

Do Ideal Partner Preferences Predict Divorce? A Tale of Two Metrics

Social Psychological and
Personality Science
00(0) 1-8
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DOI: 10.1177/1948550611435941
http://spps.sagepub.com



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Abstract

Though people report idiosyncratic desires for particular traits in an ideal romantic partner, few studies have examined whether these ideals predict important long-term relationship outcomes. The present 3.5-year longitudinal study of newlywed couples used survival analysis to investigate whether the match between participants' ideal preferences and the traits they perceive in their partner predict the likelihood of divorce. Results depended entirely on whether the match was conceptualized as a match in level (e.g., high ideal preference for a trait with the presence of the trait in the partner) or in pattern (e.g., the within-person correlation of ideals with a partner's traits across all traits). The match between the pattern of ideals and traits negatively predicted divorce with an effect size larger than most established divorce risk factors. However, the match in level was unrelated to divorce, suggesting that perspectives emphasizing ideals for the level of traits may encounter predictive validity problems.

Keywords

ideal partner preferences, relationships, divorce, person perception

With little hesitation, most people can paint a clear portrait of their ideal romantic partner. One person might generate a nuanced description of a partner who generously provides support and affection in times of stress, whereas another person might emphasize the appeal of a confident partner who can capably work a room. But if I describe a compassionate companion and you describe a stirring socialite, is it true that our relationships will be stable if, superpowers aside, I land Clark Kent and you land Bruce Wayne? In other words, are relationships more likely to succeed when people are paired with romantic partners who happen to match their ideals? The present longitudinal study of married couples examines this question, and the answer may depend entirely on what it means to "match."

The Function of Ideal Partner Preferences

Psychologists and sociologists have long studied the qualities that people ideally desire in a romantic partner (e.g., Hill, 1945). For example, classic evolutionary perspectives on mating suggest that the sexes differ in their preferences for traits such as physical attractiveness and earning prospects (Buss, 1989). More recently, in some of the most comprehensive work on this topic, Fletcher and colleagues asked participants to describe their ideal partner (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999). Their descriptions included traits that generally fell into three categories: warmth-trustworthiness (e.g., understanding, supportive), vitality-attractiveness (e.g., outgoing, sexy), and status-resources (e.g., good job, successful), which

are all appealing traits with beneficial interpersonal consequences (Wiggins, 1979).

Of course, people differ in the extent to which they emphasize these positive traits in an ideal partner, and these differences partially reflect people's idiosyncratic beliefs about which traits in a romantic partner would optimally impact their own personal and relational outcomes (Eagly, Eastwick, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2009). Consequently, several theoretical perspectives have argued that ideal partner preferences should play a pivotal role in shaping relationship development. According to interdependence theory (e.g., Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) and the ideal standards model (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000), ideals operate as chronically accessible knowledge structures that people use to make important relationship decisions. Specifically, ideals can serve as a comparison standard against which people evaluate the appropriateness of potential mates and current relationship partners. If a potential partner possesses traits that happen to match one's ideals, that partner may be a more compatible mate than a potential partner who mismatches one's ideals. In this way, the match between one's

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ideals and the traits of an actual romantic partner should predict important relational outcomes, such as romantic desire and relationship stability (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000).

However, despite the great volume of work exploring the content of people's ideals, few studies have examined if ideals indeed predict such outcomes, and the resultant findings have proven disjointed and inconsistent. For example, studies of initial romantic attraction often find that participants' ideal partner preferences do not predict with whom they desire to pursue a relationship (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Eastwick, Finkel, & Eagly, 2011; Todd, Penke, Fasolo, & Lenton, 2007). However, studies of college student relationships (i.e., predominantly dating relationships) have found that the match between ideals and a romantic partner's qualities predict both concurrent relationship satisfaction as well as the likelihood that couples would break up over a 1-month period (Fletcher et al., 1999; Fletcher, Simpson, & Thomas, 2000).

Together, these findings potentially suggest that ideal partner preferences may matter more as people progress from an attraction context to a dating context. This possibility is consistent with the increasing trajectory of interdependence between romantic partners as their relationship shifts from potential partners to casual partners and perhaps ultimately to serious partners. When two partners' day-to-day lives and potential futures are not yet entwined, interdependence remains low (Knobloch & Solomon, 2004; Solomon & Knobloch, 2004), and couples need not consider costly sacrifices (e.g., moving to a new location for a partner's job) in order to sustain their relationship. Before strong interdependence emerges, people may not be especially motivated to consider their ideals, instead relying on spontaneous affect in lieu of their ideal partner preferences to make evaluations of romantic partners (Eastwick, Eagly, Finkel, & Johnson, 2011). With time, however, couples may encounter "choice points" when factors internal or external to the relationship push them to use their ideals as a comparison standard while deliberating about important relationship decisions (Gagné & Lydon, 2004). Few decisions are as important as the decision to leave a marriage partner, which frequently produces considerable monetary costs along with emotional turmoil for spouses and children (Amato, 2000). If the interdependence perspective is accurate, then ideals should play a crucial role in marital relationships—when costs are high and consequences are severe.

Yet any conclusion about the influence of ideals on romantic relationships must remain tentative as researchers have only explored these processes in attraction contexts and early dating relationships. As such, it remains unclear whether the impact of ideal partner preferences is limited to dating relationships or whether ideals predict important outcomes in truly well-established, long-term relationships, such as marriage. The first goal of the current study, then, was to extend the prior literature on ideals and relationship development by examining the influence of ideal partner preferences on the likelihood of getting divorced during the early years of marriage.

What Does It Mean for a Romantic Partner To Match Ideals?

Another limitation of the existing ideals literature is that studies have differed in the operationalization of the "match" between ideal partner preferences and a romantic partner's characteristics. Specifically, there are two main sources of variance in participants' ideal partner preference reports that could conceivably predict meaningful outcomes. The first is the overall *level* of the response for each item; that is, does it matter if participants give high or low ratings for each ideal partner trait? This level variance in ideal partner preference reports is the variance of interest in prior research that has examined how people differ in their ideals (e.g., research on sex differences; Buss, 1989; Eagly & Wood, 1999; Kenrick, Groth, Trost, & Sadalla, 1993; Li & Kenrick, 2006; Sprecher, Sullivan, & Hatfield, 1994; Townsend, 1989; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1992). With respect to the match between ideals and a partner's characteristics, a match in level occurs when a romantic partner possesses traits that the participant values highly relative to other participants. For instance, if I value warmth more than other people do, then my partner matches my ideals if she is especially warm and mismatches my ideals if she is not. As an illustration, consider a hypothetical 2×2 matrix that crosses the level of a romantic partner's trait (high vs. low) with the level of a participant's ideal (high vs. low). The high-high and low-low quadrants represent a match in level and the high-low and low-high quadrants represent a mismatch in level, and thus the matching cells should experience positive outcomes and the mismatching cells should experience negative outcomes (notwithstanding any trait or ideal main effects). The second source of variance is the *pattern* of the responses; that is, does it matter if participants place more emphasis on some traits in an ideal partner than on others? In this case, a match occurs when a romantic partner's traits track the pattern of the participant's ideals across traits, regardless of level. For instance, if I value warmth more than passion in a partner, then my partner matches my ideals if she is warmer than she is passionate and mismatches my ideals if she is more passionate than she is warm.

These "level" and "pattern" metrics are roughly analogous to the distinction between elevation and accuracy (Cronbach, 1955) and, as Cronbach noted, each source of variance can have different effects on an outcome of interest. The varying use of these two measurement strategies could be responsible in part for some of the inconsistencies in the previous literature on the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences. In fact, all the significant predictive validity findings documented by Fletcher and colleagues (Fletcher et al., 2000, 1999) have used the pattern, not the level, conceptualization. Yet, the intellectual foundation of ideal partner preference research is that the level of traits preferred by men and women represents meaningful variance (Buss, 1989; Hill, 1945). Thus, the second goal of the current study was to offer clarity to this measurement issue by examining in the same study the

two different metrics that can capture how well a partner “matches” one’s ideals.

Overview of the Current Study

The present study examined whether the match between newlyweds’ ideals and their perceptions of their spouse predicted divorce during the first 3.5 years of marriage. We conducted a survival analysis which tests whether predictors are associated with the tendency to “drop out” of the data set—in this case, to get divorced. The match between ideals and perceptions of a partner were assessed using two statistically independent metrics: level match and pattern match. The level match is the Ideal Preference \times Perceived Partner Characteristic interaction; a significant interaction indicates that the association between the partner’s trait and an outcome is greater to the extent that the participant places a higher (vs. lower) value on the trait in an ideal partner. Alternatively, the pattern match is the within-person correlation between a participant’s ideals and his or her perception of the partner’s traits across all traits. Based on the studies reviewed above, we expected the pattern match but not the level match to significantly and negatively predict divorce. Nevertheless, given that this study examined a relationship context (marriage) and a relationship outcome (divorce) for which ideals should be especially likely to matter, it offers the best possible opportunity for the level match to demonstrate predictive validity.

Method

Participants

One hundred and sixty-nine newlywed couples were recruited through (a) advertisements placed in local newspapers and bridal shops and (b) letters sent to couples applying for marriage licenses in the surrounding community. All couples were in their first marriage. On average, husbands were 25.6 years old ($SD = 4.1$) and wives were 23.4 years old ($SD = 3.6$). Ninety-four percent of husbands and 86% of wives were White.

Procedure

Within the first 6 months of their marriage, couples completed a packet of questionnaires (Wave 1) that included a measure of ideal partner preferences and a measure assessing spouses’ perceptions of their partner’s characteristics. After this initial assessment, couples were contacted by the research team every 6 months over the subsequent 3 years (Waves 2 through 7) to determine whether the couple was still married. Marital status was verified for all 169 couples at all waves. Twenty-two couples ultimately divorced.

Materials

Ideal partner preferences. Spouses indicated whether 21 traits were important qualities in a marriage partner on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extremely*). These traits were taken from

established measures used to assess partner qualities in the close relationships literature (e.g., Fletcher et al., 1999; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Showers & Kevlyn, 1999). A factor analysis (principal axis factoring with promax rotation) followed by parallel analysis (Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999) suggested three factors. Two of the factors were roughly analogous to the Fletcher et al. (1999) ideal partner preference constructs of *warmth* (caring, understanding, generous, thoughtful, dependable, supportive, communicative, affectionate, admirable; 9-item $\alpha = .85$) and *vitality* (self-confident, outgoing, ambitious, friendly, organized, patient, optimistic, capable; 8-item $\alpha = .80$). The third factor consisted of undesirable *faults* (moody, stubborn, indecisive, critical; 4-item $\alpha = .74$).

Perceived partner characteristics. Spouses rated the extent to which their partner possessed the traits described above. The 21 items were averaged to form the same three factors of *warmth* ($\alpha = .86$), *vitality* ($\alpha = .72$), and *faults* ($\alpha = .55$).

Control variables. Spouses also completed several control measures, including attachment style (Collins & Read, 1990; comfort with closeness $\alpha = .79$, comfort with dependence $\alpha = .81$, and anxiety $\alpha = .81$), neuroticism (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1978; $\alpha = .85$), education, age, and personal income.

Results

Analysis Strategy

To examine whether the match between ideal partner preferences and perceived partner characteristics predicted marital outcomes, we used a discrete time hazard model (Singer & Willett, 2003), which is a longitudinal data analytic strategy that assesses whether predictors are associated with increased likelihood of reaching a criterion over time—in this case, divorce. In a couple-period data set, divorce was coded such that couples received a zero for each wave that they were married, one for the wave that they divorced, and missing for any subsequent waves. Each analysis included six dummy variables that corresponded to Waves 2 through 7, as recommended by Singer and Willett (2003). These time indicators form the basic hazard function (see Figure 1, solid line), which is the probability that a couple who has not yet divorced will get divorced at each wave of data collection. For example, the value of this function is .021 when years since wedding = 3, which indicates that 2.1% of couples who were still together at 2.5 years will be divorced by their third anniversary. Hypothesis tests on additional predictors in the model examine whether the predictor shifts the hazard function up or down. All analyses controlled for the length of couples’ premarital courtship ($M = 1,595$ days, $SD = 1,089$ days).

Because the dependent variable of divorce is identical for both husbands and wives at all waves, the couple (not the participant) is the unit of analysis. However, husbands and wives provided their own independent ratings of ideal partner preferences and perceived partner characteristics, and thus both the

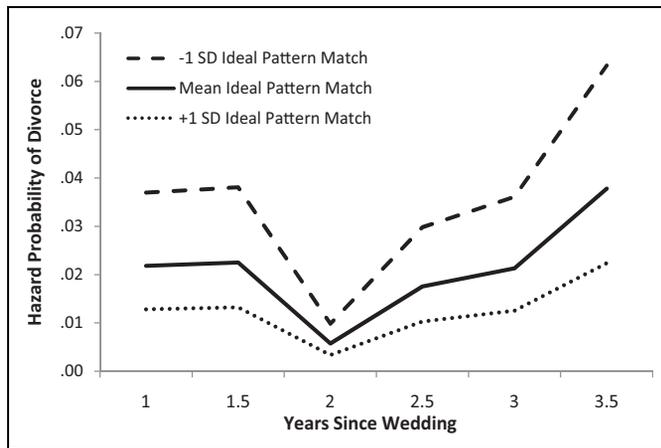


Figure 1. Model-predicted probability of divorce at each wave of data collection for participants who reached that wave (i.e., hazard probability). Dotted line indicates participants 1 SD above the mean, solid line indicates participants at the mean, and dashed line indicates participants 1 SD below the mean on the pattern match between ideal partner preferences and partner characteristics.

level and pattern match can be calculated separately for husbands and wives. Therefore, for all the models below, we test the joint significance of the husband's and wife's match scores. Specifically, we entered the terms for husbands and wives into the hazard model simultaneously, and then we compared the -2 log-likelihood measure of model fit of this *full* model against the -2 log-likelihood value of a *reduced* model with the husband's and wife's match terms excluded. The significance of the difference between the full and reduced model fit values can be determined using a chi-squared distribution (Singer & Willet, 2003).

Does a Match in Level Predict Likelihood of Divorce?

To examine whether a match in level predicts the likelihood of divorce, we conducted three separate pairs of survival analyses. Each pair of analyses (a full model and a reduced model) tested whether the level match—the Ideal Preference \times Perceived Partner Characteristic interaction—predicted divorce for one of the three partner preference constructs (warmth, vitality, and faults). For instance, the level match for the warmth dimension (an average of the nine warm trait items) was examined using the following equation as the full model:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{logit } h(t_{ij}) = & [\alpha_2 T_2 + \alpha_3 T_3 + \alpha_4 T_4 + \alpha_5 T_5 + \alpha_6 T_6 + \alpha_7 T_7] \\ & + \beta_1 \text{WarmthIdeal}_H + \beta_2 \text{WarmthIdeal}_W + \beta_3 \text{WarmthPerceived}_H \\ & + \beta_4 \text{WarmthPerceived}_W + \beta_5 \text{WarmthIdeal}_H \times \text{WarmthPerceived}_H \\ & + \beta_6 \text{WarmthIdeal}_W \times \text{WarmthPerceived}_W, \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

where $h(t_{ij})$ is the conditional probability that couple i will experience divorce in time period j , given that they did not experience divorce in any earlier time period. The T terms are

the dummy codes for time points 2–7, and the α terms represent the intercept values (i.e., the average hazard values) for each of these time points. The terms β_1 and β_2 test whether husbands' (subscript H) and wives' (subscript W) ideal partner preferences for warmth predict divorce. β_3 and β_4 test whether husbands' and wives' perceptions of their partner's warmth predicts divorce. Finally, β_5 and β_6 test whether the interaction of ideals and perceived partner characteristics predict divorce. For the level match to demonstrate predictive validity, this full model should differ significantly from a reduced model that does not contain the β_5 and β_6 terms. In other words, the two Ideal Preference \times Perceived Partner Characteristic interaction terms should be jointly significant. Parallel full and reduced models were conducted for vitality and faults.¹ Spouses' interaction terms were correlated for warmth, $r = .34$, $p < .001$, vitality, $r = .36$, $p < .001$, and faults, $r = .15$, $p = .065$.

The full model presented in Equation 1 did not differ from the reduced model without the β_5 and β_6 terms for warmth, $\chi^2(2) = 0.24$, $p = .886$, vitality $\chi^2(2) = 2.17$, $p = .338$, or faults $\chi^2(2) = 2.55$, $p = .279$. In other words, the husband and wife Ideal Preference \times Perceived Partner Characteristic interactions did not jointly account for a significant amount of variance in predicting the likelihood of divorce. Furthermore, of the six Ideal Preference \times Perceived Partner Characteristic interaction terms (three β_5 and three β_6), none were even marginally significant, with three trending negative (the predicted direction) and three trending positive (the opposite of the predicted direction). In short, the level match failed to receive support in this study; the association of perceived partner characteristics with divorce did not depend on the extent to which participants rated those traits as important in an ideal romantic partner.

We also tested two alternative ways that the level match might achieve predictive validity. First, it is possible that our conceptualization of level match was too narrow because each significance test examined only one of the three trait constructs. Therefore, we combined the β s from all three versions of Equation 1 into a single analysis to examine the predictive validity of the level match using all available ideal partner preference information. However, the six level match interaction terms did not achieve joint significance above and beyond the reduced model, $\chi^2(6) = 6.66$, $p = .354$. Second, it is possible that our conceptualization of level match was too broad because the warmth, vitality, and faults factors average across four to nine traits; perhaps what matters is how participants' ideals match the level of their spouse's characteristics for each specific trait item. To test this possibility, we conducted 21 pairs of models that tested whether the β_5 and β_6 terms were jointly significant for each of the 21 traits we assessed. In only one case were the β_5 and β_6 terms jointly significant, a number that does not exceed what would be expected due to chance.

Does a Match in Pattern Predict Likelihood of Divorce?

To examine whether a match in pattern predicts the likelihood of divorce, we first calculated the within-person correlation

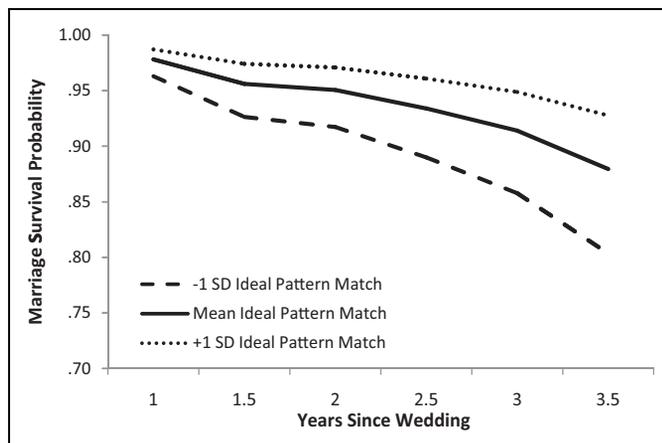


Figure 2. Model-predicted probability that a couple remains married (i.e., survival probability) plotted by wave of data collection. Dotted line indicates participants 1 *SD* above the mean, solid line indicates participants at the mean, and dashed line indicates participants 1 *SD* below the mean on the pattern match between ideal partner preferences and partner characteristics.

between ratings of the 21 ideal partner preference items and the 21 perceived partner characteristic items for each spouse (see Eastwick, Finkel et al., 2011; Fletcher et al., 2000). This correlation indicates how well the relative rating of a target's 21 characteristics generally matched the participant's relative ideal partner preferences ratings. This correlation was Fisher z transformed to produce an index of pattern match that ranged from -0.54 to 2.65 ($M = 0.83$, $SD = 0.57$). We then examined the predictive validity of the pattern match using the following equation:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{logit } h(t_{ij}) = & [\alpha_2 T_2 + \alpha_3 T_3 + \alpha_4 T_4 + \alpha_5 T_5 + \alpha_6 T_6 + \alpha_7 T_7] \\ & + \beta_7 \text{IdealPerceivedPattern}_H \\ & + \beta_8 \text{IdealPerceivedPattern}_W. \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

The terms β_7 and β_8 test whether the pattern match index for husbands (β_7) and wives (β_8) predict divorce. For the pattern match to demonstrate predictive validity, this full model should differ significantly from a reduced model that does not contain the β_7 and β_8 terms. Spouses' pattern match indices were correlated $r = .17$, $p = .034$. As predicted, the full model presented in Equation 2 differed significantly from the reduced model, $\chi^2(2) = 10.98$, $p = .004$. The hazard function is plotted in Figure 1, and the survival function (i.e., the probability that a couple will still be married at each wave of data collection) is plotted in Figure 2.² Participants were less likely to divorce to the extent that their partner's characteristics matched the participant's pattern of ideals. In Equation 2, this association was significant for men, $\beta_7 = -.65$, $e^\beta = 0.52$, Wald $\chi^2 = 6.12$, $p = .013$, and marginally significant for women, $\beta_8 = -.47$, $e^\beta = 0.63$, Wald $\chi^2 = 2.99$, $p = .084$. Furthermore, Equation 2 also differed from the reduced model using an pattern match measure calculated on the three factor scores (instead

of all 21 individual items), $\chi^2(2) = 7.37$, $p = .025$. This latter finding suggests that the predictive validity of the pattern match remained robust even when the metric consisted of only three broad trait construct "items". Finally, Equation 2 differed from the reduced model in seven separate analyses that included both spouses' comfort with closeness, comfort with dependence, attachment anxiety, neuroticism, age, education, and income as covariates, $\chi^2s(2) > 8.09$, $ps < .017$. In other words, the pattern match findings are unlikely to be an artifact of these individual difference variables.

In principle, this pattern could have emerged if participants did not vary in their ideal partner preference reports (e.g., they all desired warmth and vitality) but did vary in their perceptions of their partner's characteristics. In such a case, participants who believed their partners (a) lacked the positive warmth or vitality characteristics and/or (b) possessed the undesirable faults would be the same participants who received low scores for the pattern match index. Therefore, these participants might be more likely to get divorced not because these partners failed to match an ideal partner template but simply because they had a dim view of their partner's qualities. However, the full model also differed (albeit marginally significantly) from a reduced model in a very conservative test that included the β_3 and β_4 terms from Equation 1 for all three partner characteristic variables (six new regression terms), $\chi^2(2) = 5.43$, $p = .066$. In other words, the husband and wife pattern match terms accounted for variance in the likelihood of divorce even after controlling for husbands' and wives' perceptions of their spouses' characteristics.

Discussion

Are newlyweds more likely to get divorced if their spouse fails to match their ideal partner preferences? We conceptualized "match" using two different metrics, and the predictive validity of ideals depended entirely on which metric was used to predict divorce. The pattern match was operationalized as the within-person correlation across traits between a participant's ideals and the perception of his/her spouse. This metric was a significant and robust predictor of divorce: Participants were ~ 2.7 times more likely to be divorced after 3.5 years if they were 1 *SD* above (7% divorced, see Figure 2) versus below (20% divorced) the mean on the pattern match variable. In fact, the pattern match measure is one of the strongest predictors of divorce yet identified. The average odds ratio for men and women ($OR = 0.58$) translates to $r = .20$ (Digby, 1983), which is larger than the effect sizes associated with most well-established predictors of divorce, such as income, employment status, age at marriage, stress, negative reciprocity, and personality homogamy (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Consistent with research on ideal standards (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000) and deliberative thinking in close relationships (Gagné & Lydon, 2004), these findings suggest that people compare (implicitly or explicitly) their current partner with the pattern of traits that characterizes their ideal partner and that the outcome of this

comparison may guide spouses' decisions to maintain or dissolve their marriage.

In contrast to the pattern match findings, the level match metric was unsuccessful; the associations between warmth, vitality, and faults and the likelihood of divorce were not moderated by the level of participants' ideals. This finding has implications for approaches that emphasize whether participants' desires for particular traits in an ideal partner are high or low. Consider sex differences in preferences for physical attractiveness and earning prospects (e.g., Buss, 1989): Since these sex differences concern level and not pattern, the effects of attractiveness and/or earning prospects on actual relationship outcomes may not be sex differentiated. Indeed, research examining attraction contexts has suggested that physical attractiveness and earning prospects do not predict relationship outcomes differently depending on participant sex (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008).

Why might the predictive validity of participants' ideals be stronger for pattern variance than for level variance? Perhaps, participants simply do not take between-person considerations into account when they report the level of their ideals; that is, participants do not recognize that a high rating for warmth should imply that they desire warmth in a partner *more than other people do*. Alternatively, given that the meaning of a person's traits tends to shift depending on that person's overall constellation of traits (Asch, 1946; Eastwick, Finkel et al., 2011; Hamilton & Zanna, 1974), perhaps ideals are only meaningful in the context of the whole person—the Gestalt. Examining these and other possible explanations for the poor predictive validity of the level match relative to the pattern match will be a fruitful direction for future research.

Strengths and Limitations

This research has several notable strengths. First, we examined a highly consequential outcome (divorce) for people in highly committed relationships (marriages). Although relationship scholars frequently generalize from dating relationships to marriages and vice versa, significant differences between these two contexts do sometimes emerge (e.g., Molden, Lucas, Finkel, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2009; Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994), and thus it was essential to demonstrate the predictive validity of ideal partner preferences in a married sample. Second, we predicted divorce prospectively using data collected up to 3.5 years earlier. Thus, it is possible that measures of ideals and perceptions of a partner's traits could be used in future research to identify couples at a higher risk of divorce who might benefit from interventions. Third, we tested a variety of statistical models that collectively painted a clear picture: The variation in pattern but not level of ideals predicts relational outcomes. Indeed, the pattern metric findings withstood rigorous tests that included several individual difference variables and all six perceived partner characteristic judgments as control variables. Nevertheless, this research is limited in that the sample included mostly young students and professionals, and it is possible that ideals would not predict divorce

among populations who had few resources or extremely poor alternatives to their current relationship (Rusbult & Martz, 1995). In such a sample, one spouse might be far less interested in divorcing than the other, and thus it would be essential to examine both spouses' desire to end the relationship as separate, person-level dependent variables.

Conclusion

In summary, ideal partner preferences do have implications for marital stability: Marriages were more likely to survive when participants' perceptions of their spouses' pattern of traits matched their pattern of ideal partner preferences. Even if ideal partner preferences do not predict romantic evaluations in attraction contexts (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008; Eastwick, Finkel, et al., 2011), ideals may ultimately be relevant as interdependence increases between romantic partners and they deliberate about the potentially costly sacrifices that relationships typically require (Gagné & Lydon, 2004). In the end, some romantic dyads may indeed be more compatible than others, and with further examination of the pattern of participants' ideal partner preferences across a variety of traits, we may better understand what causes some marriages to succeed and others to fail.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank Ben Karney for providing both resources and guidance on this project, and they thank Eli Finkel for commenting on a previous draft of this manuscript.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Data reported in this article were collected with the support of Grant MH59712 from the National Institute of Mental Health awarded to Benjamin R. Karney, and preparation of this article was supported by grant BCS-0921896 from the National Science Foundation awarded to Lisa A. Neff.

Notes

1. Before running Equation 1, we first ran three models to test the significance of the main effects of the perceived partner characteristics. These models included the α terms and the main effects of perceived partner characteristics (β_3 and β_4) but not the ideal terms (β_1 and β_2) or the interaction terms (β_5 and β_6). For warmth, this model differed significantly from a reduced model that included only the α terms, $\chi^2(2) = 6.36, p = .042$. Both β_3 and β_4 were negative, indicating that participants who perceived greater warmth in their spouse were less likely to get divorced. The β s for vitality were not jointly significant (but trended negatively, as expected) and the β s for faults were not jointly significant (but trended positively, as expected). We also ran three models to test the significance of the main effects of partner ideals (the β_1 and β_2 terms

- without the β_3 , β_4 , β_5 , and β_6 terms). This model was marginally significantly different from the reduced model for warmth, $\chi^2(2) = 4.77, p = .092$, and faults, $\chi^2(2) = 5.26, p = .072$, but not vitality. The main effect of warmth trended negatively (i.e., people who rated warmth as important were less likely to get divorced) and the main effect of faults trended positively (i.e., people who reported that they were tolerant of faults were more likely to get divorced). However, these main effects are not relevant to the *match* between ideals and a partner's characteristics, which is the focus of the present study.
2. For simplicity, these figures were created using an equation that treated the participant, not the couple, as the unit of analysis. Hence, the figures present the overall effect averaged across husbands and wives.
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