



Do individuals with maladaptive personality traits find these same traits desirable in potential romantic partners?



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ABSTRACT

Individuals are generally attracted to other people with similar personality traits, but it is unclear whether these patterns replicate for maladaptive personality traits. Accordingly, we examined the association between individuals' own maladaptive personality traits and how desirable they found those traits in a potential romantic partner ($N = 334$). As hypothesized, individuals with higher levels of maladaptive personality traits rated those traits as being more desirable in a romantic partner. However, the mean desirability ratings of individuals with higher levels of maladaptive traits indicated that they rated these traits as less undesirable than the average participant but not actually desirable. These results suggest that the positive overall associations may reflect these individuals being more willing to settle for these less desirable partners rather than actively seeking them out. Further research examining the mechanisms underlying these patterns and how these choices play out in real world contexts would be valuable.

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Despite popular notions that opposites attract, romantic partners often have many similarities, including their personalities (e.g., Humbad, Donnellan, Iacono, McGue, & Burt, 2010; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Štěrbová et al., 2017). Although there is some debate about the processes leading to these pairings (for discussion, see Watson, Beer, & McDade-Montez, 2014), one leading theory is that these patterns reflect, at least in part, a process of selection and active assortment, whereby individuals prefer partners whose personalities resemble their own (Buss, 1987; Watson et al., 2014). This idea has found support in numerous studies: self-rated personality traits are associated with ideal partner personality ratings (Figueredo, Sefcek, & Jones, 2006; Furnham, 2009; Watson et al., 2014), including preferences for a potential spouse (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997), such that individuals high in specific traits report desiring partners who are also high in those specific traits.

Collectively, these studies suggest that “like is attracted to like,” yet an important question overlooked by these studies is whether these patterns play out for less desirable traits. That is, do individuals with maladaptive traits also find maladaptive traits desirable in a potential romantic partner? Previous studies are not able to address this question given that they have collapsed desirable and undesirable traits within the same ratings (e.g., participants would rate a single item with traits on opposing poles, Botwin et al., 1997; Watson et al., 2014), thereby precluding the opportunity to separately examine the desirability of adaptive (e.g., Agreeableness) and maladaptive (e.g., Antagonism)

aspects of specific domains. Moreover, no studies have examined self-ratings of personality disorder traits. Doing so is important to evaluate how individuals view maladaptive traits and to test whether the active assortment hypothesis generalizes to this context as well.

The current study aims to address these gaps by examining the association between individuals' own maladaptive personality traits and how desirable they find these same traits in a potential romantic partner. We hypothesized that there would be a positive association between individuals' own maladaptive traits and how desirable they found these traits in a potential romantic partner. We base this hypothesis on the findings described above, as well as more general research from the personality literature showing that individuals with high levels of maladaptive traits such as narcissism (Adams, Hart, & Burton, 2015; Hart & Adams, 2014) and antagonism (Lamkin, Maples-Keller, & Miller, 2017) rate these traits more favorably in others.

It is also possible, however, that the association between individuals' own maladaptive traits and how desirable they find these traits is not strongly associated or is negatively associated. Mean comparisons of own levels of personality and desired personality in an ideal mate find that individuals express preferences for partners who are similar to but better than they are (Figueredo et al., 2006; Watson et al., 2014), suggesting that individuals with higher levels of maladaptive traits may not find these traits desirable in a romantic partner. Several studies examining homophily in married partners have found weak or non-significant effects for maladaptive traits such as neuroticism (e.g., McCrae et al., 2008; Rammstedt & Schupp, 2008), impulsivity (Lavner, Lamkin, & Miller, 2017), and narcissism (Lavner, Lamkin, Miller, Campbell, & Karney, 2016), which could suggest that individuals with maladaptive

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Table 1
Descriptives for self-ratings and desirability ratings.

	Mean	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Self-ratings				
FFM maladaptive				
Neuroticism	2.51	0.90	1.00	4.83
Detachment	2.88	0.82	1.00	4.83
Closedness	2.31	0.61	1.08	4.17
Antagonism	2.07	0.61	1.00	4.33
Disinhibition	2.05	0.68	1.00	4.42
DSM-5				
Negative affectivity	1.94	0.75	1.00	4.00
Detachment	1.76	0.73	1.00	4.00
Antagonism	1.50	0.55	1.00	4.00
Disinhibition	1.47	0.61	1.00	3.80
Psychoticism	1.62	0.68	1.00	3.80
Desirability ratings				
FFM maladaptive				
Neuroticism	1.59	0.51	1.00	3.67
Detachment	2.06	0.59	1.00	4.17
Closedness	2.41	0.52	1.00	4.17
Antagonism	1.87	0.61	1.00	4.17
Disinhibition	2.21	0.47	1.00	4.17
DSM-5				
Negative Affectivity	1.43	0.80	1.00	5.00
Detachment	1.56	0.82	1.00	5.00
Antagonism	1.39	0.77	1.00	5.00
Disinhibition	1.77	0.94	1.00	5.00
Psychoticism	2.21	1.14	1.00	5.00

Note. Self-rated FFM personality scores are from the International Personality Item Pool-Five Factor Inventory (IPIP-FFI) and self-rated DSM-5 personality scores are from the Personality Inventory for DSM-5 (PID-5). "Desirability" refers to how desirable a trait would be in a partner. Desirability scores were rated using either the Five Factor Model Rating Form (FFMRF) or DSM-5 domain descriptions.

traits may not be particularly drawn to other individuals with these traits.

In addition to examining the association between one's own maladaptive traits and the desirability ratings of these traits, we also examine the mean levels of the desirability ratings to determine the extent to which these traits are actually seen as more desirable by individuals who report higher levels of these traits, as opposed to being seen as less undesirable. Rating traits as desirable would be consistent with the notion of active assortment described above, whereby individuals choose other people whose traits resemble their own (Watson et al., 2014). It is also possible, however, that these traits are still rated as undesirable (though less so than among individuals with lower levels of these traits). Recent work examining general likability (i.e., not specific to a potential romantic partner) indicates that individuals with higher Antagonism scores rated these traits in others as less likable but not actually likable (Lamkin et al., 2017). Applied to the current study, individuals with high levels of maladaptive traits may similarly be more open to other individuals with these traits (i.e., find them less undesirable), despite not finding them particularly desirable. Accordingly, we hypothesized that individuals with higher levels of maladaptive traits

would rate these traits as less undesirable than the average participant but that they would still not rate these traits as desirable.

1. Method

1.1. Participants and procedure

Initial participants included 403 adults who participated via Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) website. Consistent with Curran's (2016) recommendation, participants were removed if they had an elevation on either of two validity scales included from the Elemental Psychopathy Assessment that measured overly virtuous or inattentive responding, their response time suggested invalid responding, or endorsed items indicative of a failure to pay attention ($N = 69$), leaving a sample of 334 adults (54% male; 86% heterosexual, 9% bisexual, 5% gay or lesbian; 84% Caucasian, 6% African American, 6% Asian; 41% single, 33% married, 15% cohabitating; mean age = 35.4; SD = 10.2). Individuals were compensated \$1.50 for completion of the study. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at NAME WITHHELD FOR REVIEW (Title: Perception of Personality Traits. Project #4685).

1.2. Measures

1.2.1. International Personality Item Pool (IPIP-FFI; Maples-Keller et al., under review)

The IPIP-FFI is a 60-item, open-source measure of the FFM domains (Goldberg, 1999). Participants rated actual trait levels using a scale from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Items are aggregated to yield five broad domains: Neuroticism ($\alpha = 0.90$), Detachment ($\alpha = 0.88$), Closedness ($\alpha = 0.73$), Antagonism ($\alpha = 0.82$), and Disinhibition ($\alpha = 0.88$). Correlations between domains ranged from 0.07 (Neuroticism-Closedness) to 0.58 (Neuroticism-Detachment), with a median of 0.21.

1.2.2. Personality Inventory for DSM-5-Brief Form (PID-5-BF; Krueger, Derringer, Markon, Watson, & Skodol, 2013)

The PID-5-BF contains 25 items taken from the 220-item measure, which are aggregated to yield self-report scores for the five personality disorder domains represented in DSM-5: Negative Affectivity ($\alpha = 0.83$), Detachment ($\alpha = 0.83$), Antagonism ($\alpha = 0.81$), Disinhibition ($\alpha = 0.88$), and Psychoticism ($\alpha = 0.84$). Participants rated actual trait levels using a scale from 1 (i.e., *very false or often false*) to 4 (i.e., *very true or often true*). Correlations between domains ranged from 0.34 (Negative Affectivity-Antagonism) to 0.58 (Negative Affectivity-Psychoticism), with a median of 0.49.

1.2.3. Five Factor Model Rating Form (FFMRF; Mullins-Sweatt, Jamerson, Samuel, Olson, & Widiger, 2006)

The FFMRF assesses the five domains and 30 facets of the FFM (Costa & McCrae, 1992) with a bipolar scale for each trait. We modified the measure by asking participants to rate each end of the poles (e.g., having

Table 2
FFM maladaptive domains self-ratings and desirability ratings: bivariate and multivariate relations.

	FFM maladaptive desirability ratings									
	Neuroticism		Detachment		Closedness		Antagonism		Disinhibition	
	<i>r</i>	β	<i>r</i>	β	<i>r</i>	β	<i>r</i>	β	<i>r</i>	β
Self-ratings										
Neuroticism	0.18*	0.05	0.16*	0.02	0.05	0.08	0.03	-0.10	0.04	-0.17
Detachment	0.10	-0.03	0.17*	0.07	0.02	-0.13	-0.06	-0.18*	0.01	-0.08
Closedness	-0.03	-0.06	0.15*	0.10	0.37*	0.39*	0.05	0.00	0.01	-0.04
Antagonism	0.17*	0.08	0.18*	0.10	0.13	0.04	0.36*	0.25*	0.19*	0.05
Disinhibition	0.29*	0.25*	0.22*	0.12	0.07	0.03	0.32*	0.36*	0.33*	0.45*

Note. *r*s represent the results of bivariate correlations. *B*s represent the results from multivariate regressions in which ratings were regressed on all five self-ratings simultaneously. Self-rated FFM maladaptive personality scores are from the IPIP-FFI. Desirability scores reflect how desirable a trait would be in a partner and were rated using the FFMRF.

* $p \leq 0.01$.

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