Personality, attachment and sexuality related to dating relationship outcomes: Contrasting three perspectives on personal attribute interaction

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Although people can bring personal attributes to their relationships that affect how satisfying and enduring those relationships are, it is more often personal attribute interaction that directly determines romantic relationship outcomes. In this study, three general perspectives on personal attribute interaction—similarity, complementarity and exchange perspectives—were contrasted empirically in their ability to predict dating relationship outcomes. Based on questionnaires completed by a sample of 44 heterosexual dating couples, feelings of relationship satisfaction were most closely associated with the interaction of socially valuable attributes, generally supporting the exchange perspective. Similarity of personal attributes was also connected with relationship satisfaction; however, this association was in the negative direction. That is, couples with dissimilar personality traits, attachment styles and sexual strategies were significantly more satisfied with their dating relationships. Complementarity of personal attributes had no link to satisfaction, but complementary couples experienced significantly higher ratings of relationship commitment, especially couples with complementary personalities. Discussion focused on the differences between personal attribute connections with romantic satisfaction and commitment and on the limitations of the present study.

There is a long tradition in personality and social psychology of connecting personal attributes to relationship outcomes. In many domains this has been, and continues to be, a fruitful enterprise. For example, personal attributes appear strongly related to parenting and children’s play behaviour (Schaefer, 1997), work-related experiences (Hogan, 1986), friendship dynamics (Wiggins & Trapnell, 1996) and many aspects of successful interpersonal functioning (Eysenck, 1981; Plutchik & Conte, 1997; Strack & Lorr, 1994). In the realm of romantic relationships, however, the effects of attributes on relationship outcomes are often less direct, and as a consequence, their empirical linkages have proven less than impressive (Auhagen & Hinde, 1997; Jones, 1991).

One reason why personal attributes may be only weakly associated with romantic relationship outcomes is because such relationships typically involve complex, prolonged and intimate interchanges between different sets of attributes. For example, the direct effects of one’s personality traits on romantic relationship satisfaction may be

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filtered, distorted, amplified or negated by the corresponding personality traits of a romantic partner (e.g. Buss, 1984a, 1991). Moreover, some personality effects may be cloaked until advanced relationship stages (Murstein, 1972; Rubin, 1973), and may further depend on how a romantic partner cognitively interprets one’s personality traits in comparison with other potential partners (Rusbult, 1983; Thibault & Kelley, 1959). Consequently, many personal relationship researchers have come to focus on romantic relationship outcomes from the perspective of personal attribute interactions (e.g. Kenny & La Voie, 1984; Klohnen & Mendelsohn, 1998).

Three perspectives on personal attribute interaction and romantic relationship outcomes

The ways in which personal attributes can interact with one another are varied and complex. People in romantic relationships can have attributes that are entirely identical, largely similar, totally opposite, fully complementary or equally valuable, just to name a few types of personal attribute combinations. The current study focused on three general perspectives on personal attribute interaction, and derived from each perspective a specific hypothesis about which combinations of attributes should lead to more positive romantic relationship outcomes.

The first perspective is reflected in the old adage that ‘birds of a feather flock together’. The fundamental notion is that people tend to be attracted to and enjoy the company of like-minded others. In social psychology, this is often referred to as the similarity-attraction effect (Newcomb, 1956, 1961). Although at first glance one might not foresee individuals to prefer similarity across all personal attributes (two physically unattractive people might not prefer each other), the beneficial effects of sheer similarity have been demonstrable across many relationship outcomes, such as romantic partner choice and initial levels of relationship satisfaction (Berscheid, Dion, Walster, & Walster, 1971; Duck, 1988). Furthermore, according to Equity Theory (e.g. Hatfield, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978), two unattractive people may very well be satisfied and committed to each other because of the relative equality of their attributes. Actually, the precise reason why similarity might breed liking, and why similar personal attributes would interact to yield satisfaction and commitment in romantic relationships, can vary depending on the specific theoretical view one takes within this general perspective.

Some of the earliest theoretical explanations of similarity leading to positive relationship outcomes came from various behaviourist models (e.g. Byrne, 1971). People were hypothesized to like others who provide a certain level of reward, with similarity in romantic relationships perhaps providing rewards via a process of cognitive balance (Heider, 1958) or self-validation (Swann, 1992). However, in dating relationships, rewards seem to be related more to general reinforcement than self-verification (Swann, De La Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Other theories have suggested that phenotypic, or manifest, similarity is used by individuals as an index of genetic similarity, thus leading people to feel a special genetically generated bond with similar others (Rushton, 1988). Still other relationship researchers have focused on relationship communication styles, finding that personal attribute similarity leads to less conflict and more productive conflict resolution. For example, when a couple’s values and interests coincide sufficiently, some of the most potent sources of relationship conflict become more easily regulated (Gottman, 1994), and perhaps by having more common ground, the tactics used to overcome conflict can be more integrative (Canary & Cupach, 1988).
Although the theories within this basic perspective are diverse, the empirical connections between personal attribute similarity and romantic relationship outcomes appear to be unequivocal; similarity leads to positive romantic relationship outcomes. People tend to form romantic relationships, including marriages, with others who are somewhat similar to them, a phenomenon known as ‘mate assortment’ (Buss, 1984b; Cattell & Nesselroade, 1967; Vandenbarg, 1972). Moreover, there is some evidence that people who possess more similar personalities enjoy their romantic relationships more than dissimilar couples (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997; Buss, 1989a). In this study, I refer to the general perspective that people prefer similar others in relationships as the ‘similarity perspective’ (SP), and the specific hypothesis that more similar dating couples will enjoy higher levels of relationship quality than couples with dissimilar personal attributes as the ‘dating similarity hypothesis’.

The second basic approach to personal attribute interaction and romantic relationship outcomes can be traced to the old adage that sometimes ‘opposites attract’. In general, the notion that we find others attractive because they are the exact opposite of ourselves has received little empirical support, except in regard to biological sex and to some extent sadism/masochism (Baumeister, 1986; Buss, 1985). So it is generally not the case that people simply seek the opposite of themselves. Still, the notion that we may find others attractive and satisfying because they possess attributes that are dissimilar in form but in some way complement our own personal attributes has been the subject of numerous theoretical perspectives (Freud, 1914; Leary, 1957; Sullivan, 1953). As with the similarity perspective, the precise ways in which attributes might complement one another, and why complementarity should lead to satisfaction and commitment in romantic relationships, vary depending on the specific theoretical account within this general perspective.

Winch (1958, 1967) has suggested that we find others attractive if they satisfy our social psychological needs. A dominant person may be most satisfied in relationships with a submissive partner, whereas a nurturing person may find satisfaction in relationships with a partner who is receptive to being nurtured. Although research findings relevant to Winch’s specific hypotheses have been mixed (White & Hatcher, 1984), his emphasis on dyadic explanations of relationship satisfaction has spurred other researchers to examine the combinatory effects of individual characteristics on relationships (Cate & Lloyd, 1992).

An advanced approach to complementarity that has received increasing attention among personality and clinical psychologists is interpersonal theory (see Plutchik & Conte, 1997). According to this approach, people should be attracted to and feel satisfied with others who interpersonally approach their relationship in a complementary way. For example, someone whose interpersonal orientation involves granting love and status to the self, but not to others, would complement another who generally grants love and status to others but not to oneself. In short, a dating couple can be complementary when they both agree that one of them is more important and worthy than the other. Using a version of facet analysis (Foa & Foa, 1974), interpersonal researchers have identified several types of romantic couple combinations that, in terms of granting and rejecting status and love to self and other, should complement one another perfectly (Kiesler, 1983; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1996).

Interestingly, a similar theoretical approach is developing within the attachment theory literature (see Simpson & Rholes, 1998). Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991) have suggested that adult romantic attachment styles can be defined in terms of a person’s generally positive or negative views of oneself and others. According to this
approach, a complementary couple could include a person who had a negative internal working model of the self but a positive model of others, paired with a person who had a positive view toward self and negative views toward others. In this way, the couple mutually agrees that one of them is positive and the other is negative. A complementary couple might also include a person who had a positive internal working model of the self and others, matched with another person who had a positive view toward self and others. In other words, they both view everyone as worthy of love. From this complementarity approach, couples who have mutually compatible attachment styles might find their converging attitudes to be a source of reduced conflict and increased relationship quality (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994).

Thus, several theoretical approaches to personal attribute interaction suggest that people may reap special benefits from relationships with others who complement their approach to life and relationships. Those who mutually agree upon how they view their romantic relationship should reliably experience the most relationship satisfaction and enjoy the longest relationship duration. Although the empirical findings on complementarity and relationship outcomes have been somewhat contradictory (Campbell, 1980; White & Hatcher, 1984), previous research investigations have tended to focus on the effects of complementarity on initial attraction and mate choice. The understanding of how complementarity affects relationship outcomes over prolonged interactions remains less clear. In this study, the general perspective that people do well with others whose personal attributes complement their own is referred to as the ‘complementarity perspective’ (CP), and the specific hypothesis that romantic couples whose personal attributes compatibly define dating relationships will enjoy more relationship quality over time is referred to as the ‘dating complementarity hypothesis’.

According to the preceding perspectives, people should recognize romantic partners as satisfying and worthy of commitment if they possess characteristics that are similar to, or complement, their own personal attributes. Dating relationship quality should flow not solely from oneself, but rather from the dyadic fusion of two sets of personal attributes. Although different theories exist within the SP and CP, each general perspective provides a distinct and testable hypothesis about personal attribute interaction and dating relationship outcomes.

The third basic approach addressed in this study suggests that people should find romantic relationships gratifying and deserving of continued involvement if their partners possess attributes that are socially valued in romantic relationships—attributes that provide significant relationship rewards and that have minimal associated costs. For example, one of the most valuable attributes in a potential dating partner is physical attractiveness, and people who are paired with physically attractive dates find their dating experiences more satisfying (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1986; Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, & Rottman, 1966).

This third basic perspective is similar to several established theories of relationship satisfaction and commitment, including social exchange and cognitive equity theories (Berscheid & Walster, 1978; Clark & Reis, 1988; Ruschult, 1983). Personal relationship theories working from within this basic perspective tend to predict that relationship quality results from the exchange of equitable amounts of valued attributes. However, unlike similarity theories of satisfaction, these valuable attributes need not be the exact same attributes. For example, it is often the case that men with a high social status exchange their status for beauty in their female partners (Elder, 1969; Symons, 1979; Udry & Eckland, 1984). Each attribute is highly valued by the opposite sex in romantic
relationships: men tend to value women’s beauty, whereas women tend to value men’s status, and romantic relationship quality reliably emerges from the interactive exchange of these highly valued assets (Shackelford & Buss, 1997).

According to most exchange theories of personal attribute interaction and relationship quality, in any given culture any attribute could be considered valuable. In contrast, according to evolutionary theories of social exchange, certain attributes should be particularly valued across all cultures (Kenrick, Groth, Trost, & Sadalla, 1993). For example, according to sexual strategies theory (Buss & Schmitt, 1993), people tend to find desirable and satisfying those relationship partners who possess ‘adaptive attributes’ (Schmitt & Buss, 1996). That is, people should feel satisfied with their romantic relationships if they are with a person who provides them with the physical and emotional resources they need to survive and reproduce successfully (i.e. what they would have needed in our ancestral past). Moreover, when both partners possess evolutionary-adaptive attributes, the relationship should flourish and endure, and both partners should find it highly satisfying. People do not necessarily evaluate their romantic partners’ reproductive capacities and consciously attune their corresponding levels of relationship satisfaction; rather, it is theorized that people possess distinct evolved psychological mechanisms that unconsciously drive people to act as though they do. In this study, I refer to the basic notion that people prefer others who possess socially and reproductively valuable attributes as the ‘exchange perspective’ (EP).

According to what I refer to as the ‘dating exchange hypothesis’, couples where both partners possess valuable attributes and feed each other’s evolved romantic desires should have higher levels of relationship satisfaction than other couples. Prolonged, positive and mutually reinforcing interactions are likely to occur in these couples, which has been shown to be particularly important to dating relationship satisfaction (Swann et al., 1994). Thus, the EP views romantic relationships as interactive exchanges of attributes, and relationship satisfaction and commitment should track the status of that adaptive interchange (Rusbult, 1983; Schmitt & Buss, 2001).

**Personal attributes relevant to all three interaction perspectives on romantic relationship outcomes**

A host of personal attributes have the potential to impact romantic relationship outcomes. For example, cognitive attitudes toward sexuality, some behavioral personality traits, and emotional attitudes toward one’s partner appear to be related directly to sexual satisfaction (see Sprecher & McKinney, 1993). Gender styles and neuroticism, including their interaction, have demonstrated strong empirical connections to relationship satisfaction and stability (Benn, 1984; Fincham & Bradbury, 1993; Kenrick et al., 1993; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986). However, three pairs of personal attributes especially lend themselves to the types of interactions predicted by all three of the present perspectives—the SP, CP and EP. These attributes include the personality traits of extraversion and agreeableness, the adult romantic attachment style dimensions of anxiety and avoidance, and the evolutionary-relevant sexual strategy dimensions of sexual arousal and sexual commitment.

The personality traits of extraversion and agreeableness correspond to the first two dimensions of the five-factor model of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1992). These two traits normally display some connection to romantic relationship outcomes. For example, extraversion has been associated with sexual
satisfaction and functioning (Eysenck, 1976), and kindness and understanding, aspects of agreeableness, were the highest rated mate preferences in a survey of 37 cultures (Buss, 1989b). In addition, because couples tend to assort along these two personality dimensions (Buss, 1984b), because extraversion and agreeableness can be embedded within interpersonal theory (McCrae & Costa, 1989), and because both extraversion and agreeableness have been implicated as valuable to ancestral survival, fertility and quality parenting (Buss, 1997; MacDonald, 1995, 1998), these two dimensions were highly useful for testing the dating similarity, complementarity and exchange hypotheses.

Adult romantic attachment styles are emerging as one of the most important individual differences associated with romantic relationship outcomes (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Simpson, 1990, 1999). Some of the recent attention of researchers in attachment styles and their role in romantic relationships can be attributed to the methodological advancement of treating the many different categorization schemes of attachment as two basic dimensions: anxiety and avoidance (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Brennan & Shaver, 1995). Because these two dimensions can be broken down as described above into positive and negative views of self and other so as to test the dating complementarity hypothesis, because the corresponding four-style typology of attachment can be used to test directly the dating similarity hypothesis, because the evolution of attachment styles has been linked to mate value, reproductive success, and high-quality parenting (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Miller & Fishkin, 1997), and because socially valuable attachment styles have been linked to relationship satisfaction (Chappell & Davis, 1998), the personal attributes of attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance lent themselves well to the current study.

Recently, a lexical measure of personal attributes related to sexual strategies theory was developed and validated (Schmitt, 1996; Schmitt & Buss, 2000). This new assessment tool, the 'sexy seven' measure (SSM), captures individual difference variation along dimensions such as relationship exclusivity, sexual attractiveness, sexual restraint and emotional investment. These four dimensions reflect many of the most adaptive attributes of human mating (Schmitt & Buss, 1996) and are therefore highly relevant to evaluating the EP.

The SSM also can be used to conceptualize sexual strategies along two high-level interpersonal dimensions of sexual arousal and sexual commitment (Schmitt, 1996; Schmitt & Buss, 2000). As can be seen in Fig. 1, these two broad dimensions can be characterized as a circumplex and broken down into eight 'sexual styles', and couples can be compared as to how geometrically similar their sexual styles are. For example, a couple that included an erotophilic person and an avoidant individual would be extremely dissimilar in terms of geometric location—opposite ends of the circumplex of sexual strategies. Thus, sexual arousal and sexual commitment dimensions of the SSM can be used to test the dating similarity hypothesis and evaluate the broader SP.

Using a version of facet analysis from interpersonal theory (see Wiggins, 1979), the SSM can also provide a direct test of the dating complementarity hypothesis. As shown at the top of Table 1, each sexual style corresponds to an interpersonal blend of arousal and commitment. A person with an arousing sexual style, for example, can be interpersonally understood as granting arousal and commitment to oneself, and granting commitment to one's romantic partner, but rejecting arousal to the partner. If an arousing person were to reduce their level of sexual commitment, they would shift within the circumplex into the erotophilic sexual style. Accordingly, their facet analysis profile would change, and instead of granting commitment to their partner,
they would reject commitment to their partner. If a romantic person were to lose some sexual arousal, they would drop in the circumplex to the exclusive style and stop granting arousal to the self, and so forth.

Using this form of facet analysis on sexual styles can be useful for theoretically predicting which sexual styles should best complement one another. For example, as displayed at the bottom of Table 1, an erotophilic person is concerned primarily with his or her own sexual arousal and commitment. An avoidant individual, in contrast, is only concerned with granting others’ sexual arousal and commitment. According to the CP, an erotophilic sexuality should complement an avoidant style—they both grant arousal and commitment to only one member of the couple, the erotophile—and a dating relationship involving this combination of sexual strategies should be especially satisfying and durable. Thus, the SSM was highly useful for simultaneously testing and contrasting the dating exchange, similarity and complementarity hypotheses on personal attribute interaction and romantic relationship outcomes.

**Rationale for the current study**

Much of the extant research on personal attribute interaction and romantic relationship outcomes has suffered from three important limitations. First, the early studies on personal attributes and relationships focused primarily on attribute interaction and initial stages attraction (e.g. Byrne, 1971; Till & Freedman, 1978; Winch, 1958). Because many of the effects of personal attribute interaction emerge only after protracted periods of interaction as a couple (Kelley et al. 1983; Rubin, 1973), this may have led some prematurely to conclude that attribute interactions have relatively little impact on relationship outcomes as a whole (e.g. White & Hatcher, 1984). Second, relatively few studies have investigated the effects of personal attribute interaction from multiple perspectives concurrently (cf. Cattell & Nesselroade, 1967). This is especially unfortunate because explicitly contrasting theoretical predictions in single studies provide the kind of strong inference most capable of advancing the study of
Table 1. A facet analysis of sexual strategies noting complementary couples according to interpersonal theory

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Complementary couples

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Note. +1 represents a granting of arousal or commitment, and -1 represents a denying of arousal or commitment. See Wiggins and Trapnell (1996) for a review of facet analysis applications.

personal relationships as a science (Platt, 1964). Third, because previous studies have largely been limited to examining only one interaction perspective at a time, it remains unclear whether certain personal attributes are more relevant to some interaction theories, and to some relationship outcomes, than others. Resolving these issues might help to clarify the sometimes discrepant empirical findings generated by previous personal relationship investigations.

The current study attempted directly to address these concerns by exploring a diverse set of personal attributes within the contexts of three different perspectives on attribute interaction and relationship outcomes. Specifically, the current study had two objectives. The first was to determine whether certain kinds of personal attributes were more relevant to relationship outcomes than others. To accomplish this objective, the personality traits, adult attachment styles and sexual strategies of romantic couples were related to judgments of their relationship satisfaction and commitment. The second, and primary, objective was to determine which perspective on personal attribute interaction—the SP, CP or EP—best accounted for romantic relationship outcomes. To accomplish this objective, the three perspectives were directly contrasted in their ability to distinguish romantic couples that enjoyed higher relationship satisfaction and commitment from those experiencing a lower relationship quality.
Measures

Participants
The participants in this study were 44 women and 44 men who were paid participants in a study of heterosexual dating couples. Each couple received $20 for their participation. The participants were recruited through local newspaper advertising and through posted announcements at a large state university in a medium-sized, midwestern city within the United States. Only couples that had been dating at least 6 months and were not living together were selected as participants. The mean length of dating was 18 months, with a standard deviation of 5 months. Participants ranged in age from 18 and 42, with a mean age of 22 years and a standard deviation of approximately 5 years. The self-reported ethnicity of the sample was primarily Caucasian.

Measures
The participants completed a packet of questionnaires that included six measures relevant to this study. Participants first completed measures about their personal attributes. This included a 100-item measure of the ‘Big 5’ personality traits that has been shown to provide highly reliable and valid measures of extraversion and agreeableness (Goldberg, 1992). A measure of adult romantic attachment styles was included that also displayed adequate psychometric properties (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). The SSM (Schmitt, 1996) was the final personal attribute measure to be administered and has been shown to provide substantially reliable and valid measures of human sexual strategies (Schmitt & Buss, 2000).

All participants then completed questionnaires concerning aspects of their current romantic relationship. Two measures were assays of relationship commitment. The first measure was intended to assess the likelihood of relationship duration. Each participant responded ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ to six statements: ‘Even people who get along quite well in a relationship sometimes wonder whether the relationship is working out. Have you ever thought your relationship might be in trouble?’; ‘Has the thought of ending your relationship crossed your mind in the past three months?’; ‘Have you or your partner ever seriously suggested the idea of ending your relationship within the last three months?’; ‘Have you discussed ending the relationship with a close friend?’; ‘Have you discussed the possibility of ending your relationship with people at work?’; and ‘Have you ever discussed ending your relationship with a counsellor or member of the clergy?’. A scale was created by summing all the ‘Yes’ responses for each participant. The resulting scale had a Cronbach alpha, an index of internal reliability (Cronbach, 1951), of .65. A second scale was taken from Sternberg’s measure of love-oriented commitment (Sternberg, 1988). The two scales were summed to form a relationship commitment scale that had Cronbach alphas of .64 for men and .67 for women.

Relationship satisfaction was assessed using three scales from the relationship satisfaction questionnaire (RSQ), a measure created for this study. In the RSQ, participants rated aspects of relationship satisfaction on a Likert-type scale from 1 (unsatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied). General satisfaction was assessed using the question ‘Thinking about things all together, how would you say you feel about your relationship?’ Emotional satisfaction was assessed using responses to three questions: ‘How do you feel about your partner as someone to confide in about things that are important to you?’; ‘How do you feel about your partner as a source of encouragement and reassurance?’; and ‘How do you feel about your partner as a source of useful
information and advice? The Cronbach alpha of the emotional satisfaction scale was .83. Sexual satisfaction was assessed using the question 'How do you feel about your sexual relationship?'. The three satisfaction scales—general, emotional and sexual—were combined to form a relationship satisfaction scale that had Cronbach alphas of .81 for men and .82 for women.

**Procedure**

The dating couples received all measures in the form of an anonymous assessment packet. This packet was mailed to each dating partner separately, in a way that ensured each participant's privacy but allowed us to connect dating partner packets to one another via randomly assigned identification numbers. Of the packets, 81% were returned in pre-addressed envelopes, comprising the 44 dating couples examined. It was required that each person complete all questionnaires at home alone, outside the direct presence of any other person. Furthermore, the confidential nature of each questionnaire was emphasized throughout the assessment packet. Thus, all measures were administered under anonymous conditions.

**Categorization of dating couples according to the three perspectives on romantic relationship outcomes**

In order to examine the impact of personal attribute interaction on dating relationship outcomes from the three perspectives discussed above, the following procedure was employed. In order to test the dating similarity hypothesis, couples were categorized into two groups—similar and dissimilar—in each personal attribute domain. Of the couples, 41 fully completed the self-reported personality measure including extraversion and agreeableness. After standardizing scores along extraversion and agreeableness, couples were treated as similar in terms of their personality traits if they fell within two octants of one another using the interpersonal theory approach to personality (see McCrae & Costa, 1989; Wiggins, 1979). This classification system was used, in part, to provide relatively equal numbers of similar and dissimilar couples and led to the classification of 21 couples as possessing similar personality traits and 20 couples as possessing dissimilar personality traits.

The adult attachment style questionnaire was fully completed by 38 couples. After extracting factor scores corresponding to anxious and avoidant attachment orientations, couples were treated as similar if they were in the same quadrant of the four-style typology system advocated by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991). This led to the classification of nine couples as possessing similar and 29 couples as possessing dissimilar attachment styles.

The sexual strategies measure was fully completed by 41 couples. After standardizing scores along sexual arousal and commitment, couples were treated as similar in terms of sexual strategies if they fell within two sexual style octants of one another using the interpersonal approach to sexuality strategies (Schmitt, 1996). Again, as can be seen in Fig. 1, each sexual style octant corresponded to an interstitial blend of sexual arousal and sexual commitment. This led to the classification of 15 couples as possessing similar sexual strategies and 26 couples as possessing dissimilar sexual strategies.

Thus, the actual similarity of each couple based on self-reported combinations of personal attributes, as opposed to perceived similarity or observer-reported attributes, was diagnosed within three individual difference domains: personality, attachment and
sexuality. Other domains (e.g., values, interests) and other dimensions within each domain (e.g., neuroticism) could have been used to test the SP. However, the specific personality traits of extraversion and agreeableness, the attachment dimensions of anxiety and avoidance, and the sexual strategies of arousal and commitment were especially useful for evaluating the interpersonal CP and the evolutionary-related EP as well.

In order to test the dating complementarity hypothesis, and to evaluate the capability of the CP to generally account for relationship outcomes, couples were divided into two groups, 'complementary' and 'non-complementary'. Couples were treated as complementary in terms of their personality traits if they defined their relationships in ways that matched within one octant according to the interpersonal approach to personality traits and relationships (for a review of this approach, see Wiggins & Trapnell, 1996). Again, this procedure helped to obtain relatively equal numbers of couples within each group while remaining faithful to the theoretical rationale of attribute complementarity. This led to the personality classification of 14 couples as complementary and 27 couples as non-complementary.

Couples were treated as complementary in terms of their attachment styles if their attitudes toward self and other complemented one another as described above. For example, a person with negative views of self and positive views of other would complement someone with positive views of self and negative views of other because they both would agree that one of them is positive and the other negative. This led to the classification of 10 couples as having complementary and 28 couples as having non-complementary attachment styles.

Couples were treated as complementary in terms of sexual strategies if they defined their relationships in ways that matched within one octant according to the interpersonal approach to sexual strategies (Schmitt, 1996). This classification system is detailed in Table 1. For example, an erotophilic person who is concerned with his or her own sexual arousal and commitment, and who denies sexual arousal and commitment to others, would complement an avoidant sexual strategist who denies sexual arousal and commitment to self but grants arousal and commitment to others. This led to the classification of 18 couples as complementary and 23 couples as non-complementary in terms of their sexual strategies.

In order to test the dating exchange hypothesis, couples were divided into two groups, 'high exchange value' and 'low exchange value'. Couples were treated as high exchange value (EV) in terms of personality traits if the male partner had attributes that women find socially and reproductively valuable (high dominance with prosocial tendencies; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, Todd, & Finch, 1997), and if the female partner had attributes that men find socially and reproductively valuable—(high nurturance with prosocial tendencies; Buss, 1991; MacDonald, 1995). Using the interpersonal approach to the personality traits of extraversion and agreeableness (see McCrae & Costa, 1989), high-EV couples included those in which both the men and women were located in the interpersonal octants corresponding to sex-linked, reproductively valuable personality styles. This led to the classification of seven couples as high EV and 34 couples as low EV.

Couples were treated as high EV in terms of their attachment styles if they had reproductively valuable attachment styles—styles that lead to emotional stability and high parental investment in offspring (Kirkpatrick, 1998; Miller & Fishkin, 1997). Thus, if both partners had secure attachment styles, or if one had a secure style and the other had a positive attitude toward either self or other, such as with a preoccupied or
Table 2. Descriptive statistics for measures of personal attributes and relationship outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal attribute measures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personality traits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>8.551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>8.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment styles</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied attachment</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful attachment</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissive attachment</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure attachment</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual arousal</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual commitment</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship outcome measures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>5.54</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship commitment</td>
<td>10.70</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. These analyses were based on responses from 44 heterosexual dating couples.

dissociative style, they were treated as high-EV couples. This led to the classification of 12 couples as high EV and 26 couples as low EV.

Couples were treated as high-EV in terms of sexual strategies if the male partner was either arousing or romantic (geometrically reflecting socially and reproductively valuable men who tend to be physically attractive and emotionally investing; see Buss and Schmitt, 1993), and the female partner was erotophilic, arousing, romantic or exclusive (geometrically reflecting socially and reproductively valuable women who tend to be sexually accessible to their partner, physically attractive and sexually exclusive to their partner; see Buss and Schmitt (1993)). This led to the classification of nine couples as high EV and 32 couples as low EV in terms of their sexual strategy interactions.

Results

The descriptive statistics on all personal attribute and relationship outcome measures used in this study are displayed in Table 2. On all measures, there appeared to be sufficient variation to make meaningful comparisons among the three perspectives of personal attribute interaction and relationship outcomes. Because not all couples fully completed all measures, the reported degrees of freedom and resulting significance levels varied across statistical analyses. The intercorrelation matrix of all personal attributes is presented in Table 3. Along the diagonal of Table 3 can be viewed the cross-person correlations, reflecting the degree to which men and women assorted on the personal attribute dimensions. Sexual arousal was the only variable showing significant assortment across couples ($r(38) = .34, p < .05$).

**Personal attributes directly related to romantic relationship outcomes**

The correlations between men's and women's personal attributes and men's and women's feelings of relationship outcomes are reported in Table 4. As displayed across
Table 3. Intercorrelation matrix of personal attribute measures for men, women and across couples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Extraversion</th>
<th>Agreeableness</th>
<th>Anxiousness</th>
<th>Avoidance</th>
<th>Arousal</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extraversion</td>
<td>(-.02)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>(-.25)</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>.52***</td>
<td>.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiousness</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>(-.15)</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>(-.19)</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arousal</td>
<td>.33*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>-.36*</td>
<td>(.34* )</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>.63***</td>
<td>-.23</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>(-.14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Note. These analyses were based on responses from 44 heterosexual couples. Correlations above the diagonal are for men only. Correlations below the diagonal are for women only. Correlations along the diagonal are cross-person correlations, representing the degree to which couples are assorted on personal attribute dimensions.

Table 4. Men’s and women’s personal attributes related to men’s and women’s judgments of relationship outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal attributes</th>
<th>Relationship satisfaction</th>
<th></th>
<th>Relationship commitment</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality traits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s extraversion</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s extraversion</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>-.22</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s agreeableness</td>
<td>.35*</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s agreeableness</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment styles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s avoidance</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s avoidance</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
<td>-.31*</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s anxiousness</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s anxiousness</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>-.19</td>
<td>-.32*</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s arousal</td>
<td>.48***</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s arousal</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s commitment</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.38**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s commitment</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

Note. These analyses were based on responses from 44 heterosexual dating couples.

the first four rows of Table 4, the personality traits of men and women were largely unrelated to relationship outcomes. The sole exception was that men reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction if they described themselves as agreeable (r(39) = .35, p < .05).

There were several significant associations between women’s attachment styles and relationship outcomes. Women who reported having avoidant attachment orientations
tended to experience a lower relationship satisfaction ($\tau(36) = -0.33$, $p < .05$), and their male partners tended to express lower levels of relationship commitment. In addition, women who reported anxious attachment orientations had male partners with lower levels of relationship commitment, and tended to report lower levels of relationship commitment themselves.

The sexual strategy dimensions of arousal and commitment were somewhat related to relationship outcomes. In both men ($\tau(40) = 0.48$, $p < .001$) and women ($\tau(40) = 0.37$, $p < .01$), sexual arousal was positively correlated with self-reported feelings of relationship satisfaction. In men, those who were high on sexual commitment tended to have female dating partners who reported lower feelings of relationship commitment ($\tau(40) = -0.38$, $p < .01$). Interestingly, it appeared that women in this dating couple sample were not enticed into high levels of relationship commitment by men who were particularly faithful and monogamous.

Overall, the direct links between personal attributes and relationship outcomes in this study were relatively weak. Although this was consistent with some previous research (see Auhan & Hinde, 1997; Jones, 1991), this was somewhat surprising in that people have expressed strong desires for many of the personal attributes involved in the present study (e.g., Buss & Schmitt, 1993), and presumably people should be satisfied when they obtain what they desire. It may be that mate choice and the preferences guiding initial feelings of romantic attraction are relatively unrelated to relationship satisfaction and commitment in ongoing dating relationships. This seemed to suggest that it was necessary to view the connections between personal attributes and romantic relationship outcomes in sustained relationships from the perspective of personal attribute interactions.

**Personal attribute interactions and romantic relationship outcomes**

The main objective of the current study was to determine which of three perspectives on personal attribute interaction best accounted for romantic relationship outcomes. To accomplish this objective, the categorizations of couples as similar, complementary and exchange valuable were combined across all three sets of personal attributes—personality traits, attachment styles and sexual strategies. Each couple was, therefore, assigned one overall similarity score based on the categorized similarity of their personality traits, their attachment styles and their sexual strategies. Each couple was given one overall complementary score, and each couple had one exchange value score. In addition, relationship satisfaction and commitment scores were computed for each couple by averaging the male and female relationship outcome scores. Thus, the evaluation of personal attribute interaction and romantic relationship outcomes was appropriately based on couple-level analyses (Kenny, 1988; Kenny & La Voie, 1984).

A direct comparison of the three perspectives on personal attribution interaction and dating relationship satisfaction was made by regressing an index of each interaction perspective on relationship satisfaction. By collapsing each couples' classification across personality traits, attachment styles and sexual strategies, each couple received a score of 0, 1, 2 or 3 in terms of how similar, complementary or exchange valuable they were. These indexes were then used to predict relationship satisfaction. Table 5 displays the results from a standard regression analysis of personal attribute interaction perspective indexes on couple-based relationship satisfaction, showing the unstandardized regression coefficients ($B$), the standardized regression coefficients ($\beta$), and the $R$, $R^2$ and adjusted $R^2$ after entry of all three interaction perspective indexes.
As presented in Table 5, the index of the EP significantly predicted relationship satisfaction, suggesting that couples who both have valuable personal attributes to exchange are more satisfied with their dating relationships. The SP index also predicted satisfaction, but in the opposite direction of the dating similarity hypothesis. Dissimilar couples actually had the higher levels of satisfaction. Examination of the similarity indexes within each personal attribute revealed that this finding was driven primarily by couples with dissimilar attachment styles ($M=5.8$) enjoying more relationship satisfaction than couples with similar attachment styles ($M=5.2$; $t(36)=-2.31, p<.05$). The CP index was unassociated with relationship satisfaction. Thus, regression analyses supported the dating exchange hypothesis and suggested that the basic EP predicted relationship satisfaction better than the SP or CP.

A direct comparison of the three perspectives of personal attribution interaction and dating relationship commitment was made by regressing an index of each interaction perspective on relationship commitment. Table 6 displays the results from a standard regression analysis of personal attribute interaction perspective indexes on general relationship commitment. As can be seen in Table 6, the index of the CP significantly predicted relationship commitment. Examination of the complementarity indexes within each personal attribute revealed that this finding was driven primarily by couples with complementary personalities ($M=11.7$) enjoying more relationship commitment than couples with uncomplimentary sexual strategies ($M=10.1$; $t(39)=2.14, p<.05$), with complementary sexuality also playing a role ($t(39)=1.06$). The EP and SP indexes did not predict relationship commitment. Thus, regression analyses supported
the dating complementarity hypothesis and suggested that the basic CP predicted relationship commitment better than the EP or SP.

Discussion

The primary objective of this study was empirically to contrast three perspectives on personal attribute interaction and relationship outcomes, the similarity perspective (SP), the complementarity perspective (CP), and the exchange perspective (EP). Although previous research had shown each basic perspective to be at least somewhat useful in understanding mate choice and initial attraction, it was unclear whether in a direct contrast one perspective would show a superior ability to predict romantic outcomes in ongoing dating relationships. Moreover, the issue of whether certain kinds of personal attributes were particularly relevant to certain types of relationship outcomes remained unresolved. In the current investigation, the three basic perspectives were contrasted directly in terms of their specific hypotheses about which dating couples should enjoy greater relationship outcomes based on their personality trait, attachment style and sexual strategy interactions.

In line with other research (Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994), relationship satisfaction and commitment appeared to be distinguishable romantic outcomes. Of the three specific hypotheses, the dating exchange hypothesis appeared to receive the most support for predicting relationship satisfaction. Couples in which both partners possessed socially and reproductively valuable sexual strategies (i.e. where he was investing emotionally and she was sexually accessible) experienced higher levels of relationship satisfaction in almost every way. They were more sexually, emotionally and generally satisfied with their dating relationships than less valuable couples. Oddly, personal attribute similarity led to significantly lower levels of relationship satisfaction. These findings seemed to run counter to previous research within the SP, in which similarity generally breeds initial attraction and directly affects mate choice (e.g. Till & Freedman, 1978). This discrepancy could have resulted from the way in which couple similarity was operationalized. However, virtually identical results were found using other categorization techniques (e.g. if both partners were above or below the mean on extraversion and agreeableness). An alternate possibility is that similarity may be more important to initial attraction than to the dynamics of relationship satisfaction in enduring dating relationships, at least in terms of the personal attributes examined in the current study. Thus, among the three basic perspectives, the EP clearly received the most empirical support in terms of predicting relationship satisfaction.

In terms of relationship commitment, the dating complementarity hypothesis received the most support. Couples whose personality and sexuality complemented one another were less likely to consider ending their relationship and had higher levels of decision/commitment love (Sternberg, 1988). This finding suggests that personal attributes interact in ways that affect relationship stability differently than they impact on relationship enjoyment and satisfaction. Consistent with other research (e.g. Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Murstein, 1972), the compatibility associated with social roles and sexual styles may be more important in the later stages of romantic relationships and more critical to the long-term viability of a romantic partnership, whereas the excitement associated with high value attributes such as physical attractiveness may be more important in the early stages of romantic relationships. Thus, of the three basic perspectives of personal attribute interaction, the CP provided the most compelling account of relationship commitment among dating couples.
A secondary objective of this study was to explore whether certain kinds of personal attributes were more relevant to relationship outcomes than others. The personality dimensions of extraversion and agreeableness are interpersonal in nature (McCrae & Costa, 1989), and they should have predicted to a limited degree levels of relationship satisfaction in dating couples. However, the direct associations of one's own personality and one's relationship outcomes in this study were remarkably small. The personal attributes involving romantic attachment styles—anxiety and avoidance—are embedded in ethological and developmental theories involving intimate attribute interactions (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970; Bowlby, 1969). Theoretically, they too should have been closely related to relationship outcomes among dating couples. In fact, they were directly related to some relationship outcomes, especially among women. For example, avoidant women found their relationships dissatisfying and male partners of those avoidant women experienced less relationship commitment. Moreover, both dating partners in relationships involving anxious women experienced significantly lower levels of romantic commitment. This last finding may be related to the notion that attachment styles are primarily about regulating negative affect in relationships (see Simpson & Rholes, 1998), and that relationship outcomes are usually driven by costs, such as the emotional cost of anxiety, and not relational benefits (e.g. Rosenbaum, 1986). Finally, the personal attributes of sexual strategy dimensions were directly related to relationship outcomes. For example, among both men and women, self-reported sexual arousal was positively and strongly associated with self-reported relationship satisfaction. Interestingly, women reported more relationship commitment to men who described themselves as low on sexual commitment. Although this finding is based on a relatively small sample of dating couples, this type of association has been found by other investigators (Buss, 1994), and future research should explore this intriguing result.

Even though the direct comparison of three personal attribute interaction perspectives makes this study distinctive, the present evaluation of these perspectives was in many ways limited. For instance, the current study included only dating couples. Some personal attributes may be more relevant to dating relationships than others, and so the effects of some personal attribute interactions may be differentially observable in dating couples. For example, some research suggests that the interaction of stimulus-oriented attributes such as physical attractiveness has a larger impact earlier in relationships than other attributes (Murstein, 1972). Because the current study examined only dating couples, the evaluation of the dating similarity, complementarity and exchange hypotheses could have been biased in favor of supporting the EP, in which physical attractiveness plays a central role. However, physical attractiveness is also central to some versions of the similarity hypothesis (e.g. Berscheid et al., 1971). Moreover, the current sample of dating couples had been dating for a considerable length of time, implying that the stage of initial attraction had already occurred. Nevertheless, future research should examine the current set of attribute interaction perspectives concerning relationship outcomes among married couples. It is possible that the complementary interaction of role-oriented attributes, such as personality traits and sexual strategies, may be even more important to ongoing marital relationships.

A second important limitation of the current study involves the categorization procedure employed within each perspective and the relatively small sample of dating couples. In some cases, the theoretical requirements of couple assignment did not allow for equal sample sizes between similar/dissimilar, complementary/non-complementary and high-EV/low-EV groupings. This concern was somewhat alleviated
by using broad indexes of each grouping by collapsing across personal attributes. This limitation may be overcome in future studies with larger sample sizes in which the larger groups can be equated randomly with the smaller groups. Finally, analyses conducted among men's and women's reactions to attribute interactions would be interesting, as previous research has suggested that men and women may value different forms of attribute interaction. For example, Feingold (1991) found in a meta-analysis of attraction studies that women value similarity more than men. Again, future studies with larger sample sizes will allow researchers to evaluate more fully the impact of personal attribute interaction on relationship outcomes within and among romantic couples.

Personal attribute interaction approaches have been particularly problematic for relationship researchers because romantic partner interactions are extremely intimate, take place in the context of time, and may affect romantic relationship attraction, communication, perception, conflict and satisfaction differently depending on when and where they happen. Furthermore, relationship interactions take on many forms, and relationship theorists sometimes view the same attribute interactions from incongruous perspectives. The current study represents a distinctive contribution to our understanding of romantic relationships in that it provided a direct contrast of three different perspectives of personal attribute interaction and relationship outcomes in a sample of ongoing romantic relationships. The results of these contrasts suggest that dating exchange hypotheses and the broader EP may provide the most compelling account of romantic satisfaction, and that sexual strategy complementarity is particularly instrumental to relationship commitment among dating couples.

In sum, the current research attempted to evaluate the impact of personal attributes on romantic relationship outcomes. As expected, dating relationship outcomes appeared to be influenced less by the personal attributes that people bring individually to their relationships and more by predictable forms of personal attribute interactions. Whether a dating relationship is expected to endure seemed to require attribute complementarity, especially mutually agreed upon approaches to roles involving personality. Whether a dating relationship was presently satisfying seemed to require the combined flames of personal attribute dissimilarity and high exchange value. Although this study was limited in many respects, it illustrated how directly contrasting different perspectives can lead to meaningful integration among psychological theories, personal attribute dimensions and romantic relationship outcomes.

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**References**


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