

Where Do You End and I Begin? Evidence for Anticipatory, Motivated Self–Other Integration Between Relationship Partners

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Perceiving similarity between oneself and one's romantic partner benefits both the individual and the relationship and can arise from multiple pathways that draw either the partner closer to the self or the self closer to the partner. The current research focuses on the latter. The authors investigate novel circumstances under which the self-concepts of individuals in romantic relationships may intertwine. Although self–other integration typically grows from the depth of shared experiences between relationship partners, the current research proposes a secondary pathway through which self–other integration may occur: Specifically, motivation to draw close to a romantic partner may be sufficient to evoke self–other integration even in the absence of shared experience. In 6 studies, the authors explored this anticipatory self–other integration pathway, using both current and potential romantic partners. The results supported the hypotheses by demonstrating that self–other integration can occur in an anticipatory fashion with the appropriate motivation.

Keywords: relationships, self-concept, perceived similarity, self–other integration

Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same.

—Catherine in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

Romantic partners and relationships powerfully influence individuals' self-concepts (e.g., Agnew, 2006; Andersen & Chen, 2002; Aron & Aron, 1997; Kumashiro, Rusbult, Wolf, & Estrada, 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). Individuals in romantic relationships tend to perceive nontrivial amounts of similarity between their partner's self-concept and their own (e.g., Byrne, 1971; LaPrelle, Hoyle, Insko, & Bernthal, 1990; Terman & Buttenweiser, 1935). This perceived similarity between romantic partners' selves can be beneficial for the relationship (e.g., Amodio & Shower, 2005; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000) and can occur through the assumption that the partner's self is a mirror of one's own (e.g., Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002) or can occur by drawing one's own self closer to that of the romantic partner. Specifically, individuals in romantic relationships experience self–other integration with their partner, merging aspects of their partner's self-concept with their own until they may be unsure of where they end and their partner begins (e.g.,

Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991). Researchers typically attribute this cognitive integration of individuals' selves into their partner's to the depth and breadth of shared experiences during their time spent as a couple, as was certainly the case with Catherine and her lifelong love, Heathcliff.

The current research focuses on this self–other integration approach to perceived similarity between romantic partners. Specifically, we propose a second possible pathway through which self–other integration occurs, one that is not dependent on shared experience. To be sure, shared experiences and self-disclosures present important dyadic mechanisms through which individuals develop and maintain a similar, shared sense of self with a romantic partner (e.g., Agnew, 2006; Aron et al., 1991; Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997); however, we believe that even in the absence of extensive shared experience, self–other integration may still emerge as an outcome of the sheer desire to be close to a partner. In other words, we hypothesize that when an individual is motivated to enhance romantic closeness with another person, either a current relationship partner or even a potential romantic partner, an anticipatory inclusion of aspects of the other into his or her own self-concept can occur.

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The Self-in-Relationships: Perceived Similarity Between Romantic Partners' Selves

Of the many types of relationships that adults engage in during their lives, relationships with romantic partners seem to carry the greatest influence on individuals' sense of themselves (e.g., Agnew, 2006; Aron & Aron, 1997; Berscheid & Reis, 1998;

Kumashiro, Rusbult, Wolf, & Estrada, 2006; Lewandowski, Aron, Bassis, & Kunak, 2006; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003; Slotter, Gardner, & Finkel, 2008). Evidence for the impact of romantic partners on the self is abundant in multiple fields, and numerous theoretical perspectives underscore the importance of relationships to the self-concept.

Notably, as dissimilarity from an important social other can be a potentially threatening, dissonance inducing experience (e.g., Festinger, 1957; Heider, 1958), romantic partners frequently perceive similarity between their own and their partner's attitudes, personality traits, and self-concepts (e.g., LaPrelle et al., 1990; Terman & Buttenweiser, 1935). This perceived similarity, more so than actual similarity, can be functional, as it positively predicts both individual and relationship outcomes such as self-esteem and relationship satisfaction (Murray, et al., 2002; Murray, Holmes, Dolderman, & Griffin, 2000; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000). Additionally, perceptions of similarity to one's romantic partner can be motivated by relationship goals, such as psychological commitment (Amodio & Showers, 2005; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996).

Perceived similarity between relationship partners occurs in several ways. One way in which individuals increase perceived similarity with their romantic partner is by engaging in egocentric processes to assimilate the romantic partner to the self. Specifically, those who, sometimes erroneously, assume their romantic partner to be highly similar to themselves experience greater feelings of being understood by their partner (Murray et al., 2002). These feelings of being understood mediate the relation between egocentric tendencies and increased relationship satisfaction, suggesting that to the extent that individuals perceive the partner as being a similar kindred spirit to the self, their relationship is benefited (Murray et al., 2002).

In contrast to assimilating the partner to the self via egocentric processes and central to the current research is the relational theory of a state of cognitive interdependence that exists between partners in a romantic relationship (Agnew, 2000, 2006; Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998). Cognitive interdependence theory asserts that romantic partners, due to their shared experiences and dependence on each other, perceive a self-in-relationship representation that is characterized by the pluralistic blending of the interpersonal and intrapersonal into a shared self-concept of *we*.

Similarly, Aron & Aron's (1997) theory of self-expansion posits that in romantic relationships, an individual's sense of self expands to incorporate aspects of a partner's self, thus drawing the self closer to the partner (e.g., Aron et al., 1991; Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). For instance, the subjective experience of falling in love with a romantic partner predicts an expansion in the number of traits and attributes that an individual descriptively includes as part of his or her self (Aron et al., 1995). Moreover, Aron et al. (1991) demonstrated that married individuals experienced self-other confusion when asked to differentiate between traits that were characteristic of the self and traits that were characteristic of the spouse. Specifically, participants showed longer response time latencies when rejecting attributes as not characteristic of themselves when those attributes were characteristic of their spouse, compared with response times rejecting self-aspects that were not characteristic of the spouse. These findings demonstrate that participants in the study had incorporated attributes of their spouse

into their own self-concept and thus had a difficult time separating out which self-concept attributes belonged to whom. Moreover, use of reaction times to measure self-other integration is especially compelling, as response time is considered largely immune to self-presentational efforts. For this reason, this reaction time measure of self-other overlap continues to be viewed as an excellent way of measuring self-other integration in experimental contexts.

Cognitive interdependence and self-expansion theory have both demonstrated that self-other integration occurs naturally in relationships as a result of the breadth of shared experiences and the depth of self-disclosure that commonly occur in romantic relationships (e.g., Agnew, 2000, 2006; Aron et al., 1991, 1995; see also, Pinel, Long, Landau, Alexander, & Pyszczynski, 2006). Experiences that promote cognitive interdependence include both shared activities, such as engaging in shared hobbies (e.g., golfing or going to the movies) and shared information, such as disclosing personal information (e.g., telling one's partner about how one learned to ride a bike). Manipulations of these factors, via activities such as joint problem solving and emotionally disclosing discussions in the laboratory, have been shown to enhance the degree of self-other confusion between existing romantic partners (Aron et al., 1991). Additionally, protocols that have included novel and interdependence enhancing experiences (e.g., three-legged races) have produced self-other integration between strangers brought into the laboratory (Aron et al., 1997).

Complementing the existing literature examining the perceived similarity of the self-concepts of relationship partners, recent research in the tradition of social-cognitive theories of the relational self emphasizes how the mere psychological representation of a close other is sufficient to activate a shared self-in-relationship representation (Baldwin, 1992, 1997). Interpersonal social-cognitive theory suggests that one's relational self is easily and spontaneously activated in response to the real or mental presence of a significant other (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Andersen, Chen, & Miranda, 2002; Chen, Boucher, & Tapias, 2006). Likewise, priming a shared self-concept term such as *we*, shifts one's self-regulatory and affective experience with close others to stress the outcomes of the relational self over the individual self (e.g., Gardner, Gabriel & Hochschild, 2002). Research examining goal pursuit in an interpersonal context has demonstrated that priming an individual with a significant other influenced the individual's self-reported importance assigned to pursuing a goal that the other held for them, but this effect was contingent on the individual's self-reported desire for closeness with the primed significant other (Chen, 2006; Shah, 2003). It is important to note that this suggests that although the mere presence of a significant other may sometimes automatically influence individuals, motivated processes, such as relationship commitment (e.g., Murray et al., 1996) or a desire for closeness (Chen, 2006), also appear to play a role in driving increases in the overlapping of self-perception and regulation with the close other.

Current Hypotheses and Research Overview

The goal in the current research was to integrate the current perspectives on perceived similarity in relationships, self-expansion, and relational selves to propose a secondary pathway to self-other integration. Specifically, we explore the possibility that

individuals can draw their self-concepts closer to their romantic partner's quickly and in the absence of shared experience when given the appropriate motivation. Consistent with the tradition of research on perceived similarity (e.g., LaPrelle et al., 1990; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Murray et al., 2002), this second pathway to self-other integration assumes that individuals are motivated to see themselves as similar to their romantic partner (Murray et al., 1996).

Distinct from the work of Murray and colleagues (2002), however, our work focuses on the mutability of the self rather than on egocentric biases in perceptions of one's partners. In other words, as in natural occurring self-expansion (e.g., Agnew, 2000, 2006; Aron & Aron, 1997), individuals will draw closer to their partner by integrating aspects of their significant other's self into their own self-concepts. However, consistent with research on the relational self (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Andersen et al., 2002; Shah, 2003), this second pathway proposes that it should be possible for the integration of romantic partners' selves to occur quickly and spontaneously, without the benefit of extensive shared experience, due to their desire to be close to a romantic partner.

This anticipatory, motivated self-other integration may also be functional. For individuals in established relationships, such motivated integration may offer the benefits discussed above, such as increased relationship satisfaction (a prorelationship cognition) or forgiveness in conflict situations (a prorelationship behavior). Additionally, anticipatory, motivated self-other integration could also be functional for developing or potential romantic relationships. As perceived similarity is one of the most established predictors of romantic attraction (Byrne, 1971). Anticipatory, motivated self-other integration may also enhance the initiation of romantic relationships by bolstering positive feelings of romantic closeness and interdependence (Tesser et al., 1998) and by smoothing early interactions (Krivonos, Byrne, & Friedrich, 1976).

We tested our primary hypotheses across six studies that test the following three central predictions: (a) Individuals will quickly and spontaneously include novel attributes of a current or potential romantic partner in their own self-concepts but will not similarly include novel attributes of a classmate in their own self-concepts (Aron et al. 1991); (b) Individuals will engage in this self-other integration in the absence of shared experience, making it an anticipatory inclusion of attributes of their romantic partners; and (c) To the extent anticipatory self-other integration is driven by a desire for romantic closeness with the other, this integration should be heightened by contexts emphasizing the potential for closeness (e.g., a potential romantic context), compared with contexts that do not (e.g., a potential work-related context).

Study 1A

To first explore our primary hypotheses that individuals quickly adopt new attributes that they believe are characteristic of their romantic partner, Study 1A tested the effects of a partner, versus a stranger, presenting novel characteristics of themselves on participants' inclusion of these characteristics into their self-concepts. It is important to note that the romantic partner was actually recruited as a confederate, and the romantic partner gave scripted false information about himself or herself, so as to ensure that no prior disclosure or shared experience concerning

that attribute could have occurred before the lab experiment. We predicted that individuals would draw their self-concepts closer to those of their partner by including these novel self-attributes that they now (falsely) believed were characteristic of a romantic partner into their self-concepts but would not exhibit this effect when exposed to similarly structured and disclosing discussions of novel self-attributes from someone they just met at the time of the experiment.

Method

Participants. Thirty-one heterosexual Northwestern University undergraduates (22 women, 9 men) participated in the current study. Participants had a mean age of 18.46 years ($SD = 0.72$), and all were involved in exclusive romantic relationships that averaged 14.28 months ($SD = 13.04$) in length. Most participants were European American (67% European American, 16% Asian American, 6% Hispanic, 5% African American, and 6% other).

Procedure and materials. Participants completed a series of questionnaires during a pretesting session that took place a minimum of 2 weeks prior to all laboratory-based sessions. Participants also completed a questionnaire concerning self-concept attributes that they and their romantic partners could possibly possess. A series of 15 attributes taken from Anderson's (1968) work on personality traits were presented to participants, and they were asked to rate, on a scale of 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 7 (*extremely characteristic of me*), to what degree each attribute was characteristic of their sense of self. The participants also separately rated the same 15 items on how characteristic each of the attributes were of their current romantic partner. The attributes were controlled to be neutrally or mildly positively valenced and included the following characteristics: athletic, artistic, musical, theatrical, intelligent, studious, thoughtful, outgoing, enthusiastic, adventurous, creative, risk-taking, agreeable, ambitious, and inventive.

Two attributes were chosen for each participant. To be chosen, both attributes must have received a rating below the midpoint of the scale on both sets of ratings, and the two attributes could not differ from each other by more than an absolute value of one. This process resulted in two idiosyncratic attributes that were perceived as neither characteristic of the self (*not me*) nor characteristic of the partner's self (*not my partner*) for each participant.

Participants brought their romantic partner with them to the laboratory session. Upon arrival, participants were told that they would be taking part in a 5-min getting-to-know-you interaction task with both their romantic partner and another opposite-sex participant who was actually a research confederate in the study. At this time, the participants and the research confederate stepped into a separate room where they were told that the researchers were interested in how people learn new information about each other as a function of their relationship. Therefore, the experimenter instructed the research confederate to discuss with the participant for 5 min an attribute that was extremely important to him or her, explaining why it was important and how it influenced his or her daily life. Obviously, this would appear to be a simple task, as the participants and research confederate had just met; in reality, the research confederate constructed his or her discussion using one of the two *not me/not my partner* attributes generated by the participant at the pretesting session. The confederate thus discussed his or her love of one of several attributes such as athletics, music, art,

the theater, and so on with the participants in a loosely scripted discussion for 5 min.

During the conversation between the participants and the research confederate, the experimenter obtained the consent of the participants' romantic partner to act as a second confederate in the study. The partner was provided with the second of the two idiosyncratic *not me/not my partner* attributes generated at the pretesting session and asked to create a fake story that made the provided attribute appear to be central to the partner's self-concept. The romantic partner was given the option of not deceiving their partner (i.e., exiting the experiment), with no penalty to either the partner or the participant; no romantic partner expressed any discomfort with the procedures, and all elected to participate.

The romantic partner and the research confederate then switched places, and the romantic partner engaged in the same getting-to-know-you task, using the preselected *not me/not my partner* attribute, with the participant for 5 min. The romantic partner began the discussion by emphasizing the attribute's novelty and importance (e.g., "You may not know this about me, but art is something that has always been important to me"). The romantic partner was coached by the experimenters to craft a plausible story around the novel attribute, including experiences one had as a child (e.g., "I attended art camp every summer for years and even won a painting competition!"), to give an explanation for how the attribute still impacts their life, and to explain why the participant might not have known about it ("I guess with all my class demands, I don't have much time for it anymore—but I still consider it a really important part of who I am, and I still paint or draw sometimes when I'm alone to relieve stress"). Both the confederate's and romantic partner's attribute scripts followed similar formats, in that both emphasized the attribute's importance across their lives from childhood until the current time. No participants demonstrated suspicion regarding the procedures or the use of their romantic partner as a confederate, and all participants were fully debriefed at the conclusion of the study.

After completing both getting-to-know-you interaction tasks, participants completed an unrelated distracter task, after which participants completed three different self-concept measures in counterbalanced order. They completed the Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) Scale, created by Aron and colleagues (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) to measure self-other integration. They completed a self-report measure identical to the explicit self-attribute rating scale presented at pretest. Participants rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all characteristic of me*) to 7 (*extremely characteristic of me*) how descriptive 15 different attributes were of them. The attributes appeared in random order via a computer program. Included in this list of 15 attributes were the idiosyncratic *not me/not my partner* attributes that featured in each of the 5-min getting-to-know-you discussions. Participants also completed a reaction time measure that has been used by Aron and colleagues (1991) as the preferred method for assessing self-other integration between romantic partners without arousing demand characteristics or self-presentational concerns. This measure assessed self-other integration and confusion by examining potential response time delays in rejecting the target attribute that belonged to the partner but not the self. All 15 attributes appeared in random order to the participants via a computer program. As each attribute appeared on the computer screen, participants were asked to indicate, by pressing either *me* or *not me* with the 1 and 2 number keys

on the number pad of the computer's keyboard, whether each attribute was characteristic of their sense of self, and their reaction times were recorded. Participants were instructed to indicate *me* only if the attribute was extremely characteristic of whom they were as individuals. The number pad key designation was counterbalanced throughout the experiment, in the interest of preventing guessing response biases. This reaction time based measure has the advantage of immunity to self-presentation attempts and has been used as a powerful demonstration of self-other integration, for example, in married couples (Aron et al., 1991). It is important to note that the presentation of the dependent measures was counterbalanced across participants such that some participants experienced the explicit rating task before the reaction time task and the IOS task, whereas the order of these tasks was shuffled for other participants. The presentation of the self-attributes was also randomized within each task.

Results

To the extent that individuals spontaneously incorporate a previously unknown attribute of a romantic partner, but not a stranger, into the self—we would expect that after interacting with both their romantic partner and a newly encountered research confederate, participants would report greater current level of self-other integration with their romantic partner than with the confederate. This would indicate that after the getting-to-know-you discussions, participants viewed their self-concepts as overlapping to a greater extent with their partner than with the confederate. A repeated measures analysis of variance demonstrated that participants reported greater actual self-other integration, as measured by the IOS (Aron et al., 1992), with their romantic partner ($M = 5.69$) than with the research confederate ($M = 2.19$), after the getting-to-know-you interaction, $F(1, 30) = 119.14, p < .001$.

In the explicit self-rating task, we hypothesized an interaction, such that we would expect participants to explicitly rate the idiosyncratic *not me/not my partner* attributes used in the getting-to-know-you interaction task as more characteristic of themselves after the discussion task, compared with their pretest rating of the attribute, if they had discussed the attribute with their romantic partner but not if they had discussed the attribute with the research confederate who was a relative stranger to them. As illustrated in Figure 1, the interaction between assessment time (pretest, post-discussion) and discussion partner (romantic partner, stranger)

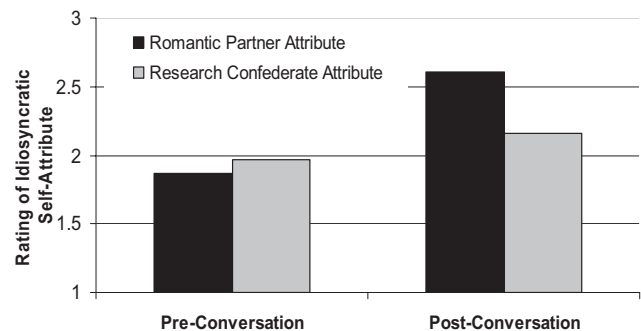


Figure 1. Study 1A: Mean changes in explicit self-ratings of idiosyncratic self-attributes as a function of interaction partner.

emerged as significant, $F(1, 31) = 5.60, p < .05$. Specifically, the explicit self-ratings conformed to the predicted pattern such that participants' rating of the preselected idiosyncratic self-attribute did not differ before the participants engaged in their getting-to-know-you conversations with their romantic partner ($M = 1.87$) and the research confederate ($M = 1.97$), $t(31) = -0.72, p = .48$, respectively; however, after their getting-to-know-you conversations, participants rated the attribute that they briefly discussed with their romantic partner as more characteristic of themselves ($M = 2.61$), compared with their rating of the attribute they briefly discussed with the research confederate ($M = 2.16$), $t(31) = 2.37, p < .05$. Additionally, participants rated the attribute that they briefly discussed with their romantic partner as more characteristic of themselves after the discussion task, compared with their pretest rating of the same attribute, $t(31) = -3.03, p < .01$, whereas no such effect was found for the attributes discussed with the research confederate: Participants endorsed the attribute to a similar degree postdiscussion as they did at pretest, $t(31) = -1.03, p = .31$. Thus, when learning a new self-attribute about a romantic partner, individuals include this attribute in their own self-concepts rather rapidly, reporting less than 15 min later that this novel self-aspect is more characteristic of themselves than it had been previously.

In the reaction time task, we predicted that participants would be slower to reject the attributes that they had been led to (falsely) believe their romantic partner possessed as a central part of the self (e.g., Aron et al., 1991). Additionally, to the extent this pattern of response latencies reflects an anticipatory attempt to increase self-other integration through shared attributes of the self with a romantic partner, it should not occur for the attributes discussed with the research confederate, despite the discussions being similarly scripted and of equal length.

To this end, we examined participants' response latencies when correctly rejecting attributes as *not me*, or as not characteristic of their sense of self. Specifically, if an attribute was classified as *not me/not my partner* from participant responses during the pretesting session, then participants would be expected to reject the attribute during their laboratory session when asked to classify the attribute as *me* or *not me*. Therefore, only the idiosyncratic *not me/not my partner* attributes that were used in the getting-to-know-you interactions with the romantic partner and the research confederate and that were rejected in this fashion were included in the analysis. Response latencies for the other assessed attributes that qualified as *not me/not my partner* attributes from the pretesting session and that were correctly rejected by the participant were entered into the analysis as a covariate to control individual differences in response tendencies. Participants who did not possess the general reaction time covariate were not included in the final reaction time analysis, resulting in the slightly reduced degrees of freedom reported below.

The predicted effect of discussion partner emerged, such that participants took significantly longer to reject correctly the idiosyncratic *not me/not my partner* attribute that they discussed with their partner as not characteristic of their self-concepts ($M = 2,418.74$ ms), compared with the time it took them to similarly reject the attribute that they discussed with the research confederate, ($M = 1,957.12$ ms), $F(1, 26) = 9.45, p < .01$. Thus, when asked to make relatively quick *me* or *not me* judgment regarding a novel attribute that has just been revealed as characteristic of either a romantic partner's or an acquaintance's self-concept, individuals

experience more integration with their own self-concepts when the attribute was discussed as a novel aspect of their romantic partner.

Discussion

Taken as a whole, the results from Study 1A imply that individuals experience greater integration between their self-concepts and the self-concepts of their partners when learning new information that they believe to be relevant to their partners' sense of themselves. This self-other integration appears to occur quickly, even without extensive shared experience. The participants in our study only briefly discussed a novel attribute of their partner's self that they had previously indicated they did not believe their romantic partner to actually possess, and indeed, the partner did not possess it, it was assigned by the experimenter; therefore, the inclusion of this novel attribute into the participants' selves could not have occurred as a result of extensive shared experience that had taken place prior to the laboratory experience. In essence, participants included things in their self-concepts that were fallacies told to them by their romantic partner at our behest. These findings suggest that individuals can draw their sense of self closer to their romantic partner's even when the self-attribute in question is a novel, unexpected attribute that the individuals did not previously view as part of their partner's self.

Despite the promising initial findings, Study 1A possesses several limitations. First, the IOS measure used in Study 1A demonstrated that participants felt greater self-other integration with their partners than with the research confederate, but as IOS scores assessed prior to the manipulation were not available, the IOS findings may have been an artifact of the relationship participants already had with their existing partner. Study 4 directly addresses this issue. Second, due to the intricacies of the design in which the participants' romantic partner had to be trained as a confederate, the partner interactions always followed the stranger interactions and, thus, were closer in time to the measurements of self-other integration. Thus, a plausible alternative explanation for the differences between partners and strangers might be one of timing. In Study 1B, we explored these limitations by replicating Study 1A, using a between-subjects design in which participants interacted only with their romantic partner or only with a research confederate before completing the dependent measures of self-other integration.

Study 1B

Study 1B replicated Study 1A, with a between-subjects, rather than a within-subjects, procedure to test the effects of a partner versus a stranger presenting novel characteristics of themselves on participants' inclusion of these characteristics in their self-concepts. The use of a between-subjects design in Study 1B improves on Study 1A, as it eliminates the possibility that the timing of the romantic partner discussion, compared with the research confederate discussion, contributed to the identified significant effects.

Method

Participants. Thirteen heterosexual Northwestern University undergraduates (7 women, 6 men) participated in the current study. Participants had a mean age of 19.00 years ($SD = 0.84$), and all

were involved in exclusive romantic relationships that averaged 12.76 months ($SD = 15.10$) in length. Most participants were European American (69% European American, 24% Asian American, 0% Hispanic, 0% African American, and 7% other).

Procedure and materials. Participant selection and pretesting procedures were similar to those in Study 1A with one exception: In contrast to Study 1A, only one (rather than two) *not me/not my partner* attribute was selected for each participant, as the current study was a between-subjects design.¹

Participants were randomly assigned to either the romantic partner condition or the acquaintance condition. The paradigm used in Study 1B was identical to the paradigm used in Study 1A, with two exceptions. First, participants interacted with either their romantic partner or a research confederate, not both. Second, the IOS measure was dropped from Study 1B's series of dependent measures. All other instructions and measures were the same as in Study 1A. As before, no participants demonstrated suspicion regarding the procedures or the use of their romantic partner as a research confederate, and all participants were fully debriefed at the conclusion of the study.

Results

As in Study 1A, we predicted that to the extent that individuals spontaneously incorporate a previously unknown attribute of a romantic partner, but not a stranger, into the self, we would expect participants to show the inclusion of the discussed attribute into their self-concepts, both explicitly and as measured by a reaction time task, in the romantic partner condition but not in the research confederate condition. This would indicate that after the getting-to-know-you discussion, participants viewed their self-concepts as overlapping to a greater extent with their partner than with the confederate.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the interaction between assessment time (pretest, postdiscussion) and condition (romantic partner, stranger) on the explicit rating task emerged as significant, $F(1, 11) = 6.32, p < .05$, replicating the results of Study 1A. Specifically, the explicit self-ratings conformed to the predicted pattern, such that participants' rating of the preselected, idiosyncratic self-attribute did not differ before the participants engaged in their getting-to-know-you conversations with either their romantic partner ($M = 1.25$) or the research confederate ($M = 1.33$), $t(11) = -0.25, p = .81$; however, after their getting-to-know-you conversations, participants in the romantic partner condition rated the

attribute as more characteristic of themselves ($M = 3.25$), compared with participants in the research confederate condition [$M = 1.50$; $t(11) = 3.72, p < .01$]. Additionally, participants in the romantic partner condition rated the attribute as more characteristic of themselves after the discussion task, compared with their pretest rating of the same attribute, $t(5) = -4.90, p < .01$, whereas no such effect was found for the attributes discussed by participants in the research confederate condition: Participants endorsed the attribute to a similar degree postdiscussion as they did at pretest, $t(6) = -1.00, p = .36$. This suggests that when learning a new self-attribute about a romantic partner, individuals include this attribute into their own self-concepts rather rapidly, reporting less than 15 min later that this novel self-aspect is more characteristic of themselves than it had been previously.

Also replicating Study 1A, the predicted effect of condition emerged on the reaction time task such that participants took longer to reject correctly the idiosyncratic *not me/not my partner* attribute that they discussed with their partner as not characteristic of their self-concepts ($M = 1,072.22$ ms), compared with the time it took them to similarly reject the attribute that they discussed with the research confederate ($M = 759.23$ ms), $F(1, 12) = 6.44, p < .05$. When asked to make relatively quick *me* or *not me* judgment regarding a novel attribute that has just been revealed as characteristic of either a romantic partner's or an acquaintance's self-concept, individuals experience more integration with their own self-concepts when the attribute was a discussed as a novel aspect of their romantic partner.

Discussion

Study 1B replicated Study 1A with a between-subject design, thus eliminating one potential alternative explanation for the increased self-other integration occurring with new partner, as opposed to stranger, attributes. Thus, the results of Studies 1A and 1B provide initial evidence for self-other integration in the absence of extensive shared experience; the inclusion of the novel partner attributes into the participants' selves occurred after a very brief face-to-face interaction with their romantic partner discussing a novel attribute. In Study 2, we begin to investigate boundary conditions by examining whether anticipatory self-other integration could occur solely through imagining that a partner possesses the attribute, thus removing any actual shared experience with a partner. To the extent self-other integration can occur subsequent to an imaginary interaction, it would highlight the ability of individuals to integrate themselves with their partner without the benefit of any actual shared experience.

Study 2

Study 2 tested the effects of imagining partner, versus acquaintance, characteristics on participants' inclusion of these characteristics

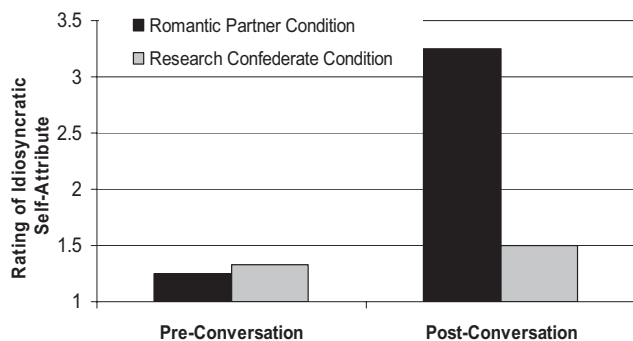


Figure 2. Study 1B: Mean changes in explicit self-ratings of idiosyncratic self-attributes as a function of interaction partner.

¹ Idiosyncratic attributes were selected to be both *not me* and *not my partner* in both conditions, despite the fact that participants in the research confederate attribute condition interacted with someone other than their romantic partner. This facet of the study was kept consistent between Study 1A and Study 1B to assure that the idiosyncratic selected attributes were not attributes that the participants could gain experience with through their partner before taking part in their experimental session.

in their self-concepts as one pathway to perceived similarity. As before, we predicted that individuals would include self-attributes that they were led to believe are characteristic of a romantic partner in their self-concepts, whereas they would not exhibit this effect when imagining self-attributes of someone with whom they were barely acquainted. Study 2 also uses a fully between-subjects design; thus, self-other integration with the target (whether romantic partner or acquaintance) is tested directly after the imagined interaction. Therefore, any differences between them cannot be due to timing.

Method

Participants. Thirty-seven heterosexual Northwestern University undergraduates (18 women, 19 men) participated in this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements of an introductory psychology course. Participants' mean age was 18.42 years ($SD = 0.84$), and all participants were involved in exclusive romantic relationships that averaged 6 months ($SD = 8.13$) in length. Most participants were European American (69% European American, 15% Asian American, 5% Hispanic, 5% African American, and 6% other).

Procedure and materials. Selection procedures were identical to those used in Study 1B: One *not me/not my partner* attribute was selected for each participant, as the current study was a between-subjects design.

Upon their arrival to their laboratory session, participants were randomly assigned to either the romantic partner attribute or the acquaintance attribute condition. The paradigm used in Study 2 was similar to the paradigm used in Study 1B, except that instead of actually interacting with their romantic partner or an acquaintance regarding the idiosyncratic *not me/not my partner* attribute, participants imagined the interaction. In each condition, participants were given a short passage to read that incorporated their idiosyncratic *not me/not my partner* attribute as determined from the pretest. The idiosyncratic attribute was incorporated unobtrusively into the essay for each participant. Examples of the essays presented for each condition are presented below; the attribute *artistic* is incorporated into the essay for the sake of illustration.

In the romantic partner attribute condition, the participants were asked to imagine the following scenario involving their actual, current romantic partner:

Imagine your boyfriend or girlfriend comes over and says he or she has something to tell you. The conversation might go something like this: "You know, there are some things about me that you do not know. I want you to know all about me, so I was thinking about what you did not know, and I realized that I had never told you how much I love to paint. I guess I like painting so much, because it was my favorite activity with my friends when I was little. When I was growing up, I always used to look forward to getting out the finger paints or the brushes and painting pictures with my friends everyday after school. Even though it's not something I do much any more, it is a very important part of who I am."

In the acquaintance attribute condition the participants were asked to imagine the following scenario involving an actual acquaintance from class:

Imagine someone from your introductory psychology class comes over and begins speaking with you after class. He or she is someone that you have talked to in class once or twice, and seems very nice; however, you don't really know much about this person and have

never spent any time with him or her outside of class. Imagine that he or she says he or she has something to tell you. The conversation might go something like this: "You know, there are some things about me that you do not know. I would really like to get to know you better, so I was thinking about what you did not know, and I realized that I had never told you how much I love to paint. I guess I like painting so much, because it was my favorite activity with my friends when I was little. When I was growing up, I always used to look forward to getting out the finger paints or the brushes and painting pictures with my friends everyday after school. Even though it's not something I do much any more, it is a very important part of who I am."

Participants then took 10 min to write about their imagined experience within the hypothetical interaction. Participants were encouraged to imagine the interaction and their interaction partner as vividly and with as much detail as possible. After completing the condition-specific essay prime, participants completed the three self-concept tasks used in Study 1A.

Results

The essays that participants wrote were first examined to assure equivalent essay engagement and essay valence. The length of the essays did not differ between the romantic partner condition (138.1 words) and the acquaintance condition (161.9 words), $F(1, 36) = 0.85$, $p = .37$, implying similar levels of engagement and elaboration. Two independent raters coded the essays for overall valence on a scale of 1 (*extremely negative*) to 7 (*extremely positive*; $\alpha = .88$) and found that although, descriptively speaking, participants wrote more positive essays in the romantic partner condition ($M = 5.11$) than in the acquaintance condition ($M = 4.29$), this difference did not emerge as statistically significant, $F(1, 36) = 3.05$, $p < .10$. This suggests that during the essay task, participants both attended to task and imagined roughly similar positive experiences with their imagined interaction partner across conditions.

As in the previous studies, we predicted that the novel information that was imagined as coming from the participants' romantic partner, but not the acquaintance, would be incorporated in the participants' self-concepts, even though the participants had not actually shared any previous experiences or self-disclosures involving this particular self-aspect with the romantic partner. To this end, we first examined participants' IOS scores as a function of condition (Aron et al., 1992). As predicted, participants reported greater actual self-other integration, as measured by the IOS (Aron et al., 1992), when they imagined their romantic partner ($M = 4.8$) rather than an acquaintance from class ($M = 3.2$), $F(1, 36) = 9.46$, $p < .01$.

We next examined explicit self-ratings, which replicated the results of the previous two studies. As illustrated in Figure 3, the hypothesized interaction between assessment time (pretest, postimagining task) and imagined discussion partner (romantic partner, acquaintance) emerged as significant, $F(1, 35) = 4.22$, $p < .05$.² Specifically, the explicit self-ratings conformed to the predicted

² A secondary, yet identical analysis was conducted, controlling for the effects of the length and the valence of participants' essays written during the imagined interaction task. In this rigorous test, the interaction between assessment time (pretest, postimagining task) and imagined discussion partner (romantic partner, acquaintance) emerged as marginally significant, $F(1, 33) = 4.35$, $p = .06$.

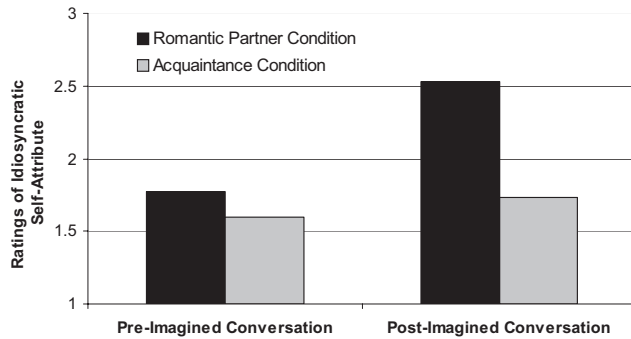


Figure 3. Study 2: Mean changes in explicit self-ratings of idiosyncratic self-attributes as a function of essay prime condition.

pattern such that participants' rating of the preselected idiosyncratic self-attribute did not differ before the participants engaged in their imagined interaction with either their romantic partner ($M = 1.77$) or an acquaintance ($M = 1.60$), $t(35) = -0.66$, $p = .52$; however, after the imagined interaction, participants in the romantic partner condition rated the attribute as more characteristic of themselves ($M = 2.59$) than did participants in the acquaintance condition ($M = 1.73$), $t(35) = -2.23$, $p < .05$. Additionally, participants who merely imagined a romantic partner rated the idiosyncratic attribute as significantly more characteristic of themselves after the manipulation in the laboratory, compared with their ratings of the attributes during the pretest survey, $t(18) = 2.38$, $p < .05$. However, participants who imagined an acquaintance did not rate the idiosyncratic imagined attribute significantly differently after the manipulation in the laboratory, compared with their ratings of the attributes during the pretest survey, $t(19) = -0.93$, $p = .36$.

We next turned to the reaction times on the *me/not me* task. Replicating the previous findings, a marginally significant effect of condition emerged, such that participants who imagined a romantic partner were slower to reject correctly the idiosyncratic attribute ($M = 2,318.62$ ms), compared with participants who imagined an acquaintance ($M = 1,766.08$ ms), $F(1, 36) = 3.93$, $p = .08$.³ Thus, when asked to make a relatively quick *me* or *not me* judgment regarding a novel attribute that has just been revealed as characteristic of either a romantic partner's self-concept or an acquaintance's self-concept, individuals experience more confusion with their own self-concepts when the attribute was imagined as a novel aspect of their romantic partner.

Discussion

As in Studies 1A and 1B, the findings from Study 2 indicate that individuals readily incorporate novel self-attributes of a romantic partner, but not those of a social acquaintance, into their own self-concepts, when they had not possessed the attribute previously. This is true at both an explicit and schematic level and can occur without the benefit of shared experience relevant to the attribute. Participants also indicated that their selves were more overlapping after imagining an interaction with a romantic partner as measured by the IOS (Aron et al., 1992). The researchers view this anticipatory self–other integration as indicative of an attempt on the part of the participant to gain the benefits of perceived

similarity to their romantic partner by increasing the number of self-attributes that he or she shares with the romantic partner. This hypothesis was supported by the data in that participants explicitly drew their self-concepts closer to the imagined self-concepts of their romantic partner and experienced greater schematic confusion on the reaction time task between their own self-concepts and the novel attribute that they imagined their partner now possessed. Neither of these effects emerged with an attribute that participants imagined an acquaintance possessed. Additionally, because participants generated the imagined interactions and were similarly engaged (similar essay lengths and valence across conditions), differences in salience or elaboration cannot account for these effects.

However, in all of the studies in the current research thus far, participants either briefly discussed or briefly imagined discussing the attribute with their actual romantic partner. Thus, although this certainly does not represent the types of shared experience previously demonstrated to encourage self–other integration between partners, it still does not clearly demonstrate that such integration could occur purely as a function of motivation to be close with a partner. To this end, we designed a study to examine whether romantic motivation produced by a dating context alone could be sufficient to encourage self–other integration in single participants with a desirable (but fictional) potential romantic partner.

Study 3

From the central tenets of theories of both perceived similarity and self-expansion, namely, that individuals are motivated to include aspects of others in their self-concepts because it is beneficial to them both personally and relationally (e.g., Agnew, 2006; Aron et al., 1991; Murray, Holmes, Dolderman, & Griffin, 2000; Murray, Holmes, Bellavia, Griffin, & Dolderman, 2002), we predicted that the motivation to be romantically involved with potential romantic partner would be sufficient impetus for anticipatory self–other integration to occur. Thus, in Study 3, we examined the effects of single participants viewing the characteristics of an opposite-sex individual's self-concept on participants' inclusion of these characteristics into their self-concepts as a function of the motivational context in which the individual appeared. To the extent romantic motivation is sufficient to encourage anticipatory self–other integration, only when the opposite-sex target was presented as a potential partner should individuals incorporate these novel attributes into the self.

Method

Participants. Fifty heterosexual Northwestern University undergraduates (20 women, 30 men) participated in this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements of an introductory psychol-

³ A secondary, yet identical analysis was conducted, controlling for the effects of the length and the valence of participants' essays written during the imagined interaction task. In this rigorous test, the effect of imagined discussion partner (romantic partner, acquaintance) did not remain statistically significant; however, descriptively speaking, participants in the romantic partner condition still took longer to correctly reject the idiosyncratic attribute ($M = 2,234$ ms), compared with participants in the acquaintance condition ($M = 1,782$ ms).

ogy course. Participants had a mean age of 18.70 years ($SD = 0.92$), and all reported that they were not currently involved in a romantic relationship at the time of the study. Most participants were European American (63% European American, 18% Asian American, 4% Hispanic, 8% African American, and 7% other).

Materials and procedure. Selection procedures were similar to those used in Study 2: One *not me* attribute was selected for each participant during a pretesting session, as the current study was a between-subjects design. As participants were all single, the *not my partner* distinction was not relevant for the selected attribute and, thus, was not assessed.

Upon their arrival at their laboratory session, participants were told that the psychology department had been asked to help the university develop an online website service created especially for students. Participants were assigned to evaluate either a university version of Match.com, a dating website, or a university version of Monster.com, a nonromantic website. As part of the research and development cover story, participants in the romantic context condition were asked to view and evaluate a profile taken from the initial stages of the university Match.com service's development. Participants were told that the person whose profile they would be viewing was a fellow student who had expressed interest in using the pilot version of the website as an online dating service. Participants were asked to evaluate the appeal of the website template as well as their overall liking for and perceived similarity to the target; then, participants completed the self-other inclusion dependent variables, using in the previous three studies, ostensibly presented as merely designed to assess their personality traits.

As part of the same cover story, participants in the nonromantic context condition were asked to view and evaluate the same profile as individuals in the dating context condition, except that the profile was framed as a university version of Monster.com. Via this website, university students could preview other students running for student government offices around campus in order to be better informed about the student candidates whose election could affect their lives on campus. Participants were told that the person whose profile they would be viewing was a fellow student who was planning on running for a student government position in upcoming student elections and who had expressed interest in using the site to reach fellow students. Participants were asked to evaluate the appeal of the website template as well as their overall liking for and perceived similarity to the target; then, participants completed the self-other inclusion dependent variables used in the previous three studies, ostensibly presented as merely designed to assess participants' personality traits.

After receiving these instructions, participants were placed at computers in private cubicles where they viewed the profile of an opposite-sex target for 60 s. There were two possible targets, one male and one female, and both had been pretested to be equivalently and moderately physically attractive. Information about the target was displayed next to a photo of the target and included four personality traits that the target had ostensibly possessed, as self-described, and four corresponding hobbies that the target ostensibly enjoyed engaging in. Of the four traits and/or hobbies, one was the idiosyncratic *not me* attribute selected from the pretesting session. The other three traits/hobbies were chosen to be attributes from the pretesting session that all participants had rated as at least moderately characteristic of themselves (i.e., had chosen the mid-

point or higher on the scale to describe how characteristic the attribute was of them).

Suspicion checks revealed that all participants reported believing the cover story. After viewing the profile, participants completed, in counterbalanced order, the same explicit and reaction time self-concept tasks used in the previous studies in the current research.

Results

We predicted that participants would explicitly rate the idiosyncratic *not me* attribute embedded in the dating context profile of a potential romantic partner as more characteristic of them after viewing the profile, but that viewing the idiosyncratic *not me* attribute embedded in a nonromantic context of a potential student government representative would not influence ratings of the idiosyncratic attribute. Similarly, we predicted that during the reaction time task, participants would be slower to reject correctly the idiosyncratic attribute embedded in the dating context profile as *not me* but that reaction times to reject correctly the idiosyncratic attribute would not be impacted when embedded in the nonromantic context profile.

We first examined explicit self-ratings, which replicated the results of the previous studies with actual or imagined interactions with an actual romantic partner or acquaintance. As illustrated in Figure 4, the interaction between assessment time (pretest, postevaluation task) and condition (romantic context vs. nonromantic context) emerged as marginally significant, $F(1, 46) = 3.28, p = .07$, but patterns of means and predicted effects conformed to hypotheses. Specifically, the explicit self-ratings conformed to the predicted pattern such that participants' rating of the preselected idiosyncratic self-attribute did not differ before the participants viewed a hypothetical, potential dating partner ($M = 1.48$), versus a hypothetical student government candidate, ($M = 1.42$), $t(48) = 0.29, p = .77$. However, after viewing viewed a hypothetical, potential dating partner, participants in the romantic context condition rated the attribute as significantly more characteristic of themselves ($M = 2.52$) compared with participants who viewed a hypothetical, potential student government candidate in the nonromantic context condition, ($M = 1.79$), $t(48) = 2.64, p < .01$. Additionally, single participants in the romantic context condition rated the idiosyncratic attribute as significantly more characteristic of themselves after seeing their profile in the laboratory, compared with their ratings of the attributes during the pretest

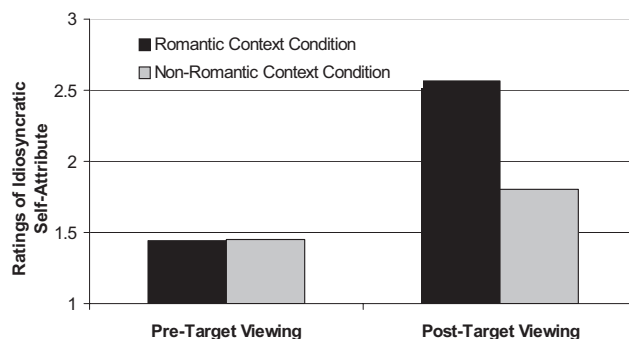


Figure 4. Study 3: Mean changes in explicit self-ratings of idiosyncratic self-attributes as a function motivational context.

survey, $t(28) = -3.96$, $p < .001$. However, no such effect emerged for participants in the nonromantic context condition, $t(18) = -1.68$, $p = .11$. This suggests that when learning about the self of a potential romantic partner, individuals are motivated to include this novel attribute of the potential romantic partner into their own self-concepts rather rapidly, reporting approximately a minute later that this novel self-aspect is more characteristic of them than it had been previously.

We next turned to the reaction time task, which, as before, replicated the previous findings. A marginally significant effect of condition emerged such that participants in the romantic context condition were slower to reject correctly the idiosyncratic attribute ($M = 1,846.90$ ms), compared with participants in the nonromantic context condition ($M = 1451.82$ ms), $F(1, 48) = 3.94$, $p = .07$. Thus, when asked to make a relatively quick *me* or *not me* judgment regarding a novel attribute that has just been viewed as part of either a potential romantic partner's or a potential student government representative's self-concept, individuals experienced more integration with their own self-concepts when the attribute was imagined as a novel aspect of a potential romantic partner, with whom they may experience the motivation to be romantically close. It is important to note that self-other integration appeared to be spurred by the potential dating context, despite the fact that a potential student candidate for an office could also impact the day-to-day lives of the participants.

Discussion

The findings from Study 3 thus replicate the results of the previous studies in the current research by showing that individuals readily incorporate novel self-attributes of potential romantic partners into their own self-concepts, at both an explicit and a schematic level, when they had not possessed the attribute previously. These results provide especially strong evidence for an anticipatory pathway of self-other integration, as participants in Study 3 were single and merely viewing a photograph of a hypothetical individual whom they did not have the opportunity to share experiences with or to self-disclose to and whom the participants did not anticipate interacting with. Furthermore, these findings demonstrate that even single participants engage in anticipatory self-other integration with an opposite sex individual when placed in a context that produces a romantic motivation toward that individual as a potential romantic partner; however, the same single participants do not engage in anticipatory self-other integration when viewing an opposite sex individual in a distinctly nonromantic motivational context.

Study 4

Study 4 served as a replication of Study 3, with an important extension: the addition of the IOS scale developed by Aron and colleagues (1992) as a dependent measure. In Study 4, both trait-specific and general versions of the IOS were included for participants who had just viewed an opposite-sex individual in either a romantic or nonromantic context. As in Study 3, to the extent romantic motivation is sufficient to encourage anticipatory self-other integration, only when the opposite-sex target was presented as a potential partner should individuals incorporate these novel attributes into the self.

Method

Participants. Forty-six heterosexual Northwestern University undergraduates (26 women, 20 men) participated in this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements of an introductory psychology course. Participants had a mean age of 18.56 years ($SD = 0.84$), and all reported that they were not currently involved in a romantic relationship at the time of the study. Most participants were European American (60% European American, 21% Asian American, 4% Hispanic, 7% African American, and 8% other).

Materials and procedure. Selection and experimental procedures were identical to those used in Study 3. Also as in Study 3, suspicion checks revealed that all participants reported believing the cover story. Participants then completed the same explicit and reaction time self-concept tasks used in the previous studies in the current research.

Uniquely in Study 4, we incorporated both trait-specific and general versions of the IOS (Aron et al., 1992). Specifically, participants using the IOS rated the extent to which they felt that their self-concept overlapped with the target individuals' self-concept, both in general and on each of the attributes assessed at the pretesting session before the laboratory component of the study. As participants had never met and did not anticipate meeting the target individuals, we anticipated that they would not experience self-other integration with the target individual prior to the manipulation. It is important to note that the presentation of the dependent measures was counterbalanced across participants.

Results

Results replicated those of Study 3. We predicted that participants would explicitly rate the idiosyncratic *not me* attribute embedded in the dating context profile of a potential romantic partner as more characteristic of them after viewing the profile, but that viewing the idiosyncratic *not me* attribute embedded in nonromantic context of a potential student government representative would not influence ratings of the idiosyncratic attribute. Similarly, we predicted that during the reaction time task, participants would be slower to reject correctly the idiosyncratic attribute embedded in the dating context profile as *not me* but that reaction times to reject correctly the idiosyncratic attribute would not be impacted when embedded in the nonromantic context profile. Two separate analyses were conducted to examine the effects of the motivation produced by a dating context, versus a nonromantic context, on participants' anticipatory self-other integration on both the explicit rating task and the reaction time task.

We first examined explicit self-ratings, which replicated the results of the previous studies with actual or imagined interactions with an actual romantic partner and acquaintance. As illustrated in Figure 5, the interaction between assessment time (pretest, postevaluation task) and condition (romantic context vs. nonromantic context) emerged as significant, $F(1, 44) = 7.53$, $p < .01$. Specifically, participants' rating of the preselected idiosyncratic self-attribute did not differ before the participants viewed a hypothetical, potential dating partner ($M = 1.42$), versus a hypothetical student government candidate ($M = 1.50$), $t(48) = -0.41$, $p = .68$. However, after viewing a hypothetical, potential dating partner, participants in the romantic context condition rated the attribute as more characteristic of themselves ($M = 2.04$), compared with participants who viewed a hypothetical, potential

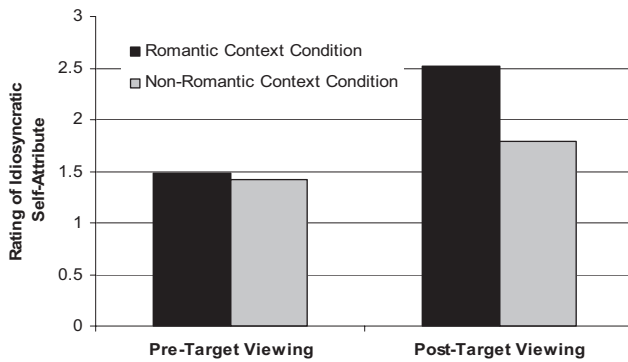


Figure 5. Study 4: Mean changes in explicit self-ratings of idiosyncratic self-attributes as a function motivational context.

student government candidate in the nonromantic context condition ($M = 1.55$), $t(48) = 1.99$, $p = .05$. Additionally, single participants in the romantic context condition rated the idiosyncratic attribute as significantly more characteristic of themselves after seeing their profile in the laboratory, compared with their ratings of the attributes during the pretest survey, $t(25) = -4.17$, $p < .001$. However, no such effect emerged for participants in the nonromantic context condition, $t(19) = -.37$, $p = .71$. This suggests that when learning about the self of a potential romantic partner, individuals are motivated to include this novel attribute of the potential romantic partner in their own self-concepts rather rapidly, reporting approximately a minute later that this novel self-aspect is more characteristic of them than it had been previously.

We next turned to the reaction time task. The pattern of means replicated the findings of all prior studies in that participants in the romantic context condition were also slower to reject correctly the idiosyncratic attribute ($M = 1,654.96$ ms), compared with participants in the nonromantic context condition, ($M = 1,435.00$ ms), $F(1, 45) = 1.94$, $p = .17$; however, this did not emerge as statistically significant.

Finally, we examined participants' endorsements of their self-other integration with the target individual on Aron and colleague's (1992) IOS scale as a function of motivational context. We predicted that on the IOS item asking participants to rate their self-other integration with the opposite-sex target individual, with regard to the selected idiosyncratic attribute, individuals would report greater self-other integration in the romantic context than in the nonromantic context. We did not have strong hypotheses concerning the general version of the IOS scale.

Our hypotheses were again generally supported: The overall interaction between IOS scale type and motivational context emerged as significant, $F(1, 44) = 6.49$, $p < .05$. Specifically, with the IOS scale on a trait specific level, participants who viewed an opposite-sex individual in a romantic context reported their self-concepts were more integrated with the target individual's self-concept ($M = 2.42$), compared with participants who viewed the opposite-sex target individual in a nonromantic context, ($M = 1.58$), $t(46) = 2.49$, $p < .05$. In contrast, participants rating on the IOS scale on the general self-concept level for either the romantic context ($M = 1.92$) or the nonromantic context conditions ($M = 2.02$), $t(46) = -.792$, $p = .43$, did not differ, suggesting that when dealing with an opposite-sex target individual, motivational context may impact individuals selves

on a specific level, at least at initially, rather than a general one with regards to self-other integration and perceived similarity.

Discussion

Study 4 again demonstrates that this anticipatory self-other integration in the service of perceived similarity is a motivated phenomenon. Specifically, upon viewing information regarding a potential romantic partner's self, but not upon viewing information regarding a potential student government candidate's self, participants incorporated the novel self-attributes into their sense of themselves both explicitly and schematically, as well as on a trait-specific IOS scale (Aron et al., 1992). With regard to the general IOS scale, perhaps this is one arena in which shared experience (e.g., Aron et al., 1991) provides an additional advantage. Although our data strongly suggest that self-other integration can take place at a trait-specific level due to sheer motivation, more general self-concept change may require the additional vehicle of shared experience. Taken together, the results of Studies 3 and 4 provide strong support for an anticipatory, motivated pathway through which self-other integration can occur with romantic partners.

Study 5

In Study 5, we further extend Studies 3 and 4 by examining one specific motivation that could be driving the self-other integration effects evidenced in the romantic context condition in Study 3. Thus, Study 5 replicates the romantic motivational context created in Study 3 and allows us to examine the moderation of the hypothesized effects by the degree to which participants' feel motivated to begin a romantic relationship with the potential partner they encounter. As anticipatory self-other integration appears to be motivated, individual differences in romantic interest in dating the potential partner depicted should predict greater incorporation of these novel attributes into the self, as it indicates a motivation to draw closer to the potential partner. Notably, all participants saw profiles of the identical opposite-sex potential romantic partner; only the idiosyncratic selected attribute differed across participants.

Method

Participants. Thirty-four heterosexual Northwestern University undergraduates (19 women, 15 men) participated in this study in partial fulfillment of the requirements of an introductory psychology course. Participants had a mean age of 18.44 years ($SD = .64$), and all reported that they were not currently involved in a romantic relationship at the time of the study. Most participants were European American (65% European American, 19% Asian American, 5% Hispanic, 6% African American, and 5% other).

Materials and procedure. Selection procedures were identical to those used in Studies 3 and 4. Experimental procedures were also similar to those used in Studies 3 and 4, with two exceptions. First, only the romantic context condition was used as a manipulation; second, after viewing the profile of the potential romantic partner, participants were asked a series of questions regarding the target that were embedded in a larger questionnaire regarding the university Match.com service. Specifically, participants rated on a

scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*) how much they liked the target, and how motivated they would be to go on a date with the target. These two items were significantly correlated ($r = .67, p < .001$) and, therefore, were averaged together. They were then standardized ($M = 0; SD = 1$) to create a composite index of romantic motivation toward the target. Suspicion checks revealed that all participants reported believing the cover story. Participants then completed the same explicit and reaction time self-concept tasks used in the previous studies in the current research.

Results

We predicted that participants would explicitly rate the idiosyncratic *not me* attribute embedded in a romantic motivational context as more characteristic of them after viewing the profile to the extent that they expressed the motivation to date the potential romantic partner they encountered. Similarly, we predicted that during the reaction time task, participants would be slower to indicate the idiosyncratic attribute as either characteristic of them or not characteristic of them to the extent that they expressed romantic motivation toward the potential partner they encountered. Two separate analyses were conducted to examine the effects of the motivation to date a potential romantic partner on participants' preemptive self-other integration on both the explicit rating task and the reaction time task.

Results conformed to predictions for the explicit rating task. Replicating the results of the previous studies, participants' rated the preselected idiosyncratic self-attribute as more characteristic of themselves ($M = 2.56$) after the task, compared with their pretest rating of the same attribute ($M = 1.76$), $F(1, 32) = 33.63, p < .001$. It is important to note that this main effect was qualified by a significant interaction with the motivation to date the potential romantic partner, such that the more motivated participants were to date the potential romantic partner that they viewed during the university Match.com task, the higher they rated the idiosyncratic *not me* attribute after the task, compared with their pretest rating of the attribute, $F(1, 32) = 8.09, p < .01$. This suggests that when learning about the self of a potential romantic partner that they would like to begin a romantic relationship with, individuals include this novel attribute of the potential romantic partner in their own self-concepts rather rapidly, reporting approximately a minute later that this novel self-aspect is more characteristic of them than it had been previously.

For the reaction time task, we conducted a regression analysis examining participants' response latencies when correctly rejecting attributes as *not me*, or as not characteristic of their sense of self. Again, results conformed to predictions; the more motivated participants were to date the potential romantic partner they had encountered, the longer it took them to reject correctly the idiosyncratic *not me* attribute during the reaction time task, ($\beta = .39$), $t(30) = 2.05, p = .05$. Participants were slower to indicate that their idiosyncratic *not me* attribute was not characteristic of their sense of self if they experienced a strong motivation to date the potential romantic partner whom they viewed as possessing the attribute. This suggests that when learning about the self of a potential romantic partner who they would like to begin a romantic relationship with, individuals have a harder time discriminating between attributes that are characteristic of them and attributes that are characteristic of a potential romantic partner.

Discussion

Taken together, the findings from Study 5 replicate the results of Studies 3 and 4 by showing that individuals readily incorporate novel self-attributes of potential romantic partners in their own self-concepts, at both an explicit level and a schematic level, when individuals had not possessed the attribute previously. These results provide strong evidence for an anticipatory pathway of self-other integration as participants in Study 5 were single and merely viewing a photograph of a hypothetical individual whom they did not have the opportunity to share experiences with or self-disclose to and whom the participants did not anticipate interacting with. Additionally, the use of our reaction time task as a dependent measure allows us to infer that participants were exhibiting these effects beyond self-presentational efforts. In combination, these findings extend Study 3 by demonstrating that single participants in a romantic motivational context can engage in anticipatory self-other integration with a potential partner if they possess the motivation to actually date that partner.

Meta-Analysis

The present research explored the possibility that individuals can draw their self-concepts closer to their romantic partner's quickly and in the absence of shared experience when given the appropriate motivation. Across all five studies, we found evidence that individuals do, in fact, engage in self-other integration with romantic partners, but not social acquaintances, both on an explicit rating task and on a schematic reaction time task. However, we wished to present a more comprehensive picture of the magnitude of our results across studies. Thus, we conducted a meta-analysis of our findings across all five studies for each of our central dependent variables.

The mean Cohen's d effect size statistic for the explicit rating task across Study 1A ($d = 0.62$), Study 1B ($d = 2.93$), Study 2 ($d = 0.81$), Study 3 ($d = 0.74$), Study 4 ($d = 1.11$), and Study 5 ($d = 5.77$) was $d = 1.78 (p < .001)$, indicating that participants experienced a greater increase in explicit endorsement of the target attribute as part of their self-concept from pretest to post-manipulation in the romantic partner or romantic context conditions compared with the acquaintance or nonromantic context conditions. Similarly, the mean Cohen's d effect size statistic for the reaction time task across Study 1 ($d = 2.40$), Study 1B ($d = 1.50$), Study 2 ($d = 1.29$), Study 3 ($d = 1.12$), Study 4 ($d = 0.58$), and Study 5 ($d = 0.85$) was $d = 1.27 (p < .001)$. Again, this indicates that participants took longer to reject correctly the target attribute as not characteristic of their self-concept after the manipulation in the romantic partner/romantic context conditions compared with the acquaintance/nonromantic context conditions. Neither of these effects was moderated by participant gender.

A meta-analysis of IOS scale was not conducted across studies as it was included primarily as a manipulation check in Studies 1A and 2 and as a dependent variable only in Study 4. That said, the effect size for the trait-specific IOS scale for Study 4 was Cohen's $d = 0.51 (p = 0.01)$, complementing the findings from the other dependent variables. As with the other dependent variables, this effect was not moderated by participant gender.

The overall Cohen's d across all three of our central dependent variables was $0.88 (p < .001)$. Taken together, these results

provide clear evidence that only when learning new self-relevant information from an actual or potential romantic partner, and not under other circumstances, do individuals incorporate this new self-relevant information in their own self-concept.

General Discussion

Past research has persuasively demonstrated that romantic partners exert a significant amount of influence on each other's sense of self (e.g., Aron, 2003; Aron & Aron, 1997; Aron et al., 1991). Our partners impact the self-attributes we think of as characteristic of ourselves, impact the roles and expectations we have for ourselves, and even contribute to the perception that we are more similar to our partners than perhaps is actually the case. The findings from the current set of studies amply support this past work by demonstrating that individuals draw their own self-concepts closer to their partner's by integrating attributes of their romantic partners into their self-concepts. Specifically, our studies demonstrate that when encountering a novel self-attribute that participants were led to believe was part of an interaction partner's self-concept, participants were more likely to integrate this attribute into their own selves, at both the explicit and schematic level, when they believe the novel self-attribute to be possessed by an actual or potential romantic partner rather than a nonromantic acquaintance. The effects on response times were particularly persuasive as they are largely immune to self-presentational concerns.

The majority of the existing research on self-other integration posits that this perceived similarity of self-concepts between one's romantic partners and oneself evolves from the conversations, activities, and other experiences that are shared. The current research extends these models by suggesting that as perceived similarity is a common goal in romantic relationships and self-other integration is one way to fulfill this goal (e.g., Aron et al., 1991; Murray, Holmes, Dolderman, & Griffin, 2000), individuals may sometimes be motivated to include attributes of actual or potential romantic partners into the self-concept as a means of promoting this self-partner integration. Thus, in addition to the shared relational selves that naturally arise from shared experience in relationships, individuals may also include aspects of their partner in their self-concepts as an anticipatory attempt to increase perceived similarity to their partner. Studies 1A and 1B showed that the self-other integration between participants and their partner occurred after a brief 5-min interaction with the partner, on an attribute that was completely foreign to the way the participant previously viewed the partner and for which the participant and partner had no prior shared experience. It is important to note that a discussion of the same format, depth, and length with an acquaintance did not produce the same self-other integration effects.

A potential critique of the first studies in the current research would be that although the self-attributes used in Studies 1A and 1B should not have been previously experienced by the couple (as they were not, in fact, actually possessed by the partner), the participants still briefly interacted with their partner regarding the attribute, which could be construed as self-disclosure via shared experience, albeit brief and scripted. Therefore, the remaining studies in the current research dealt with this potential limitation in an effort to establish a truly anticipatory form of cognitive interdependence between romantic partners. Study 2 replicated the

findings of the first studies by having individuals merely imagine interactions involving a novel self-attribute of either their partner or a social acquaintance. As before, participants integrated supposed partner-attributes into their own self-concepts after imagining an interaction, without the facilitation of actual shared experience. Again, a similar imagination task with a classmate as a target produced no evidence of self-other integration. Finally, Studies 3, 4, and 5 demonstrated that anticipatory self-other integration could also occur for single participants when presented with an online dating service profile of a potential romantic partner who was completely fictional, who was represented simply as a photo and web profile, and with whom participants (obviously) shared no prior experience.

Studies 3 and 4 also established that this anticipatory self-other integration is a motivated process. Specifically, viewing an opposite-sex individual in a romantic motivational context, as a potential romantic partner, predicted greater amounts of self-other integration than did viewing the same profile in a nonromantic motivational context (evaluating them for student government). Additionally, Study 5 demonstrated that within a romantic context, the specific motivation to initiate a relationship with a potential romantic partner increased individuals' integration of an attribute possessed by the potential partner into their own self-concept. This effect suggests that the motivation to develop a romantic relationship with someone is sufficient to induce self-other integration in the absence of shared experience. Taken together, the current research provides evidence for a secondary pathway of self-other integration, by which individuals in both established and emerging relationships can engage in self-other integration in the absence of shared experience if they are motivated to be romantically involved with the potential partner in question.

Implications and Future Directions

The internalization of the attributes of romantic others has potentially important implications for the fields of research on both relationship and the self. Specifically, perceived similarity, possibly via self-other integration, between romantic partners has been shown to be functional for both the individual and the romantic relationship in that it contributes to the occurrence of prorelationship cognitions such as enhanced relationship satisfaction (e.g., Murray, Holmes, Dolderman, & Griffin, 2000, Murray et al., 2002) as well as prorelationship behaviors, such as transformation of motivation in difficult interpersonal situations. We believe that transformation of motivation is likely encouraged by self-other overlap, as the differences between the goals of the self and the goals of the partner may be minimized to the extent that the self and the other are integrated (e.g., Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992; Rusbult, 1983).

Anticipatory, motivated self-other integration may also be functional for individuals in burgeoning romantic relationships with potential romantic partners. After all, perceived similarity is one of the strongest predictors of romantic attraction (Byrne, 1971), has been shown to promote a *we* focus of interdependence (Tesser et al., 1998), and has even been demonstrated to smooth interpersonal interactions and improve performance on joint tasks (Krivonos et al., 1976). Thus, in the light of the current findings, individuals may integrate aspects of even a potential romantic partner's self-concept into their own in the interest of cultivating a

neophyte relationship. Our data demonstrate that this is especially likely to occur, as might be suspected, to the degree that individuals have a strong romantic interest in a potential romantic partner.

Of course, in addition to the multiple benefits self–other integration brings to a relationship, there may be potential drawbacks to extensive self–other integration, especially when that relationship is lost. Specifically, extensive self–other integration between romantic partners could potentially contribute to the distress that most individuals experience when a romantic relationship ends. A few recent studies (e.g., Lewandowski et al., 2006; Slotter et al., 2008) have begun to establish that as a result of the impact romantic partners have on the self, some portion of the distress that individuals experience in response to a romantic breakup may be contributed by the impact that the breakup has on the individuals' sense of who and what they are. Distress over relationship dissolution may be exacerbated to the extent that people perceive themselves and the selves of their romantic partners to be similar and integrated, and thus, lose a fundamental part of themselves along with the relationship itself. Thus, a fruitful area for future research may be the dynamics of self–other overlap and its impact on both the construction of selves in relationships and reconstruction of selves after relationship dissolution.

In the future, researchers would also be wise to examine the stability and generality of the effects found in the current studies and the impact of different factors (both motivational and situational) on the intertwining of selves across time. For example, although motivation appears to be sufficient impetus to initiate the incorporation of a novel attribute of an actual or desired romantic partner in the self, perhaps subsequent shared experience regarding this attribute is what dictates whether the attribute will be retained as part of an individual's self-concept over time. Additionally, as our findings from Study 4 evidenced self–other integration on a trait-specific version of the IOS but not on a general version, shared experience may also play a key role in generalizing the self–other integration between romantic partners beyond a single self-attribute.

The current research also opens the door for future work to examine, in more depth, the motivational underpinnings of anticipatory self–other integration, as well as perceived similarity more generally. The current research demonstrates that as the establishment and maintenance of perceived similarity is a desirable goal in romantic relationships (e.g., Agnew, 2006; Andersen et al., 2002; Aron et al. 1991; Chen, 2006; Chen et al. 2006), the goal to become a couple with a potential romantic partner influences individuals to engage in anticipatory attempts at self–other integration in the hopes of fostering closeness and similarity in an emerging relationship. In the future, researchers should further investigate the motivation to date to a romantic partner as a mechanism that drives anticipatory cognitive interdependence, as well as the potential existence of other motivational underpinnings of the cognitive interdependence in a broad sense (e.g., the motivation to self-enhance by incorporating only positive aspects of a partner into the self, the motivation to reduce dissonance that now the romantic partner who one knew so well is not quite as one expected, the motivation to avoid the threatening notion of being dissimilar to one's partner, or the motivation to draw closer to one's ideal self by incorporating aspects of the partner into the self that facilitate this goal).

Subsequent research might also examine the specific mechanisms that produce anticipatory self–other integration. The current research suggests that given the self–other integration that occurs at both the explicit and schematic level, individuals are truly viewing themselves are more similar to a romantic partner after the current manipulations and are not merely engaging in self-presentational efforts. This is especially true given the findings in Study 3, in which participants did not even expect to interact with the potential romantic partner and thus had no reason to manage their self-presentation. However, the current research does not address how the self–other integration evidenced in the current studies is cognitively represented. Do individuals perceive greater similarity by remembering back to a specific instance in which they actually behaved in accordance with the self-attribute that they now believe to be characteristic of their partner? Or perhaps they reconstruct previous events and behaviors in their past to portray themselves as more characteristic of the self-attribute in question, and thus more similar to their romantic partner, than they actually are.

Finally, the occurrence of self–other integration in different types of close relationships remains an important potential path of investigation. In the past, researchers have largely investigated the development and maintenance of cognitive interdependence in romantic relationships. The current research expands on this impressive body of literature in meaningful ways; however, individuals form similar types of relationships with close others that are not romantic partners and, therefore, may engage in motivated, anticipatory attempts to establish and maintain self–other integration with these individuals. Given that the close relationships that individuals develop with parents and friends over the course of their lives can have vast implications for individuals' selves (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003), parental relationships and friendships may be sensible arenas to look for other types of shared, similar, relational selves and we-ness.

Conclusions

The current research provides an exploration of how the self is impacted by romantic partners beyond the traditionally examined vehicle of shared experience. Overall, the findings of these studies powerfully extend the idea that people strive to establish a feeling of similarity with their romantic partners by integrating their self-concepts (e.g., Agnew, 2000, 2006; Aron & Aron, 1997; Aron et al., 1991), demonstrating that people are capable of integrating aspects of actual or even desired partners into their self-concepts even in the absence of the typical facilitating factors of shared experience and self-disclosure. Anticipatory self–other overlap appears to stem from a motivation to establish or deepen a relationship with a romantic partner, the desire for increased closeness appearing to provide sufficient impetus to alter one's own self-concept. Thus, although some of the perceived sameness of Catherine and Heathcliff in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* surely arose, in part, out of their lifelong experience with each other, the current findings demonstrate that Catherine's deep desire to be Heathcliff's true love may have been sufficient to induce the similarity and integration of their souls.

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