Perceived Similarity in Personality, Ideologies Predicts Relationship Satisfaction Across Sexual Orientation Spectrum

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Research consistently demonstrates that dyads with more perceived/actual similarities in personality traits and life goals tend to report higher relationship satisfaction. However, past studies typically focus on current, heterosexual couples, and both partners' responses. We investigated self-reported similarities to a current or past partner across the sexual orientation spectrum. Over 450 U.S. American participants from three samples completed the online survey, including: 1) university faculty, staff, and students, 2) Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers, and 3) a college student sample. Greater perceived personality and ideology similarities predicted more relationship satisfaction; however, unique variations across samples also existed. Relationship counselors may benefit by noting perceived as well as actual similarities, given that perceived similarities tend to be the stronger satisfaction predictor.

Statement of Relevance

The literature generally indicates that dyads with more perceived or actual similarities in personality, life goals, and religion report higher relationship satisfaction. However, past studies typically focus on current, heterosexual couples and both partners' responses. Different than past studies, we investigated self-reports of being more similar to a current *or past* relationship partner would show greater relationship satisfaction. We included three diverse and representative samples from myriad age groups, sexual orientations, ethnic groups, and locations.

Degree of Perceived Similarity in Personalities and Ideologies Predicts Relationship Satisfaction for Couples Across the Sexual Orientation Spectrum

Ward et al. (2009) defined relationship satisfaction as being content with the experiences and interactions in a relationship. Previous research overwhelmingly has indicated a small to moderate, positive correlation between relationship satisfaction and similarities in personality traits, life goals, and ideological beliefs like religion (e.g., Becker, 2013; Gaunt, 2006; Montoya et al., 2008). Across three studies, we sought to add to the relationship satisfaction literature by analyzing perceived similarities in partners in personality (in terms of the Big Five personality traits) and ideologies (e.g., views on religion, politics, children, hobbies, career goals, and spending money) with more diverse samples than has been used in past studies.

Do Similarities or Opposites Attract and Sustain?

The *law of attraction* or *similarity-attraction effect* (Byrne & Rhamey, 1965; Byrne, 1971; Byrne, 1997) stated the more similar the attitudes or practices are between two people, the stronger the initial attraction. Similarities in attitudes, emotional warmth, physical attractiveness, and demographic characteristics have all tended to play a role in initial attraction (Markey & Markey, 2007; Willerton, 2010). Thus, while the idea that "opposites attract" is commonly discussed in media and everyday life, research - both lab-based and applied – has tended to support that similarities attract.

Similarity is not only important in initial attraction but in relationship sustainability as well. Becker (2013) noted two processes that tend to increase similarities between relationship partners over time. First,

during selection and relationship deepening there tends to be a *selection process*, where dissimilar couples do not choose to stay together. Second, through the *alignment process*, couples grow increasingly similar over time if they were not so in the first place. Both processes tend to lead to a higher probability of homogamy in a long-term relationship with a partner who is more similar than different to one's self (Blackwell & Lichter, 2004).

Relationship Satisfaction and Personality
        While there are certainly more factors than just personality that account for relationship satisfaction, there can be no denying that personality plays an important role in relationship desirability (Sprecher & Regan, 2002) and overall relationship satisfaction (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Malouff et al., 2010), although not necessarily relationship dissolution (Le et al., 2010). Many models of personality exist, but the Five-Factor Model, often called the Big Five or OCEAN model (McCrae & Costa, 1987), is perhaps the model most commonly used to describe personality aspects. The five factors are openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness, and neuroticism. The connections between the Big Five personality traits and relationship satisfaction have been studied by a number of researchers and with varying methods. One kind of analysis considers personality characteristics of the actor as possible predictors of relationship satisfaction cross-sectionally. For example, Becker (2013) showed that the trait neuroticism (high scores in emotional autonomy) had a strong positive correlation with relationship satisfaction. Generally, a high score in emotional autonomy (component of neuroticism) positively correlated with relationship stability, and high scores on irritability and social inhibition (components of agreeableness) negatively correlated with stability. Malouff et al. (2010) performed a meta-analysis of the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and satisfaction in long-term relationships. Low neuroticism and high agreeableness, extroversion, and conscientiousness tended to correlate with high relationship satisfaction — most likely due to conflict resolution behaviors attached to the desirable personality traits. Neyer and Voigt (2004) predicted relationship satisfaction from both the respondent's personality traits and their partner's traits. They found several significant *actor effects*, specifically that one's own agreeableness and conscientiousness (controlling for partner's personality) were significant satisfaction predictors. They also found several significant *partner effects*, where the partner's openness and

agreeableness (controlling for the actor's personality) also predicted satisfaction. Dyrenfroth et al. (2010) determined that actor and partner effects for Big Five personality traits were more highly predictive of satisfaction than compatibility in said traits. Taken together, numerous studies indicate that the Big Five personality traits contribute to relationship satisfaction.

A second approach to studying personality and relationship satisfaction is longitudinal rather than cross-sectional. Karney and Bradbury (1997) found that neuroticism at the beginning of a marriage negatively impacted initial marital satisfaction, particularly when there was a lack of realistic expectations. In a longitudinal study, they monitored 60 married heterosexual couples over the span of 4 years of marriage, beginning within the first few months of the marriage. Couples filled out questionnaires every six months during a required laboratory visit. Interaction behavior served as a mediator of the personality-satisfaction relationship. The measure of behavior consisted of coding in-person interactions during a conflict resolution activity in the laboratory, rating behaviors as negative if it involved criticizing one's partner and positive if the communication was non-evaluative and aimed toward compromise. These interactions contributed to changes in marital satisfaction over time but did not contribute predict initial satisfaction.

A third kind of approach to relationship satisfaction looks at match or similarity between the partners on personality traits, rather than looking at the absolute personality trait scores of the actor and/or partner. For example, Gaunt (2006) tested the effects of personality similarity on relationship satisfaction for married couples. Partners indicated attitudes, gendered personality, values, and religion, with the prediction that the more items the couple had in common, the higher level of satisfaction. Generally, the results consistently yielded a moderate, positive correlation between similarities and satisfaction, with the strongest correlations shown in the areas of personality and values. However, Malouf et al.'s (2010) meta-analysis showed no consistent pattern across studies between Big Five traits and relationship satisfaction, nor did a recent study of 312 married couples by Leikas et al. (2017).

In summary, the personality traits of relationship partners do seem to be predictive of relationship satisfaction. However, the impact

of personality trait similarities between partners on relationship satisfaction is less clear.

Relationship Satisfaction: Ideologies (Values, Goals, Politics, and Religion)

One of the biggest similarity indicators of relationship satisfaction in long-term relationships seems to be family-related values and goals, such as opinions about having children and gender roles in the home. Specifically, Becker's longitudinal study (2013) found positive correlations of both similar life goals and family related values with relationship satisfaction, indicating that similarity is more likely than dissimilarity to have positive influences on relationship satisfaction and stability. Gaunt (2006) found a similar pattern of results in a cross-sectional study. In addition to the aforementioned effect of similarity, Becker (2013) also suggested structured gender roles can have a negative impact on relationships. Men and women differed on how career focus impacted relationship satisfaction. For women, placing an important focus on their careers correlated with slightly more negative relationship satisfaction compared to those who focused more on the home; while men assuming traditional gender roles had a negative impact on their own satisfaction (Becker, 2013). In a study of married couples, Leikas et al. (2017) found that couples tended to be more satisfied when they were more similar in political attitudes and values. Finally, religion and spirituality appear to have some but not as large of an impact on satisfaction as other values (Becker, 2013; Brimhall & Butler, 2007; Gaunt, 2006). Blackwell and Lichter's (2004) *winnowing hypothesis* stated that people seek similarities with partners in initial dating relationships but partners continue to seek more similarity as relationships deepen (e.g., cohabitating and marriage). They found mixed support for this hypothesis in their own work in regards to partner similarities by education, religion, and ethnicity. In terms of religion, Catholics' likelihood ratios for selecting a Catholic as a partner were highest for marriage but lower for cohabitating than dating, Protestants rates stayed relatively similar across the deepening stages of relationship, and (as hypothesized) ratios for people from "Other" religions (non-Christian) were lowest for dating and highest for marriage. In contrast, George et al. (2015) found that similarity between partners for spirituality predicted married couples' satisfaction. Taken together, it

seems that similarity in values and life goals is often important for couples, although the overall impact of religion or spirituality similarity on relationship satisfaction is unclear.

Is Similarity in the Eye of the Beholder?

In both lab-based attraction studies and evaluation of ongoing relationships, while actual similarity between partners in a dyad is important, it may be less important than perceived similarity. For example, Selfhout et al. (2009) found that attraction between acquaintances was based more on the *perception* of similarity rather than true similarity in the dyad. Similarly, Neyer and Voigt (2004) found that actual similarities in personality largely did not relate to the quality of couples' romantic relationships, instead finding that the perceived quality of the relationship between partners indicated satisfaction better. A speed-dating paradigm found more attraction based on perceived rather than actual similarity on things like interests, religion, politics, and personality (Tidwell et al., 2013). These experimental findings are in agreement with ongoing relationship studies, including meta-analyses, where perception of similarity was a stronger predictor of relationship satisfaction than actual similarity (e.g., Becker, 2013; Brandstätter et al., 2018; Malouff et al, 2010; Montoya & Horton, 2013; Montoya et al., 2008; Weidmann et al., 2016).

The Current Study

A host of studies have provided evidence indicating a relationship between perceived or actual similarities between romantic partners and relationship satisfaction; however, it is unclear whether these results are present across all types and depths of romantic relationships, specifically for individuals who do not identify as heterosexual. In almost all of the primary literature examined in this paper thus far, the studies focused on heterosexual relationships (e.g., Becker, 2013; Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Gaunt, 2006; George et al., 2015; Leikas et al., 2017; Malouff et al., 2010; Neyer & Voight, 2004). Research that has included couples who do not identify as heterosexual have tended to focus on sexual minority status/stress, internalized homophobia, or degree of out-ness (e.g., Barrantes et al., 2017; Gonçalves et al., 2019; Noble & Linville, 2012; Otis et al., 2006). Additionally, studies involving the Big Five personality traits and same-sex couples' satisfaction seem to be almost non-existent (e.g., Clausell

& Roisman, 2009). The current study addressed this limitation in the research by examining satisfaction and similarities for partners who identified from myriad sexual orientations.

Moreover, previous studies tended to focus on the aspect of children and building a family when asking questions about life goals or ideologies (e.g., Becker, 2013; Gaunt, 2006). However, other important life goals and values exist, including education, focus on careers, money, and hobbies. Although some studies mentioned similarity of religion or lack thereof (Gaunt, 2006; George et al., 2015), overall, the relationship between religious or spiritual similarities and relationship satisfaction is inconclusive. Thus, the current study examined life goals and values in addition to 'family' goals and how they relate to relationship satisfaction.

Given this past research, we hypothesized that there would be a positive association between degree of perceived match in personality traits and relationship satisfaction with a current or past partner. We also hypothesized that relationship satisfaction ratings would be higher when participants perceived matched with a partner in ideologies (hobbies, career, having children, spending money, politics, and religion).

Study 1 - University-Based General Sample
Method

Participants

The final survey was a convenience sample (N = 134) recruited through Facebook, targeted emails, and university email lists in Fall 2018. This university-based sample included 60 student respondents, 46 staff, and 28 faculty. Nearly all the participants indicated some form of higher education, with 2% (n = 3) completing high school, 39% (n = 52) completing some college or currently enrolled, 23% (n =31) completing an associate's or bachelor's degree, 21% (n =29) completing a master's degree, 13% (n = 18) completing a doctoral degree, and less than 2% indicating another response or not replying. The average age was 34.16 years (SD = 13.79) with 82% identifying as female (n = 111), 17% male (n = 23), and one Female-to-Male transgender individual. The vast majority (93%) indicated their ethnicity as European/Caucasian American/White (n = 127), with much smaller numbers of African/African American (n = 1), Asian/Asian American (n = 2), Hispanic or Latin(x) American (n = 1), biracial/multiracial (n = 3) and "Other" (n = 1) participants.

In regards to relationship-relevant characteristics, 87% of these respondents identified as heterosexual (*n* = 117), with 13% identifying as a sexual orientation minority, including bisexual (*n* = 14), pansexual (*n* = 3), and homosexual/gay/lesbian (*n* = 1). Most respondents evaluated current relationships (86%, *n* = 116), while 14% (*n* = 19) reflected on a past relationship. Relationship status included married (47%, *n* = 64), engaged (6%, *n* = 8), dating 5+ years (4%, *n* = 6), dating 3-5 years (7%, *n* = 9), dating 1-3 years (27%, *n* = 20), and dating less than a year (16%, *n* = 21).

Measures

      Relationship satisfaction. We adapted our 12-item relationship satisfaction scale in part from an internet survey (loveisrespect.org, n.d.); we averaged items into a total satisfaction score, with a higher score indicating greater satisfaction with a current or past partner. For example, two of the items on the relationship satisfaction scale were: "My partner meets(met) all of my emotional needs", and "I trust(ed) my partner." The 5-point, Likert-rated scale asked participants to rate their overall agreement, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). All items were positively worded. The relationship satisfaction inventory was highly reliable (α = .899).

      Personality traits. We self-created 10 items based on the Big Five personality trait descriptions in the literature, with two items for each Big Five trait. For each item, participants indicated whether it was like themselves but not their partner, like their partner but not themselves, like both themselves and their partner, or like neither themselves nor their partner. We coded their responses as a match or non-match and tallied the number of items (out of 10) the couple matched on for personality traits, with possible scores being 0-10 (converting a series of nominal responses into a ratio variable). Thus, a higher number indicated greater similarity in personality traits.

      Ideologies. For ideologies, we asked participants whether they were similar (yes, yes and no, no) with their partner on hobbies, career goals, whether or not to have children, religion, political issues, and how to spend money.

      Demographics. Participants indicated their relationship status (current or past), age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, highest education level, partner's gender, relationship length, campus role, and their primary campus (one of three possibilities).

Procedure

After approval by the institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB), research team members administered the survey electronically by posting the link to their Facebook accounts, emailing colleagues at the university, and publicizing the study on university email lists. On Qualtrics, we restricted participation for individuals under the age of 18 or those who were not part of the university community. After providing informed consent, all participants indicated their current relationship status. Participants who had never had a romantic relationship discontinued. If participants were not currently in a relationship, they reflected upon their longest past relationship. Constructs were presented in the following order: perceived personality matches, ideologies (life goals, religion, politics, hobbies, money); individual relationship satisfaction; and demographic information. Upon submitting the survey, a debriefing form thanked participants and provided the website on healthy relationships from which some of the relationship satisfaction questions were adapted. Respondents were entered into a drawing for one of three $50 gift certificates rather than being individually compensated for their responses, which took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Results

Personality

For descriptive data, please see Table 1 (See the Appendix of Tables and Figures). We hypothesized that greater perceived similarities between self and partner across Big Five personality traits would relate positively to relationship satisfaction. As shown in Table 2, Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests for normality determined that our personality data were significantly different from normal. Figure 1 (See the Appendix of Tables and Figures) presents the relationship between relationship satisfaction and number of matches in personality; the spread of our data was heteroscedastic. Thus, we used a Spearman correlation, which showed, as hypothesized, that those with more similar perceived personality traits had higher relationship satisfaction, $r_s(133) = .344$, $p < .001$, a moderate effect.

Ideologies

We hypothesized that greater perceived similarities between self and partner across ideologies would relate to greater relationship satisfaction. We found that our satisfaction data were non-normal (by skew and kurtosis) across various ideologies. Given this and the small sample size, we analyzed the data with a non-parametric alternative to ANOVA between: Kruskal-Wallis *H*-tests, utilizing ε^2 for effect size (Tomczak & Tomczak, 2014). Relationship satisfaction was differentiated by perceived degree of similarity (do you and your partner agree: yes, yes and no, no) for preferences for hobbies, χ^2 (d.f. = 2, *N* = 135) = 13.18, *p* = .001, ε^2 = .08, moderate; career goals, χ^2 (d.f. = 2, *N* =135) = 13.97, *p* = .001, ε^2 = .09, moderate; having children, χ^2 (d.f. = 2, *N* = 135) = 13.57, *p* = .001, ε^2 = .09, moderate; how to spend money, χ^2 (d.f. = 2 , *N* = 135) = 25.34, *p* < .001, ε^2 = .18, large; religion χ^2 (d.f. = 2 , *N* = 135) = 12.76, *p* = .002, ε^2 = .08, moderate); and politics χ^2 (d.f. = 2 , *N* = 135) = 10.77, *p* = .005, ε^2 = .07, moderate).

Post-Hoc Testing: Pairwise Comparisons. To examine exactly which groups differed from each other, we used a series of Mann-Whitney *U*-tests with α = .05 and a Bonferroni correction for family-wise error, resulting in *p* < .016 being significant. Please see Figure 2 for median satisfaction scores by match category. In almost all cases (except career goals), the patterns were in the expected direction: People who matched were more satisfied than those who somewhat matched and those who did not match. However, not all pairwise comparisons were significantly different, and effect sizes were small to moderate. For hobbies, people who did not match their partner (*n* = 14) were less satisfied than people who did match (*n* = 69), *U* = 198.00, *Z* = -3.47, *p* = .001, *r* = -.38, and those who somewhat matched (*n* = 52), *U* = 209.00, *Z* = -2.43, *p* = .015, *r* = -.30, but those who matched and somewhat matched did not significantly differ, *U* = 1455.50, *Z* = -1.78, *p* = .08, *r* = -.17. For career goals, people who did not match their partner (*n* = 42) were less satisfied than people who did match (*n* = 55), *U* = 722.50, *Z* = -3.15, *p* = .002, *r* = -.32, and those who somewhat matched (*n* = 38), *U* = 455.50, *Z* = -3.30, *p* = .001, *r* = -.37, but those who matched and somewhat matched did not significantly differ, *U* = 960.00, *Z* = -0.67, *p* = .51, *r* = -.07. For having children, people who did not match their partner (*n* = 17) were less satisfied than people who did match (*n* = 100), *U* = 422.50, *Z* = -3.31, *p* = .001, *r* = -.31, but not those who somewhat matched (*n* = 18), *U* = 97, *Z* = -1.85, *p* = .07, *r* = -.31, and those who matched and somewhat matched also did not significantly differ, *U* = 642.50, *Z* = -1.93, *p* = .05, *r* = -

.18. For religion, people who did not match their partner (*n* = 23) were less satisfied than people who did match (*n* = 99), *U* = 607.50, *Z* = -3.48, *p* < .001, *r* = -.31, but not those who somewhat matched (*n* = 13), *U* = 88.00, *Z* = -2.03, *p* = .04, *r* = -.33, and those who matched and somewhat matched also did not significantly differ, *U* = 540.50, *Z* = -0.94, *p* = .35, *r* = -.09. For politics, people who did not match their partner (*n* = 16) were less satisfied than people who did match (*n* = 88), *U* = 348.00, *Z* = -3.21, *p* = .001, *r* = -.31, but not those who somewhat matched (*n* = 31), *U* = 154.00, *Z* = -2.11, *p* = .035, *r* = -.31, and those who matched and somewhat matched did not significantly differ, *U* = 1169.50, *Z* = -1.18, *p* = .23, *r* = -.11. For how to spend money, people who did not match their partner (*n* = 29) were less satisfied than people who did match (*n* = 60), *U* = 305.50, *Z* = -4.95, *p* < .001, *r* = -.52, and those who somewhat matched (*n* = 45), *U* = 378.00, *Z* = -3.04, *p* = .002, *r* = -.35, but those who matched and somewhat matched did not significantly differ, *U* = 1007.50, *Z* = -2.22, *p* = .026, *r* = -.22.

Discussion

A moderate, positive correlation was found between perceived personality similarities and satisfaction. Regarding ideologies as a whole, effect sizes tended to be small to medium except for how to spend money, where some effect sizes were large. Significant differences were found for those who perceived matches (versus not or somewhat) with their partner on hobbies, career goals, having children, religion, politics, and how to spend money. People who matched were more satisfied than people who did not match in all six outcomes, people who somewhat matched were more satisfied than those that did not match in three of six outcomes, and people who matched and somewhat matched did not significantly differ in satisfaction in all six outcomes.

Study 2 - Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) Sample

Given the significant findings from a university-based sample in Study 1, we wanted to see if we could replicate the findings in a more diverse, nationally representative sample.

Method

Participants

Our MTurk sample (*N* = 143) of U.S. American participants, collected Fall 2018, were similar in age to participants from Study 1, with an average age of 33.54 years (*SD* = 9.22). Gender ratios were more heavily male in this study (Female, 37%, *n* = 53; Male, 63%, *n* = 90). Participants reported a wider array of ethnic identities, although the sample was still primarily European/Caucasian American (76%, *n* = 108), with small percentages of African/African Americans (8%, *n* = 12), Asian/Asian Americans (6%, *n* = 8), Hispanic/Latin(x) Americans (6%, *n* = 8), Native Americans/First Peoples (2%, *n* = 3), Biracial/Multiracial respondents (3%, *n* = 4). This sample was more diverse in terms of education than the Study 1 sample, less than 1% (*n* = 1) had not completed high school, 13% (*n* = 19) completed high school or a GED, 4% (*n* = 6) had completed trade/technical school, 13% (*n* = 19) had completed some college or were currently enrolled, 10% (*n* = 14) had secured an associate's degree, 47% (*n* = 67) had graduated with a bachelor's degree, 10% (*n* =14) finished a master's degree, and 2% (*n* = 3) held a doctoral degree.

In regards to relationship-relevant demographic characteristics, 84% identified as heterosexual (*n* = 120), with 16% identifying as a sexual orientation minority, including bisexual (*n* = 16) and homosexual/gay/lesbian (*n* = 7). Most respondents evaluated current relationships (84%, *n* = 120), while 16% (*n* = 23) reflected on a past relationship. Relationship status included married (46%, *n* = 66), engaged (8%, *n* = 12), dating 5+ years (13.3%, *n* = 19), dating 3-5 years (8.4%, *n* = 12), dating 1-3 years (17.5%, *n* = 25), and dating less than a year (6%, *n* = 9).

Measures

The survey measures were identical to Study 1. The satisfaction measure was also highly reliable in this sample (⍺ = .925).

Procedure

We recruited this convenience sample through MTurk. Participants, who must have been in the United States of America, self-selected to complete the study. The MTurk community has historically requested about minimum wage or at least $0.10 per minute as a suggested fair wage (for

more on the ethical importance of crowdsourcing fair wage, please see Downs, 2018; Gleibs, 2017; Kwek, 2020). As the study was estimated to take 8-10 minutes to complete, each respondent was compensated $1.50, which equates roughly to at least $0.15 per minute or $9.00 per hour. After IRB approval, the participants completed the survey following the same procedure in Study 1.

Data Analysis

After looking for assumptions of normality, we used Spearman correlations to look at the correlation between relationship satisfaction and personality similarities. Because the data were not normally distributed and sample sizes were disparate, a series of Kruskal-Wallis *H*-tests with follow-up Mann-Whitney *U*-tests were used instead of ANOVA to look at satisfaction differences in ideologies when participants indicated they matched, somewhat matched, or did not match their partner.

Results

Personality

For descriptive data, please see Table 1. Figure 3 presents the relationship between average satisfaction and number of matches in personality. The data were heteroscedastic. As shown in Table 1, given that Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests for normality determined that our personality data were significantly different from normal, a Spearman correlation found, as hypothesized, that those with more similar perceived personality traits had higher relationship satisfaction, $r_s(141) = .424$, $p < .001$, a moderate effect (similar to Study 1).

Ideologies

We found that our data had abnormal skew and kurtosis across various ideologies. Similar to Study 1, relationship satisfaction was differentiated by perceived degree of similarity (do you match: yes, yes and no, no) for hobbies, χ^2 (d.f. = 2, N = 143) = 7.04, p = .03, ε^2 = .04, small; having children, χ^2 (d.f. = 2, N = 143) = 11.26, p = .004, ε^2 = .07, moderate; religion, χ^2 (d.f. = 2, N = 143) = 8.21, p = .017, ε^2 = .04, small; and how to spend money, χ^2 (d.f. = 2 , N = 143) = 20.95, p < .001, ε^2 = .13, large. Perceived match with partner on career goals, χ^2 (d.f. = 2, N =143) = 5.27, p = .072, ε^2 = .02, small; and politics, χ^2 (d.f. = 2 , N = 143) = 5.45, p = .066, ε^2 =

.02, small, were in the predicted direction and showed similar effect sizes as in Study 1 but did not significantly differentiate relationship satisfaction.

   Post-Hoc, Pairwise Comparisons. To examine exactly which groups differed from each other, we used a series of Mann-Whitney *U*-tests with α = .05 and a Bonferroni correction for family-wise error, resulting in *p* < .016 being significant. Please see Figure 4 for median satisfaction scores by match category. In almost all cases (except hobbies), the patterns were in the expected direction: People who matched were more satisfied than those who somewhat matched and those who did not match. However, not all pairwise comparisons were significantly different, and effect sizes were small to moderate. For hobbies, people who did not match their partner (*n* = 15) were less satisfied than people who did match (*n* = 77), *U* = 325.00, *Z* = -2.68, *p* = .007, *r* =-.28. However those who did not match or somewhat matched (*n* = 51) , *U* = 233.00, *Z* = -2.29, *p* = .022, *r* = -.28, and those who matched and somewhat matched did not significantly differ, *U* = 1948.00, *Z* = -0.08, *p* = .08, *r* = -.007. For having children, people who did not match their partner (*n* = 22) were less satisfied than people who did match (*n* = 108), *U* = 665.00, *Z* = -3.26, *p* = .001, *r* = -.29. However, those who did not match and those who somewhat matched (*n* = 13), *U* = 105, *Z* = -1.30, *p* = .19, *r* = -.22 were not significantly different. Those who matched or somewhat matched were significantly different, *U* = 559.50, *Z* = -1.20, *p* = .23, *r* = -.11. For religion, people who did not match their partner (*n* = 31) were less satisfied than people who did match (*n* = 97), *U* = 1002.00, *Z* = -2.80, *p* = .005, *r* = -.25, but not those who somewhat matched (*n* = 15), *U* = 214.00, *Z* = -0.43, *p* = .66, *r* = -.06. Also, those who matched and somewhat matched did not significantly differ, *U* = 585.00, *Z* = -1.22, *p* = .22, *r* = -.12. For how to spend money, people who did not match their partner (*n* = 30) were less satisfied than people who did match (*n* = 87), *U* = 606.00, *Z* = -4.37, *p* < .001, *r* = -.40, but not those who somewhat matched (*n* = 26), *U* = 291.00, *Z* = -1.63, *p* = .10, *r* = -.22. Also, those who matched and somewhat matched did not significantly differ, *U* = 792.50, *Z* = -2.32, *p* = .02, *r* = -.22.

Discussion

   In Study 2, we partially replicated the findings of Study 1. A moderate, positive correlation was found between perceived personality similarities and satisfaction. Significant differences were found for those who perceived matches (versus not or somewhat) with their partner on hobbies, having children, religion, and how to spend money, but not career

goals and politics. Matches with partner (versus not or somewhat) tended, overall, to have small to moderate effects in the predicted direction, although not all of these comparisons were significant due to small sample size.

Study 3 - University College Students

Given our hypotheses were fully supported with broader community samples in Study 1 and mostly supported in Study 2, we wondered if the findings would replicate for a young adult, more ethnically diverse population as represented by college-aged students in the U.S.A. Southeastern region.

Method

Participants

Utilizing a psychology research pool after receiving IRB approval, we recruited undergraduate students to reflect on a current or past romantic relationship (N = 179) in academic year 2018-2019, indicating their relationship satisfaction and perceived partner similarities. Given this was solely a college student sample, this group had a lower mean age of participants than the community-based samples in Study 1 and 2. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 45 (M = 19.91, SD = 3.22), including African Americans (22.9%, n = 41), Asians (1.7%, n = 3), Latinx Americans (5%, n = 9), White Americans (64.2%, n = 115), and biracial or multiracial individuals (6.1%, n = 11). Most (78.8%, n = 141) of our participants were female, with 20.1% (n = 37) male and 0.5% (n = 1) transgender. All the participants were currently enrolled at the university. Similar to Study 1 and Study 2, our participants were relatively more diverse in sexual orientation than samples from past research, identifying as heterosexual (84.8%, n = 156), bisexual (9.5%, n = 17), homosexual (1.1%, n = 2), asexual (1.1%, n = 2), and pansexual (1.1%, n = 2). Relationship status included married (2.7%, n = 5), engaged (1.6%, n = 3), dating 5+ years (3.3%, n = 6), dating 3-5 years (15.2%, n = 28), dating 1-3 years (34.2%, n = 63), and dating less than a year (40.2%, n = 74).

Measures

The survey measures were identical to Study 1 and 2. The internal consistency (KR-20) for the personality score of .47 is moderately reliable.

We determined that the six ideology questions did not display good internal consistency as one factor (α = .304). Thus, we ran an independent inferential statistic for each predictor as we had done in Study 1 and 2. The satisfaction measure was also highly reliable in this sample (α = .912).

Procedure

We recruited this convenience sample through the SONA research management program, providing participants who self-selected to complete the study course-based research credits for their university classes. After IRB approval, the participants completed the survey following the same procedure in Study 1.

Results

Personality

For descriptive data, please see Table 1. Figure 5 presents the relationship between average satisfaction and number of matches in personality. Given the personality data were homoscedastic and non-normal (see Table 1), we again utilized a Spearman correlation. As hypothesized, we found that those with more similar perceived personality traits had higher relationship satisfaction $r_s(177)$ = .303, $p < .001$, a moderate effect (similar to Study 1 and 2).

Ideologies

We hypothesized that greater perceived similarities between self and partner across ideologies would relate to greater relationship satisfaction. Like Study 1 and 2, we found that our data had abnormal skew and kurtosis across various ideologies. Using the Kruskal-Wallis H-test, relationship satisfaction was differentiated by perceived degree of similarity (do you match: yes, yes and no, no) for hobbies, χ^2 (d.f. = 2, N = 179) = 14.80, p = .001, ε^2 = .08, moderate; career goals, χ^2 (d.f. = 2, N = 179) = 18.90, $p < .001$, ε^2 = .10, moderate; having children, χ^2 (d.f. = 2, N = 179) = 20.51, $p < .001$, ε^2 = .11, moderate; and how to spend money, χ^2 (d.f. = 2 , N = 179) = 17.01, $p < .001$, ε^2 = .09, moderate. Perceived match levels with partner on religion χ^2 (d.f. = 2 , N = 179) = 2.32, p = .32, ε^2 = .002) and politics χ^2 (d.f. = 2 , N = 179) = 1.67, p = .43, ε^2 = -.002) did not predict relationship satisfaction.

Post-Hoc, Pairwise Comparisons. To examine exactly which groups differed from each other, we used a series of Mann-Whitney U-tests with α = .05 and a Bonferroni correction for family-wise error, resulting in $p < .016$ being significant. Please see Figure 6 for median satisfaction scores by match category. In almost all cases (except religion), the patterns were in the expected direction: People who matched were more satisfied than those who somewhat matched and those who did not match. However, not all pairwise comparisons were significantly different, and effect sizes were small to moderate. For hobbies, people who did not match their partner (n = 4) were less satisfied than people who did match (n = 113), U = 43.00, Z = -2.75, p = .006, r = -.23 and those who somewhat matched (n = 62) , U = 29.50, Z = -2.54, p = .011, r = -.31. Those who matched or somewhat matched also significantly differed, U = 2613.50, Z = -2.78, p = .005, r = -.21. For career goals, people who did not match their partner (n = 77) were less satisfied than people who did match (n = 56), U = 1262.50, Z = -4.08, $p <$ .001, r = -.35, or those who somewhat matched (n = 46), U = 1222.50, Z = -2.87, p = .004, r = -.26. Those who matched or somewhat matched did not significantly differ, U = 1105.00, Z = -1.23, p = .22, r = -.12. For having children, people who did not match their partner (n = 28) were less satisfied than people who did match (n = 133), U = 847.00, Z = -4.53, $p < .001$, r = -.36 or those who somewhat matched (n = 18), U = 130.50, Z = -2.74, p = .006, r = -.40. However, those who matched or somewhat matched were not significantly different, U = 1151.50, Z = -0.26, p = .79, r = -.02. For how to spend money, people who did not match their partner (n = 45) were less satisfied than people who did match (n = 90), U = 1177.50, Z = -3.96, $p <$ .001, r = -.34, or those who somewhat matched (n = 44), U = 619.00, Z = -3.05, p = .002, r = -.32. However, those who matched and somewhat matched did not significantly differ, U = 1801.50, Z = -0.85, p = .40, r = -.07.

Discussion

We partially replicated the findings of Study 1 and 2. A moderate, positive correlation was found between perceived personality similarities and satisfaction. Differences were found for those who perceived matches (versus not) with their partner on career goals, hobbies, how to spend money, and having children: Post-hoc tests found that partners who reported 'yes' in terms of perceived degree of similarity had significantly higher mean ranked satisfaction scores compared to those who reported

'no' across all significant ideology comparisons. However, differences were not found for religion and politics.

Overall Discussion

Prior research about whether similarity or complementarity in terms of personality traits, attitudes, and ideologies predict greater relationship satisfaction has primarily focused on the each relationship partners' ratings for the items. However, based on past research, one could argue that perception of the characteristics of one's relationship partner (and perception of whether those traits match one's own) may be more important than the actual traits scores (e.g., Becker, 2013; Brandstätter et al., 2018; Malouff et al, 2010; Montoya & Horton, 2013; Montoya et al., 2008; Weidmann et al., 2016). The current series of studies focused on how relationship satisfaction related to the perception of match with a relationship partner in terms of personality traits, attitudes, and ideologies. In addition, the current work was more inclusive than prior work of people from various age groups, sexual orientations, geographic locations, and ethic groups.

A number of consistent results existed across the three studies that fully or mostly supported our hypotheses. In all cases, participants who perceived that they had more personality traits that were similar to their romantic partner also reported higher relationship satisfaction. Participants who reported that they matched their relationship partner in terms of hobbies, as compared to not matching, reported greater relationship satisfaction (though which conditions were significantly different from the "somewhat match" condition differed across studies). Finally, participants who reported not matching their partner in terms of desire for having children or how to spend money also reported significantly lower relationship satisfaction than those who did match (though whether the "somewhat match" category was significantly different from the do not match category differed across studies). The results align with past studies which found positive correlations between high relationship satisfaction and degree of perceived or actual similarities in couple personality traits, life goals, and values (e.g., Becker, 2013; Gaunt, 2006; Neyer & Voigt, 2004; Selfhout et al., 2009).

At the same time, some inconsistencies across the three studies also existed for hypothesized predictors of relationship satisfaction. While career goal similarities predicted satisfaction in a university-community sample and

college student sample, the results were small but non-significant in the U.S. American MTurk sample. The non-significant results for the U.S. American MTurk sample could be due to the greater percentage of males in that sample. The gender breakdown differed across our three studies: university-community sample (female, 82%; male, 17%), college student sample (female, 78.8%; male, 20.1%), and U.S. American MTurk sample (female, 37%; male 63%). Previous research showed that career goal similarity was positively associated with women's relationship satisfaction, but that there was no relationship between career goal similarity and relationship satisfaction for men (Arránz Becker, 2013). Second, matching on politics was predictive of relationship satisfaction in the university community sample, small but non-significant in the MTurk sample, and non-predictive in the college student sample. Third, matching on religion was related to satisfaction in the university-community and MTurk samples but did not differentiate satisfaction in the college student sample. It may be that religion and political differences are less salient to the young adults on a college campus in more transitory relationships than to our more widely representative samples in Study 1 and Study 2, which included a greater percentage of older adults (who were also more likely to be in marriage rather than dating relationships). The young adults in Study 3 were much less likely to be married (2.7%) than the participants in Study 1 (47%) and Study 2 (46%). For example, in regards to religion, utilizing data from the 2006 Portraits of American Life study, Perry (2015) reviewed how partners who were more similar religiously tended to be happier within marriage. At the same time, his research on the influence of religion as a pre-marital sorting mechanism was more complicated.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the major limitations we must recognize with our cross-sectional research like ours is that correlation is not causation. One could easily start by assuming that perceived similarity leads to relationship satisfaction, but it may well work the other way around, and more likely, the effects may be reciprocal or demonstrate circular rather than linear causality. For example, Morry and colleagues supported the attraction-similarity hypothesis in both correlational and priming studies, finding that satisfaction impacted the perception of similarity between friends (Morry, 2005) and dating couples (Morry et al., 2011).

Regarding methodology, although the internal consistency of our measure of our self-created relationship satisfaction measure was strong in each study, some researchers may prefer a more standardized and validated measure of relationship satisfaction, such as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) or the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988). Similarly, the way we counted up to 10 matches (or non-matches) in Big Five personality trait descriptions may resonate well with some personality researchers but not others. Future studies could utilize previously established measures of personality - such as the Big Five Inventory-2 (BFI-2; Soto & John, 2017), the NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 2020), or the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Johnson, 2019).

One potential confound - and interesting future direction - that could come from our work is that we allowed participants to reflect on either a current or past relationship. To the best of our knowledge, most relationship satisfaction studies had participants rate satisfaction in a current/ongoing relationship, rather than being retrospective. How might reflection on a past relationship affect their ratings? Finn et al. (2020) proposed and found support for an *accumulating distress model*, which indicated that the dissimilarities in couples who are dissolving partnerships have higher base dissimilarities that also expand rapidly. We might expect that both similarity and relationship satisfaction ratings would decrease after relationship dissolution or divorce, perhaps particularly if the ending was unwanted by the reporting partner.

Although our study is an improvement of past work by including people across the sexual orientation spectrum, we recognize that only 13-16% of our participants across the three samples identified as a category other than heterosexual. In a 2017 review, Lavner called for the need for research to address a wider understanding of the predictors of relationship satisfaction in same-sex couples, which was echoed by others (e.g., Diamond & Blair, 2018; Clausell & Roisman, 2009). Sparse previous work has focused on the association between personality factors and relationship satisfaction in same-sex relationships. For example, Eldridge and Gilbert (1990) found that relationship satisfaction, as measured by Spanier's Dyadic Adjustment Scale (1976), was negatively associated with mismatching on commitment to one's career for lesbian relationships. In Lavner's (2017) review, a number of types of factors related to relationship satisfaction that have been studied in lesbian relationships, and there were only three

personal characteristics in the review: attachment (Mohr et al., 2013), differentiation of the self (Spencer & Brown, 2007), and neuroticism (Goldberg & Sayer, 2006; where it should be noted that the effect of neuroticism was on love, not relationship satisfaction). Thus, we hope future research continues to examine the correlates of relationship satisfaction in LGBTQIA+ relationships.

Although we thought it important to analyze each sample separately, a future approach that could be taken with these data is to combine the three studies into one data set, increasing overall sample size and power, and thus allowing the opportunity to look at demographic and personal factors as possible predictors of satisfaction in more robust regression or ANOVA analyses. Rather than speculating about the influence of these factors post-hoc, we would be able to address some of the speculations we raised above about reasons for potential differences that existed in some results across the set of studies (e.g., age, gender, type of relationship, education levels).

Conclusion

As a whole, our study generally upheld the "birds of a feather" prediction (instead of "opposites attract") for three very divergent samples of individuals, which included participants in current or past romantic relationships from many ethnic groups, with varying ages and relationship depths, and across the sexual orientation spectrum. Researchers would benefit from continuing to look for potential predictors of relationship satisfaction, including ideology and personality matches, from individuals in the LGBTQIA+ community; long-standing patterns of predictors that work for heterosexual couples may or may not generalize to same-sex couples. Couples and family therapists who work with any couple—same sex or not—may want to attend to perceived dyadic dissimilarities rather than or in addition to actual dissimilarities in ideology and personality as potential risk factors for divorce, relationship dissolution, or struggles during couples therapy.

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Appendix of Tables and Figures

Table 1
Descriptive Data for Personality Matches and Satisfaction

Study	*M (SD)*	*Mdn*	Range	Cronbach's ⍺
Study 1				
Personality Matches	6.97 (1.91)	7.00	9.00	--
Satisfaction	4.17 (0.84)	4.45	4.00	.899
Study 2				
Personality Matches	6.38 (2.24)	7.00	10.00	--
Satisfaction	4.16 (0.71)	4.25	3.50	.925
Study 3				
Personality Matches	7.15 (1.79)	7.00	10.00	--
Satisfaction	4.12 (0.74)	4.33	3.92	.912

Table 2
Kolmogorov-Smirnoff Tests for Normality in Total Matches in Personality Traits

Study	Skewness	Kurtosis	Kolmogorov-Smirnoff (*K-S*)	*p*
Study 1	-3.06	1.32	.143	< .001
Study 2	-1.97	-0.69	.126	< .001
Study 3	-3.04	-1.54	.126	< .001

Note. Data are considered substantially skewed or kurtototic when they are beyond +3.29 (Tabachnik & Fiddel, 2007).

Figure 1

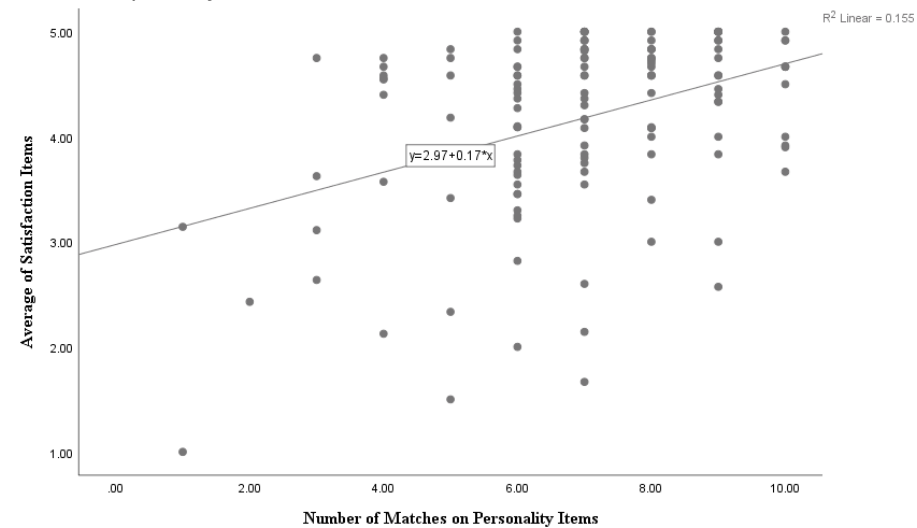*Study 1: Association Between Number of Matches on Personality Items and Relationship Satisfaction*

R² Linear = 0.155

y=2.97+0.17*x

Average of Satisfaction Items

Number of Matches on Personality Items

Figure 2

Study 1: Median Relationship Satisfaction Scores by Degree of Ideology Match

Median Relationship Satisfaction Score
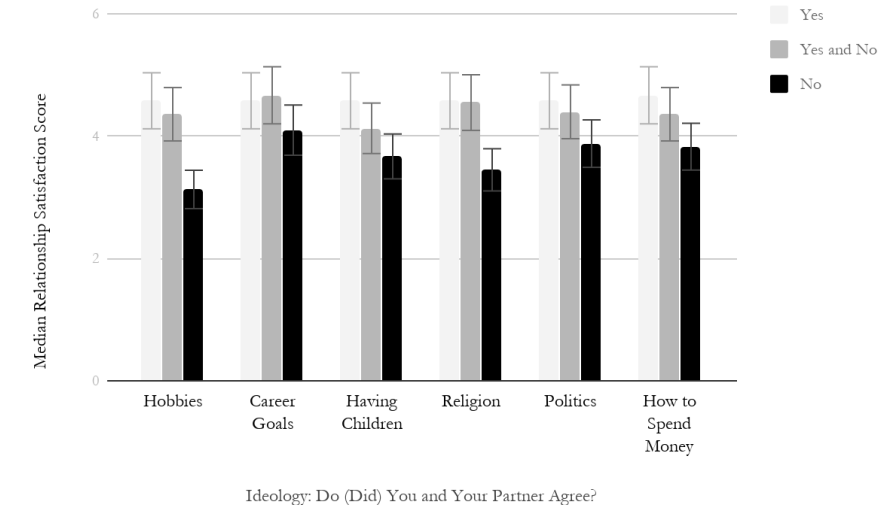
Yes
Yes and No
No

Hobbies · Career Goals · Having Children · Religion · Politics · How to Spend Money

Ideology: Do (Did) You and Your Partner Agree?

Figure 3

Study 2: Association Between Number of Matches on Personality Items and Relationship Satisfaction
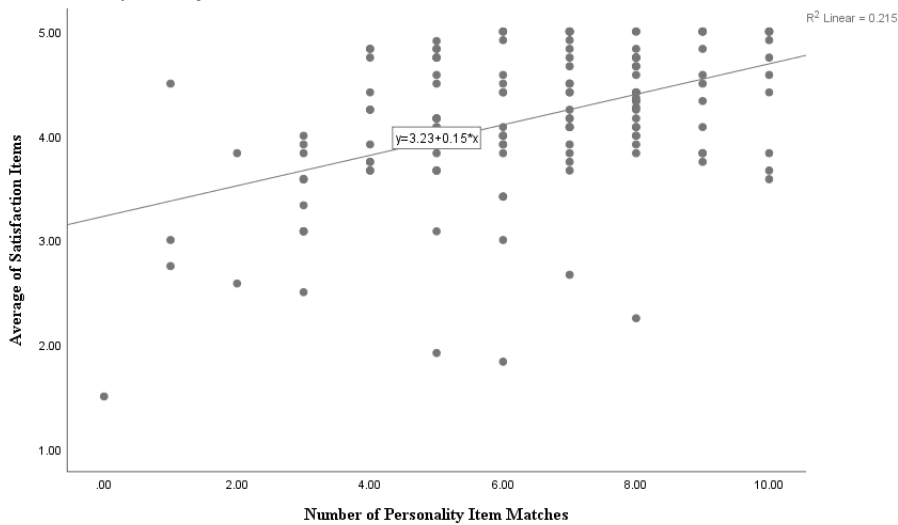

Figure 4

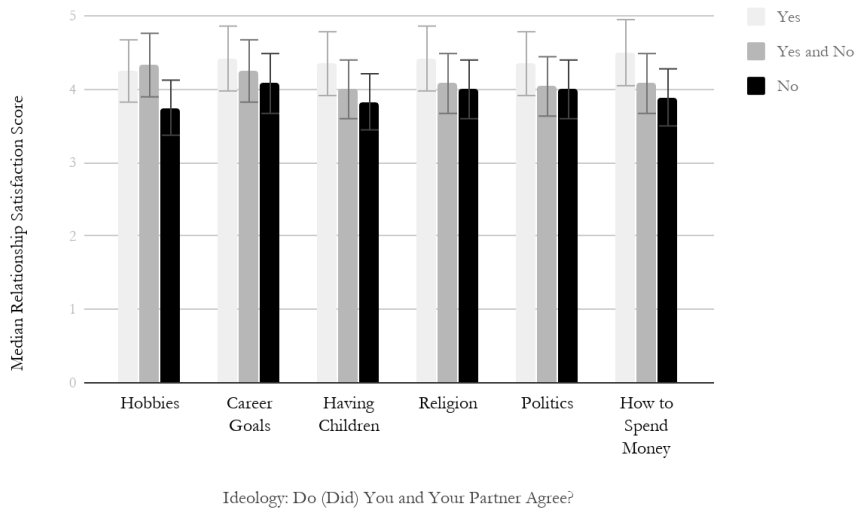*Study 2: Median Relationship Satisfaction Scores by Degree of Ideology Match*

Figure 5

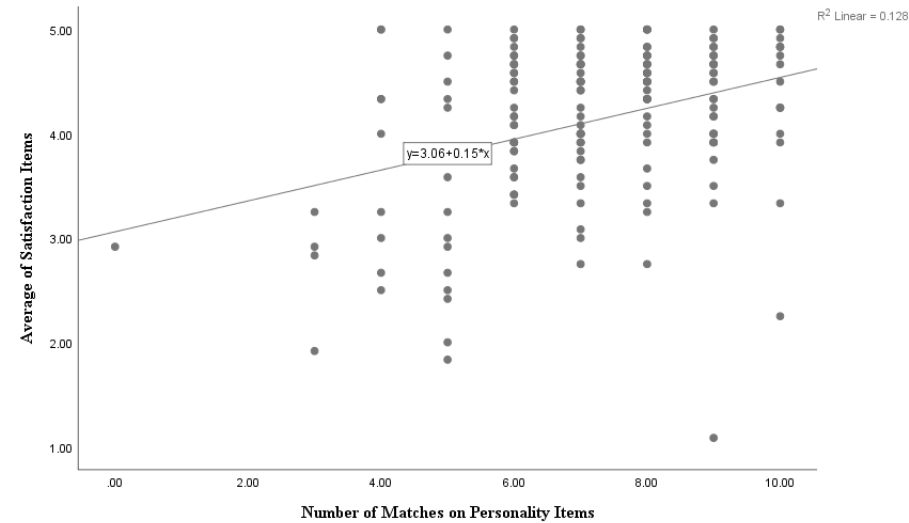*Study 3: Association Between Number of Matches on Personality Items and Relationship Satisfaction*

Figure 6

Study 3: Median Relationship Satisfaction Scores by Degree of Ideology Match