

*Love,
Romance,
Sexual
Interaction*

Research Perspectives from *Current Psychology*

Nathaniel J. Pallone, editor



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Perceived and Actual Characteristics of Parents and Partners: A Test of a Freudian Model of Mate Selection

Glenn Geher

The present research is concerned with the effects that parents have on the partner choice of their children as these offspring mature and engage in intimate relationships. This research is concerned specifically with the notion that our parents provide us with templates for choosing mates in adulthood; in other words, that people tend to seek romantic partners who resemble their parents in meaningful ways. The notion that individuals seek romantic partners reminiscent of their opposite-sex parents specifically has been labeled the "psychoanalytic theory of mate selection" (Epstein & Guttman, 1984) as well as the "template matching hypothesis" (Daly & Wilson, 1990), implying that one's opposite-sex parent is used as a template for determining romantic partner choice. This template matching hypothesis has garnered some empirical support (e.g., Wilson & Barrett, 1987). The current research was designed to elaborate on the empirical findings in this area.

Perhaps the most well-known, and controversial, theoretical tradition pertaining to the template matching hypothesis is Freud's (1927) psychoanalytic theory, which proposes several predictions concerning the role that one's parents play in mate selection during adulthood. With regard to the mate selection process, several current interpretations of Freud's work (e.g., Daly & Wilson, 1990; Epstein & Guttman,

1984) suggest that he explicitly proposed the template matching hypothesis when describing romantic partner choice. Presumably, according to psychoanalytic theory, early unconscious sexual interest in one's opposite-sex parent should manifest itself later in life as a romantic preference for individuals reminiscent of that parent in terms of several characteristics.

Like psychoanalytic theory, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969) proposes that one's relationships with early caregivers are critical in determining that person's patterns of behavior in adulthood. According to this perspective, one's interactions with early caregivers give rise to "internal working models" that guide future relationships. Much current social psychological research on intimate relationships has focused on how such early attachments are manifest in romantic relationships (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1990; Rothbard & Shaver, 1994).

In their original description of "adult attachment styles," Hazan and Shaver (1987) suggested that, depending on one's attachment history, adults may be conceptualized as falling into one of three attachment categories: secure, anxious, or avoidant. This conceptualization of adult attachment styles as relatively stable patterns of behaving across the life-span is relevant to the present research on two different levels. On one level, the very notion of adult attachment styles as developing from early relationships with caregivers is parallel to the template matching hypothesis; both ideas suggest that early child/caregiver interactions greatly affect relationships across the life-span. Also, the template matching hypothesis proposes that, in choosing a romantic partner, an individual is motivated to find a mate who is similar to his or her opposite-sex parent along several stable dimensions. As adult attachment theorists often conceptualize adult attachment style as a relatively stable aspect of the person, it may be the case that individuals seek romantic partners who have similar attachment styles as their opposite-sex parents.

Attachment theory speaks to possible causal factors underlying template matching phenomena. In a proximal sense, attachment theory posits the construct of "internal working models" that may act to elicit template matching behaviors in the mate selection process. Additionally, attachment theory is largely based on evolutionary principles. As such, this theory speaks to possible ultimate causes of forming attachments; causes that allow for survival and/or reproduction. Regarding the adaptive function of attachment formation, Bowlby (1969) pro-

posed that such attachment behaviors on the parts of both infants and mothers serve to increase the infant's chances for survival. Thus, attachment theory suggests that template matching phenomena may be rooted in the principles of natural selection.

More current evolutionary psychologists have explicitly written about template matching phenomena as relating to natural selection. In a review concerning the empirical validity of Freud's Oedipal theory, Daly and Wilson (1990) argued that template matching phenomena have been consistently documented, but are best explained in terms of evolutionary, as opposed to psychoanalytic, principles. They argue that, "we have evolved by natural selection a strategy of using parental phenotypes as partial criteria in mate choice" (Daly & Wilson, 1990, p. 172).

Daly and Wilson (1990) suggested that it may be more adaptive for an individual to seek a partner with intermediate genetic similarity to oneself in order to optimize genetic fitness while reducing the chances of reproducing maladaptive traits. Hence, using one's parent as a template for choosing romantic partners, as opposed to using oneself, may be adaptive from an evolutionary perspective. Such a strategy is similar to the "optimal discrepancy theory of mate selection" (Thiessen & Gregg, 1980), which proposes that, in order to maximize genetic fitness, one should select a mate outside the family group; thereby avoiding the adverse effects of incest. However, given that the potential mate is outside the immediate family group, other things being equal, the potential mate should have a phenotype similar to biological kin.

Evidence for the Template Matching Hypothesis

Several studies, using a variety of methodologies, have tested the template matching hypothesis. In their review concerning the empirical validity of Freud's Oedipal theory, Daly and Wilson (1990) concluded that template matching phenomena have been documented consistently in the extant research. In another review of research on this topic, Epstein and Guttman (1984) concluded that evidence generally does support the template matching hypothesis. However, in some of this existing research, opposite-sex influence has been found to be significantly more important than same-sex influence (e.g., Jedlicka, 1984) while in other studies, characteristics of both same and oppo-

site-sex parents were significantly predictive of characteristics of romantic partners (e.g., Aron, 1974).

Researchers have tested this hypothesis in regard to both physical resemblance (e.g., Wilson & Barrett, 1987) and personality resemblance (e.g., Kent, 1951). Regarding template matching phenomena for physical characteristics, Wilson and Barrett (1987) asked heterosexual teenage girls who described themselves as "in love" to describe their significant others, mothers, and fathers along several dimensions including eye color. Consistent with the template matching hypothesis, the reported eye color of the significant others matched the reported eye color of the fathers more than would be expected by chance. In addition, eye color matched more between significant others and fathers than between significant others and mothers.

Jedlicka (1980, 1984) obtained similar results by studying characteristics of members of mixed-ethnic Hawaiian married couples. Jedlicka found that over a ten year period, both males and females were more likely to marry into the ethnic group of their opposite-sex parents than the ethnic group of their same-sex parents.

Research on resemblance in personality between romantic partners and opposite-sex parents has been somewhat inconsistent (Epstein & Guttman, 1984). In one study of the template matching hypothesis, Aron (1974) was interested in whether individuals involved in romantic relationships tend to repeat the relationships they have with their opposite-sex parents in their current romantic relationships; thus examining personality similarity in interactional and dynamic terms. In this study, male and female subjects who were waiting in line at the marriage license bureau were asked to complete a questionnaire describing their relationships with their future spouses, their opposite-sex parents, and their same-sex parents. In apparent support of the template matching hypothesis, the results indicated that males tended to describe their relationships with their future spouses as similar to their relationships with their mothers. However, females also tended to describe their relationships with their future spouses as being similar to their relationships to their mothers, as opposed to being similar to their relationships with their fathers. These results indicate that, for both males and females, maternal influence contributes to mate selection and relationship interaction, whereas paternal influence, for both sexes, may be relatively unimportant.

In an earlier test of the template matching hypothesis and personal-

ity variables, Strauss (1946) had subjects describe both of their parents along with their fiancées or spouses using a personality checklist. Strauss found that personality descriptions of mates were similar to descriptions of both opposite-sex parents and same-sex parents. Thus, Strauss concluded that both parents contribute equally to mate choice.

In Wilson and Barrett's (1987) research on this topic, female subjects described their significant others and both of their parents along the personality dimension of dominance/submissiveness. A significant relationship was found between the reported degree of dominance for the significant other and the reported degree of dominance for the opposite-sex parent. No relationship was reported between the degree of dominance for the significant other and the degree of dominance for the same-sex parent.

In a study addressing template matching with regard to attachment style, Collins and Read (1990) proposed that one's parental attachment history is directly related to the attachment style of his or her romantic partner. These researchers found that how subjects perceived their parents was related to the attachment styles of their partners. Males who reported having warm mothers were involved with female partners who scored low on anxiety. Males who reported cold or inconsistent mothers tended to be involved with relatively anxious female partners. Interestingly, the males' perceptions of their fathers were found to be unrelated to their partners' attachment styles. For females, conversely, perceptions of fathers were related to the attachment styles of their partners, whereas perceptions of their mothers were unrelated to partners' attachment styles. Interestingly, for both males and females, perceptions of same-sex parents were unrelated to partners' attachment styles.

Goals of the Present Research

While this existing research on the template matching hypothesis has provided interesting insights into romantic partner selection and perception, several questions regarding the template matching hypothesis remain. Three broad issues need to be addressed based on this past research. First, research findings pertaining to the issue of whether opposite-sex and same-sex parents are equally as influential in the mate selection process have been somewhat inconsistent. Some of this research has found opposite-sex parental influence to be most impor-

tant, while other studies have found that both parents are equally as influential. Additionally, the previous research on this topic raises methodological concerns regarding response bias. In most of these studies, parent/partner similarity has been gauged exclusively based on the target individual's perceptions of his or her parents and partners. Thus, findings of similarity may speak more to people's perceived similarity between parents and partners as opposed to "actual" similarity between parents and partners. Finally, past research assessing personality similarity between parents and partners was primarily conducted with somewhat limited conceptualizations of personality. The modern conceptualization of the Big Five traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992) allows for a broader study of personality similarity between parents and partners.

The current undertaking was designed to elaborate on previous research regarding the template matching hypothesis with regard to personality dimensions. Like past research, this research assessed the template matching phenomenon by asking people to report on the personalities of their romantic partner and their parents. Additionally, unlike past research, personality data were collected from participants' actual parents and partners. These data allowed for an assessment of the template matching phenomenon that would not be mediated by participants' perceptions of similarity. Also, the current research assessed personality in terms of the Big Five personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and in terms of adult attachment styles (Collins & Read, 1990). Thus, these data represent both broad aspects of personality and personality characteristics pertaining specifically to relationship behavior. Additionally, participants were asked to report their degree of relationship satisfaction. This variable allowed for the assessment of whether similarity between parents and partners relates to one's satisfaction with his or her relationship.

Method

The methods employed in the present study involved collecting data from individuals involved in romantic relationships. Most subjects were undergraduate students ($N = 492$) while some were engaged individuals recruited from outside the university ($N = 40$). Subjects were asked to complete personality measures to describe themselves, their parents, their significant others, and their ideal significant others.

Additionally, subjects were asked to provide the addresses of their significant others and parents so data could be collected from these individuals.

Participants

Four classes of individuals served as subjects for this sample; young adults involved in monogamous relationships, referred to as primary subjects ($N = 532$), a subset of their significant others ($N = 239$), a subset of their opposite-sex parents ($N = 227$), and a subset of their same-sex parents ($N = 191$). The average age of female primary subjects ($N = 368$) was 18.47 ($SD = 1.94$) with a range of 17–42 years. The average age of male primary subjects ($N = 164$) was 18.97 ($SD = 2.42$) with a range of 17–45 years. The average length of relationships was 20.78 months ($SD = 20.28$) with a range of 1 to 238 months. Primary subjects consisted of introductory psychology students who were currently involved in monogamous romantic relationships ($N = 492$) and engaged individuals from the community ($N = 40$) who were recruited from a local bridal convention. Student-primary participants received course credit for their participation while non-student participants received \$5 as compensation.

Materials

Materials included a personality trait measure, an attachment style measure, and a relationship satisfaction measure. The personality measure employed was the NEO-FFI (Costa & McCrae, 1992). This scale contains 60 items for which a subject is supposed to report the degree to which each item is characteristic of him or herself. Each item represents one of the Big Five trait dimensions of neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Costa & McCrae, 1985, 1992). The Adult Attachment Scale (Collins & Read, 1990) was employed to measure attachment style. This scale includes the three continuous subscales of anxiety, dependency, and closeness. Additionally a brief relationship satisfaction questionnaire was utilized (Murray et al., 1996). This measure was included to address whether template matching in mate selection is related to one's satisfaction in a relationship.

Procedure

Participants completed the measures in groups of approximately 30. During each session, they were given packets that included five copies of each measure listed earlier. Subjects were instructed to complete each measure to describe five different people: themselves, their opposite-sex parents, their significant others, and their ideal significant others.

The instructions of the last page of the packet asked subjects to provide the names and addresses of their significant others and opposite-sex parents. It was made clear to the subjects that providing such information was completely optional. Almost all subjects completed the entire packet in less than one hour. Questionnaires were sent to significant others and parents of subjects who provided their addresses. The questionnaires were identical to the ones completed by the primary subjects except that they only asked the partners and parents to describe themselves using the personality measure, the attachment style measure, and the demographic questionnaire.

Results

The analyses were chosen so as to specifically test the following predictions: (A) People perceive their significant others and ideal partners as similar to their opposite and same-sex parents in terms of their personalities and attachment styles; (B) Similarities in the perceptions of people's significant others and parents are not exclusively artifacts of response biases or of variance shared between people's self-perceptions and their perceptions of their significant others or between their self-perceptions and their perceptions of their parents; (C) People's significant others' actual personalities and attachment styles are similar to the actual personalities and attachment styles of both their opposite and same-sex parents; (D) Overall, significant others (in terms of both perception and actuality) are more similar to subjects' opposite-sex parents than to their same-sex parents; Additionally, (E) analyses were conducted to assess whether similarity between parents and partners was related to one's perceived satisfaction with the relationship.

Nine scales comprised of multiple items were employed in the present research. These measures included the five personality scales corresponding to the Big Five traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992), the three

TABLE 4.1
Mean, Standard Deviation, N, and Cronbach's α
for Personality Trait Measures

Big Five Personality Scales (Costa & McCrae, 1992)*				
	M	SD	N	α
Openness				
Primary Subject	40.06	6.46	366	.67
Perceived Opposite-Sex Parent	35.26	6.62	360	.63
Perceived Same-Sex Parent	37.81	6.92	282	.68
Perceived Significant Other	38.18	7.66	366	.73
Ideal Significant Other	42.56	6.72	366	.72
Actual Opposite-Sex Parent	37.19	7.07	213	.69
Actual Same-Sex Parent	38.91	7.77	196	.76
Actual Significant Other	39.08	7.17	217	.69
	M	SD	N	α
Conscientiousness				
Primary Subject	45.50	6.92	366	.83
Perceived Opposite-Sex Parent	49.49	9.82	360	.91
Perceived Same-Sex Parent	50.94	8.14	282	.90
Perceived Significant Other	44.77	8.79	366	.89
Ideal Significant Other	52.95	5.17	366	.83
Actual Opposite-Sex Parent	47.33	8.01	213	.87
Actual Same-Sex Parent	48.93	7.11	196	.82
Actual Significant Other	43.83	7.95	217	.83
	M	SD	N	α
Extraversion				
Primary Subject	44.96	6.81	366	.79
Perceived Opposite-Sex Parent	40.21	8.25	360	.82
Perceived Same-Sex Parent	42.67	8.01	282	.83
Perceived Significant Other	44.80	7.47	366	.81
Ideal Significant Other	48.87	5.56	366	.81
Actual Opposite-Sex Parent	40.87	7.11	214	.72
Actual Same-Sex Parent	41.15	7.29	196	.77
Actual Significant Other	42.98	7.20	217	.79
	M	SD	N	α
Agreeableness				
Primary Subject	46.68	6.44	366	.77
Perceived Opposite-Sex Parent	44.49	9.41	360	.88
Perceived Same-Sex Parent	47.78	9.09	282	.89
Perceived Significant Other	44.67	7.97	366	.73
Ideal Significant Other	50.62	5.44	366	.83
Actual Opposite-Sex Parent	45.56	6.84	213	.75
Actual Same-Sex Parent	49.16	6.28	196	.76
Actual Significant Other	42.83	7.46	217	.78
	M	SD	N	α
Neuroticism				
Primary Subject	33.34	8.17	366	.84
Perceived Opposite-Sex Parent	30.17	9.08	360	.86
Perceived Same-Sex Parent	31.81	9.03	282	.87
Perceived Significant Other	30.14	8.62	366	.86
Ideal Significant Other	22.55	5.62	366	.70
Actual Opposite-Sex Parent	27.72	7.81	213	.83
Actual Same-Sex Parent	29.45	8.43	196	.83
Actual Significant Other	30.30	7.76	217	.79

* Each scale is comprised of twelve items on a five-point Likert scale

TABLE 4.2
Mean, Standard Deviation, N, and Cronbach's α for Attachment* and Relationship Satisfaction Measures**

	M	SD	N	α
Anxiety				
Primary Subject	13.36	4.35	530	.67
Perceived Opposite-Sex Parent	12.06	4.28	522	.61
Perceived Same-Sex Parent	12.88	5.00	280	.73
Perceived Significant Other	15.17	5.31	525	.76
Ideal Significant Other	11.92	3.21	530	.43
Actual Opposite-Sex Parent	11.80	4.03	272	.59
Actual Same-Sex Parent	11.32	4.16	196	.65
Actual Significant Other	14.09	3.80	269	.49
Closeness				
Primary Subject	11.76	4.12	530	.74
Perceived Opposite-Sex Parent	12.94	4.67	522	.77
Perceived Same-Sex Parent	11.61	4.43	280	.79
Perceived Significant Other	13.01	4.59	525	.77
Ideal Significant Other	10.28	3.48	530	.74
Actual Opposite-Sex Parent	13.73	3.92	270	.59
Actual Same-Sex Parent	12.44	4.15	196	.70
Actual Significant Other	13.29	4.27	269	.67
Dependency				
Primary Subject	14.28	4.67	530	.78
Perceived Opposite-Sex Parent	15.04	5.35	522	.83
Perceived Same-Sex Parent	13.99	5.30	280	.85
Perceived Significant Other	14.81	4.71	525	.79
Ideal Significant Other	10.77	4.00	530	.66
Actual Opposite-Sex Parent	16.29	4.29	272	.64
Actual Same-Sex Parent	15.52	4.57	196	.75
Actual Significant Other	15.99	4.40	269	.68
Relationship Satisfaction				
Primary Subject	13.55	2.11	363	.83

* Each scale is comprised of six items on a five-point Likert scale.

** This scale is comprised of three items on a five-point Likert scale.

adult attachment style scales (Collins & Read, 1990), and the Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire (Murray et al., 1996). In order to assess the internal reliability of these scales, Cronbach alpha coefficients were computed for each scale (see Table 4.1 for NEO-FFI data and Table 4.2 for Adult Attachment Scale and Relationship Satisfaction Scale data). Tables 4.1 and 4.2 also include descriptive information for each of these different scales including the mean, standard deviation, and N for each variable.

These descriptive statistics on the personality and attachment variables provide some interesting information. For instance, the pattern of data for the "ideal significant other" variables tends to be indicative of the relative valence for each trait. For example, for both Big Five measures, the ideal significant others' scores were the highest of all

targets for the variables of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness; thus indicating that these characteristics are generally held in positive regard. The converse is true for neuroticism and the three attachment styles, which are all scored in such a way so that higher scores tend to mean less stable. Additionally, an unexpected pattern may be observed concerning subjects' perceptions of their parents. It was expected that participants' parents would be perceived as relatively positive along the different dimensions being assessed. The results described in Table 4.1 clearly do not suggest that such idealization existed in the present research. Subjects almost invariably rated themselves more positively than their parents on the different dimensions in addition to rating their parents less positively than their parents rated themselves. Thus, any positive correlations that may be found between subjects' descriptions of their parents and their descriptions of their ideal significant others must not come from participants simply describing both their parents and ideal significant others in absolutely idealized terms. This issue will be discussed in more detail in an ensuing section of the Results section as well as in the Discussion.

Analyses Regarding Primary Hypotheses

In order to address the issue of similarity between significant others (ideal, perceived, and actual) and parents (for same and opposite-sex, both perceived and actual), zero-order correlation and partial correlation analyses will be presented for the Big Five trait variables and for the attachment style variables.

Zero order correlations were performed in order to assess similarity between each of the following pairs: (a) perceived opposite-sex parent and perceived significant other, (b) perceived same-sex parent and perceived significant other, (c) perceived opposite-sex parent and ideal significant other, (d) perceived same-sex parent and ideal significant other, (e) actual opposite-sex parent and actual significant other, (f) actual same-sex parent and actual significant other, (g) actual opposite-sex parent and ideal significant other, and (h) actual same sex-parent and ideal significant other (see Table 4.3).

These correlation analyses comprise, perhaps, the clearest description of the results obtained in the present research. Across all eight relevant dimensions (the Big Five personality dimensions and the three attachment style dimensions), people perceived their significant others

and their ideal significant others to be similar to their opposite-sex parents. Similarly, people perceived their significant others and ideal significant others to be similar to their same-sex parents across these same dimensions. In fact, it appears that subjects perceived more similarity between their same-sex parents and significant others than between their opposite-sex parents and their significant others. Whether these observable differences are actually significant will be discussed in the next section.

Of eight correlations computed between actual significant others' traits and actual opposite-sex parents' traits, four were found to be both positive and significantly different from 0. These specific correlations were for the dimensions of openness ($r(194) = .15, p < .05$), agreeableness ($r(194) = .15, p < .05$), neuroticism ($r(194) = .13, p < .05$), and closeness ($r(194) = .21, p < .01$). These results lend some support to the template matching hypothesis concerning actual similarity between significant others and opposite-sex parents. The next correlation analyses included variables from actual significant others and actual same-sex parents. As subjects tended to perceive that their romantic partners were more similar to their same-sex parents than to their opposite-sex parents, it seems that actual similarity between same-sex parents and actual significant others should be at least as strong as the actual similarity between actual opposite-sex parents and actual significant others. Interestingly, this proposed pattern is not manifest in this correlation matrix: Of eight correlations between actual same-sex parents and actual significant others, none were significantly different from 0. This particular finding is a bit puzzling and will be addressed in the Discussion section.

Assessing Differences between Correlations

In order to address whether perceived similarity was indeed stronger between same-sex parents and romantic partners (both actual and ideal) than between opposite-sex parents and romantic partners (both actual and ideal), t-tests were conducted using a procedure outlined by Hotelling (1940). Specifically, a t value was obtained for the difference between the correlation between perceived same-sex parent with perceived significant other and the correlation between perceived opposite-sex parent with perceived significant other. Such t-values were

TABLE 4.3
Zero-Order Correlations Between Parents and Significant Others
for 5 Personality Variables and 3 Attachment Variables

Correlation between	Specific Dimension							
	Openness	Conscientiousness	Extraversion	Agreeableness	Neuroticism	Anxiety	Dependency	Closeness
Perceived Opposite-Sex Parent and Perceived Significant Other ¹	.28**	.14**	.15**	.12*	.29**	.19**	.26**	.18**
Perceived Same-Sex Parent and Perceived Significant Other ²	.35**	.13*	.28**	.29**	.22**	.21**	.19**	.27**
Perceived Opposite-Sex Parent and Ideal Significant Other ¹	.33**	.15**	.17**	.24**	.30**	.30**	.31**	.26**
Perceived Same-Sex Parent and Ideal Significant Other ³	.38**	.22**	.40**	.41**	.26**	.31**	.32**	.43**
Actual Opposite-Sex Parent and Actual Significant Other ⁴	.15*	-.08	.10	.15*	.13*	-.08	.00	.21**
Actual Same-Sex Parent and Actual Significant Other ⁵	.07	-.06	-.04	.03	-.05	-.08	.05	.08
Actual Opposite-Sex Parent and Ideal Significant Other ⁴	.13*	.13*	.08	-.07	.04	.05	-.00	.10
Actual Same-Sex Parent and Ideal Significant Other ⁷	.23**	-.01	-.01	.16*	.12	-.01	.05	.10

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; ¹ $N = 359$ for Big 5 variables and 516 for attachment variables; ² $N = 282$ for Big 5 variables and 516 for attachment variables; ³ $N = 282$ for Big 5 variables and 280 for attachment variables; ⁴ $N = 194$ for Big 5 variables and 230 for attachment variables; ⁵ $N = 179$ for all variables; ⁶ $N = 212$ for Big 5 variables and 271 for attachment variables; ⁷ $N = 196$ for all variables

obtained for all eight dimensions (the Big Five dimensions and the three attachment style dimensions). Of eight t-tests, two were significant. The correlation between perceived same-sex parents' agreeableness and perceived significant others' agreeableness ($r(276) = .29$) was significantly greater than the correlation between perceived opposite-sex parents' agreeableness and perceived significant others' agreeableness ($r(276) = .09; t(276) = 2.59, p < .01$). Similarly, the correlation between perceived same-sex parents' dependency and perceived

significant others' dependency ($r(276) = .27$) was significantly greater than the correlation between perceived opposite-sex parents' dependency and perceived significant others' dependency ($r(276) = .11$; $t(276) = 2.37, p < .01$).

Next, t -values were calculated for the differences between the correlations between perceived same-sex parent with ideal significant other and between opposite-sex parent and ideal significant other. In this case, perceived same-sex parent was significantly more predictive of ideal significant other than perceived opposite-sex parent for three of the eight dimensions (extraversion ($t(275) = 2.93, p < .05$), agreeableness ($t(275) = 2.58, p < .05$), and closeness ($t(275) = 2.85, p < .05$)).

Partial Correlations

The next series of analyses was designed to assess whether the correlations concerned with perceived similarity described earlier might have resulted from two artifactual sources. First, if subjects perceived their significant others as similar to themselves and perceived their opposite-sex parents as similar to themselves, then any correlations between significant others and opposite-sex parents could result simply from the fact that both are perceived as similar to the self. In addition, if subjects tended to employ the same response biases in completing all of the measures, then positive correlations could result simply from this shared methodology (i.e., having the same subject complete all measures). In order to address both of these points, the correlations of primary interest were re-conducted controlling for subjects' own scores on the variables of interest. For example, a correlation was computed between the perceptions of the significant other and opposite-sex parent on the trait of extraversion partialling out the subject's own score on the extraversion measure. Partialling out the subject's own score should control for both of the possible artifacts described earlier.

In general, the patterns of partial correlations mirrored the patterns of correlations. Most partial correlations were positive and significantly different from 0. For instance, of the eight correlations conducted between perceived significant other and perceived opposite-sex parent controlling for subjects' own scores on relevant variables, seven remained positive and significantly different from 0. For example, the zero-order correlation between perceived significant other and per-

ceived opposite-sex parent for neuroticism was $r(359) = .29 (p < .01)$ while this same correlation controlling for subjects' self-reported neuroticism scores was $r(355) = .25 (p < .01)$. These partial correlations indicated that, for the most part, perceived similarity between partners and parents still existed even after controlling for subjects' own scores.

Multiple Regression Analyses

Multiple regression analyses were performed in order to determine the variables that are most predictive of perceived significant others' characteristics, ideal significant others' characteristics, and "actual" significant others' characteristics. Thus three sets of regression analyses were performed. First, analyses employing variables representing perceived significant other as the dependent variables were conducted. For these analyses, predictor variables included variables representing actual opposite-sex parent, actual same-sex parent, perceived opposite-sex parent, perceived same-sex parent, ideal significant other, actual significant other, and the subject him or herself. Eight such analyses were conducted: one for each of the Big Five traits and one for each of the three attachment styles. In each analysis, a significant amount of variability in the dependent variable was accounted for by the set of predictor variables (R^2 ranged from .28 to .58). Across seven of the eight analyses, the variables representing actual significant other and ideal significant were found to be significant predictors of the dependent variable based on semi-squared partial correlations. For instance, the amount of neuroticism subjects perceived in their partners was significantly predicted by both (a) the degree of neuroticism reported for their ideal significant others and (b) the amount of neuroticism their actual significant others reported themselves (see Table 4.4). Thus, subjects' perceptions of their partners reflect, to some degree, their actual partners along with their own ideal partners.

Generally, variables representing subjects' parents (both actual and perceived) were not significantly predictive of perceptions of partners. In two cases, the "actual same sex parent" variable was negatively related to the dependent variable after controlling for multicollinearity (see Table 4.4 for an example).

Next, analyses were performed employing variables representing ideal significant others as dependent variables. For eight such analyses (one analysis for each Big Five trait and one for each of the three

attachment styles), predictor variables represented actual opposite-sex parent, actual same-sex parent, perceived opposite-sex parent, perceived same-sex parent, perceived significant other, actual significant other, and the subject him or herself. In each analysis, a significant amount of variability in the dependent variable was accounted for by the set of predictor variables (R^2 ranged from .20 to .64). In seven of these eight regression analyses, variables representing the perceived significant others and the subjects' self-perceptions served as significant predictors of the dependent variable based on semi-squared partial correlations. For instance, subjects' ideal significant others' degree of neuroticism was significantly predicted by both their perceived significant others' neuroticism as well as their own self-reported degree of neuroticism. These results indicate that one's ideal partner is, in part, a reflection of his or herself as well as a reflection of his or her own partner. Also, for two of the eight dimensions, variables representing subjects' parents served as significant predictors. Specifically, a significant amount of ideal significant others' agreeableness was predicted by both actual opposite-sex parents' agreeableness and perceived opposite-sex parents' agreeableness. Also, ideal significant others' neuroticism was significantly predicted by both actual same-sex parents' neuroticism and perceived opposite-sex parents' neuroticism. This particular finding implies that our conceptualization of our ideal romantic partners may be somewhat based on our opposite-sex parents in terms of neuroticism.

Finally, regression analyses were performed in order to determine the best predictors of actual significant others. For eight such analyses conducted (one for each Big Five trait and one for each of the three attachment styles), variables representing actual significant others served as dependent variables while variables representing actual opposite-sex parent, actual same-sex parent, perceived opposite-sex parent, perceived same-sex parent, ideal significant other, perceived significant other, and the subject him or herself all served as predictor variables. In each analysis, a significant amount of variability in the dependent variable was accounted for by the set of predictor variables (R^2 ranged from .17 to .45). Across all eight of these regression analyses, subjects' perceptions of their partners on the relevant dimensions accounted for a significant amount of variability in the dependent variable as indicated by semi-squared partial correlations. For instance, subjects' perceptions of their partners' degree of extraversion was

TABLE 4.4
Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Significant Other Neuroticism from Neuroticism of the Following Targets: Actual Opposite-sex Parents, Actual Same-sex Parents, Perceived Opposite-sex Parents, Perceived Same-sex Parents, Ideal Significant Others, Actual Significant Other, and Self-Perceptions

Perceived Significant Others' Neuroticism (DV)				
Targets' neuroticism	B	β	sr^2	t
Actual Opposite-Sex Parent	.07	.06	.01	.85
Actual Same-Sex Parent	-.15	-.14	.01	-1.99*
Perceived Opposite-Sex Parent	.07	.07	.00	.89
Perceived Same-Sex Parent	.09	.10	.01	1.31
Ideal Significant Other	.69	.42	.12	5.71**
Actual Significant Other	.39	.34	.11	5.38**
Primary Subject	-.00	-.00	.00	-.03
Constant	-.20			-.05

$R^2 = .51$
 R^2 (adjusted) = .49
 $R = .71^{**}$

significantly related to their partners' self-reported extraversion scores. Thus, to a large extent, people are accurate in describing the personality traits and attachment styles of their romantic partners. Additionally, for the traits of openness and extraversion, actual opposite-sex parents' scores on these dimensions were significant predictors of actual significant others' scores on these same dimensions. Thus, to some extent, characteristics of people's actual parents may independently predict characteristics of their romantic partners.

Sex Differences

As men and women have been found to be differentially attracted to different characteristics in members of the opposite-sex (Buss, 1994) and previous theorists have suggested that mothers are disproportionately influential in affecting the partner choice of both sons and daughters (Winch, 1950), it follows that certain sex differences in template matching phenomena may exist. In order to address any such differences, several zero-order correlations were conducted separately for male and female subjects. First, correlations between perceived opposite-sex parent and perceived significant other were performed separately for males and females. These analyses were conducted for the Big Five personality dimensions. For both males and females, all correlations were positive (suggesting that both males and females perceived their significant others as similar to their opposite-sex parents along these dimensions). The strength of these correlations did not seem to differ between the sexes. For males, these correlations ranged from $r(92) = .14$ to $.29$ whereas for females, they ranged from $r(267) = .13$ to $.29$.

Next, correlations between actual opposite-sex parent and actual significant other were performed separately for males and females. Again, no striking sex differences existed. For males, these correlations ranged from $r(40) = .06$ to $.26$ whereas for females, they ranged from $r(154) = -.13$ to $.17$. If anything, these data suggest that males may be involved with partners who are a bit more similar to their opposite-sex parents than females. However, the relatively small sample size for males makes it impossible to confidently conclude that such a difference exists.

Finally, correlations between perceived same-sex parent and perceived significant other were performed separately for males and females. For males, these correlations ranged from $r(42) = .20$ to $.50$ whereas for females, they ranged from $r(154) = .13$ to $.38$. Regarding these analyses, sex differences are not particularly pronounced.

Relationship Satisfaction

Relationship satisfaction, as measured by the Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire (Murray et al., 1996), had a ceiling effect: Slightly more than half of the subjects scored 15 out of 15 (Most satisfied).

Thus, in order to split subjects into either the "satisfied" or "unsatisfied" conditions, "satisfied" subjects were defined as scoring 15 out of 15 ($N = 187$) while dissatisfied subjects were defined as scoring less than 13 ($N = 81$).

First, correlations between perceptions of significant others and perceptions of opposite-sex parents were performed. An interesting pattern emerges when the data are analyzed in this way. It seems that satisfied individuals tend to perceive similarity between their partners and opposite-sex parents more than dissatisfied individuals do. For satisfied subjects, the correlations ranged from $r(187) = .07$ to $.27$. Three of these correlations were significantly different from 0. These were for the variables of openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism. Interestingly, the only significant relevant correlation for the dissatisfied group was for the trait of neuroticism ($r(80) = .39$, $p < .01$). This finding is somewhat intriguing and will be addressed both in the Discussion and later in the Results section.

Next, correlations between actual significant others and actual opposite-sex parents were conducted separately for satisfied and dissatisfied individuals. Interestingly, only one correlation was significant for satisfied subjects (agreeableness, $r(112) = .19$, $p < .05$) while only one correlation, for a different dimension, was significant for the dissatisfied subjects (neuroticism, $r(38) = .28$, $p < .05$). The finding regarding neuroticism is particularly noteworthy. These results suggest that individuals whose partners are similar to their opposite-sex parents in terms of neuroticism tend to be relatively dissatisfied with their relationships. However, this interpretation implies that some subjects (a) have relatively stable (unneurotic) opposite-sex parents, (b) become involved with partners who are similar to their opposite-sex parents on this dimension (i.e., who are also somewhat stable) and (c) are, consequently, dissatisfied with their relationships. This possibility is counter-intuitive.

Concerning the relationship between neuroticism and relationship satisfaction, it seems most plausible that subjects who are involved with neurotic partners would be less satisfied in their relationships than subjects involved with stable partners. In order to address this issue, two between-groups t-tests were performed: one addressing whether satisfied subjects perceive their partners as less neurotic than dissatisfied subjects and one comparing whether satisfied subjects'

actual partners are, indeed, less neurotic than dissatisfied subjects' actual partners. Both analyses revealed significant between-group differences. Satisfied subjects perceived significantly less neuroticism in their partners ($M = 27.98$; $SD = 8.22$) than dissatisfied subjects ($M = 33.11$; $SD = 8.74$; $t(272) = 4.65$, $p < .01$). Additionally, satisfied subjects' actual partners reported having significantly less neurotic tendencies ($M = 29.62$; $SD = 6.87$) than dissatisfied subjects' actual partners ($M = 32.00$; $SD = 8.55$; $t(169) = 1.82$, $p < .05$).

These results and the results concerning concordance between opposite-sex parents and significant others for the trait of neuroticism suggest that dissatisfaction in a relationship may stem from both (a) becoming involved with relatively neurotic individuals and (b) becoming involved with individuals who, other things equal, are relatively similar to one's opposite-sex parent in terms of neuroticism. The implications of these findings will be addressed in the Discussion.

Finally, correlations between perceptions of significant others and perceptions of same-sex parents were performed separately for satisfied and dissatisfied subjects. For the satisfied group, all five relevant correlations were significant and positive, while, for the dissatisfied group, only two correlations were significant and positive. Unlike with the previous two correlation matrices, no noticeable differences were found for the variable of neuroticism ($r(146) = .24$, $p < .01$ for the satisfied group, whereas $r(67) = .25$, $p < .05$ for the dissatisfied group).

In terms of relationship satisfaction, the present results suggest that dissatisfied individuals may perceive slightly less similarity between their opposite-sex parents and significant others overall, while perceiving more similarity for the dimension of neuroticism. Further, actual concordance for the dimension of neuroticism may exist more for dissatisfied individuals than for satisfied individuals. Also, satisfied subjects may perceive more similarity between their same-sex parents and significant others than dissatisfied subjects.

Discussion

The present research was designed to assess the validity of the template matching hypothesis, a hypothesis derived from Freud's (1927) psychoanalytic theory, which proposes that, when choosing a mate, a person unconsciously tries to match a template of his or her opposite-sex parent that was formed early in development. While evidence has

been obtained which suggests that people do tend to choose partners who are physically similar to their opposite-sex parents (Jedlicka, 1980, 1984), evidence concerning personality similarity and the template matching phenomenon has not been consistent (Epstein & Guttman, 1984). Indeed, existing research that has attempted to demonstrate that people choose partners who are similar to their opposite-sex parents in terms of personality has exclusively employed personality assessments of the opposite-sex parents and significant others that were made by the subjects themselves. Thus, such research may be tapping a perceptual bias whereby people perceive their significant others to be similar to their opposite-sex parents; regardless of actual similarity.

The present study was designed explicitly to test the template matching hypothesis in addition to certain related hypotheses. In previous research on the template matching hypothesis, subjects have simply been asked to describe both their opposite-sex parents and their significant others along certain dimensions, thus obtaining two sets of data (Wilson & Barrett, 1987; Aron, 1974). The present research obtained these same two sets of data in addition to six other sets of data including subjects' perceptions of themselves, perceptions of their same-sex parents, conceptualizations of their ideal significant others, and actual data obtained from subjects' significant others, opposite-sex parents, and same-sex parents.

For each of these data sets, individuals were described (either by themselves or by the primary subjects) along five trait dimensions (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and three attachment style dimensions (Collins & Read, 1990). Thus, while the present research design is adequate to address the template matching hypothesis in a similar way as past research, by assessing the degree of similarity between people's perceptions of their romantic partners and perceptions of their opposite-sex parents, the present research also allows for the assessment of several additional questions.

Actual Similarity between Parents and Partners

In terms of actual similarity between subjects' parents and romantic partners, some interesting results were obtained. Of eight correlations that were calculated between actual opposite-sex parents and actual significant others, four (i.e., half) were both positive and significantly different from zero. The specific dimensions for which actual concor-

dance was found were openness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and closeness. These dimensions represent a relatively broad range of traits and suggest that, at least to a moderate degree, people do tend to enter romantic relationships with individuals similar to their opposite-sex parents. In other words, to some extent, Freud (1927) was correct in his assertions that individuals choose romantic partners in adulthood who resemble their opposite-sex parents. The present research found this template matching phenomenon to exist for personality variables. While these effect sizes are relatively small, in terms of the extant literature, this finding is novel. Past research on this topic has not administered personality measures to actual parents and partners of subjects.

This finding concerning actual similarity between people's romantic partners and opposite-sex parents may have implications for partner selection as well as for relationship success. For instance, consider individuals who, for a variety of reasons, have relatively poor relationships with their opposite-sex parents. Such individuals may cherish the day that they move out of their parents' homes for good. What would become of these individuals if they became involved with, or even married, people who had very similar personalities as their opposite-sex parents? This scenario brings to mind images of frustration, resentment, unhappy relationships, and divorce. If, as the present research suggests, there is a general tendency for individuals to become romantically involved with persons similar to their opposite-sex parents along several personality dimensions, knowledge of this finding may serve to help guide the partner choice of individuals who have generally negative relationships with their opposite-sex parents. For such individuals, it may be advantageous to seek partners who are discernibly different from their opposite-sex parents in terms of openness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and closeness. The correlation found for neuroticism seems a bit counter-intuitive and will be discussed in a later section titled "The Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction and Template Matching Phenomena."

Regarding the issue of the differential importance of same and opposite-sex parents, the current data are somewhat mixed. Of the eight zero-order correlations calculated between actual significant others and actual same-sex parents, none were found to be significantly different from zero. However, concerning perceived similarity between partners and parents, a different story unfolds.

Perceived Similarity between Parents and Partners

Evidence regarding actual similarity between romantic partners and parents suggests that people's partners tend to be similar to their opposite-sex parents along some dimensions. These results further suggest that characteristics of individuals' same-sex parents are unrelated to characteristics of their romantic partners. However, the results bearing on the question of perceived similarity suggest that people perceive their romantic partners as similar to both their opposite and same-sex parents. These results remained apparent even after partialling out subjects' own scores on the dimensions of interest. Thus, across all eight dimensions addressed in the present research, subjects described their romantic partners as similar to both their same and opposite-sex parents. Furthermore, subjects seemed, if anything, to perceive somewhat more similarity between their same-sex parents and significant others than between their opposite-sex parents and significant others.

Perceived Similarity between Parents and Ideal Partners

The results concerning similarity between parents and ideal significant others are quite similar to those relating to similarity between perceptions of parents and significant others. Across all of the different dimensions assessed, subjects perceived both their same and opposite-sex parents as similar to their ideal significant others. In fact, people seemed to perceive more similarity between their ideal significant others and parents than between their actual significant others and parents.

People may perceive similarity between their parents and their ideal significant others partly because their parents may be perceived in generally idealized ways and thus may provide templates for ideal significant others. However, after carefully reviewing the results of the present study, this hypothesis seems only half true. Subjects did, indeed, perceive a significant amount of similarity between their ideal significant others and their parents. However, unexpectedly, subjects' parents were not generally perceived in idealized terms. For instance, subjects' own scores on openness were, on average, higher than both their perceptions of their opposite-sex parents' and same-sex parents' scores, which, in turn, were lower than their opposite-sex parents' self-reports as well as lower than their same-sex parents' self-reports. Similar results were found for several other variables.

If subjects in the present study did not, in general, idealize their parents, then why would their perceptions of their parents be so highly correlated with their conceptualizations of their ideal significant others (which are defined as ideal)? It may be that people's conceptualizations of their ideal significant others are based, in part, on their relatively *unidealized* perceptions of their parents. Thus, idealized romantic partners represent an interaction of generalized idealized individuals, projections of the self (Murray et al., 1996), and projections of perceived characteristics of both parents. Regardless of whether one idealizes his or her parents, a person's ideal significant other represents characteristics that he or she perceives his or her parents to have. For example, one's ideal significant other is not simply as stable (i.e., unneurotic) as possible, but is *relatively* stable. Further, that same ideal significant other may be similar to that specific person's parents (as perceived by that person) for the dimension of stability. Based on this reasoning, subjects' ideal significant others do represent their perceptions of their specific parents, regardless of whether they idealize those parents.

The Relationship between Relationship Satisfaction and Template Matching Phenomena

As previously mentioned, the findings from the present research may have implications for how to achieve satisfaction in romantic relationships. The findings concerning relationship satisfaction as a moderator variable are particularly intriguing. Using the Relationship Satisfaction Questionnaire (Murray et al., 1996), subjects were divided into groups representing either high or low satisfaction. Overall, the satisfied individuals tended to perceive similarity between their opposite-sex parents and significant others more than the dissatisfied subjects (i.e., across more dimensions). However, dissatisfied subjects perceived more similarity between their opposite-sex parents and significant others for the dimension of neuroticism. In other words, dissatisfied subjects tended to perceive that their partners were, generally, as neurotic (emotionally unstable) as their opposite-sex parents. It is apparent that such a perception may easily lead to problems in a relationship.

The correlations between actual significant others and actual opposite-sex parents, which were calculated separately for satisfied and dissatisfied subjects, suggest even more about how neuroticism may

play a role in determining relationship satisfaction. Of five correlations calculated for satisfied subjects (one for each Big Five dimension), one was significant and positive. Specifically, subjects' actual opposite-sex parents were found to be similar to their significant others for the dimension of agreeableness. Subjects whose partners were roughly as agreeable as their opposite-sex parents seemed happy with their relationships. For dissatisfied subjects, interestingly, subjects' actual opposite-sex parents were found to be similar to their actual significant others for the dimension of neuroticism. Subjects whose partners were, generally, as neurotic as their opposite-sex parents were unhappy with their relationships. Further, these subjects seemed to accurately perceive this similarity in neuroticism.

It seems as though the relationship between an undesirable trait such as neuroticism and relationship satisfaction would simply be that people involved with relatively neurotic partners are less satisfied than individuals whose partners are relatively stable. This hypothesis was partially confirmed in the present research: Subjects who were satisfied with their relationships were involved with less neurotic partners (in terms of both perception and "actuality") than subjects who were dissatisfied with their relationships. However, the present findings suggest that, above and beyond this tendency for partner-neuroticism to co-vary with relationship satisfaction, satisfaction is also moderated by the degree to which partners and opposite-sex parents are similar along such dimensions. Perhaps future research could examine the complexities concerning just how template matching phenomena do, indeed, affect relationship satisfaction.

Implications

The present research has implications for many aspects of interpersonal relationships. First, in terms of actual mate selection, the findings provide modest support for Freud's (1927) theory of mate selection. While effect sizes were generally small, these data suggest that along a variety of traits, people may tend to choose romantic partners who are similar to their opposite-sex parents. In light of the empirical evidence presented in the present work, this Freudian notion may not be folklore. This tendency has implications for relationship success and relationship satisfaction.

The present findings do not imply that choosing a romantic partner

reminiscent of one's opposite-sex parent is necessarily a recipe for failure. In fact, the subjects in the present research who chose partners similar to their opposite-sex parents on the dimension of agreeableness tended to be most satisfied with their relationships. On the other hand, it seems that becoming involved with a romantic partner who is not only neurotic but is, additionally, similar to one's opposite-sex parent in terms of this trait dimension, may lead to relationship despair.

These results do, however, suggest a mechanism for people to increase their likelihood of finding relationship satisfaction. Recall that dissatisfied subjects not only chose partners who were actually similar to their opposite-sex parents in terms of neuroticism, but that these subjects also perceived this similarity to exist. These findings suggest that people are able to perceive a factor that appears to lead to dissatisfaction in relationships. Being able to perceive such similarity should help people choose partners for whom they are better suited.

The present research also has implications concerning generalized romantic partner perception. It seems clear that people perceive their actual and ideal romantic partners as similar to both their opposite and same-sex parents. Further, this perception exists after controlling for subjects' own personalities. This finding is consistent with the notion of internal working models as described in Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory which suggests that people develop internal working models which help them predict characteristics of relationships. The tendency to perceive one's partner as similar to one's parent(s) may be appropriately characterized as the manifestation of such internal working models. The present research suggests that these internal working models not only guide relationship patterns, but also help color the perceptions people have of others with whom they are involved.

Also, concerning partner perceptions, the present research implies that relatively satisfied individuals are more likely to perceive their partners as similar to their parents than relatively dissatisfied individuals. This finding is consistent with the work of Murray and her colleagues (e.g., Murray et al, 1996) which concentrates on the positive benefits that people gain from holding positive illusions in relationships. Her research implies that people who tend to idealize their partners are generally satisfied with their relationships. The present research suggests a parallel process by which people project characteristics of their parents on their partners, feel that they can predict their partners' behavior, and, consequently, are relatively satisfied with their

relationships. Such a perceptual phenomenon may allow people to understand their romantic partners as coherent gestalts; what more could one want from a romantic partner?

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