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Birds of a Feather Don't Always Fly Farthest: Similarity in Big Five Personality Predicts More Negative Marital Satisfaction Trajectories in Long-Term Marriages

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Decades of research suggest that similarity in demographics, values, activities, and attitudes predicts higher marital satisfaction. The present study examined the relationship between similarity in Big Five personality factors and initial levels and 12-year trajectories of marital satisfaction in long-term couples, who were in their 40s and 60s at the beginning of the study. Across the entire sample, greater overall personality similarity predicted more negative slopes in marital satisfaction trajectories. In addition, spousal similarity on Conscientiousness and Extraversion more strongly predicted negative marital satisfaction outcomes among the midlife sample than among the older sample. Results are discussed in terms of the different life tasks faced by young, midlife, and older adults, and the implications of these tasks for the "ingredients" of marital satisfaction.

Keywords: aging, Big Five, marital satisfaction, personality

"Birds of a feather flock together." This proverb has reached the status of dogma in research on romantic attraction and marital satisfaction, and with good reason. Studies have repeatedly found that similarity between romantic partners in domains such as socioeconomic status, educational background, age, ethnicity, religion, physical attractiveness, intelligence, attitudes, and values predicts higher levels of marital satisfaction and lower likelihood of separation and divorce (e.g., Berscheid, Dion, Hatfield, & Walster, 1971; Bouchard & McGue, 1981; Buss, 1985; Feingold, 1988; Sprecher & Duck, 1994; Tan & Singh, 1995; Vandenberg, 1972; White, 1980).

But does similarity in the personalities of romantic partners predict greater relationship satisfaction? The alternative to the similarity hypothesis, the *complementarity hypothesis*, proposes that partners may be more satisfied when they differ on certain personality variables rather than when they match. Some studies of interacting strangers do support the complementarity hypothesis. For example, Schimel, Pyszczinski, Greenberg, O'Mahen, & Arndt (2000) found that participants were more likely to distance themselves from confederates who displayed behavior matching their own supposed negative traits (as manipulated in experimenter feedback) than from confederates displaying an alternative negative trait. Dryer and Horowitz (1997) found that participants reported greater liking of partners who complemented, rather than matched, their own level of dominance versus submission. However, these studies examined the effects of personality similarity versus complementarity on liking for strangers, not satisfaction with long-term relationships. Little is known about the latter issue. We do know that married couples are more similar in personality than would be expected from random pairings (Houts, Robins, & Huston, 1996; Merikangas, 1982), though only to a modest degree (Eysenck, 1990). As for satisfaction, remarkably few studies have assessed the link between personality similarity and relationship satisfaction, and those that did have typically used cross-sectional designs with participants in dating couples or young marriages. The relation between personality similarity and relationship satisfaction in marriages of longer duration and at different life stages is still unknown, as is the effect of personality similarity on the trajectories of marital satisfaction over time.

The present study examined the relation between personality similarity and initial levels and 12-year trajectories of marital satisfaction in both middle-aged and older couples. To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine this issue longitudinally and the first to explicitly consider age as a potential moderator of the link between similarity and satisfaction. Thus, we were able to evaluate the "birds of a feather flock together" hypothesis both for initial levels of relationship satisfaction and for predictions of marital satisfaction trajectories over time in both middle-aged and older couples.

Spouses' Personality and Marital Satisfaction

For approximately 20 years, the dominant model of personality used by researchers has been the Big Five (Costa & McCrae, 1985; 1992). Applied to the study of marriage, the standard paradigm has been to examine personality characteristics of each spouse in regards to marital satisfaction or other marital outcomes, rather than to examine similarities in or differences between spouses'

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personalities (see review by Karney & Bradbury, 1995). The most consistent finding to emerge from these studies is that high Neuroticism, or the frequent experience of negative emotion, in either or both partners is toxic for marriage. In a cross-sectional study, Gattis, Berns, Simpson, and Christensen (2004) found that spouses' Neuroticism was higher in distressed couples who sought counseling than in nondistressed couples. In a study of newlyweds, Karney and Bradbury (1997) found that both husbands' and wives' Neuroticism was associated with lower marital satisfaction. Longitudinal studies have also documented negative effects of Neuroticism on later marital outcomes. In a 40-year study, Kelly and Conley (1987) found that both husbands' and wives' Neuroticism at the beginning of the study predicted greater likelihood of divorce. Kelly & Conley (1987) found that of several personality and behavioral variables, Neuroticism measured at the beginning of the study was the strongest predictor of future marital dissatisfaction. Caughlin, Huston, and Houts (2000) reported a similar finding from a 13-year longitudinal study; each partner's trait anxiety at the beginning of the study predicted both their own and their spouse's subsequent marital dissatisfaction. A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies of marital satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) estimated that each partner's Neuroticism accounted for roughly 10% of variability in marital satisfaction at later time points.

Extraversion may also predict marital outcomes; however, findings on this have been less consistent. One cross-sectional study found that one spouse's Extraversion was associated with lower marital satisfaction in the other spouse (Lester, Haig, & Monello, 1989). A longitudinal study found that husbands' Extraversion at the beginning of the study was associated with increased likelihood of divorce (Kelly & Conley, 1987). However, in another cross-sectional study, no effect of Extraversion on marital satisfaction was found (Gattis et al., 2004).

The few studies that have examined Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience on marital satisfaction have generally concluded that these traits are beneficial (e.g., Botwin, Buss, & Shakelford, 1997; Gattis et al., 2004; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Kosek, 1996). Given that these are all considered to be positive qualities, these findings may simply mean that more socially desirable partners tend to have happier and more stable marriages. The Extraversion trends are less easily explained in this manner, because Extraversion is usually considered a desirable trait. One possibility is that highly Extraverted individuals are more likely to meet and develop relationships with potential alternative partners, posing a threat to the relationship with the spouse. The Neuroticism trends are most easily explained, with each spouse's high dispositional negative affect impairing both their own and their partner's ability to enjoy and benefit from the marriage.

Personality Similarity and Marital/Relationship Satisfaction

Finding that the personalities of individual spouses predict marital outcomes is not the same as saying that *similarity* of spouses' personalities predicts marital outcomes. Moreover, it is clearly the latter that is suggested by the "birds of a feather" proverb. The studies reviewed in the previous section all treat personality as an individual-level variable. In their proposed agenda for marital research in the 21st century, Gottman and Notarius (2002) call for increased attention to dyad-level predictors of marital outcomes. Similarity between spouses' personalities is such a dyad-level variable.

Few studies have explicitly examined the association between personality similarity and relationship satisfaction. Of these studies, some have found no evidence of an association. Glicksohn and Golan (2001) observed no effect of personality, assessed via the Sensation Seeking Scale (Zuckerman, 1979) and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985), on satisfaction in a sample of married couples aged 26–66 years. In a cross-sectional study of newlyweds, Watson and colleagues (2004) found no effect of similarity in any Big Five trait. Russell and Wells (1991) also observed no effect of personality similarity on satisfaction. Other studies have observed significant effects of personality similarity, however, and these generally suggest that similarity is good for relationships. In a cross-sectional study of college-age dating couples, Robins, Caspi, and Moffitt (2000) found that similarity in Neuroticism was associated with higher relationship satisfaction. In a cross-sectional study of young marriages (average duration of marriage approximately 10 years), Gattis and colleagues (2004) found that distressed married couples who sought counseling were significantly less similar on Agreeableness than were nondistressed couples. Using a couple-centered approach examining similarity across newlyweds' profiles of attitudes, Big Five personality, and attachment style, Luo and Klohnen (2005) found that similarity on both sets of personality variables (but not attitudes) was associated with greater satisfaction. In one study of married couples in their 40s through 60s, Caspi and Herbener (1990) found that similarity on the California Q-Sort (Block, 1971) predicted greater satisfaction.

Marital Processes in Early, Middle, and Late Adulthood

One limitation of previous studies of personality similarity and marital/relationship satisfaction is that most were conducted with dating couples or young married couples. Studies that did include longer married couples did not consider age as a moderator of the main effects of similarity. Although the study by Gattis et al. (2004) did include some couples who had been married for more than 15 years, the mean duration of marriage was only 10 years, and analyses did not distinguish between the newer marriages and the long-term marriages. Similarly, neither Caspi and Herbener (1990) nor Glicksohn and Golan (2001) considered age or relationship duration as a moderator of the association between similarity and satisfaction.

Marriages change in a number of ways over the course of decades. Individuals confront different life tasks in their 40s and 60s than they do in young adulthood, and what each spouse needs from the marriage is likely to change as a result. When couples are dating or are in the newlywed stage of marriage, issues of partner selection and the development of intimacy and attachment are particularly important (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). At this stage, partners are most likely to idealize each other, and a positive global evaluation of the partner is associated with greater relationship satisfaction, even if this evaluation is based on failure to acknowledge the partner's true personality (Murray et al., 1996). Early in marriage couples are in the process of developing a shared life, and feelings of similarity may

make this easier (Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002). In young couples, a sense of equity in terms of each spouse's contribution to and benefit from the marriage predicts satisfaction (Utne, Hatfield, Traupmann, & Greenberger, 1984), and differences between spouses in their value of emotional attachment/Agreeableness, their degree of psychological distress/Neuroticism, and their motives for being in the marriage are associated with increased likelihood of divorce (Kurdek, 1991).

By mid-life—which, for most couples, occurs 10–20 years into marriage—life tasks have changed considerably. Spouses are raising their family, facing increased responsibility in the workplace, and coping with greater role strain than at any other life stage (Moen, Kim, & Hofmeister, 2001). For as long as children are living at home, their parenting is likely to be the subject of considerable marital conflict (Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; Johnson, White, Edwards, & Booth, 1986). Midlife couples also tend to disagree more than older couples about finances and household responsibilities and about how to spend leisure time (Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004; Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1993). At this point, the focus for many couples seems to be less on the marriage itself and more on meeting individual and shared responsibilities.

By the time spouses are in their 60s, after 25 or more years of marriage, many of these responsibilities have subsided. The departure of children from the home and retirement from professional work increase the amount of time couples spend together. Couples at this stage report less conflict over instrumental issues, such as parenting, household tasks, and finances, and are more likely to raise issues of emotional expression and companionship (Ekerdt & Vinick, 1991; Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004; Levenson et al., 1993). For the first time, spouses may complain of spending too much time together, particularly homemaker wives whose husbands have recently retired (Fengler, 1975; Keating & Cole, 1980). At the same time, older couples show more affectionate behavior during interaction (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995) and disagree less with each other overall (Carstensen et al., 1995; Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004; Levenson et al., 1993).

Personality similarity could have different implications for marriages at each of these stages. Similarity might be helpful for dating couples and young marriages, enhancing the sense of intimacy, contributing to perceptions of balance and equity in the relationship, and making it easier to develop shared activities and goals. Findings in previous studies of young marriages that personality similarity affects satisfaction are consistent with this hypothesis (Gattis et al., 2004; Kurdek, 1991; Robins et al., 2000). The effects of similarity on marital satisfaction for midlife and older couples are less easy to predict. In midlife, similarity may help couples to develop compatible approaches to instrumental tasks; may lead to clashes as couples attempt to divide the workload and find that both partners want and reject the same tasks or are set on accomplishing the same task in very different ways; or may be irrelevant as partners spend more time apart completing their respective tasks. Whichever of these patterns is observed, we might anticipate that similarity in Extraversion and Conscientiousness—the two Big Five factors most closely associated with agency—might be particularly strong predictors of marital satisfaction. Later in life, personality similarity might again facilitate a sense of intimacy as couples are apart less and have fewer external responsibilities, might lead to boredom in a couple who has spent their entire adult life together, or might be irrelevant as spouses come to terms with each others' personalities, whatever they may be. In the present study, we asked which of these patterns is dominant in an existing sample of long-term married couples of two age groups.

Why Study Marital Satisfaction Trajectories?

Strong correlates of current levels of marital satisfaction may not be good predictors of how marital satisfaction will change over time. Most studies of the predictors of marital satisfaction, including those of similarity in personality, have used cross-sectional designs (Bradbury & Karney, 2004; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). A number of longitudinal studies have been conducted, but these have typically examined how variables measured early in the relationship predict later marital satisfaction levels rather than predicting the marital satisfaction trajectories of individual couples (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; 1997).

Identifying predictors of the trajectories of marital satisfaction could be most helpful in elucidating the processes that lead to marriages improving or deteriorating over time (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000; Gottman, 1993; Karney & Bradbury, 1997). In this regard, the impact of personality similarity on trajectories of marital satisfaction could be particularly important.

The Present Study

The present study examined the relation between similarity of spouses' personalities (in terms of the Big Five) and the initial levels and 12-year trajectories of marital satisfaction in a longitudinal sample of couples in long-term marriages in two age groups (Levenson et al., 1993). Spouses in the middle-aged group were between 40 and 50 years old at the beginning of the study and had been married at least 15 years. Spouses in the older group were between 60 and 70 years old at the beginning of the study and had been married at least 35 years. Marital satisfaction was measured in three waves, at roughly 6-year intervals. Analyses addressed four core research questions: (a) Does similarity in personality at Time 1 predict marital satisfaction intercepts (representing marital satisfaction at the beginning of the study)? (b) Is the relation between Time 1 personality similarity and marital satisfaction intercepts the same for middle-aged and older couples? (c) Does personality similarity at Time 1 predict marital satisfaction trajectories over the next 12 years? (d) Is the relation between Time 1 personality similarity and marital satisfaction trajectories the same for middle-aged and older couples?

Method

Sample

Recruitment and screening. Because sampling and recruitment procedures for this sample have been reported in detail elsewhere (Levenson et al., 1993), in this article, we will only provide a brief overview. Potential participants were recruited through newspaper advertisements in San Francisco Bay Area newspapers, flyers, posters on local busses, and radio announcements. Married couples interested in participating contacted the research laboratory to ensure that the following criteria were met: age of oldest spouse was between 40–50 or 60–70 years, with a maximum 5-year age difference between spouses; minimum du-

ration of marriage was 15 years for the middle-aged sample and 35 years for the older sample; spouses' marital satisfaction (instruments will be described later) scores were within 20 points of each other; primary wage earner was not yet retired; residence was within 10 miles of the University of California at Berkeley campus; English was the native language of both spouses or primary language spoken at home; and both spouses had scores of 7 or below on the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (Selzer, 1971). The criteria for similarity on age (within 5 years) and marital satisfaction (within 20 points) were included for two reasons: (a) Couples were similar on these variables in the modal long-term marriage, and (b) these criteria facilitated our treating couple-level age and marital satisfaction as ordinal categorical variables without splitting husband and wife into different cells—a strategy used in some prior analyses of this data set (e.g., Levenson, Carstensen, & Gottman, 1994). The recruitment procedures were designed so that the final sample was representative of the demographics of couples in this age group in the recruitment area.

Initial sample. At Time 1, the sample consisted of 156 couples: 82 middle-aged and 74 older. All but one couple were in their first marriage, 149 couples had children, and one couple was expecting their first child. Demographic and initial marital satisfaction characteristics of the initial sample are presented in Table 1.

Attrition and final sample. Of the 156 couples in the initial sample, 54 (37 middle-aged, 17 older) did not complete the questionnaire packet containing the personality measure administered between the first and second marital satisfaction assessments. An additional 35 couples (18 middle-aged, 17 older) did not complete at least one of the three marital satisfaction assessments. Middle-aged couples in this category included 6 couples who divorced or separated, 2 couples in which one or both spouses died, 2 couples with whom we lost contact, and 8 couples who declined to participate. Older couples missing one or more marital satisfaction assessments included 12 in which one or both spouses died, 2 with whom we lost contact, and 3 who declined to participate. Because estimates of marital satisfaction trajectories based on fewer than three time points tend to be unreliable (Collins & Sayer, 2000), these couples were not included in the present analyses. Thus, the sample for the present study consisted of 67 couples—27 middle-aged and 40 older. Demographic and initial marital satisfaction characteristics of this sample are also listed in Table 1. Across the entire sample, the number of days between the first day of the Time 1 visit and the first day of the Time 2 visit averaged 1,906 ($SD = 161$), and the number of days between the first day of the Time 2 visit and the first day of the Time 3 visit averaged 2,557 ($SD = 284$). Middle-aged and older couples did not differ significantly in either mean or variability of intervisit durations (see Table 1). In 1 middle-aged couple (3.7%) and 24 of the older couples (60.0%), the primary wage earner retired between Time 1 and Time 3.

Measures

Big Five. Participants' personality was measured through the Adjective Check List (ACL; Gough & Heilbrun, 1980). The ACL consists of 300 single-word trait descriptors; participants check the

Table 1
Characteristics of Initial and Final Samples of Married Couples

	Initial sample						Final sample					
	Middle-aged ($n = 82$)			Older ($n = 74$)			Middle-aged ($n = 27$)			Older ($n = 40$)		
Variable	*M*	*SD*	%	*M*	*SD*	%	*M*	*SD*	%	*M*	*SD*	%
Age (years)												
Husbands	44.3	2.9		63.6	2.9		44.1	3.1		63.1	2.7	
Wives	43.3	2.9		62.2	3.2		43.9	2.9		62.0	2.9	
Length of marriage (years)	21.1	3.4		40.3	3.4		21.4	3.7		39.6	3.2	
No. of children	2.1	1.0		3.3	1.4		2.0	1.0		3.1	1.2	
With children at home			90.0			15.0			81.0			13.0
Ethnicity												
European American			79.0			94.0			89.0			100.0
Other ethnicity			21.0			6.0			11.0			
Socioeconomic status												
White collar			64.0			75.0			63.0			80.0
Pink collar			26.0			14.0			19.0			13.0
Blue collar			10.0			11.0			18.0			7.0
Time 1 marital satisfaction	109.0	15.9		114.0	16.2		116.0	12.9		114.0	14.5	
Interval (days)												
Time 1-Time 2							1,927.0	175.0		1,889.0	149.0	
Time 2-Time 3							2,589.0	231.0		2,531.0	321.0	
With primary wage earner retired by Time 3									3.7			60.0
Difference between husband and wife in												
Extraversion							0.26	0.19		0.23	0.15	
Agreeableness							0.13	0.10		0.14	0.12	
Conscientiousness							0.21	0.14		0.19	0.12	
Neuroticism							0.18	0.13		0.17	0.16	
Openness							0.16	0.15		0.19	0.15	
Total Big Five							0.94	0.39		0.92	0.34	

words that they feel accurately describe their own personality. Individual ACL items considered by expert raters to reflect Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience, as well as items reflecting the opposites of these traits, have been identified by John (1989), and the viability of using the ACL to derive scores correlating strongly with NEO Personality Inventory scores of the same factors has been confirmed by Piedmont, McCrae, and Costa (1991) and by Hill, Williams, and Bassett (2002). For the present study, we derived scores for each Big Five trait for each spouse by adding 1 point for each checked trait-consistent item and one for each unchecked trait-opposing item and dividing by the total number of trait-relevant items on the ACL. Thus, possible scores for each Big Five trait ranged from 0 (no trait-consistent items checked and all trait-opposing items checked) to 1.0 (all trait-consistent items checked and no trait-opposing items checked).

Marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction was assessed using two self-report measures. The Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959) consists of 15 items emphasizing agreement between spouses in various life domains and amount of leisure time spent together. Scoring followed the procedures described by Locke and Wallace (1959). The Marital Relationship Inventory (MRI; Burgess, Locke, & Thomes, 1971) consists of 22 items measuring satisfaction with affection and sexuality in the marriage, and overall satisfaction with the marriage, as well as areas of agreement. Scoring followed the procedures described by Burgess and colleagues (1971). Both instruments were used in the present study, following the convention in this paradigm (e.g., Levenson et al., 1994), in order to ensure full coverage of the marital satisfaction construct and enhance reliability.

Procedures

Individual spouses completed the MAT and MRI marital satisfaction measures as part of a questionnaire packet completed for the first time in 1991. Two years later, spouses were mailed another self-report questionnaire packet containing the ACL.[1] Approximately 6 years after the initial assessment, and again 12 years after the initial assessment, spouses completed the marital satisfaction instruments for a second and third time. At all three times of measurement, couples also participated in an in-laboratory assessment of marital interaction in which they had three 15-min conversations about marital issues (Carstensen et al., 1995; Levenson et al., 1994). Data derived from these laboratory interactions are not part of the present study.

Analyses

Couple-level personality similarity. Big Five absolute difference scores for each couple were calculated by subtracting the wife's score from the husband's score on each Big Five trait and taking the absolute value of the signed differences. The five trait-specific absolute difference scores were then summed to create a total personality difference score for each couple.

Marital satisfaction intercepts and trajectories. Pearson's correlations between individual spouses' MAT and MRI marital satisfaction measures at each assessment ranged from .67 to .90, with a mean of .80. Scores on the two instruments were therefore averaged to produce a single marital satisfaction index for each spouse at each assessment. Correlations between husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction indexes were .78 at the first assessment, .61 at the second assessment, and .59 at the third assessment. Husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction indexes were therefore averaged to produce a dyad-level marital satisfaction score at each assessment. This is consistent with procedures we have used with these scales in our research on marriage with this (Levenson et al., 1993) and other samples (e.g., Levenson & Gottman, 1983).[2]

In order to calculate a marital satisfaction intercept and trajectory for each couple, we regressed each couple's dyad-level marital satisfaction scores from the three assessments onto the numbers 0, 1, and 2 using the intercept and slope functions in Excel (Microsoft, Redmond, WA).[3] This procedure treats the relationship between time and marital satisfaction as a linear function, with deviations from the line of best fit interpreted as measurement error or effects of nonmeasured predictors on the dependent variable (marital satisfaction). The intercept represents an estimated, error-free initial level of marital satisfaction, and the slope represents the trajectory of marital satisfaction associated with time within a given couple. The resulting couple-level marital satisfaction intercepts and slopes were used as the dependent variables in subsequent analyses. This technique presumes that the marital satisfaction trajectories over the 12 years of the study were, in fact, linear. In previous studies, researchers comparing linear models of marital satisfaction trajectories with quadratic and higher level models have generally found this to be the case (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Vaillant & Vaillant, 1993). In addition, previously reported latent variable growth curve modeling of marital satisfaction data from the sample used in the present study also supported a linear model (Kupperbusch, 2003).

Personality similarity and marital satisfaction. As recommended by Griffin, Murray, and Gonzalez (1999) and applied in recent cross-sectional research on personality similarity and marital satisfaction (e.g., Gattis et al., 2004; Watson et al., 2004), we assessed the strength and significance of the relation between similarity on each of the Big Five personality traits and marital satisfaction intercepts via a three-step linear regression. In the first

[1] Although Big Five personality measures would ideally have been taken at Time 1 instead of 2 years later, Time 1 ACL data were not available for this sample. Studies of adult development of Big Five personality factors overwhelmingly support stability after age 30, however (e.g., Terracciano, Costa, & McCrae, 2006). Given prior empirical findings, we concluded that personality change greater than measurement error during the 2 years between Time 1 marital satisfaction assessment and ACL administration 2 years later was extremely unlikely.

[2] An alternative to this procedure would be to examine husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction as separate dependent variables. In the present study, dyad-level marital satisfaction was used as the dependent variable because the main predictor of interest (similarity) was also a dyad-level variable and because husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction scores were so highly correlated. However, the main findings reported here were also observed in analyses examining husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction separately.

[3] An alternative to this procedure would be to use the days-between questionnaire administration as the predictors and Time 1–Time 3 marital satisfaction scores as the outcomes in calculating marital satisfaction slopes and intercepts. Use of wave (i.e., Wave 0, 1, or 2) versus days-between questionnaire administration does not affect the findings presented here.

step, marital satisfaction intercepts were regressed on the husbands' scores on the Big Five variable of interest. In the second step, residual marital satisfaction scores from the first step were regressed on the wives' corresponding Big Five scores. In the third step, residuals from the second step were regressed on the dyad-level absolute difference scores for the Big Five variable of interest. In analyses of the effects of total Big Five similarity on marital satisfaction intercepts, all five of the husbands' Big Five scores were entered in the first step, all five of the wives' Big Five scores were entered in the second step, and the total Big Five absolute difference score was entered in the third step. Entering the individual spouses' personality scores in the first two steps removed their confounding effect and allowed us to focus solely on the capacity of personality similarity to predict marital satisfaction (Griffin et al., 1999).

In analyses predicting marital satisfaction trajectories, a four-step regression model was used. In the first step, we regressed marital satisfaction slopes on marital satisfaction intercepts to control for the effects of initial marital satisfaction levels on trajectories. In the second and third steps, we controlled for the husbands' and wives' individual Big Five scores, respectively, using the residualizing procedures described earlier. In the final step, we then regressed the residuals from Step 3 on the absolute difference scores.

The signs of the beta weights associated with the capacity of Big Five personality difference scores to predict marital satisfaction intercepts and slopes in the final step of each analysis were then reversed. This enabled us to highlight the relation between personality similarity and marital satisfaction.

Assessing Age × Similarity interactions. We performed analyses for the entire sample but also performed separate analyses for the middle-aged and older samples. Then, we used a test of the significance of difference between independent *Bs* (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003) to assess whether age group moderated the effect of similarity on marital satisfaction for each Big Five variable and for total Big Five similarity. This procedure allowed us to examine the interaction between age group and Big Five similarity in predicting marital satisfaction.

Results

Age Group Differences

The means and standard deviations of Time 1 marital satisfaction values and Big Five similarity indexes (each Big Five factor and total Big Five) are presented separately for each age group in Table 1. No significant differences were observed between the middle-aged and older samples in Time 1 marital satisfaction, total Big Five personality similarity, or similarity on any of the individual Big Five factors. Also, no significant age differences were observed in marital satisfaction intercepts or slopes.

Personality Similarity and Marital Satisfaction Intercepts

Beta weights from the regressions for personality similarity and marital satisfaction intercepts are presented in Table 2. Looking first at relation between the two for the entire sample, we found no significant relation between similarity in total Big Five personality and the marital satisfaction intercept. In terms of the individual Big Five factors, only the relation between similarity in Agreeableness and marital satisfaction approached significance ($\beta = 0.25$, $p = .06$).

Looking at the relationships for the older and middle-aged groups separately, we found that similarity in total Big Five personality was not related to marital satisfaction intercept for either group. None of the individual Big Five factors was significantly related to marital satisfaction intercept in either group. In middle-aged couples, similarity in Extraversion was marginally associated with more negative marital satisfaction intercept ($\beta = -0.43$, $p = .08$), and the difference between the two age groups' corresponding *B* weights was significant, $t(65) = 2.69$, $p < .01$.

Personality Similarity and Marital Satisfaction Trajectories

Beta weights from the regressions of marital satisfaction trajectories on personality trajectories are presented in Table 2. In the relationships for the total sample, after marital satisfaction intercepts and each spouse's individual personality were controlled, total personality similarity was significantly associated with more negative marital satisfaction trajectories ($\beta = -0.32$, $p < .05$). Similarity on specific Big Five personality traits generally failed to predict marital satisfaction trajectories with the exception of similarity in Agreeableness, which was significantly associated with more negative trajectories ($\beta = -0.23$, $p < .05$).

Looking at the relationships for the older and middle-aged groups separately, we observed one age difference. Among middle-aged couples, similarity in Conscientiousness was signifi-

Table 2
Beta Weights Associated With Big Five Similarity in Predicting Marital Satisfaction Intercepts And Trajectories

	Similarity					
Sample	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Conscientiousness	Neuroticism	Openness	Big Five total
			Marital satisfaction intercepts			
Whole	−.01	.25†	.04	.14	.13	.12
Middle-aged	**−.43**†	.32	.26	.31	−.03	.10
Older	**.09**	.21	−.09	−.03	.21	.15
			Marital satisfaction trajectories			
Whole	.08	−.23*	−.11	−.18	−.09	−.32*
Middle-aged	−.14	−.13	**−.41****	−.22	−.15	−.46*
Older	.17	−.27†	**.16**	−.18	−.08	−.32

Note. Beta weights printed in bold denote a difference between the middle-aged and older samples that is significant at the $p < .01$ level.
† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

cantly associated with more negative marital satisfaction trajectories ($\beta = -0.41$, $p < .01$). This relationship was not observed in the older sample, however, and the difference between the two age groups' corresponding B weights was significant, $t(65) = 5.48$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

The present study examined the relationship that similarity in Big Five personality factors has with initial levels and 12-year trajectories of marital satisfaction in long-term marriages. Our central finding was that, on the whole, personality similarity was unrelated to initial levels of marital satisfaction, but greater personality similarity predicted more negative slopes in marital satisfaction trajectories over a 12-year period. These findings are in striking contrast to the "birds of a feather" dogma, suggesting that birds with too-similar personalities may face increasing difficulty in flying together over time.

This study was distinctive in its focus on both middle-aged and older couples, rather than on young couples, and in its examination of the differences between the two age groups. Although our statistical power was somewhat limited in examining differences between the middle-aged and older samples, there were suggestions of age differences in the relationship between similarity on specific Big Five traits and marital satisfaction. First, Extraversion similarity was associated with lower initial levels of marital satisfaction in middle-aged couples but not in older couples. Second, Conscientiousness similarity was associated with more negative slopes in marital satisfaction trajectories in middle-aged couples but not in older couples. In both cases, personality similarity was associated with more negative outcomes in the middle-aged sample than in the older sample.

Earlier studies with younger dating and married couples have suggested that personality similarity predicts higher relationship satisfaction. Given these findings, why might personality similarity have negative implications for marital satisfaction in long-term marriages? Although we do not have data that explicitly address this question, we have suggested that changing life stages and demands outside the marriage may lead to different effects of Big Five similarity when couples are in their 20s, 40s, and 60s. As noted earlier, individuals face very different life tasks during these periods of life (Baltes, 1997; Erikson, 1959/1980), and the relationship qualities that support fulfilling these tasks may vary accordingly. Among young couples, partner selection, emotional intimacy, and the development of a shared life are core issues (Murray et al., 1996; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). Personality similarity may promote feelings of intimacy and attachment (Kurdek, 1991) and may help foster a sense of equity in contributing to the marriage (Utne et al., 1984).

In midlife, the focus for couples seems to be less on the marriage itself and more on meeting individual and shared responsibilities (Moen et al., 2001). Increasing role strain during this period may mean that couples who can divide tasks easily and effectively reap the greatest benefits in relationship satisfaction. Key areas of conflict for midlife couples tend to involve finances, parenting, and household responsibilities (Anderson et al., 1983; Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004; Johnson et al., 1986; Levenson et al., 1993). At this stage, personality similarity may become a disadvantage, with spouses competing with each other in similar performance domains and clashing when attempting to complete the same tasks. For example, highly Conscientious people are highly motivated to get things done, but by their 40s they are also used to doing things in a particular way. Two people living together, each insisting that a given task must be accomplished in a particular way, make for a great deal of conflict. By comparison, task completion may be eased when one partner is highly concerned with the details, and the other is more laissez-faire.

Also, couples with more "diversification" in personality may have a wider range of skills to offer and may be better able to divide tasks and pursue goals with less attendant conflict. For example, a couple in which one partner is achievement-driven and work-focused and produces a high income (a profile reasonably associated with Conscientiousness) and the other partner is more socially oriented, maintaining relationships outside the marriage as well as taking primary responsibility for raising the family (a profile reasonably associated with Extraversion and Agreeableness), may face less conflict in getting through a week's tasks than a couple in which both partners are workaholics or social butterflies. On a given evening, if someone needs to pay the bills and balance the checkbook, and someone needs to call other parents to arrange a carpool, the "complementary" couple will presumably argue less about who does what than the "similar" couple.

Once spouses are in their 60s, many of the responsibilities so prevalent in midlife have diminished, and intimacy is again a core issue. The departure of children from home and retirement from professional work—both of which distinguished our older from our midlife sample—each increase the amount of time couples spend together. Couples at this stage report less disagreement over instrumental issues, such as parenting, household tasks, and finances, and are more likely to report conflict about emotional expression and companionship (Ekerdt & Vinick, 1991; Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004; Levenson et al., 1993). Older couples show more affectionate behavior while discussing an area of conflict (Carstensen et al., 1995), and disagree less with each other overall (Carstensen et al., 1995; Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004; Levenson et al., 1993). At this stage, personality similarity may offer less cause for conflict than in midlife, consistent with our finding that similarity in Extraversion and Conscientiousness was less strongly associated with decreasing marital satisfaction in the older than in the middle-aged sample. However, spouses may complain of spending too much time together, particularly wives whose husbands have recently retired (Fengler, 1975; Keating & Cole, 1980). To the extent that personality similarity still predicts decreasing marital satisfaction, as observed in this sample, too-similar spouses may find themselves becoming bored with each other (Amato & Previti, 2003).

Because age and cohort are confounded in the present design, an alternative interpretation of these findings reflects a cohort effect. Couples in the older sample reached adulthood, and most of them married, during the 1950s. Gender roles during this period were at their most traditional since the early part of the 20th century: Husbands were primary wage earners, and wives emphasized homemaking. By contrast, the middle-aged couples reached adulthood and began their marriages during the 1970s, the decade during which women's roles in domains outside the home expanded dramatically. For couples coming of age in the 1950s, spouses could be quite similar in their dispositional affiliativeness and need for accomplishment, while directing those energies into

different domains—home versus work. For couples coming of age in the 1970s, similarity in traits reflecting individual agency, in particular, might have triggered greater conflict as both spouses pursued individual accomplishment in the workplace, while still negotiating responsibilities at home.

The life stage and cohort explanations share a common feature, however, in that both consider each spouse's roles and responsibilities outside the marriage in explaining the effects of personality similarity on marital satisfaction; these effects do not operate in a dyad-level vacuum. By either interpretation, the present findings suggest that long-term married couples with highly similar personalities, especially in terms of Conscientiousness and Extraversion, may face greater relationship conflict when responsibilities outside the marriage are at their peak. This may be one case in which differently feathered birds become better off over time.

It is important to note limitations to the generalizability of the present findings. First, the sample studied here may not include couples on the extreme low end of the relationship satisfaction distribution. By definition, long-term marriage samples weed out couples who divorce within the first few years, the most common time for marriages to end. Although the sample was chosen to reflect a fairly wide range of satisfaction (Levenson et al., 1994), couples in this study were presumably satisfied enough during the early years of marriage to avoid separating. Also, attrition of participants from Time 1 to Time 3 was partly due to separation and divorce (although the majority of participant attrition was due to not completing the ACL or to the death of one or both spouses), especially in the midlife sample, and midlife couples in the present sample did have somewhat higher initial marital satisfaction levels than those in the original sample (see Table 1). It may be that extremely dissimilar couples separate early on in the marriage, leaving a longer married population that masks a curvilinear (inverted U) relationship between personality similarity and satisfaction.

Second, our findings regarding the association between Big Five personality similarity and marital satisfaction may not generalize to other personality variables. The Big Five were chosen for the present study because these variables have been the overwhelming focus of personality research in recent decades and because of their conceptual breadth. Similarity on other personality variables such as attachment style, dominance/submissiveness, and cognitive style might have quite different effects on satisfaction, however, especially if differences in these aspects of personality reflect incompatibility of emotional needs or communication styles. Indeed, in the one study in which a positive relationship between personality similarity and marital satisfaction has been found in older couples, Caspi and Herbener (1990) used an instrument with a much broader scope than the Big Five—the California Q-Sort, which was designed to assess personality factors of interest in clinical diagnosis.

Third, analyses in the present study examined marital satisfaction as a dyad-level variable, aggregating across husbands' and wives' marital satisfaction rather than analyzing effects of the Big Five similarity on husbands' and wives' separate satisfaction measures. Although in the present study, we observed a large correlation between spouses' marital satisfaction scores and a similar pattern of findings when using dyad-level and individual-level marital satisfaction scores (see Footnote 2), it is important to note that treating marital satisfaction as a dyad-level variable leads to an inability to explicitly examine gender differences in the predictors of this outcome. Such differences are often present (Karney & Bradbury, 1995) and must always be explored in analyses predicting marital satisfaction.

Finally, attrition in the sample and multistage analyses led to less-than-ideal statistical power. One consequence of this somewhat low power is that the present study may have failed to detect some effects of similarity in specific personality variables or some differences between the implications of personality similarity at different life stages. As always, this does not compromise the validity of effects that were found to be significant, but one should exercise caution when interpreting null effects.

In sum, the present findings highlight the need for researchers to think of long-term marriage as a process, embedded in shifting roles in and demands by the outside world, not as a static and isolated unit. The influence of some individual- or dyad-level variables on marital satisfaction may be constant across changing life stages, cohorts, or cultural environments. However, the effects of many other variables may alter dramatically with these changes in environment. Here we have focused on age as one marker of changing life stages and demands within and outside the marriage, but as we have noted, generational cohort and culture may have similar moderating effects. Considering these moderators may lead to a more nuanced understanding of when and why marriages succeed or fail.

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New Editors Appointed, 2009–2014

The Publications and Communications Board of the American Psychological Association announces the appointment of six new editors for 6-year terms beginning in 2009. As of January 1, 2008, manuscripts should be directed as follows:

- *Journal of Applied Psychology* (http://www.apa.org/journals/apl), **Steve W. J. Kozlowski, PhD,** Department of Psychology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824.
- *Journal of Educational Psychology* (http://www.apa.org/journals/edu), **Arthur C. Graesser, PhD,** Department of Psychology, University of Memphis, 202 Psychology Building, Memphis, TN 38152.
- *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology: Interpersonal Relations and Group Processes* (http://www.apa.org/journals/psp), **Jeffry A. Simpson, PhD,** Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, 75 East River Road, N394 Elliott Hall, Minneapolis, MN 55455.
- *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* (http://www.apa.org/journals/adb), **Stephen A. Maisto, PhD,** Department of Psychology, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244.
- *Behavioral Neuroscience* (http://www.apa.org/journals/bne), **Mark S. Blumberg, PhD,** Department of Psychology, University of Iowa, E11 Seashore Hall, Iowa City, IA 52242.
- *Psychological Bulletin* (http://www.apa.org/journals/bul), **Stephen P. Hinshaw, PhD,** Department of Psychology, University of California, Tolman Hall #1650, Berkeley, CA 94720. (Manuscripts will not be directed to Dr. Hinshaw until July 1, 2008, as Harris Cooper will continue as editor until June 30, 2008.)

Electronic manuscript submission: As of January 1, 2008, manuscripts should be submitted electronically via the journal's Manuscript Submission Portal (see the website listed above with each journal title).

Manuscript submission patterns make the precise date of completion of the 2008 volumes uncertain. Current editors, Sheldon Zedeck, PhD, Karen R. Harris, EdD, John F. Dovidio, PhD, Howard J. Shaffer, PhD, and John F. Disterhoft, PhD, will receive and consider manuscripts through December 31, 2007. Harris Cooper, PhD, will continue to receive manuscripts until June 30, 2008. Should 2008 volumes be completed before that date, manuscripts will be redirected to the new editors for consideration in 2009 volumes.