field (Duck, 1988; Kelly, et al. 1983) and at least three review articles (Clark & Reis, 1988; Holmes & Boon, 1990; Lopez, 1993). In part, this surge of interest could be the result of the great interest in attraction research overflowing into close relationships. This interest may also be a result of the general public's renewed interest in understanding and improving relationships. One need only travel to the nearest bookstore to find shelves of self-help books on relationships. These books underscore the need for further research and dissemination as research shows these books do not always represent close relationships accurately (Worell, 1988). For whatever reason, close relationship research is continuing to expand.

In 1983 Kelly et al. set a standard for close relationship research with their book, Close Relationships, in which they discuss the research and new methodology for this field. Out of this book came one of the most commonly used definitions for close relationships: "The close relationship is one of frequent, strong, and diverse interdependence that lasts over a considerable period of time" (p.38).
Close relationship research is gradually growing as a field and with that brings a diversity of adherents and viewpoints which has led to explorations in a variety of areas, including psychoanalytic, personality and social psychology, as well as social cognition. While most of these areas have begun in-depth research, social cognition is only beginning to be explored in the work of recent researchers (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Baldwin, 1992; Deutsch & Mackesy, 1985; Deutsch, Sullivan, Sage & Basile 1991; Ginsburg, 1988; Lisnik-Oberstein & Cohen, 1984).

One of the most basic assumptions in psychology is that humans do not process information randomly. Piaget's Cognitive-Stage Theory defined cognitive organization as consisting of different systems integrated to make a whole that coordinates cognitive activities (Miller, 1984). We know from previous research that cognitive structures representing important interpersonal significance can shape an individual's sense of self (Baldwin, Carrell, & Lopez, 1990). Similarly, Kelly's (1970) Personal Construct Theory proposes that mental constructs guide or "channelize" personal processes according to how a person anticipates events. Kelly believed these personal constructs are used as references that help people make sense of events. Additionally, Bowlby (1980) proposed "inner working models"
found in the self and relationship partners which span life-cycles. Bowlby's model suggests consistency in attachment styles, mediated by beliefs, expectations, and defenses.

In 1977, Markus utilized the schema, a construct that had been mainly used in developmental and cognitive psychology until that time, and brought it into the realm of social and social cognition psychology by exploring its place in the self. Markus defined the self-schema as cognitive generalizations developed out of past experience which organize and guide the processing of socially relevant information that is related to the self. Her research into the self-schema has defined a new way of looking at the self and the way it processes information (Markus, 1988; Markus, Moreland & Smith, 1985; Markus & Smith, 1981). This construct of the self-schema has been examined by others who have developed Markus' ideas further (Baldwin, 1992; Baldwin, Carrell, & Lopez, 1990; Bem, 1982; Crane & Markus, 1982; Deutsch & Mackesy, 1985; Fong, & Markus, 1982; Lewicki, 1984). Some of the schema research has begun to explore how the self-schema affects perception of not just the self, but of others. This work demonstrates that the self-schema is a reference for our judgments in activities such as seeking information about others or determining the relative desirability of traits (Fong & Markus, 1982; Lewicki, 1984).

What this means for close relationship research is that
couples may create their own relationship "realities" using these schemata which in turn influence their self and other observations and interpretations of behavior. While not a new idea (Baldwin, 1992; Lopez, 1993), the use of schemata and their influence on close relationships have not been widely explored.

The idea that relationships can have a powerful effect on individual lives has been suspected for some time and recently supported by high correlations of overall satisfaction with life and the state of close relationships (Diener, 1984; Freedman, 1978). Because of the pervasiveness of the effects of relationship satisfaction, it has become a widely explored topic. Satisfaction has been examined across many different populations including friends (Caldwell, 1982), married couples (Hendrick, 1981), dating couples (Coombs, 1966), cohabitating relationships (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983) and lesbian relationships (Peplau, 1982). Satisfaction is likely to vary according to the type of relation involved, as it has been shown to be influenced by a variety of variables such as gender, stage of relationship, ethnicity, sexual intimacy, and degree of general intimacy (Worell, 1988). An important similarity between dating and married couples is that their satisfaction is best predicted
by the overall rewards received (Hicks & Platt, 1970; Lopez, 1993).

While much has been written about relationship satisfaction regarding close relationships, few have explored this issue from an information processing viewpoint. As mentioned earlier, couples' cognitive constructs contribute to influencing the processing of relationship observations and interpretations. According to satisfaction research, certain ways of perceiving, organizing or processing information will contribute to satisfaction. It has also been theorized by Baldwin (1992) that partner's scripts and schemata may form self-schema for how a person experiences themselves in a relationship and schemata for the other person in the relationship. Similarly, Ginsburg (1988) has made a strong argument for potential uses of rules, scripts and prototypes in relationship research. Evidence from Lesnik-Oberstein and Cohen (1984) supports the theory that similar cognitive styles promote mate attraction, as well as influencing marital quality. In other research, couples who are more satisfied with their relationships have been found to make more positive attributions to their partner, and are more likely to dismiss negative concerns to environmental causes, whereas dissatisfied couples make more negative attributions, thus making the partner hypervigilent for further transgressions (Lopez, 1993). This research again
supports the role of information processing in close relationships and relationship satisfaction.

As research has expanded, it has become more specialized and thus has demanded changes in methodology. Currently, many studies still involve the use of strangers, like much of the previous attraction research. Huston and Levinger (1978), in discussing the advances in attraction and relationship research, complained that 80% of this research uses "personally irrelevant" others, or people who the participants normally might never meet in real life. This presents an important methodological problem because individual intimate episodes are not going to be influenced by the same factors as in ongoing intimate relationships (Duck & Sants, 1983). To increase the external validity of future close relationship research, it is becoming readily apparent that intimate others who are currently in ongoing relationships must be used. While some have begun to do this involving friendships (Deutsch & Mackesy, 1985; Deutsch et al., 1991) or using males or females involved in relationships (Markus, 1977; Markus & Smith, 1981), more investigation is needed involving the social cognitions of both partners in an ongoing relationship.

The lack of research in these areas indicates a need for further investigation. This investigation explored the self-schemata of couples in long-term relationships and how these
schemata are related to relationship satisfaction. Specifically, three hypothesis were tested involving 1) the relation of couples' similar self-schemata to relationship satisfaction, 2) the match between each partner's ideal partner schema and their current partner's schema and its correlation with relationship satisfaction, 3) gender differences in the importance of schemata similarity in relationship satisfaction.

**Similarity of Schema**

Similarity in close relationships has been one of the most systemically explored variables in attraction research. As early as 1945, Burgess and Locke found that approximately 100 studies had been done on similarity and all had found a tendency for like to marry like. Similarity has been associated with attraction across numerous populations such as children from the fourth grade and up, alcoholics, Japanese, Native Americans, Mexicans and senior citizens. It also has appeared on a variety of dimensions such as simple behavioral acts, task performance, emotional states, and perceived social desirability of self and target (Byrne & Griffitt, 1973). People have also shown a significant degree of attraction to similar others on diverse variables, such as repression-sensitization, masculinity-feminity, dominance-submissiveness and intellectual ability (Byrne, 1971). Much has been said about the relation between attraction and
similarity, but even as the focus of research has turned to ongoing relationships, the research on satisfaction with a similar other has not been prevalent. Much of the research focuses either on married couples or strangers and reinforces the idea that similarity across variables such as socio-economic status, age, religion (Hicks & Platt, 1970), and positive attribution style (Holmes & Boon, 1990) are related to satisfaction.

Similarity in cognitive style has also been found to promote qualities in married couples such as ease of communication, successful communication, understanding, and empathy (Lesnik-Oberstein & Cohen, 1984). Lesnik-Oberstein and Cohen also speculated that these qualities may contribute to marital quality. Cognitive similarity has also been found in friends (Deutsch & Mackesy, 1985). With roommates, the more time spent talking, the more similar individuals' schemata become (Deutsch et al., 1991). Since people in long-term relationships spend long periods of time together, this may influence the development of self-schema. Cognitive style is similar to self-schema because it helps to process and organize information. In turn, it may be assumed that similarity of self-schema in a close relationship may promote ease of communication, similar values and rewarding interaction, thus promoting satisfaction in long term relationships. When these data are taken together, they
indicate a link between cognitive similarity and relationship satisfaction that until now has not been explored. Specifically, if the self-schema of members of a couples in long term relationships are highly correlated, this should result in greater individual satisfaction ratings.

Additional research has suggested that there may also be two components to similarity, similarity to the self, and similarity to an ideal self (Wetzel & Insko, 1982). It is this ideal-self that serves as the basis for the second hypothesis.

Comparing the Ideal-partner to the Other's Self-schema

Freud (1914) was probably the first psychologist to discuss the ideal other in his work. Freud developed the concept of the "ego-ideal," a construct that possesses what we lack in the ego. Freud felt that the individual who possesses these ideals would in turn be loved. Several studies have shown that another's similarity to an ideal-partner is a better predictor of attraction than similarly to the participants real self (LaPrelle, Hoyle, Insko & Bernthal, 1990; LaPrelle, Insko, Cooksey, & Graetz, 1991; Wetzel & Insko, 1982). Murstein (1976) has found that dating couples whose ideal and actual partners were relatively congruent made better courtship progress over a six month period. Murstein (1971) also found that people tend to become engaged to those who are similar to their ideal self.
and current level of self-acceptance. Murstein felt that people were attracted to these ideal others because they also enhanced self-esteem, thus also improving relationship satisfaction. There are indications that this effect may generalize to other close relationships. McKenna, Hofstaetter, and O'Connor (1956) asked participants to make self-referent statements to determine their self-concept, ideal-concept, and the concepts of their first and second best friend. Results showed that the best friend concepts on the average resembled the ideal-concept more than the self-concept. The closer the self-concept was to the ideal concept, the closer the correlation of self-concept between self and friend.

Current data from social psychology indicate ideal constructs of partners play a significant role in attraction, but little is to be found on its role in ongoing relationships, particularly in social cognition research. However, current research does indicate participants will use their own self-schema to make judgments or evaluations of others (Markus & Smith, 1981). This may imply that participant's ideal-other is cognitively organized into a schema, and that they may use this to judge their mate. If so, then the previously cited research could apply to ratings of satisfaction within the relationship. The next logical step is to determine whether an ongoing relationship partner
paired with a mate matching his or her ideal mate would be more satisfied with the relationship than someone paired with a partner who is different from their ideal. This can be explored cognitively by determining a partner's ideal-mate schema and comparing it to their current mate's self-schema. The higher the correlation between their ideal and other's self-schema, the higher that partner should rate relationship satisfaction.

Gender Differences in the Importance of Similarity to Satisfaction

Certain functions or aspects of relationships have been shown to be more important to women than men, thus increasing the probability that they would notice specific differences in a relationship. Women have been found to measure their well-being in terms of their close relationships more than men do (Worell, 1988). Using a Thematic Apperception Test, McAdams, Lester, Brand, McNamara and Lensky (1988) found that women rated higher on intimacy motivation than did men. Pollack and Gilligan (1982) also found that women were likely to see themselves and others as a part of an interdependent "community of care." The men in the study tended to see themselves and others as independent and, at times, conflicting. Taken together, these studies indicate that women, due to more receptive or harmonious attitudes toward relations, may be motivated to emphasize similarity in their
relationships more than men. Other studies have confirmed that women find similarity more important to satisfaction than their male partners (Stroebe, Insko, Thompson, & Layton, 1971; Vinacke, Shannon, Palazzo, Balsavage, & Cooney, 1987). Crane and Markus (1982) have argued that since men and women process information differently, in accord with their gender self-schemata, they should have different schemata organized according to gender specific information. Thus, by examining data from the first hypothesis, it should become readily apparent whether women find similar self-schema more important to relationship satisfaction than men do by comparing men's and women's similarity and satisfaction correlations.

The purpose of this study was to examine how cognitions of couples in long term relationships influence relationship satisfaction. The first hypothesis was that couples with more similar ratings of self-schema should have higher levels of relationship satisfaction than those with less similar ratings of self-schema. Those partners whose self-schema highly correlate with each other should have higher correlations with their satisfaction scores. The second hypothesis proposes that individuals whose trait ratings of ideal-partner schema closely match their current partner's self-schema rating should have higher levels of satisfaction than those whose partner is less similar to their ideal-
partner schema. Lastly, the correlation between women's satisfaction scores and schema match should be significantly higher than men's, indicating that similarity is more important to women in relationships than it is to men.
METHOD

Participants

The participants for this study were undergraduate college students enrolled in courses at California State University, San Bernardino and their significant others. Participants were either volunteers from classes or responded to a posted request for participants in the Psychology department. All participants (N=168, or 84 pairs) were in a committed heterosexual relationship, defined as either dating or married more than six months. Most of the sample in the study were unmarried (n= 52 pairs). Participants who returned both questionnaires from psychology courses received extra-credit for their assistance.

The ethnic composition of the sample included 114 Caucasians (male = 67.9%, female = 69.5%), 26 Hispanics (male =16.7%, female = 15.3%), 8 Asians (male = 3.6%, female = 6.0%), 6 African Americans (male = 3.6%, female = 3.6%), 3 Native Americans (male = 2.4% female = 1.2%) and 8 others (male = 4.8%, female = 4.8). The average age of the male participants was 30.90 (SD = 13.87), while the female participant's average age was 29.82 (SD = 15.78). The participant's average income was between $15,001-25,000. The mean length of the relationships was 68.26 months, or 5.69 years.
Measures

The first page of the questionnaire included several background and demographic questions (see Appendix A). Each questionnaire used a participant code, which was the same for each member of the couple, to preserve confidentially. Hendrick's (1988) Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS) was administered to test for relationship satisfaction (see Appendix B). Also, a modified adjective checklist was designed to measure both the self-schema (see Appendix C) and the ideal-partner (see Appendix D) schema of each member of the couple.

The modified adjective checklist used 52 traits that were rated 1 to 11, from "Describes me" to "Does not describe me" in terms of how much each trait was descriptive of how participants perceived themselves (Self-descriptive) or how they would describe their ideal partner (Ideal partner). This modified checklist is based on Trapnell's and Wiggins' (1990) work in identifying traits that fit under the Big Five factors of personality. A box was also provided to check whether each trait was considered essential to the description. Only those traits rated 9 to 11 and checked as essential were considered schematic.

Previous research has shown that extreme ratings of scales have been related to extensive knowledge of domains and have been used to determine inclusion or exclusion of
traits as schematic. An assumption of this study and previous ones was that the ratings are extreme because the domain is viewed as important to self-definition (Markus, Moreland, & Smith, 1985). Problematic to this questionnaire was the potential for participants to choose socially acceptable traits that are not truly schematic. The tendency for people to describe themselves in ways that make them stand out as different or positive (McGuire, McGuire, Child & Fujioka, 1978) may present an unnecessarily extreme self-schema. This was controlled by the use of the essential trait box, which was only checked if the trait considered was essential to the Self-description or Ideal-partner description (see Appendix C and D).

The second measure assessed the amount of satisfaction that each member of the couple feels they experience in the relationship, as measured by Hendrick's (1988) Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS). This is a seven-item scale that measures responses to the item questions on a five-point Likert scale. The RAS is based on the Dyadic Assessment Scale (Spainier, 1976) and was deliberately designed and worded to be a generic measure of interpersonal relationship satisfaction. The RAS is highly correlated with the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, a test that has been called "the psychometrically soundest measure of marital adjustment available" (Foullette & Jacobson, 1985, p. 340). The RAS was
also designed to be for more general use than other measures that only assess marital satisfaction, which makes it useful for the diverse population that was measured.

Reliability indices indicated the seven item scale among males resulted in unsatisfactory reliability ($a=.22$). Therefore, two of the seven items were discarded on both male and female scales (see Appendix B). The resulting reliability of the shortened scale was $a=.85$ for males and $a=.83$ for females.

**Procedure**

Each member of the couple completed the satisfaction measure and two schematic measures. Because it was necessary to have both couples complete questionnaires for the study, those couples whose partner did not fill out the questionnaire ($n=1$) or did not fill it out properly ($n=4$) were discarded. The questionnaires were completed at home by the participants and their partners. The measures took approximately 30 minutes to complete. Participants were verbally warned not to share their answers till they had completed their own questionnaire and it was also written into the instructions for their partners' benefit as well. Participants were also instructed to seal their questionnaires in the envelopes provided with each questionnaire to ensure each individual's confidentiality.
Statistical Analysis

For the first hypothesis, each partner's self-schema was compared with the significant other's self-schema to measure the degree of match, as determined by the number of schematic traits they had in common, divided by the number of essentials checked by the person. This was done by adding up those traits which had been scored between 9-11 as well as having been marked essential to their self-description. When both partners had a match on a trait and essential scores, a "1" was scored. Next this total match was divided by the number of essentials each had marked for that questionnaire. Both numerator and denominator had a one added to their calculations to compensate for potential zeroes in the calculations which would result in elimination of participants with no essential scores in the statistics. The use of the number of essentials checked as a denominator for the matching equation controlled for differences among individuals in the number of traits checked as essential. The similar score consisted of the sum of these matches over 52 items with the persons number of essentials (see Appendix C and D) The female match and male match scores, representing percent of schematic traits shared, were correlated with both individuals' separate measure of satisfaction.

For the second hypothesis, the percentage of matching traits between the ideal-partner schema and significant
other's self-schema was then calculated and correlated with the level of satisfaction of the individual, as was done in the first hypothesis. This process was completed for both members of the couple.

The third hypothesis made use of the data already accumulated in the study to determine if women valued similarity in relationship more than men. The correlation between the male matching score and his satisfaction score was compared to the correlations of the females matching scores and her satisfaction score. It should be noted that for measures of schema match for both partners was the same; however, the denominator of essential scores yielded different numbers.

Statistics

For hypothesis one and two a Pearson's $r$ was used to correlate the traits and satisfaction scores. In hypothesis three, the correlations of women and men for hypothesis one were compared using a $Z$ score transformation.
RESULTS

Means and Standard Deviations

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the primary variables in this study. The mean length of a relationship in the study was 65 months or 5.41 years. No significant differences were found between male and female satisfaction scores, and male and female partners' satisfaction scores were significantly related, $r = .44$, $p < .001$.

To test hypothesis 1, the couples' schema match scores were determined by dividing the trait rating matches with scores 9 or higher by participants' number of essential scores. This computation was used to control for the number of traits marked essential. Thus, although the number of matches was the same for both persons in a relationship, dividing by the number of essential traits created different scores for each partner. The mean match of traits for the females was 20%, and the mean match of traits for the males was 26%. Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and ranges of the match scores corrected for number of essentials, the match scores alone, and the essential scores alone.

Table 1 also presents the means, standard deviations, and ranges of the variables used to test hypothesis 2, including the male's ideal-partner's matches with his female
partner's self-schema score, and the females' ideal-partner matches with her male partner's self-schema score.

**Hypothesis One**

Contrary to expectations, the correlations between males' relationship satisfaction and females' relationship satisfaction with the number of matches on schematic essential traits were not significant, for males $r = -.07, p = .26$; or for females $r = .14, p = .11$.

In order to examine other methods of calculating the matches between partners, the data were examined without the essential scores, with a match indicated by both partners scoring 9 or greater on a given trait. The correlation between match on traits with male satisfaction was not significant, $r = .14, p = .23$. The correlation between matches on traits with female satisfaction also was not significant, $r = .10, p = .40$.

The matches between the essential scores were calculated without inclusion of the trait rating scale scores. The match in essentials was not significantly correlated with male satisfaction, $r = .16, p = .16$, nor was it with female satisfaction, $r = .15, p = .18$.

Because the distributions of trait matches controlling for number of essentials were skewed and contained outliers, the data were dichotomized into one or more matches v. no matches. For example, male and female partners' zero matches equalled 47.6% of
Table 1

Variable Means, Standard Deviations and Ranges of Match and Satisfaction Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
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<td>CMATSE</td>
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<td>2.39</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMIFS</td>
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<td>2.38</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFIMS</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CESCOR</td>
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<td>3.69</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CISCOR</td>
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<td>4.33</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMATS</td>
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<tr>
<td>MESS</td>
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<td>7.30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>FESS</td>
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<td>6.58</td>
<td>81</td>
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<tr>
<td>MSATSH</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSATSH</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.
CMATSE = computed match between male and female scores corrected for essentials.
CMIFS = computed match between male ideal-partner and female self-schema.
CFIMS = computed match between female ideal-partner and male self-schema.
CESCOR = computed match using only self-schema essential scores, without rating scores.
CISCOR = computed match using only ideal-partner essential scores, without rating scores.
CMATS = computed score using only rating scores, without essential scores.
MESS = computed male essential scores.
FESS = computed female essential scores.
MSATSH = shortened satisfaction score for males.
FSATSH = shortened satisfaction score for females.
the scores. The male ideal-female self-schema zero matches were equal to 34.5% of the scores, while the female ideal-male self schema zero matches equaled 20.2% of the scores. Due to the high frequency of zero matches and low number of matches, the scores were extremely skewed. The decision to dichotomize was also influenced by several outliers that could disproportionately affect the findings. An analysis of variance was performed on male and female satisfaction scores by matches v. no matches. This analysis produced significant differences in satisfaction for both male participants, $F(1,73) = 10.44, p = .01$, and female participants, $F(1,73) = 5.40, p = .05$. If participants had one or more matches, they were more satisfied with their relationships than those who did not have any matches. For females with zero matches, the mean satisfaction score was 20.08, and the standard deviation was 3.28, whereas those with one or more matches had a mean satisfaction score of 21.80 and a standard deviation of 3.12. The male participants with zero matches had a mean of 19.58 and a standard deviation of 3.96. Those males who had one or more matches had a mean of 22.09 and a standard deviation of 2.49.

The distribution was also dichotomized to examine the difference in satisfaction of participants when they were matched by only those traits marked as essential scores, using no rating scale scores. The essential traits were
dichotomized into no matches v. one or more matches. Both male, \( r = .28, p < .01 \), and female, \( r = .30, p < .01 \), dichotomized essential scores were related to their respective satisfaction scores. Additional analyses of variance on the satisfaction scores by matches on essentials alone also yielded significant effects, \( F \) for males, \( F(1,80) = 7.00, p < .01 \) and \( F \) for females \( F(1,80) = 7.65, p < .01 \). Those participants who had at least one match on traits considered to be essential were more satisfied with their relationships than those who had no matches. Male participants scoring one or more matches scored a mean of 21.62 and a standard deviation of 2.73, with those with zero matches scoring a mean of 9.56 and a standard deviation of .31. The female participants scoring one or more matches had a mean of 21.76 and a standard deviation of 3.01, with women scoring zero matches scoring a mean of 19.78, and a standard deviation of 3.38.

**Hypothesis Two**

Scores were matched in a similar manner as the first hypothesis for the match of male self-schema scores and female ideal-partner scores and for the match of female self-schema scores and male ideal-partner scores. The correlation between the number of matches of the male partner's ideal-partner schema with his significant other's self-schema, was significant, \( r = .35, p < .005 \) (See Table 1 for means).
Those males whose partner's self-schema showed more matches with their ideal-partner schema were more satisfied with their relationship than those with fewer matches.

These matches were also dichotomized, resulting in a significant difference on the male satisfaction scores between males who had no matches v. one or more matches, $F(1,60) = 8.50, p < .05$. The mean satisfaction score was higher when there was one or more matches ($M = 21.88, SD = 3.10$) than when there were no matches ($M = 19.20, SD = 4.10$).

When the male ideal-partner and female self-schema match used only dichotomized essential scores, with no rating score traits, a significant effect was found for male satisfaction, $F(1,81) = 4.23, p < .05$. Those males scoring one or more matches were more satisfied than those who scored no matches. Males scoring one or more match had a mean of 21.31 with a standard deviation of 2.80, and those who scored zero matches had a mean of 19.60, with a standard deviation of 4.71. The females match of her ideal-partner with her partner's self-schema was not significantly related to her satisfaction either when the number of matches was maintained or when it was dichotomized into none v. one or more matches.

Hypothesis Three

Gender differences were expected in the relationships between matches on essential schematic traits, with matches expected to be more related to female than to male
relationship satisfaction. Due to the lack of significance in the original correlations for the first hypothesis, any information relative to this hypothesis is indirect. An omega squared was calculated to examine the strength of association between these variables for both males and females. The results indicated 11% of the variance in relationship satisfaction for men can be accounted for by the male schema match, while only 6% of the variance in relationship satisfaction for women can accounted for by schema match. This suggests that similar schema matches in relationships have somewhat more influence over male's relationship satisfaction than women's. Male satisfaction was also significantly related to how well their ideal-partner schema matches their partners self-schema, while this was not true of females (.35 v. .17). This also supports the greater importance of similarity among males than among females.
Hypothesis one demonstrated that, for both male and female participants, relationship satisfaction was related to a match on self-schema. When one or more matches was found between couples, satisfaction increased. But this was found to occur only when the data were dichotomized into matches v. no matches. This hypothesis demonstrates that men and women are more satisfied with their relationships when their partners are similar on even one important schematic trait compared to no matches. This finding suggests that Byrne's (1971) law of attraction also influences relationship satisfaction. These results also indicate that some degree of similar self-schemata is important to the satisfaction of both male and female participants.

Hypothesis two proposed that when male and female participants ideal-partner ratings closely matched their partner's actual schema, relationship satisfaction would increase significantly. For men, having a partner who rated herself as similar to his ideal partner was related to relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction increased when one or more matches occurred, with and without dichotomization of the data. For women, there was no relationship between the degree of match of ideal partner and actual partner's rating as correlated with women's satisfaction. This suggests an interesting relationship
between gender and the importance of the match between ideal partner schema and actual partner self-schema to relationship satisfaction. Previous attraction literature has found the ideal partner important to both sexes in attraction (LaPrelle, Holye, Insko & Bernthal, 1990; LaPrelle, Insko & Graetz, 1991; Wetzel & Insko, 1982). It is interesting to note this did not carry over to both sexes in the maintenance stage. Since female participants unexpectedly did not find information about the match of their partner to their ideal partner important to relationship satisfaction, other gender related factors may be influencing this outcome.

For hypothesis three, the correlation between women's satisfaction scores and schema match was predicted to be significantly higher than men's, indicating a greater importance of similarity in relationships to women than to men. The correlation between the number of matches was not significant for either women or men. As data were dichotomized, gender differences could not be compared directly. Yet it should be considered that male participants demonstrated a stronger omega squared than women regarding the effects of no match v. one or more schema matches on relationship satisfaction. This indicates the strength of association may be larger for men than for women, a finding that is contrary to what was hypothesized.

The first hypothesis is based on the idea that if
contribute to the understanding of both hypotheses two and
reinforce previous work. One potential theory which
was only supported in male partners and thus did not
degree of partner matching and satisfaction. This hypothesis
ideal partner schema, as well as the correlation between the
hypotheses two examined the relation between actual and
Hypotheses two examined the relation between actual and
those in long term non-marital relationships.

to determine whether these effects differ between married and
role in on-going relationships, further research is required.
supports Byrne’s work. While similarity does seem to play a
relationship satisfaction and schemata. The current study
be due to methodological differences in measures of
research contradicts Byrne et al.’s findings. This could
sample in the current study were unmarried (n=52 pairs), this
levels, introducing unmarried couples. Since most of the
has suggested that similarity influences satisfaction at all
(1987). Byrne (1988) and others have suggested that effects are marital, but
relationships and satisfaction. The current study
another study suggested this effect in married couples (N=752).
these effects from an information processing perspective.
previous research examined similarity of attitude and
personality on relationship satisfaction (Byrne, 1987; Levent
then they should be more satisfied with their relationships.
couples process information similarly using similar schemata,

three is Fower's (1991) study, which supports that married men are somewhat more satisfied with their relationships than women are. While this probably accounts for some of the variance in the married couples in this study, it is unknown as to whether this influences unmarried couples. The factors that Fower reports as contributing to men's greater satisfaction involve degree of task sharing and inequity of power. Such factors should logically exist within non-married relationships and thus this research could be extended to the non-married long term relationship population. Future research could explore the gender difference of ideal partner similarity to relationship satisfaction further by replicating this study or exploring gender differences in a similar manner.

The results for hypothesis three were surprising, particularly in relation to previous studies. Even though no direct evidence of a relationship between similarity of schema and relationship satisfaction was found, males' correlations for hypothesis one were higher than females. While not significant, these results indicated a trend that went against what was expected. Previous research has shown that women are more likely than men to be attracted to and enjoy working with men on the basis of attitude similarity (Stroebe et al., 1971). Vinacke et al. (1987) found that, within couples who were compared on the basis of personality
and relationship satisfaction, women who were similar to their partner were significantly more satisfied than those who were not. There were no differences for men due to similarity. It is possible that the discrepancy between past research and the current results is due to a difference in theoretical approaches to similarity.

An alternative explanation is suggested by research examining gender differences in ability to decode nonverbal behavior. Studies support that unless a person has a developed conscious schema for assimilating information, he or she is unable to report nonverbal knowledge that they have acquired (Epstein, 1990). Since women are more skilled at decoding of nonverbal stimuli than are men (Costanzo & Archer, 1989), males who are more similar to their partners may have to do less guessing about their partner's intentions. Thus, similarity could lead to greater relationship satisfaction among those less skilled at nonverbal decoding who have to do less guessing.

The current study has provided some interesting findings for social cognition, an area not traditionally associated with close relationship research. The correlations for similarity and ideal partner have supported the use of internal models (Bowlby, 1980; Kelly, 1970; Markus, 1977). Each one of these models demonstrates how individuals use constructs to define and interpret their social relationships
within the world. The use of such cognitive constructs was
further suggested in this study by the finding that for male
and female participants, similar constructs, like self-
schemata and ideal-partner, do affect satisfaction. Also,
males demonstrated that the more their ideal
partner schema matched their actual partner's schema, the
more satisfaction increased. This hypothesis again
demonstrates the influence of cognitive constructs on
satisfaction. These two findings also support Fong's and
Markus' (1982) work in the influence of self-schemata in the
perception of others.

Both attraction and close relationship research refer to
two distinct phases of relationships defined as attraction
(initiation) and maintenance (Bryne & Muren, 1988; Vinacke et
al., 1987). Both of these phases involve very different
concepts, as people within each phase seek different ends.
Those in attraction seek to narrow down and engage someone to
enter into a relationship. Those in maintenance work to keep
and improve an already existing relationship with their
partner. Of the two phases, it is the area of maintenance
that requires much more understanding and further research
(Bryne & Muren, 1988).

All in this study couples were together for at least 6
months and were considered to be in the maintenance phase.
Therefore, this study has succeeded in supporting that some
of the concepts of the attraction phase can be transferred to maintenance phase in relationships. Those concepts are the similarity-attraction hypothesis (Byrne, 1971), which suggests that we are attracted to those who are similar to us, and the ideal similarity hypothesis, which suggests we are attracted to those who are similar to our personal version of an ideal partner (La Pelle, et al., 1990; Mathes & Moore, 1985; Reik, 1957). Byrne and Muren (1988) maintain that while constructs crucial to attraction are also crucial to maintenance, these variables are not just repetitions of the attraction phase. In maintenance, similarity and ideal others no longer serve to help choose a partner, but to maintain satisfaction. Similarity maintains satisfaction by easing communication and increasing the validation of self (Coombs, 1966). Since very little research has been done regarding the effects of the ideal-other on maintenance, it can only be speculated that it maintains desirability by reinforcing the individual's values.

While previous attraction research has used trait comparisons (LaPelle, et al., 1990; LaPelle, et al., 1991; Mathes & Moore, 1985; Nias, 1977; Wetzel & Insko, 1982), this method does not directly measure the effects of how we process information, nor the effects of processing on relationship satisfaction. Due to our previous experience, some domains are more essential to processing information
relevant to our concept of self than others. While participants may have been similar on trait dimensions, it does not necessarily follow that they will be similar on traits that are essential to their own self-schemata. People possess complex schemata composed of many traits, but in some domains, people tend to be more "expert" than in others. That is, they possess intricate cognitive representations of areas with which they define themselves, which also influences perceptions of others (Crane & Markus, 1982; Fong and Markus, 1982; Markus et al., 1985; Markus & Smith, 1981). This study is different from previous attraction research in that it uses these essential domains to measure schemata. This distinction is important in separating the findings of this study from others which have replicated previous trait similarity and ideal partner research.

Although the hypotheses were partially supported by the data, on the average participants provided very few actual matches among the couples. For the first hypothesis, partners matched on trait ratings and essential scores on specific traits in 35 out 84 cases (41.7%). The top three most likely numbers of trait matches were one match (n=14), two matches (n=9), and three matches (n=4). In hypothesis two, when comparing female's self-schema with their male ideal partner, there were a total of 33 out of the 84 couples that had matches (39.3%). The top three most likely number
of trait matches were one match (n=13), two matches (n=6), and three matches (n=5). A dramatic difference is noted when looking at the male self-schema as compared to their female ideal partner. The total of trait matches for this comparison equaled 47 out of 84 couples (56%). The top three most likely number of trait matches were one match (n=22), three and four matches (n=6), two matches and (n=4). It is much more likely that the couples will match on only one trait than on more than one. Yet even such a few number of matches still correlates with greater satisfaction in participants than no matches. While the dichotomized data suggested the importance of similarity in long-term relationship satisfaction, it raises the question of how different degrees of similarity affect satisfaction.

Another unexpected aspect of this study was the need to dichotomize the data. While outliers are difficult to avoid in any study, there were some ways the low number of matches and skewed distributions could possibly be avoided in the future. In future research, it might help to ascertain that instructions were understood under the supervision of an experimenter, so any confusion regarding filling out forms could be avoided. Confusion over instructions could have contributed to the many numbers of incomplete returned measures. Much of the failure to get a larger sample is due in part to participants not fully completing forms, or one
member of the couple failing to fill out their form. These problems contributed to a smaller $n$, thus potentially affecting results by limiting the sample. Many who did not fully complete their forms failed to use the boxes given for marking traits as essential. Failure to mark essential boxes could be particularly significant, since when traits were scored for similarity without using essential scores, there were no significant relationships. When the marked essential boxes were scored without trait rating scores the results were significant. Thus, an increase in the use of the essential boxes may in turn increase the number of matches between couples in the first hypothesis and possibly in the second and third hypothesis.

Future research might include further examination of hypothesis three to determine if men really do find similarity more important to relationship satisfaction than women do and the process by which males use similarity. It also may prove interesting to separate married and long term couples to search for potential differences and similarities that have been indicated in other areas (Vinacke et al., 1987). For instance, the development of the ideal-partner between males and females may differ due to a function of amount of time spent with the partner, or with individual personal needs. Further research in the area of schemata is also warranted. In particular, exploration of the causal
implications of schemata in relationships needs to be examined (Lewicki, 1984).

Current results give an indication that there is a reason and need for continuing to explore the area of schemata and close relationships. Schemata have been shown to influence the satisfaction of males and females in long term relationships. This study has also contributed to the growing use of more practical methodology for relationship research (Kandel, 1978) such as using real couples instead of strangers in contrived laboratory relationships. The current research has also related long-term relationships to the already well explored area of attraction and extended the similarity and ideal-other research of this area into social cognition.
APPENDIX A

ID CODE____

Background Information
(All information is kept confidential)

Sex ___ Age___ Number of Months in Relationship___

Married___ Non-Married___ Cohabiting___

Homosexual___ Heterosexual___ Bisexual___

Race or Ethnic Group:
  Native American___ African-American___ Caucasian(White)___
  Asian___ Hispanic/Latino___ Other___

Annual Income:
  Under 15,000___ 15,001-25,000___ 25,001-35,000___
  35,001-45,000___ 45,001-55,000___ Over 55,001___

Instructions
(Please Read Carefully Before Beginning)

You are being asked to fill out the 3 following measures. One measure will be for relationship satisfaction, another for recording self-descriptions, and the last for recording what your ideal-partner is. The measures you are filling out will be used to study close relationships and relationship satisfaction. Each measure should be filled out quickly, using what answers come to mind first. Please do not share answers with your significant other or spouse. Doing so could harm the validity of your answers. This should take no more than 30 minutes of your time.

Upon finishing all 3 three measures, place them inside the provided envelope and seal it. To receive your extra credit, these envelopes should then be returned to the psychology department secretary, Nicole, in the physical sciences building at San Bernardino State University. Extra credit will be given out only if Both envelopes are returned. If you have any questions regarding the study call Dr. Cowan (909) 880-5575, PS112. The results of this study can be obtained by contacting Jim Rowley (909) 880-4000, after June.
APPENDIX B
Couples Study
Relationship Satisfaction Measure

The first measure is a relationship satisfaction questionnaire and requires that you answer seven questions. Each question has a scale measuring from 1 to 5. Please circle a number from 1-5 which indicates how you feel about each question, with 3 being average. Circle only one of these numbers and mark nothing between them.

1. How well does your partner meet your needs?
   Poorly  1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5  Extremely Well

2. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship?
   Unsatisfied  1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5  Extremely Satisfied

3. How good is your relationship compared to most?
   Poor  1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5  Excellent

4. How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?
   Never  1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5  Very Often

5. To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations?
   Hardly At All  1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5  Completely

6. How much do you love your partner?
   Not Much  1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5  Very Much

7. How many problems are there in your relationship?
   Very Few  1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5  Very Many
APPENDIX C

Couples Study
Self-Description Measure

For the self-description measure, you will fill out the forms marked with the 1-11 scale and the box on the right side. Rate how descriptive each of the traits is of you on the 1 to 11 scale. Circle only one number and leave all spaces between the numbers blank. Also, check the box on the right side only if this trait is essential to how you describe yourself. Please mark every trait, and work quickly, using what answers come to mind first.

If the trait intuitive is very descriptive of you, you would circle 11 on the scale. In this example the person felt that the trait intuitive was central to their self-description and marked the box on the right to signify this.

Does Not Describes Me Essential to Describe Me Self-Description

Intuitive

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

If the trait intuitive did not describe you at all, you would mark 1 on the scale. In the following example, the person did not feel that the trait, intuitive, was central to their self-description and did not mark the box.

Intuitive

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

If you described yourself as about as intuitive as the next or average person, you would mark a 6 or 7 accordingly.

Intuitive

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

Intuitive

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**Efficient**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

**Questioning**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

**Undisciplined**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

**Self-Conscious**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

**Orderly**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

**Persistent**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

**Dominant**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

**Thorough**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11
Self-Description Measure

Essential to Self-Description

Does Not Describe Me

Describes Me

Reflective

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

Literary

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

Forgetful

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

Unconventional

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

Hypersensitive

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

Philosophical

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

Broadminded

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

Firm

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# Self-Description Measure

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### Conventional

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APPENDIX D
Couples Study
Ideal-Partner Description

In this measure you will fill out the form just as you did the self-description measure except, you will use the adjectives to describe your ideal relationship partner. For instance, if you see the trait intellectual as being very descriptive of your ideal partner, you would circle 11 on the scale. If this trait is not at all descriptive of your ideal partner you would mark 1. If your ideal partner is of average intellect, you would mark 6 or 7 accordingly. If the trait intellectual was central to your conception of your ideal partner you would check the box on the right side.

Essential to Ideal-Partner

Does Not Describe Ideal-Partner

Describes Ideal-Partner

Intellectual

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Ideal-Partner Measure

Essential to Ideal-Partner

Does Not Describe Ideal-Partner

Describes Ideal-Partner

Reflective
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 Literary
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Forgetful
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

Unconventional
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

Hypersensitive
1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

Philosophical
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Broadminded
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Firm
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53
# Ideal-Partner Measure

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**Conventional**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

**Assertive**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

**Self-Confident**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11

**Worrying**

1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 - 6 - 7 - 8 - 9 - 10 - 11
APPENDIX E

Couples Study Consent Form
(Please Read Carefully)

The study in which you are about to participate is designed to examine satisfaction in close relationships. This study is being conducted by Jim Rowley under the supervision of Dr. Gloria Cowan. The study has been approved by the Human Subject Review Board, Department of Psychology, California State University, San Bernardino.

The purpose of this study is to examine information processing in close relationships and its effects on satisfaction among both partners in a relationship. In the study, you will be asked to fill out three questionnaires, and given another set that your significant other or spouse will also need to fill out. Both pairs of measures are identical, but it is important that neither of you compare or share answers, in order not to influence the other’s results. Doing so would defeat the purpose of the study, which is to obtain answers as empirically valid as possible. Please fill out the answers quickly, writing down what answer comes to mind first. The three questionnaires together should take a maximum of 30 minutes to complete. Two envelopes are attached, one for each set of questionnaires. After finishing, for purposes of anonymity, each person must put their questionnaires in separate envelopes and seal them. Only when both sets of the tests are returned, will you receive extra credit. At the conclusion of the study, you will receive a report of the results.

Please be assured that any information you provide will be held in strict confidence by the researcher. At no time will your name be reported along with your responses. All the data will be reported in group form only. To maintain anonymity, identity codes will be used instead of names.

Please understand that your participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during this study without penalty, and to remove any data at any time during this study. If you have any questions regarding the study or your rights as a participant please contact Dr. Gloria Cowan, PS112 (909) 880-5575.

I acknowledge that I have been dating and/or married to my current partner for at least six months prior to participating in this study. I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate.

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<table>
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Coupled Study
Debriefing Form

This study was designed to examine how couples process information differently and how this affects their satisfaction in relationships. This was done by taking the results of the measures you filled out and correlating them with each other. One of the main aspects of this study examines what are called self-schema. A self-schema, or self-concept, is built from our past experiences. We all use self-schemas to select, interpret, and recall information about specific subjects, which relate to the self. The other variable in the study was relationship satisfaction as measured by the questionnaire you filled out. We wanted to see if couples with similar self-schemas are more satisfied with their relationships than those with less similar self-schema. We also looked at people's ideal-partner schema, which is just like the self-schema except it applies to your conception of the ideal partner. We wanted to see if those who had a current partner who closely matched their ideal partner schema were more satisfied in their relationship than those with a partner who did not match the ideal partner schema closely.

Since I am still collecting data for this experiment and will be for a while, I would appreciate that you not discuss the nature of this test with anyone who has not already participated in the experiment. If you do discuss the test with others who may take the test, it may bias them and make test results invalid, thus biasing the entire study.

If you are interested in the results or have any questions contact Dr. Gloria Cowan (909) 880-5575 (California State University, San Bernardino, PS 112). Results should be available by this June.
REFERENCES


