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# Parental influence on romantic attraction with simulated online dating profiles.

Johanna Strokoff

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PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON ROMANTIC ATTACTION WITH  
SIMULATED ONLINE DATING PROFILES

By

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B.A., Salisbury University, 2007  
M.A., Towson University, 2010

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
the College of Education and Human Development of the University of  
Louisville in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Department of Counseling Psychology  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

August, 2015



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A Dissertation Approved on  
July 17, 2015

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## DEDICATION

My dissertation is dedicated to family and friends who provided unconditional support and encouragement throughout my academic career and to faculty and peers who I was fortunate enough to learn from during my journey.

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## ABSTRACT

### PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON ROMANTIC ATTRACTION WITH SIMULATED ONLINE DATING PROFILES

Johanna Strokoff

July 17, 2015

Romantic attraction is commonly studied in the scientific literature, with countless theories providing hypotheses for why we find particular characteristics attractive. This study focused on psychodynamic theories to investigate the attraction process, particularly regarding the influence of parental figures on romantic attraction through the psychoanalytic theory of partner selection (i.e., template matching hypothesis used interchangeably), attachment theory, and Core Conflictual Relational Themes theory. With previous research often relying solely on self-report measures of parental figures and romantic partners, this study contributed to the field through capturing the attraction phenomenon through the ratings and selection of simulated online dating profiles. Participants ( $n = 88$ ) completed two survey administrations, first providing self-report data of parental figures (e.g., parental personality traits, attachment styles) and personal characteristics (e.g., relationship status, depression symptomology, family environment). Information from the first survey was used to create two idiosyncratic dating profiles, one profile imitating personality and relational characteristics similar to

one's opposite-gender parent (titled the Alike profile) and one profile depicting dissimilar qualities of one's opposite-gender parent (titled the Unalike profile). Two additional standard profiles representing a neutral and unbecoming option were also presented (titled the Neutral and Jerk profile respectively). Participants were asked a series of questions assessing the attractiveness of each profile option and then asked to rank the four profiles based on attractiveness. Results indicated that the Neutral profile was the most favorable among our sample, with the Alike profile being deemed the second most attractive option. Participants who reported experiencing betrayal trauma before age 18 were significantly less likely to select the Alike profile as the most attractive. In addition, participant reports of unfinished business (i.e., lingering feelings of disappointment or resentment) was the most salient predictor variable for Alike profile attraction ratings, suggesting that as unfinished business towards parental figures increased, attraction ratings for the Alike profile decreased. Perceived similarity to one's parental figure also influenced attraction ratings for the Alike profile, potentially indicating that participants may have identified personal similarities with characteristics described in the profile. Limitations and implications are provided to highlight areas of future research.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Attraction and love have been popular subjects of study in the scientific literature. This popularity is mirrored in the market with self-help books, dating blogs, and magazines echoing our culture's fascination with understanding the rules of attraction. During a recent search on Amazon.com (June 28, 2015), 3,139 self-help books were provided for the search terms "love and attraction" (e.g., *The Soulmate Secret: Manifest the Love of Your Life with the Law of Attraction*; Ford, 2011; *Secrets of Attraction: The Universal Laws of Love, Sex, and Romance*; Taylor, 2001). To begin answering the age-old question of what creates a romantic connection, there is overwhelming evidence suggesting that physical traits appear to influence our immediate attraction (Feingold, 1990; Luo & Zhang, 2009; Todd, Penke, Fasolo, & Lenton, 2007). However, aside from one's instant physical attraction, other factors such as personality characteristics and situational factors play a vital role in our initial attraction (Klohn & Luo, 2003). Indeed, personality characteristics (e.g., intelligence, warmth) are possibly more important than physical appearance with long-term partnerships, potentially due to the desire for sustained emotional support and compatibility (Regan, Levin, Sprecher, Christopher, & Cate, 2000). Accordingly, this study will focus on how individuals come to desire certain personality factors. In particular, theory and common anecdotal

perspectives often contend that individuals tend to gravitate towards personality characteristics displayed by one's parents.

An early contributor to the idea that children often choose romantic partners similar to their parents was Sigmund Freud (1927), who described childhood developmental stages involving a key developmental marker in which children develop an attraction to the opposite-gender parent, while feuding with the same-gender partner to protect the relationship (i.e., Oedipus complex). It was thought that this forbidden sexual attraction translated into seeking qualities in a partner that mirror qualities of one's opposite-gender parent (Epstein & Guttman, 1984). This concept is commonly referred to as the psychoanalytic theory of partner selection. Commins (1932) asserted that a young boy's first "sweetheart" is his mother, and when he decides to choose a romantic partner, his memory of her will create a desire to find someone just like her. Since then, more contemporary theories have inspired numerous studies geared to investigate this link, with research yielding mixed results. We will first review theories exploring the potential relationship between characteristics of our parents and our dating lives, along with supportive research and gaps in the literature.

### **Theory Illustrating Influence of Parents**

The impact of parents on romantic partner choice has been investigated through multiple overlapping theoretical models, with psychoanalytic theory of partner selection (i.e., tendency to be attracted to traits found in opposite-gender parental figures; Freud, 1927) paving the way for subsequent theories such as the template matching hypothesis (i.e., parents serving as a template for future romantic relationships; Daly & Watson, 1990), imago theory (i.e., individuals seeking partners who match their unconscious

representation of a primary caregiver to correct unfinished business; Hendrix, 1996), and sexual imprinting (i.e., children internalizing parental phenotypes during a sensitive period during their development to serve as a model for partner selection and genetic compatibility; Bereckei, Gyuris, & Weisfeld, 2004; Todd & Miller, 2003). Additional perspectives (e.g., evolutionary theory) could provide alternative hypotheses for why parental figures may impact our romantic attraction. However, for the purposes of this research, we will conceptualize this phenomenon through a psychodynamic lens, thereby focusing on the psychoanalytic theory of partner selection (i.e., template matching hypothesis used interchangeably), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969), and core relational themes (Luborsky, 1985).

**Psychoanalytic theory of partner selection.** The psychoanalytic theory of partner selection (Freud, 1927) postulates that individuals are romantically attracted to those who resemble their opposite-gender parents among multiple characteristics in order to transfer the attraction of one's parent to similar individuals (Epstein & Guttman, 1984; Jedlicka, 1980). Providing an alternative interpretation of Freud's work, the template matching hypothesis (Daly & Wilson, 1990) states that relationships with opposite-gender parents serve as a template for future romantic partner selection (Geher, 2000). Early studies arose shortly following the Freudian theory, often discrediting the theory with discrepant findings regarding which parent is most influential (i.e., the theory strongly predicts that the opposite-gender parent will be the most influential) and null findings with parental influences on partner selection all together (e.g., Aron et al., 1974; Mangus, 1936; Strauss, 1946; Winch, 1950). However, more contemporary studies have supported the template matching hypothesis with opposite-gender parents with both

physical characteristics (e.g., Jedlicka 1980, 1984; Little et al., 2003) and personality characteristics (e.g., Geher, 2000; Buss 1994, Wilson & Barret, 1987).

With regards to physical traits, Jedlicka (1980, 1984) found that individuals who had parents from two different ethnic backgrounds were more likely to marry partners who matched their opposite-gender parent's ethnicity. Examining these domains closer, a recent study found that women were more likely to rate photographs as attractive if they had similar facial dimensions as their fathers, particularly if they rated their relationship with their fathers highly (Wiszevska, Pawlowski & Boothroyd, 2007). Similarly, Little, Penton-Voak, Burt, and Perrett (2003) found one's partner's hair and eye color to be positively related with parental hair and eye color, with a stronger relationship with the opposite-gender parent. To investigate the parental influence of age on attraction tendencies, Perrett et al. (2002) asked participants to rate the attractiveness of computerized images varying with ages 18-60 years old within a short-term and long-term relationship context. Findings indicated that women born to parents over the age of 30 were more attracted to computerized images of older men for both short-term and long-term relationships, as compared to women born to parents under the age of 30. Men in the study born to older parents, particularly older mothers, were not as influenced by youth cues when rating visual attractiveness for long-term relationships (i.e., no relationship existed between parental age and attractiveness ratings for short-term relationships). A recent study replicated these findings with individuals being more likely to deem older faces as attractive if born to older parents, as compared to individuals born to younger parents (Heffernan & Fraley, 2013). While these two studies focused on age and physical cues, an alternative interpretation could include personality characteristics

(i.e., being attracted to the maturity exemplified in older photos or youthful personality traits associated with younger individuals). Further, some research supports that matching phenotypes between romantic partners and parents may be an adaptive tendency to ensure genetic compatibility with partners (Daly & Wilson, 1980; Todd & Miller, 2003; Tregenza & Wedell, 2000). Nevertheless, these studies provide some support for the opposite-gender hypothesis proposed by psychoanalytic theory.

Pertaining to personality characteristics, several studies have found similarities among romantic partners and parental traits. For instance, Wilson and Barrett (1987) found that the amount of dominance displayed by participants' opposite-gender parents was associated with the amount of dominance displayed by significant others. In a recent study, Geher (2000) had participants describe their romantic partner, same-gender parent, and opposite-gender parent's personality traits, along with having partners and parents describe themselves. Results indicated that while participants perceived their partners to match their opposite-gender parents on all eight personality characteristics, parent and partner self-reports overlapped among four variables (openness, agreeableness, neuroticism, and closeness), suggesting that participants consciously or unconsciously exaggerated the presence of commonalities between their parents and partners. In particular, individuals who were satisfied in their romantic relationship perceived greater similarities between their partner and opposite-gender parent than those less satisfied with their relationship. Individuals who reported feeling unsatisfied with their romantic relationships were more likely to report a similarity between parents and partners with the trait of neuroticism (which was also a matched similarity between parent and partner reports). While the matched similarities identified between parental and partner

personality characteristics partially support the template hypothesis, the discrepancies between self-reports from participants, romantic partners, and parental figures suggest that individuals may not provide accurate descriptions of their own romantic experiences.

Also contending with theories of parental influence on attraction and partner selection are environmental factors, such as the type of relationship experienced with each parent. While some individuals may strive for relationships that mimic pleasant relationships with parents, others may seek relationships that are the opposite of the unpleasant relationships formed with parents (Wiszevska, 2007). An early study found that participants described their ideal partners in accordance with characteristics obtained by the parent with whom the closest relationship was formed, as opposed to the opposite-gender theory (Prince & Baggeley, 1963). However, these individuals were not in a current relationship; therefore, it is unknown how their ideal, conscious preferences influenced later partner choice. With respect to physical features, Bereczkei, Gyuris, Koves, and Bernath (2002) found men to be less likely to choose a female partner with similar physical traits as their mothers if they experienced higher amounts of rejection from their mothers during childhood. Another study found comparable results, but recruited women who were adopted into their families. In this study, women who felt more emotional support from their adoptive fathers were more likely to choose partners with similar characteristics, compared to women who had less supportive fathers (Bereczkei, Gyuris, & Weisfeld, 2004). These studies suggest the notion that individuals gravitate towards partners who exhibit parental characteristics if they experienced a positive relationship with their parents, while those who experienced a negative family environment may be more likely to stray from that prototype.

On the other hand, other individuals may be repeating the negative relationships endorsed during childhood throughout their adult life, thereby unconsciously hoping for a positive resolution. Unfinished business occurs when difficulties from past relationships result in lingering feelings of disappointment, resentment, and grief associated with those relationships (Greenberg & Foerster, 1996). Thus, individuals may enter relationships with the hidden desire to work through unresolved issues from the past, particularly with parental relationships. Targeting individuals with particular traits reminiscent of past relationships (i.e., parent-partner similarities) may provide an opportunity work through one's unfinished business. Unfinished business can also be conceptualized through a psychodynamic lens, particularly through interpersonal themes and attachment theories.

**Core relational themes.** The concept of Core Conflictual Relational Themes (CCRT; Luborsky, 1985) is defined as an individual's idiosyncratic pattern of interpersonal relationships that are unconsciously repeated with others. These patterns are thought to resist awareness due to the pain associated with such recognition, even though these repetitive relationships may cause inner turmoil or conflict. CCRT's are comprised of three elements, including one's inner desires and wishes (W), one's expected responses from others (RO), and one's emotional reaction or response from self (RS; Barber, Luborksy, Crits-Christoph, & Diguier, 1995). These components are often in conflict, making one's needs inappropriately answered and remaining unmet. By gaining insight, change is prompted through a self-understanding of one's desires and the maladaptive ways one strives to achieve such wishes. These themes are thought to originate from past interpersonal experiences of distressing situations, particularly with parental figures. These notions fit within the psychodynamic framework, particularly

regarding the powerful influence early relationships have on our current day interpersonal functioning, and can be applied towards our attraction with romantic prospects. Within the CCRT theory, individuals may reenact relationship patterns that mirror dynamics with parental figures, thereby gravitating towards individuals with similar characteristics as their caregivers. Similarly, perhaps unpleasant early experiences with parental figures encourage us to choose partners who resemble our parents in hopes of achieving a better resolution (i.e., recapitulation). While CCRT's have been investigated in relation to psychosocial wellbeing (see Chance, Bakeman, Kaslow, Farber, & Burge-Callaway, 2000; Luborsky, Barber, Schaffler, & Cacciola, 1998; Wilczek, Weinry, Barber, Bustavsson, & Asberg, 2000), no known studies have explored CCRT's with romantic attraction.

Nevertheless, studies investigating Core Conflictual Relational Themes have supported the notion that individuals repeat interpersonal patterns across different relationships and appear to remain consistent over time (Fried, Crits-Christoph, & Luborsky, 1990; Luborsky & Diguier, 1998, Luborsky, Crits-Christoph, & Mellon, 1986). Referred to as transference, Luborsky, Crits-Christoph, and Mellon (1986) used the CCRT method to discover that an individual's relationship with one's therapist was highly similar to his or her relationships with others. Consequently, the stability of themes across relationships could be useful in understanding how unfinished business might influence partner selection.

**Attachment theory.** Attachment theory echoes psychoanalytic theory regarding the impact of early experiences with caregivers serving as a template for adult romantic relationships (Geher, 2000; Owens, Crowell, Pan, Treboux, O'Connor, & Walters, 1995).

Bowlby (1969, 1973, 1980), the originator of attachment theory, contended that one's attachment to a caregiver creates an inner working model of future interpersonal relationships (Feeney & Noller, 1990). According to this view, individuals seek social environments that reinforce their working models, thus creating a stable relationship pattern throughout one's development (Collins & Read, 1990). Hazan and Shaver (1987) identified adults with three styles of interpersonal attachment developed through early childhood relationships: secure, avoidant, and anxious/ambivalent. Secure attachment is characterized by having stable relationships low on anxiety and avoidance (Schachner & Shaver, 2004). Insecure attachment can lead to unstable relationships with the tendency to avoid an emotional connection (avoidant attachment) or fear rejection or abandonment with partners (anxious attachment). More contemporary research argues for four attachment styles that lie on two dimensions of anxiety and avoidance: (1) secure attachment (low anxiety and low avoidance), (2) preoccupied attachment (high anxiety and low avoidance), (3) fearful-avoidant attachment (high anxiety and high avoidance), and (4) dismissing-avoidant attachment (low anxiety and high avoidance; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Several studies have investigated attachment styles as a predictor for future romantic relationships, proposing a consistent, enduring attachment style (e.g., Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987). While some research supports that early attachment figures serve as a prototype and significant predictor for future romantic relationships, other research supports that attachment is flexible and can be influenced by new relationships (Fraley, 2002). For instance, while previous research indicates a stronger parental influence for long-term relationships (i.e., Perrett et al., 2002), contrary

research suggests that as current romantic relationships become more serious, previous childhood experiences with parents may become less influential (Dinero, Conger, Shaver, Widaman, & Larsen-Rife, 2011). However, who individuals initially choose for romantic partnership may be influenced through personal attachment styles or observed attachment styles of parents.

The interaction between attachment styles and parental influences on romantic attraction can be interpreted through the following hypotheses: individuals may be seeking similar attachment styles as their own (the similarity hypothesis), styles that complement their own (complementarity hypothesis), or styles that provide an optimal sense of safety (attachment-security hypothesis; Holmes & Johnson, 2009). With the similarity hypothesis, securely attached individuals prefer other securely attached individuals due to congruent goals of a healthy connection, while maintaining independence. Insecurely attached individuals may also endorse the similarity hypothesis, thereby being attracted to those with similar styles, or may be more likely to endorse another hypothesis. For example, with the complementarity hypothesis, individuals prefer partners with an attachment style that confirms their negative relational expectation (e.g., an anxiously attached individual is attracted to avoidant individuals who confirm that partners are distant in relationships), thereby providing a negative, yet consistent relational pattern. The final hypothesis contends that individuals prefer attachment-security, making secure individuals the most desirable candidate, regardless of personal attachment style, followed by anxious and then avoidant individuals who are less likely to ensure an emotional bond (Holmes & Johnson, 2009). With each of these hypotheses, individuals sift through potential partners, while unconsciously sensing one's attachment style in

relation to their own. Consequently, one's early childhood experiences, particularly with parental figures, may create an attachment style (or template or relational theme) that is influential in the attraction process.

Connections have also been found with parental attachment styles and attachment styles endorsed by current romantic partners, indicating an interplay between attachment styles and the template hypothesis. Collins and Read (1990) found that women who described their fathers as warm were more likely to date male partners who were comfortable with interpersonal closeness, while women with self-described distant fathers were less likely to date such partners; therefore, it is plausible that parental attachment styles are related to partner choice or individuals may be adopting their parents' attachment styles. This finding would support the similarity hypothesis presented above (i.e., individuals who experienced a secure relationship with parental figures prefer relationships that mimic that same attachment). Further, men who described their mothers as cold and distant were more likely to date women with an anxious attachment style, while men with reported warm mothers were more likely to be in relationships with women low on anxious attachment characteristics. However, participants' attachment to same-gender parents did not predict current relationship styles. Similarly, Geher (2000) found that individuals tend to date partners who resemble their opposite-gender parent's attachment style, particularly within the dimension of closeness (i.e., in this study, attachment styles were distinguished as secure, avoidant, and anxious, and further delineated by three domains comprised of anxiety, dependency, and closeness; closeness indicated participants comfort with intimacy). In addition, parental caregiving styles may be associated with adult partner ratings of satisfaction. For

example, Frazier et al. (1996) found that individuals who perceived their parents as less cold and ambivalent, particularly with their mothers, recorded higher ratings for secure partners. Furthermore, those who reported mothers as cold and ambivalent displayed less attraction to secure individuals.

A potential explanation for this phenomenon is provided by Sroufe and Fleeson (1986) who suggested that individuals prefer to reenact similar relationships as ones formed in the past in order to maintain personal consistency. Further, familiarity allows individuals to feel knowledgeable and safe (Fiske, 2009), which may encourage attraction. Individuals may also prefer what is familiar, because understanding another person's behavior increases security and a sense of control. This corresponds with psychodynamic theories that propose patterns of romantic behavior based on familial influences, which may provide a source of familiarity for the individual. Persons may be deemed attractive based on the familiarity of one's interpersonal template (e.g., relationships are supposed to include arguing and yelling), attachment style (e.g., this relationship allows me to be comfortably distant) or core relational themes (e.g., I tend to date partners who make all of the decisions and desire control).

### **The Unconscious Influence on Attraction**

The link between the psychodynamic theories presented above is the unconscious dimension that is responsible for our decisions regarding partner choice. While individuals may be able to quickly disclose characteristics to describe their ideal partner, these traits may be quickly ignored during a visceral romantic interaction. Individuals underestimate the profound influence immediate attraction has on our judgment and decision making skills, which is referred to as the "hot-cold empathy gap" phenomenon

(Loewenstein, 1996; Loewenstein, O'Donoghue, & Rabin, 2003). For example, when having a conversation with a friend, one may provide adjectives for a preferred partner, including being compassionate, honest, and dependable. Yet, when enveloped in a romantic interaction, this friend may unconsciously desire someone who displays spontaneous, narcissistic behavior. In addition, the lack of insight regarding the impact of sexual arousal on behavior places individuals at risk for unpleasant consequences (e.g., making faulty decisions; Ariely & Loewenstein, 2005).

Discrepancies between ideal and actual attraction preferences were tested by Eastwick and Finkel (2008) who compared survey questions examining partner preferences with speed dating ratings of whom they would like to date. Results displayed typical gender norms with self-reports about desiring financial stability and physical attractiveness, yet these findings did not match during in-person interactions. Therefore, these individuals failed to predict whom they would be attracted to based on their ideal preferences reported prior to speed dating. This theme was also illustrated by Todd and colleagues (2007) who found that participant reports of preferential partner characteristics did not predict whom they selected to date during a speed dating interaction. Potentially due to preferences rooted in evolutionary theory (e.g., men being more attracted to physical characteristics, and women being more attracted to men who matched their perceived desirability level), the cognitive process of pre-declaring partner preferences was overshadowed by hidden drives (Todd et. al., 2007). Consequently, individuals appear to be poor predictors of their behavior, thus often relying on a priori theories to explain their actions (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). These findings are important to consider when conceptualizing attraction, as alternative explanations for what is considered

attractive is needed. Hence, theories such as the psychoanalytic theory of partner selection, attachment theory, and core relational themes may provide a more comprehensive picture of the attraction process, since our conscious preferences seem to provide a false sense of understanding.

### **Gender Differences**

Also potentially impacting the parental influence on romantic partner selection is one's gender. For instance, Perrett et al. (2002) found gender differences with participant attraction ratings of photographs with varying physical similarities to parents, with women being impacted by parental figures for both short-term and long-term relationship prospects, and men being influenced by parental figures, particularly mother figures, for only long-term relationships. These findings suggest that women may be especially impacted by parental figures on romantic attraction. In addition, while another study found limited gender differences regarding the similarity between attachment styles of opposite-gender parents and those of romantic partners, there were nuance results for particular attachment dimensions (Collins & Read, 1990). For men, attachment ratings for mothers were associated with varying degrees of fear of abandonment among romantic partners, and for women, attachment ratings for fathers were associated with the level of comfort with emotional closeness exhibited by romantic partners. It was hypothesized that gender socialization may have impacted these differences, for women may be particularly primed to emphasize emotional closeness with romantic partners, and men may be especially sensitive to their independence and their partner's level of dependency. However, Gehr (2000) found no gender differences with participants' perceived personality similarities between parental figures and romantic partners, along

with no gender differences with actual similarities between partner and parent self-reported personality characteristics.

### **Gap in the Research**

Overall, there appears to be general support for the psychodynamic theories of partner selection among heterosexual couples, however research yields mixed results (Epstein & Guttman 1984). Early studies examined this topic through comparing characteristics of an ideal partner and parental characteristics (Kent, 1951; Mangus, 1936, Prince & Baggaley, 1935), thereby mistakenly overemphasizing an individual's ability to indicate what is deemed attractive (see Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). With regards to personality characteristics, a popular avenue for investigating this link is by having individuals fill out a personality questionnaire (e.g., the Big Five) for their partners and both of their parents (see Aron et al., 1974; Wilson & Barrett, 1987). A more modern publication with this methodology added the step of having the individual's parents fill out their own assessment to see if individuals were perceiving their partner to be like their parents (particularly their opposite-gender parent) or if similarities actually exist (see Geher, 2000). However this method is susceptible to mono-method biases (e.g., use of self-report measures only) and does not account for more unconscious, visceral feelings of attraction (e.g., "hot-cold empathy gap"; Loewenstein, 1996). Similarly, other studies commonly utilize couples whom are already dating/married (e.g., Jedlicka, 1984), which does not capture the initial attraction process.

Therefore, this study will add to the literature by investigating the attraction process through using a quasi-experimental design, attempting to tap into the unconscious drives of attraction (as suggested by Collins & Read, 1990). A potential way to capture this phenomenon is have a participant fill out a personality measure for their parents (a

method consistent with previous research) and then have the participant rate their preferences among multiple options of mock dating profiles representing different personality types, attachment styles, and CCRT's that are *specifically tailored* to the participant. Therefore, we can measure whether individuals gravitate towards profiles that match or contrast with their self-reported personality measures of parental figures. Through tailoring dating profiles to each participant, which to our knowledge has never been done before, we believe the idiosyncratic attraction process may be more accurately captured.

In addition, there may be environmental factors that influence an individual's tendency to select romantic partners. For example, individuals who experienced a poor relationship with their parents may seek opposite characteristics in their partner, as opposed to those who had pleasant relationships (e.g., Wiszewska, Pawlowski & Boothroyd, 2007). Relationships with parents may be a result of several specific childhood experiences, such as one's exposure to trauma, feelings of aggression towards parents, and an individual's sense of differentiation from their family members, all of which could likely impact one's desirability to date someone similar to parental figures. For example, Betrayal Trauma Theory posits that individuals who experience abuse by someone they trust are more likely to dissociate and miss social cues necessary to process social messages (DePrince et al., 2012). These experiences in which betrayal trauma victims forget or misremember past events may influence current social cues that influence dating behavior. With regards to aggression, hostility toward parents may be indicative of unfinished business (see Greenberg & Foerster, 1996) toward a parental figure, and could therefore impact whether an individual gravitates towards similar or

dissimilar characteristics with romantic partners. Finally, one's level of differentiation from their family could be a sign of enmeshment, or possibly the strength of the parental imprint (Bowen, 1985), potentially influencing one's desire to date someone that aligns with their family system. By assessing these aspects, we will also be able to differentiate between the assessment of the template matching hypothesis (based on attachment styles, CCRT's, and personality) and other related experiences.

Finally, two caveats are essential to mention when discussing this research. First, the traditional psychoanalytic theory was conceptualized using a two-parent model, thereby excluding families who do not fit this template (e.g., single parent families, step-parents, etc.). For example, if an individual's opposite-gender parent was absent during childhood, one's recollections of this person may be limited or idealized. Often absent from attraction studies are family constellation considerations, along with appropriate language that is generalizable to diverse family systems (e.g., including terms such as parental figure and mother or father figure). Another assumption is that individuals have both a mother and a father (e.g., as opposed to families with same-gender parents). In general, psychoanalytic theories do not take into account sexual minority couples (Eeden-Moorefield & Lindsey, 2005). Additionally, since participant samples frequently exclude sexual minority participants or do not assess for sexual orientation, little is known about how this population selects romantic partners. Including participants from diverse family backgrounds and sexual orientations would provide a more representative and accurate depiction of this theory.

## **Hypotheses**

With the theoretical underpinnings presented above regarding parental influences on romantic attraction, it is hypothesized that the psychoanalytic theory of partner selection will influence participants' selection of narrative dating profiles, with individuals being more likely to select profiles that match their parents' personality characteristics, attachment style, and core relational themes. I posit that participants will be more likely to rate the parent-profile more attractive than the other profiles (Hypothesis 1). Next, I will test predictors of participants' attraction to the Alike profile. Specifically, I hypothesize that individuals who report childhood betrayal trauma (Hypothesis 2), feelings of aggression towards their parents (Hypothesis 3), or have/had an unsatisfactory relationship with their parents (Hypothesis 4) will be less likely to select similar profiles as their parental figures. Furthermore, individuals who are strongly enmeshed with their parents, or have perceived similarities with their parental figures (and therefore similarities to the Alike dating profile), will be more likely to choose profiles with consistent parental characteristics (Hypothesis 5).

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

#### **Participants**

During the first round of the survey administration, 116 individuals completed the survey. Individuals self-identifying as a sexual minority ( $n = 13$ ) were excluded from data analysis, resulting in 88 heterosexual-identified participants who completed both survey administrations (i.e., Part I and Part II). Those participants completing both sections of the survey slightly differed with age,  $t = -1.73$ ,  $p = .05$ , with those completing the survey being slightly younger than those who did not ( $M = 31$  years old versus  $M = 34$  years old respectively). With additional comparisons between individuals who did or did not complete both survey administrations, chi-square analyses determined that there were no differences found with relationship status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious identity, education level, and exposure to trauma, and an independent samples t-test reported no significant association between reported depression and loneliness symptom ( $ps > .05$ ).<sup>1</sup>

The final sample consisted of 28 males (32% of sample) and 60 females (68% of sample), with 79 (90%) individuals identifying as White, one individual identifying as African American (1.1%), three individuals identifying as Asian/Asian American (3.4%), and two individuals identifying as biracial (2.3%). Participants ranged in ages from 23

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<sup>1</sup> Chi-square analyses for ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and education level did not achieve the sample size assumption, which suggests that no more than 20% of cells represented in each category should have an expected count less than 5 for constructs to be comparable. Consequently, these results should be interpreted with caution.

years-old to 63 years-old ( $M = 31$  years old), and approximately 65% of the sample was in a romantic relationship during the first survey administration. The sample was primarily highly educated, with 37.5% of the sample having a college degree, 10% having some graduate school, 38.6% having a master's degree, and 4.5% having a terminal degree. Further, 54.5% of the sample identified their parents as married/living together, 26.1% divorced/separated, 13.6% deceased, and 4.5% never married. When asked to identify the parent participants were most exposed to, 78.4% reported their biological mother and father, 18.2% their biological mother, 1.1% their biological mother and step-father, and 1.1% biological parent and another family member (e.g., grandparent, etc).

### **Measures for Profile Construction**

*Personality Checklist.* The Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, Kentle & 1991) was used to assess for personality characteristics of each parental figure, as observed by the participant. The measure is a brief, 44-item measure that aligns with the Big Five personality domains (e.g., extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness, and neuroticism). Instead of providing single adjectives, brief phrases are provided to improve consistency among answers (e.g., *I see myself as someone who... is inventive; is sometimes shy, inhibitive; is full of energy*). The introductory instructions were adapted to ask participants to describe their parental figures, as opposed to themselves. Further, the brief nature of this instrument does not compromise its psychometrics, including high test-retest reliability (.80-.90) and comparable validity with other Big Five measures (John & Srivastava, 1999). Cronbach's alphas for this study for father figures were .87 (Extraversion), .90 (Agreeableness), .85 (Conscientiousness),

.89 (Neuroticism), and .87 (Openness) and for mother figures were .84 (Extraversion), .90 (Agreeableness), .89 (Conscientiousness), .90 (Neuroticism), and .86 (Openness).

*Parental Attachment Style.* To assess the attachment style of participant parental figures, the Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (ECR)-Short form (Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007) was used. This 12-item scale includes six questions for the avoidant attachment style (e.g., *I am nervous when partners get too close to me*) and six questions for the anxious attachment style (e.g., *I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner*). Answers were provided on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 7 (*agree strongly*). The ECR-S has demonstrated sufficient construct validity, internal consistency (e.g., alphas ranging from .78 - .88 for the Avoidant subscale and .77 - .86 for the Anxiety subscale), and test-retest reliability ( $r = .83$  for avoidance and  $r = .80$  for anxiety and over a 1 month period) across multiple studies and maintains similar psychometrics as the original 36-item ECR (Brennan, Clark & Shaver, 1998) version (Wei et al., 2007). For the purposes of this research, the wording of “I” was replaced with “my father/mother figure” and “others” and “romantic partner” were replaced with “me” or “I” (e.g., *My father figure gets nervous when I get too close*). This was completed to assess for the attachment style within the parent/participant relationship. Cronbach’s alphas for this study were .81 for both avoidant and anxious attachment for father figures and .78 and .83 for avoidant and anxious attachment respectively for mother figures.

*Core Relational Themes.* The Revised Central Relationship Questionnaire (Revised CRQ; McCarthy, Connolly Gibbons, & Barber, 2008) assesses for interpersonal themes theoretically developed during childhood with one’s caregivers. This measure

was adapted and shortened from the original CRQ developed by Barber, Foltz, and Weinryb (1998) and is divided into scales addressing one's wishes (e.g., *I wish to be admired by my parent*), response of other (e.g., *My parent rejects me, My parent feels I am a special person*), and response of self (e.g., *I feel respected by my parent, I avoid getting into conflicts with my parent*). All questions utilize a 7-point Likert scale, and participants are instructed to imagine the relationship when it was at its worst for each section. The measure typically asks the respondent rate themselves in relation to their mother, father, romantic partner, and same-gender best friend, however for the purposes of this research, the participants were asked to rate just their parental figures. Participants coming from a non-traditional family were asked to choose the person who most closely resembled their parent (e.g., aunt/uncle, grandparent, close family friend). All questions designed for a romantic partner (e.g., attractiveness, sexual desirability) were excluded. Within the revised scale, 94% of subscales across relationships demonstrated acceptable internal consistency above .70 (McCarthy, Connolly Gibbons, & Barber, 2008). For this study, Cronbach's alphas for father figures were as follows: .87 (Hurtful), .86 (Loving), .79 (Independent), .45 (Submissive), .82 (Autonomous), .90 (Avoidant), .82 (Domineering), .91 (Intimate), and .88 (Nonconfrontational). Cronbach's alphas for mother figures were as follows: .87 (Hurtful), .72 (Loving), .84 (Independent), .51 (Submissive), .82 (Autonomous), .90 (Avoidant), .74 (Domineering), .90 (Intimate), and .91 (Nonconfrontational).

#### **Additional Measures used for Predictor Variables and Participant Characteristics**

*Trauma.* The Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey (BBTS; Goldberg & Freyd, 2006) was used to assess for traumatic experiences among participants. The measure is

comprised of 11 categories of traumatic experiences (e.g., *Emotionally or psychologically mistreated over a significant period of time by someone with whom you were very close*) and any traumatic experience not provided by the measure. Responses include *Never*, *One or two times*, and *More than that*, and participants were asked to distinguish if the event occurred before or after the age of 18. Questions regarding natural disasters and automobile accidents were excluded to focus on interpersonal trauma, resulting in nine questions. When given over a three year period, the BBTS displayed strong test-retest reliability, with 83% of agreement between administrations with childhood events and 75% of agreement with adulthood events (Goldberg & Freyd, 2006).

*Differentiation of Self.* The Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised (DSI-R; Skowron & Schmitt, 2003) is a self-report measure assessing for an individual's balance between autonomy and intimacy with significant relationships and family members. This 46-item measure utilizes a 6-point Likert scale ranging from *Not at all true of me* and *Very true of me*. Four subscales, supported by confirmatory factor analyses, include Emotional Reactivity (ER), "I" position (IP), Emotional Cutoff (EC), and Fusion with Others (FO). Higher scores indicate a stronger sense of self differentiation and independence and less emotional reactivity. The measure demonstrates sufficient stability with internal consistency alphas including .89 (ER), .81 (IP), .84 (EC), .86 (FO), and .92 for the full scale (Skowron & Schmitt, 2003). The revised version demonstrated improved psychometrics, including enhanced construct validity, as compared to the original measure (DSI; Skowron & Friedlander, 1998). For the purposes of this research, wording for questions about romantic partners was replaced with "parent(s)." Cronbach's alpha for the full scale for this study was .91.

*Aggression toward Parents.* The Voodoo Doll Task (VDT; DeWall et al., in press) instructs participants to look at a computerized picture of a doll that represents their parent. The measure then instructs the participants to release their negative energy by placing pins in the doll (between 0-51 pins are allotted). Nine studies investigated the measure's psychometric properties and deemed the VDT to be highly reliable and valid (DeWall et al., in press). Construct and convergent validity was illustrated with associations between the numbers of pins selected by the participants and numerous types of aggression, including physical, psychological, and verbal aggression.

*Similarity with parents.* To assess if participants perceive themselves to be similar to their parental figures, three Likert scale questions were created with scores ranging from 1-7. Participants were asked to rate the similarity to each parental figure with regards to personality, emotional expression, and comfort with interpersonal closeness. This scale was adjusted to two items to improve internal consistency (*I perceive myself to be similar to my father/mother figure regarding our personality characteristics (e.g., introverted/extroverted, spontaneous/disciplined)* and *I perceive myself to be similar to my father/mother figure regarding the way we display emotion (e.g., affectionate/private)*). Cronbach's alphas for these two items were .61 for father figures and .76 for mother figures.

*Type of Relationship with Parental Figure.* For this study, four items from the Central Relationship Questionnaire measure mentioned above were combined to create a measure for emotional closeness to one's parent, including *How close was this person to you*, *How intimate of a relationship did you have with this person*, *How important was this person to you*, and *How enjoyable was this relationship at its best*. These items were

not included in the CRQ subscales, and therefore were only used to measure closeness to parental figures. Cronbach's alphas for this study were .88 and .86 for one's father and mother figure respectively.

*Unfinished Business.* Five items were created to measure unfinished business toward parental figures (e.g., *When thinking about my relationship with my father figure, there are parts that are unresolved, Unpleasant memories about my father figure still linger around today, I have resentment towards my father figure, When I think about my relationship with my father figure, I wish things were different, and I have not worked through the challenges I have experienced with my father figure*). Ranges for responses ranged from 1 (*Not at all true*) to 7 (*Very true*). Cronbach's alpha for this study was .91 for both mother and father parental figures.

*Participant Well-being.* To assess for depressive symptomology, the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale (CESD-10; (Andresen, Malmgren, Carter, & Patrick, 1994) was used. This measure consists of 10 Likert scale items ranging from 0 (*Rarely or none of the time*) to 3 (*Most or all of the time*), including questions such as *I felt that everything I did was an effort* and *I felt hopeful about the future*. Previous studies have demonstrated support for the reliability and validity of this measure (Cole, Rabin, Smith, & Kaufman, 2004). Cronbach's alpha for this study was .84.

*Relationship Satisfaction.* The Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI-4; Funk & Rogge, 2007) was used to measure relationship satisfaction among those participants who reported being in a romantic relationship ( $n = 57$ ). The measure consists of 4 Likert scale items, with the first item ranging from 0 (*extremely unhappy*) to 6 (*perfect*) and the remaining three items ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 5 (*completely*), with total scores

below 13 indicating relationship distress. Previous studies have supported the psychometrics of this measure (see Funk & Rogge, 2007; Graham, Diebels, & Barnow, 2011). Cronbach's alpha for this study was .87.

### **Procedure**

A community sample was recruited, with participants needing to be adults over 21 years old. The primary recruiting tool utilized was Facebook.com, with individuals uploading the survey on their profiles. All IRB procedures were followed before recruiting participants, and all volunteers completed informed consent measures.

Data were collected on two occasions per participant (see Appendix 2 and 3 for specific measures used with each phase of data collection). First, participants completed a questionnaire asking a variety of questions regarding their dating preferences, current dating status, personal wellbeing, and parental figure characteristics (attachment, personality, and CCRT's). In particular, participants completed measures describing their relationship with parents, their parents' attachment style, and their parents' personality characteristics (i.e., individuals were asked to describe a mother and father figure which could include extended family and other close relationships). A variety of questions about participants' wellbeing were asked in order to conceal the emphasis placed on parental figures and gain additional information about our sample.

The second phase of the study, which occurred approximately two weeks later, included creating four dating profiles (see Appendix A) designed to measure if participants were drawn towards profiles that replicated parental characteristics. During this two week period, participants' descriptions of their opposite-gender parent (e.g., responses from the personality checklist, attachment style questionnaire, and core

relational theme measure) were used to create two *personalized* dating profiles: (1) a profile using adjectives and relationship styles provided by participants' description of their opposite-gender parental figure, which was titled the Alike profile for our purposes (2) a profile using adjectives and relationship styles opposite of those provided by participants' description of their opposite-gender parental figure, titled the Unalike profile for our purposes. A template was created for each profile in order to maintain objectivity and consistency among the profiles, thereby allowing the only manipulation of profiles to be based on responses from Part I of the survey. For instance, for every person that identified their parental figure as high on extraversion, for the profile stem "my friends would describe me as..." a version of the following response was inserted, "someone who is outgoing and sociable." In order to dilute the personalized profile options, two additional profiles were created for all participants, including one nondescript, ambiguous option, titled the Neutral profile for our purposes, and one unpleasant option, titled the Jerk profile for our purposes. Nondescript responses for the Neutral profile included descriptions commonly found among dating profiles that do not provide detailed information (e.g., "My friends would describe me as someone who is nice and fairly laid-back at times."), and examples of an unpleasant response include "I like when my partner realizes how good they have it," and "I am looking for someone who can keep me entertained." The Neutral and Jerk profiles were not modified, so all participants rated the same two profiles. Among the four profiles, the remaining information was created to be equivalent (e.g., general, vague information regarding hobbies and music preferences). Following each of the four dating profiles, participants were asked to rate their attraction to the profile. After reviewing all four options,

participants ranked their preferences from most to least attractive. Profiles were displayed in a random order to control for order effects.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

#### **Data Analytic Plan**

For the first hypothesis investigating if the Alike Profile was deemed the most attractive, a paired sample t-test was conducted comparing the attraction ratings for each profile option (see Table 1). Descriptive statistics were also utilized to determine the results from asking participants to rank the profiles from most to least attractive. For the second hypothesis, chi-square test analyses were completed to examine the association between experiences of trauma before or after 18 years old (i.e., yes/no dichotomous variable) and selection of the Alike profile as most attractive (yes/no dichotomous variable). For the remaining hypotheses and predictor variables (i.e., Hypotheses 3-5; unfinished business with opposite-gender parent, aggression towards opposite-gender parent, emotional closeness with opposite-gender parent, differentiation of self from parents, and perceived similarity with opposite-gender parent), analyses were conducted in two ways: (1) a series of correlations for the predictor variables were conducted to determine associations between selecting the Alike profile as most attractive (i.e., point-biserial correlations) and attraction ratings for the Alike profile (i.e., bivariate correlations; see Table 2). (2) Subsequently, statistically significant predictor variables from the correlational analyses were then used in a multivariate context through conducting a multiple linear regression for the prediction of attraction ratings, and a

binary logistic regression for the prediction of selecting the Alike profile as most attractive (see Table 4), to assess for the most salient predictor variables.

**Hypothesis 1: Participants will be more likely to rate the parent-alike profile more attractive than the other profiles.**

A paired samples t-test was conducted to compare the attraction means of each of the profiles (Alike Profile  $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 1.50$ ; Unalike Profile  $M = 3.60$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ; Neutral Profile  $M = 4.85$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ; Jerk Profile  $M = 1.62$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ). The results indicated that all mean scores were statistically different from each other at  $p < .05$ . The Alike profile was statistically significantly different from the Unalike profile,  $t(87) = 3.25$ ,  $p = .002$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.27$ , Neutral profile,  $t(85) = -2.30$ ,  $p = .02$ , Cohen's  $d = -0.16$ , and Jerk profile,  $t(87) = 14.10$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.09$ . The Unalike profile was statistically significantly different from the Neutral profile,  $t(85) = -5.57$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = -0.43$  and Jerk profile,  $t(87) = 11.13$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.79$ . The Neutral profile was also statistically significantly different from jerk profile,  $t(85) = 18.22$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.32$ .

These results indicated that participants rated the Neutral profile the highest among the profiles, with the Alike profile receiving the second highest rating, followed by the Unalike profile and the Jerk profile. It should be noted that the Neutral profile and Alike profile received the most similar attraction ratings, as evidenced by the significant, yet small effect size between the two groups. The largest effect size for the Alike, Unalike, and Neutral profile was found when compared to the Jerk profile, which was consistently rated lower among the sample.

Participants were also asked to rank each profile from a 1<sup>st</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> place. The results from these rankings using descriptive statistics indicated that 49.4% of the sample ranked the Neutral profile as their favorite, followed by the Alike profile at 28.7%, the Unalike profile at 20.7%, and the Jerk profile at 1.1%. Given that the Neutral profile was deemed most attractive, indicating that the Alike profile was not the most favorable as projected, this hypothesis was not supported. However, the Alike profile was rated the second most attractive profile and illustrated the smallest differences to the Neutral profile (Cohen's  $d = -0.16$ ) compared to the Unalike (Cohen's  $d = -0.43$ ) and Jerk (Cohen's  $d = 1.32$ ) profiles.

**Hypothesis 2: Individuals who reported trauma will be less likely to select similar profiles as their parental figures.**

A chi-square test was conducted to determine associations between participants who experienced betrayal trauma and whether or not the Alike profile was chosen as the most desirable. There was a significant association with individuals who reported experiencing betrayal trauma before the age of 18 (i.e.,  $n = 57$ ; 65% of sample) and the selection of the Alike profile,  $\chi^2(1, N = 87) = 4.09, p = .04$ , with a small to moderate effect size (Cramer's  $V = .22$ ). Furthermore, of those individuals who experienced betrayal trauma before the age of 18, 21.4% selected the Alike profile as most attractive, compared to 78.6% of individuals who did not. In contrast, among those who did not experience betrayal trauma before the age of 18, 41.9% selected the Alike profile as most attractive, compared to 58.1% who did not. No significant findings were found for individuals who reported trauma after the age of 18,  $\chi^2(1, N = 87) = 0.84, p = .36$ . Therefore, this hypothesis was partially supported, due to the results indicating that those

experiencing trauma before the age of 18 appeared less likely to select the Alike profile as most attractive. In addition, among those participants who did not experience trauma, the gap between the Neutral and Alike profile decreased for selection of the most attractive profile (i.e., among those who did not experience trauma before 18, 45.2% selected the Neutral profile, 41.9% selected the Alike profile, and 12.9% selected the Unalike profile as most attractive; no participants selected the Jerk profile).

**Hypothesis 3: Individuals with feelings of aggression towards their parents will be less likely to select similar profiles as their parental figures as the most desirable.**

Correlation analyses found no association between aggression with either the attraction ratings for the Alike profile ( $r = .04, p = .74$ ) or selection of the Alike profile ( $r_{pb} = -.06, p = .60$ ). Since this predictor was not statistically significant, this hypothesis was not supported and aggression towards parental figures was not included in the multivariate analyses.

**Hypothesis 4: Individuals who have/had an unsatisfactory relationship with their mother or father figure will be less likely to select similar profiles as their parental figures as most desirable.**

Two measures were used for this hypothesis to measure unfinished business and emotional closeness to parental figures. Bivariate correlation analyses indicated that unfinished business towards the opposite-gender parental figure was statistically significant with the attraction ratings of the Alike profile ( $r = -.29, p = .01$ ), indicating that higher unfinished business was associated with lower attraction ratings for the Alike profile. This indicator was included in the following multivariate analyses. Unfinished business was not statistically significant with the selection of the Alike profile as most

attractive ( $r_{pb} = -.03, p = .82$ ). Due to unfinished business being related to Alike profile attraction ratings but not the selection of the Alike profile as most attractive, this hypotheses was partially supported.

To measure the type of relationship with parental figures, a scale was created examining emotional closeness with the opposite-gender parent. The correlational analysis between emotional closeness and the Alike profile attraction ratings was close to statistical significance ( $r = .21, p = .052$ ), and therefore was not included in the multivariate analyses below. However, the effect size suggests that this association would have likely achieved significance with a larger sample size (i.e., effect sizes above .20 are consistent with other predictor variable effect sizes that attained statistical significance). Emotional closeness was not significantly associated with selecting the Alike profile as most attractive ( $r_{pb} = .01, p = .95$ ).

**Hypothesis 5: Individuals who are strongly enmeshed with their parents, or report similar characteristics as their parents, will be more likely to choose profiles with consistent parental characteristics.**

Two measures were used to examine this hypothesis. First, the Differentiation of Self measure found no association between attraction ratings for the Alike profile ( $r = -.06, p = .56$ ) or selecting the Alike profile as most attractive ( $r_{pb} = -.09, p = .39$ ). Consequently, this measure was not included in the multivariate analyses.

The second measure utilized for this hypothesis was perceived similarity to the opposite-gender parent. This measure was statistically significant with attraction ratings for the Alike profile ( $r = .22, p = .04$ ), indicating that as similarity to one's opposite-gender parental figure increased, the attraction ratings for the Alike profile increased.

This measure was included in the multivariate analyses. However, similarity to one's parental figure was not significantly associated with selecting the Alike profile as most attractive ( $r_{pb} = .15, p = .17$ ).

### **Multivariate Analyses**

Unfinished business and similarity to parental figures were significant indicators for attraction ratings of the Alike profile from the bivariate correlations. These predictors were included in a multivariate linear regression to determine the association with the attraction ratings of the Alike profile (see Table 4). Trauma before the age of 18 was the only significant indicator associated with selecting the Alike profile (yes/no). Consequently, a binary logistic regression was not conducted.

The multiple linear regression model, with predictor variables unfinished business and similarity to parental figures, was statistically significant,  $F(2, 84) = 5.0, p < .01$ , and accounted for approximately 11% of the variance for attraction ratings of the Alike profile. Among the individual predictor variables, unfinished business was statistically significant ( $t = -2.35, p = .02$ ), thereby indicating that as unfinished business increased, attraction ratings for the Alike profile decreased ( $\beta = -.20$ ). Similarity to parental figures was not statistically significant,  $t = 1.40, p = .17$ . Consequently, it appears that unfinished business towards parental figures was the most influential predictor for attraction ratings.<sup>2</sup>

### **Gender Differences**

When investigating the impact of predictor variables on the attractiveness of the Alike profile, differences arose between men and women participants (see Table 3).

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<sup>2</sup> A multiple linear regression conducted with three predictor variables, unfinished business, similarity, and emotional closeness to the opposite-gender parental figure (i.e., emotional closeness was almost statistically significant with point biserial analysis,  $p = .052$ ) with attraction ratings of the Alike profile was statistically significant,  $F(3, 82) = 3.07, p = .03$ . Independent variables, unfinished business ( $t = -1.79, p = .08$ ), similarity ( $t = 1.20, p = .23$ ), and relational closeness ( $t = .04, p = .97$ ) were not statistically significant.

With men, unfinished business ( $r = -.25, p = .20$ ), perceived similarity ( $r = .40, p = .03$ ), differentiation of self ( $r = -.26, p = .18$ ), and experiences of trauma before age 18 ( $r = -.23, p = .24$ ) were all associated with attraction ratings of the Alike profile (i.e., effect sizes above .20 were considered sufficient for a notable association based on low statistical power). Also among male participants, emotional closeness ( $r_{pb} = -.26, p = .19$ ), trauma before age 18 ( $r_{pb} = -.26, p = .19$ ), and trauma after age 18 ( $r_{pb} = -.33, p = .08$ ) was associated with selecting the Alike profile as most attractive. For women, unfinished business ( $r = -.30, p = .02$ ) and emotional closeness ( $r = .31, p = .02$ ) was associated with attraction ratings for the Alike profile, and differentiation of self ( $r_{pb} = -.22, p = .10$ ) was associated with the selection of the Alike profile as most attractive.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate if individuals would gravitate towards simulated online dating profiles with similar personality, attachment, and relational characteristics as their parental figures. Participants were given four profiles to rate, including two tailored profile options with alike and unlike characteristics to parental figures (i.e., titled Alike profile and Unlike profile) and two non-tailored profiles rated by all participants consisting of a neutral and unappealing profile (i.e., titled Neutral profile and Jerk profile). Profiles were rated through a developed attraction scale (i.e., continuous variable consisting of four questions assessing for romantic attraction towards profile) and ranking the four profiles from most to least favorable. It was predicted that participants would endorse the Alike profile as the most attractive option out of the four displayed profiles. However, attraction ratings and ranking of profile options deemed the Neutral profile to be most attractive to participants, with the Alike profile being rated the second most attractive profile.

The Neutral profile was designed to be simple and pleasant to serve as an accurate test of attractiveness against the Alike profile. While the favoritism of this profile was unanticipated, the competitiveness of the Neutral profile provided high standards to achieve the hypotheses regarding the selection of the Alike profile. Further, these results illustrate the difficulty designing a truly neutral profile that is distinguishable from other profile options. There are several reasons why this might have been the case based on

previous research and open-ended responses provided by participants following each profile.

First, it is likely that the neutrality of the profile was commonly interpreted as kindness, which was possibly perceived as a healthy indicator for a romantic relationship and outweighed other personality and relational constructs (e.g., extraversion, attachment style). Indeed, some research supports the power of kindness as one of the most influential components on romantic attraction (see Buss & Barnes, 1986; Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002). For instance, Buss and Barnes (1986) found *kindness and understanding* to be the top ranked quality for a prospective romantic partner out of 10 characteristics, ranking higher than characteristics such as an exciting personality, intelligence, and physical attractiveness. Second, it is plausible that the indistinctness of the Neutral profile provided more opportunities for participants to project their desires onto the profile. The projective hypothesis within psychodynamic theory posits that individuals project unconscious desires and conflicts onto nondescript stimuli often exemplified via inkblot tests (Kearney & Trull, 2011). The Neutral profile may have provided the optimal description for a projective experience (e.g., seeing things in the profile that may be a wish or fantasy of the participant), which favored participant's hopes for a relationship. Similarly, the two tailored profiles provided more details regarding personality characteristics and preferences in relationships, potentially providing more opportunities for the profiles to be critiqued. While these profiles potentially provided a more accurate depiction of a romantic interest (i.e., someone with perceived positive and negative qualities), the non-neutral profiles may have lessened the

opportunity to be romanticized as one's romantic interest, thereby contributing to lower attraction ratings.

### **Significant Predictor Variables**

*Selecting the Alike profile.* The only significant predictor variable for the selection of the Alike profile as most attractive was whether participants reported experiences of trauma before age 18. Results indicated that individuals who reported betrayal trauma experiences before the age of 18 were *less* likely to select the Alike profile as the most favorable. While some individuals who experience betrayal trauma may reenact such experiences with the fantasy of creating a different outcome, or gain mastery over the consuming feelings associated with the traumatic event, others may rigorously avoid perceived associated experiences (Herman, 1992). In particular, the Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey predominantly assess for observing or experiencing trauma among close individuals such as a parent. Further, betrayal trauma theory posits that victims of trauma from individuals close to them may forget or misremember traumatic events as a defense to preserve the relationship with abusers, thereby missing future valuable cues of relationship dangers signs (DePrince et al., 2012). However, individuals who remember traumatic experiences may be more likely to be distrustful of those relationships and describe the abuser negatively.

Consequently, findings do not support betrayal trauma theory, however it is unknown why. It is possible that our sample comprised of individuals who were more aware of their traumatic experiences, thereby having an aversion to similar traits of their abuser who may be connected to a parental figure. Although, it is important to note that it is unknown who the perpetrators of the betrayal trauma experiences were (i.e., it may not

have been a parental figure). In addition, our sample comprised of individuals who were primarily highly educated, well-adjusted, and reported healthy relationships with parents (e.g., high reported emotional closeness, low reported aggression and unfinished business) and romantic partners (i.e., reported high relationship satisfaction; see Table 5). Thus, it is plausible that these characteristics were a buffer for experiencing residual effects of betrayal trauma.

*Attraction ratings for Alike profile.* Results indicated that participant reports of unfinished business with the opposite-gender parental figure was the most salient predictor of attraction ratings for the Alike profile, with higher attraction ratings being associated with lower ratings of unfinished business. Similarly with traumatic experiences, while lingering feelings of resentment and sadness from previous influential relationships may result in reenacting those relationship styles with others (i.e., Core Conflictual Relational Themes; see Luborsky, 1985), others may experience an aversion to these characteristics. Avoiding characteristics of parental figures where unfinished business exists perhaps provides a protective function of preventing the distress that would ensue if dating individuals with similar traits. In contrast, those individuals experiencing less unfinished business with parental figures may be more apt to be attracted to similar parental traits due to a sense of security attributed to those characteristics. Further, one can conclude that individuals with less unfinished business with parental figures likely perceive those relationships as more positive. Numerous studies have supported the connection between positive relationships with parents and the increased likelihood of being attracted to parental characteristics, including physical similarities (see Berezkei et al., 2002; Berezkei, Gyuris, & Weisfeld, 2004; Wiszewska,

2007) and personality characteristics (see Geher, 2000). Similarly, while not statistically significant, participant reports of emotional closeness with opposite-gender parental figures was positively related to attraction ratings for the Alike profile and demonstrated an noteworthy effect size, further indicating the influence of the type of relationship with parents on romantic attraction.

Perceived similarity with the opposite-gender parental figure was also related to increased attraction ratings for the Alike profile. Similarity to one's parental figure can also be interpreted as a sense of similarity to the Alike profile. As opposed to the common belief that opposites attract (i.e., complementarity), research favors the preference for similarity among romantic partners (e.g., Berscheid & Reis, 1998). Further, the similarity-attraction principle postulates that individuals prefer others who share similar characteristics such as comparable backgrounds, personality traits, and interests (Fiske, 2009). This preference could be influenced by the tendency to avoid feelings of stress that arise with perceived differences or conflict, gaining validation for shared beliefs and attitudes, thereby bolstering self-esteem, and increasing one's confidence of reciprocal attraction from individuals with similar characteristics. Thus, these variables combined, perceived similarity to one's parental figure and absence of unfinished business, may be particularly impactful of being attracted to partners with parental characteristics.

### **Null Findings**

Among the remaining predictor variables, aggression towards participants' opposite-gender parental figures and enmeshment were not significantly associated with the Alike profile attraction ratings. Although null effects can be difficult to explain, it

may be that these variables are simply not associated with partner selection. While these indicators were theoretically predicted to be influential based on previous studies demonstrating associations between type of relationship with parental figures and romantic attraction, the current study does not support these assertions. These results may also be influenced by methodological constraints with profile construction (e.g., preferences for Neutral profile) and limitations with the measurements themselves. For instance, the Voodoo Doll Task used to capture aggression towards parental figures appeared to suffer from floor effects. This indicates that participants hesitated to report such reactions to parental figures through this instrument (see limitations for further details).

### **Limitations**

Given that this study was the first known investigation of romantic attraction with this methodology, identifying limitations will help fine tune this approach to capture the attraction process. First, constructing intricate profiles to replicate parental characteristics is a complicated task. While measurements completed by participants were systemically utilized to provide consistent descriptions of profiles tailored to be Alike and Unalike parental figures, it is unknown if these profiles captured the essence of one's parental figure. While open-ended questions asking participants to comment on their reactions to each profile illustrated that profile descriptions were believable (i.e., participants appeared to react to profiles as if they were actual individuals), it is possible that descriptions did not align strongly with parental figures. Post-hoc questions investigating if participants could identify similarities or differences between dating profiles and parental characteristics may help confirm the validity of the profiles.

As noted above, potential interpretations of profiles may have skewed attraction ratings of the tailored profiles. For instance, some parental characteristics may have been interpreted in a negative tone (e.g., avoiding conflict, anxious/avoidant attachment styles), thereby making those profiles more vulnerable to being disliked. Adjusting the language for such descriptions, while keeping the integrity of the descriptor, may allow other profiles aside from the Neutral profile to be more strongly considered as potential romantic partners. For instance, *someone who tends to go along with what others want to avoid conflict*, could be reworded as *someone who values being flexible during disagreements*. Similarly, while the Neutral profile successfully added to the pool of romantic options, rewording the profile may help maintain the neutral integrity of the profile. For instance, instead being described as, *someone who is nice and fairly laid-back at times. Also, they would say I'm kind*, the stem could read, *someone who is nice, I guess, and who can be somewhat laid-back. Also, they would say that I'm a pretty simple person*. Furthermore, while additional profile comments, used to provide a more detailed, believable profile, were intentionally created to be consistent and impartial throughout the Alike, Dislike, and Neutral profiles (e.g., all three profiles consisted of comparable descriptors such as liking all genres of music and common hobbies like trying new restaurants and hanging out with friends), occasional open-ended responses highlighted notable interpretations on these descriptors. While language is always going to be interpreted differently by participants, greater intentionality to limit these discrepancies, along with further testing to assess the understanding of such language, would aid in the validity of the research question (i.e., attraction towards parental characteristics and not unrelated constructs).

Further, there were limitations with some of the measurements used to describe parental characteristics. The Voodoo Doll Task was not able to encapsulate variance of aggression towards parental figures (i.e., when asked to place 0-51 pins in a voodoo doll representative of a parental figure, participants rarely reported more than 0 pins). More sensitive instructions may improve the ability to measure aggression without the perceived hostility of the Voodoo Doll task as is. In addition, The Revised Central Relationship Questionnaire (McCarthy, Connolly Gibbons, & Barber, 2008) demonstrated poor internal consistency with a subscale measuring submissiveness traits among parental figures, thereby influencing the validity capturing this characteristic when constructing the dating profiles. Also notable of the study methodology was reliance on participant self-report, thereby making the accuracy of parental characteristics (e.g., attachment styles, personality characteristics) unknown. Similarly, there was a tendency for participants to describe their parental figures positively. While perceptions may have been accurately reported, it is also possible that positive descriptions were inflated. For instance, participants were more likely to describe parents as outgoing, agreeable, and loving, compared to more negative options, thereby likely experiencing bias when reporting parental characteristics.

Finally, a convenience sample was recruited through Facebook and was homogenous and limited regarding size. Participants were underrepresented with national norms regarding gender, race, and education level. Furthermore, only heterosexual, cis-gender (i.e., individuals identifying as their gender assigned at birth) identified participants were included in the analysis, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results. However, not used in the analysis for this study were open-response data

collected from individuals identifying as a sexual minority, providing some preliminary direction for future studies. When asked about patterns of dating partners with similar characteristics as parental figures, participants reflected on this phenomenon by reporting both seeking similar and dissimilar traits of parental figures. Given that only one known study has investigated parental influences on dating behaviors within the LGBTQ community, new theories are likely needed outside of the opposite-gender template to be inclusive of diverse sexual orientations. Furthermore, as highlighted in the results and discussion, the limited sample size likely prevented predictor variables with notable effect sizes from having enough power to achieve statistical significance.

### **Implications for Counseling Psychologists**

Driving this research was the desire to gain additional knowledge about how individuals select romantic partners. Given that our romantic relationships contribute to personal well-being, selecting healthy romantic partners can be important for emotional health and contentment (see Demir, 2008; Dush & Amato, 2005; Patrick, Knee, Canevello, & Lonsbary, 2007). With evidence suggesting that individuals may unconsciously exhibit romantic relationship patterns related to relationships with parental figures (i.e., psychoanalytic theory of partner selection; Freud, 1927), thereby reenacting previous relationships (i.e., Core Conflictual Relational Themes; Luborsky, 1985) and attachment styles (Bowlby, 1969), investigating cyclical relational styles is paramount to making intentional decisions regarding romantic partner selection.

Our results demonstrated some differences with previous research findings, with individuals gravitating towards the Neutral profile more favorably than the Alike profile (i.e., profile most similar to parental figures). This finding suggests that among our

sample, parental characteristics may not have been as influential as previous research implies, or perhaps this relationship is more subtle than the overt display demonstrated with our methodology. The Neutral profile may have provided more opportunities for individuals to project or assume qualities that may or may not have been present. Similarly, the natural ambiguity of partner selection may lead individuals to make assumptions about romantic interests. In contrast, the other profiles provided more data (for better or worse), thereby reducing ambiguity. Accordingly, it may be useful to further understand how individuals are making decisions about partner selection in the face of neutral attributes.

However, impacting the selection of the Alike profile was the presence of betrayal trauma, indicating that individuals with betrayal trauma histories were less likely to select the Alike profile. In contrast, participants who reported similarity to parental figures and an absence of unfinished business provided higher attraction ratings for the Alike profile. These findings have important considerations for clinicians. While some individuals may be reenacting harmful relationship patterns created during childhood, some individuals may be forming healthier relationship templates. These results potentially highlight adaptive relationship tendencies, illustrating that the stereotype of being stuck in poor relationship patterns may not be true within some populations. Although, it is unknown how this sample represents individuals entering therapy, who may have different relationship styles influenced by parental figures. For instance, these findings may not be applicable to individuals who witness, or are experiencing, intimate partner violence or are reporting relationship distress with romantic partners (i.e., our sample appeared to be comprised of individuals reporting relationship satisfaction and minimal personal

distress). Future studies can look at these indicators with different populations, particularly among individuals who are more distressed or with clinical presentations. Indeed, with relational distress being a common impetus for seeking psychotherapy services (Berscheid & Reis, 1998), including relationship dissatisfaction being connected with depression symptomatology (Segrin, Powell, Givertz, & Brackin, 2003), it is possible that distressed individuals may be more vulnerable to replaying maladaptive relational themes. Thus, clinicians may play a crucial role in helping clients recognize unconscious romantic attraction tendencies, using this awareness to make corrective relationship choices and process displaced unmet emotional needs.

Finally, this preliminary study was an introductory step to further investigate cyclical relational patterns influenced by caregiver characteristics. While empowering individuals to gain awareness about relational patterns may transition to healthier relationships, preventative interventions may involve parenting styles and ways of modeling romantic relationships for children. Family influences, particularly with parental figures, have been connected with aggression in adolescent romantic relationships (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009), adult romantic relationship problems and satisfaction (Feldman et al., 1998), and warm and supportive adult romantic behaviors (Conger, Cui, Bryant, & Elder, 2000). While the mechanism of parental influences on romantic attraction remains theoretically varied (e.g., psychodynamic theories, modeling/observational learning), emphasis on healthy family dynamics and romantic relationships is suggested through further research and clinical practice. This study specifically contributed to this effort through building on potential processes that impact romantic partner selection to encourage adaptive, fulfilling relationships.

Table 1

*Paired Sample T-Test Results Comparing Four Profile Attraction Means*

<b>Profile Comparison</b>	<b>Mean Difference</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b><i>t</i> value</b>	<b><i>p</i> value</b>	<b>Cohen's <i>d</i></b>
Alike vs. Unalike	.78	2.26	3.25	.002	0.27
Alike vs. Neutral	-.46	1.87	-2.30	.02	-0.16
Alike vs. Jerk	2.77	1.84	14.10	<.001	1.09
Unalike vs. Neutral	-1.26	2.10	-5.57	<.001	-0.43
Unalike vs. Jerk	1.99	1.67	11.13	<.001	0.79
Neutral vs. Jerk	3.24	1.65	18.22	<.001	1.32

Table 2

*Point-Biserial and Person Correlations for Predictor Variables and Endorsement of the Alike Profile*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Unfinished Business	--								
2. Aggression	.25*	--							
3. Emotional Closeness	-.66**	-.21*	--						
4. Similarity	-.27*	-.33**	.29**	--					
5. Differentiation of Self	.39**	.16	-.25*	-.20	--				
6. Trauma before 18	.38**	.18	-.22*	-.17	.19	--			
7. Trauma after 18	.18	.18	-.07	-.04	.23*	.66**	--		
8. Alike Profile Attraction Rating	-.29**	.04	.21	.22*	-.06	-.02	.06	--	
9. Selection of Alike Profile	-.03	-.06	.01	.15	-.09	-.09	-.03	.44**	--

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ . Selection of Alike Profile coded 0, 1 (0 = no, did not select Alike profile as most attractive, 1 = yes, did select Alike profile as most attractive).  $N$ 's range from 84 to 88.

Table 3

*Point-Biserial and Person Correlations for Predictor Variables and Endorsement of the Alike Profile Split by Gender*

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Unfinished Business	Men									
	Women									
2. Aggression	Men	.46*								
	Women	.19								
3. Emotional Closeness	Men	-.58**	-.79**							
	Women	-.67**	.01							
4. Similarity	Men	-.61**	-.47*	.63**						
	Women	-.17	-.23	.24						
5. Differentiation of Self	Men	.44*	.10	-.37	-.34					
	Women	.33**	.26*	-.13	-.19					
6. Trauma before 18	Men	.17	.14	-.22	-.46*	.09				
	Women	.02	.16	.15	-.06	.34**				
7. Trauma after 18	Men	.18	.28	-.30	.04	.25	.41*			
	Women	.23	-.07	-.12	-.11	.19	.31*			
8. Alike Profile Attraction Rating	Men	-.25	.05	-.11	.40*	-.26	-.23	-.14		
	Women	-.30*	.02	.31*	.16	.02	.06	.04		
9. Selection of Alike Profile	Men	.01	.05	-.26	.03	.14	-.26	-.33	.48*	
	Women	-.05	-.11	.13	.19	-.22	-.20	.01	.43**	

*Note.* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ . Selection of Alike Profile coded 0, 1 (0 = no, did not select Alike profile as most attractive, 1 = yes, did select Alike profile as most attractive).

Table 4

*Multiple Linear Regression with Significant Predictors from Point-Biserial Correlation Table with Attraction Ratings for Alike Profile*

	Unstandardized <i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	CI for <i>B</i>
Unfinished Business	-.20*	.09	-.38, -.03
Similarity	.14	.10	-.06, .34

*Note.* \* $p < .05$

Table 5

*Participant Characteristics*

<b>Measure</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>	<b>Measure Range of Scores</b>
Depression	10.22	4.34	Range 0 – 30; higher scores indicate higher depression symptoms
Differentiation of Self	3.04	0.63	Range 1 - 6; Higher scores indicate higher self-differentiation
Closeness to Parent	5.30	1.29	Range 1 – 7; Higher scores indicate higher closeness toward parent
Aggression toward Parent	2.30	7.67	Range 0 – 51; Higher scores indicate higher aggression toward parent
Unfinished Business toward Parent	2.89	1.86	Range 1 – 7; Higher scores indicate higher unfinished business toward parent
Relationship Satisfaction	15.26	3.96	Range 0 – 21; Clinical Cut-off <i>M</i> = 12; higher scores indicate higher relationship satisfaction

*Note.* Depression, relationship satisfaction, and aggression calculated via total score; closeness, differentiation, and unfinished business calculated via mean score. Relationship satisfaction for those individuals who identified being in a romantic relationship ( $n = 57$ ). Closeness, aggression, and unfinished business measured towards opposite-gender parental figure.

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Appendix 1. Profile examples including the tailored profile template for the Alike and Unalike profile, Neutral profile, Jerk Profile.

**Profile 1: Tailored to be alike or Unalike parent:**

Hello there! I'm excited to meet new people and potentially find a partner in crime. I enjoy mixing up my week by going out with friends or staying in to cook dinner. I like trying new things and am looking for someone special to share my life with.

About Me:

\*\*My friends would describe me as... (insert adjectives for Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness). Add in fillers like, "someone who" "and/but also"

\*\*My hobbies include... I enjoy anything outside and enjoying time to relax.

\*\*My favorite music is... I like many genres of music.

My Dating Style:

\*\*On a first date, I tend to be... (insert adjectives for neuroticism)

\*\*I think it's fun on first dates to... (insert adjectives for openness)

\*\*Past partners have told me... (insert CRQ OTHERS for hurtful and loving)

\*\*When making decisions in relationships, I notice I... (insert CRQ OTHERS Independent and Submissive)

What I'm looking for:

\*\*In relationships, I like when my partner... (insert anxious attachment scale).

\*\*I feel most comfortable in relationships when...(insert avoidant attachment scale)

\*\*I am looking for someone who... (insert CRQ SELF for Autonomous and Avoidant).

\*\*I find it attractive when... (insert CRQ SELF Domineering and Intimate)

\*\*When things are bothering my partner, I like it when... (insert CRQ Nonconfrontational)

**Profile 2: Neutral Profile**

Hey all! I've never done online dating before, but I thought it would be interesting to give it a try. I like meeting up with friends and trying new things.

About Me:

\*\*My friends would describe me as... Someone who is nice and fairly laid-back at times. Also, they would say I'm kind.

\*\*My hobbies include... I enjoy staying somewhat active and trying new restaurants.

\*\*My favorite music is... I like different types of music depending on how I am feeling.

My Dating Style:

\*\*On a first date, I tend to be... Okay, and maybe a bit nervous.

\*\*I think it's fun on first dates to... Get to know each other better and enjoy each other's company.

\*\*Past partners have told me... That it was nice getting to know me and that I was pretty easy to get along with.

\*\*When making decisions in relationships, I notice I... Tend to be okay on the day-to-day. It helps when we both are on the same page.

What I'm looking for:

\*\*In relationships, I like when my partner... Is having fun, fairly easy to get along with, and is a nice person.

\*\*I feel most comfortable in relationships when... We are both getting along well and things are going smoothly.

\*\*I am looking for someone who... Is fine staying in on a Saturday night watching a movie or going out with friends.

\*\*I find it attractive when... Someone is genuine and enjoys life.

\*\*When things are bothering my partner, I like it when... We are able to work through it when we need to.

### **Profile 3. Jerk Profile**

Hi there. My last relationship was an awful experience, and I am really ready to move on. I think I am a great catch and won't be single for long.

About Me:

\*\*My friends would describe me as... I'm not sure, you should ask them.

\*\*I would describe myself as... A confident person who knows what I like. I'm not afraid to let others know when I disagree with them.

\*\*My hobbies include... I think hobbies can be a waste of time, so whatever I feel up to in the moment is how I spend my time.

\*\*My favorite music is... I'm not really a music person, so whatever is on the radio works for me.

My Dating Style:

\*\*On a first date, I tend to be... Just fine. I don't think it's a big deal to be on a date with someone.

\*\*I think it's fun on first dates to... Go out! That way if we are not getting along, we can part ways and still have fun.

**\*\*Past partners have told me...** That they weren't ready for a relationship. It was a huge waste of time.

**\*\*When making decisions in relationships, I notice I...** Am always the only one who tries to fix things, but unfortunately it takes two for a relationship. Why aren't there people who have it together?

What I'm looking for:

**\*\*In relationships, I like when my partner...** Realizes how good they have it. My partner should know how great of a catch I am.

**\*\*I feel most comfortable in relationships when...** There is no drama. I try to avoid others who bring me down, because I do not have time to deal with their mess.

**\*\*I am looking for someone who...** Can keep me entertained. I like to have fun and am looking for someone who can keep up.

**\*\*I find it attractive when...** When my partner stays in shape. We all should try to look our best at all times.

**\*\*When things are bothering my partner, I like it when...** My partner allows me to speak. It's frustrating when I can't get my point across.

**Questions for each profile:**

1. How would you rate your attraction to this individual? (Rating Scale 1-7)
  2. I could see myself in a long term relationship with this person? (Rating Scale 1-7)
  3. How compatible do you think you would be with this person? (Rating Scale 1-7)
  4. How special do you find this person? (Rating Scale 1-7)
- (Questions 1-4 create the Attraction Scale)

**Question at end of profiles:**

Now that you have read all four profiles, how would you rank the profiles in order of who you would most likely be interested in dating? (Provide headings of each profile)

Appendix 2: Measures utilized during phase 1 in the study, including demographic information, measures to create the profiles, and other individual characteristics.

### **Demographic Information**

I identify my gender as? (Male, Female, Transgender, Other/Please specify)

What is your age in years?

I would describe my race as (please check all that apply) (American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian, Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, African American, Caucasian, Other).

My religious domination is best characterized as (Catholic, Christian, Protestant, Jewish, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, New Age/Metaphysical, None, Other/Please specify).

Please indicate your highest level of education (Some high school education, High school diploma, Some college, College degree, Some graduate school, Master's degree, Terminal degree, Other).

I identify as (Heterosexual; Lesbian; Gay; Bisexual; Queer; Unlabeled; Other/Please specify)

Are you currently in a romantic relationship (yes/no)?

Which best statement best describes your relationship? (Dating exclusively- One person only; Dating; Engaged; Married; Polyamorous; Other- Please specify).

The relationship with my primary partner is with? (A different gender partner, same-gender partner, Other)

### **Family History**

Please indicate which of the following best describes your situation:

My parents are married and living together (we consider marriage to be defined by the couple, rather than legal contracts)

My parents are separated or divorced

One or both of parents is deceased (mother, father, both)

My parents never married

Other- Please specify (open answer)

How old were you when your parents separated or divorced?

How old were you when your parent passed away?

Please check the parental relationship you were most exposed to growing up

Biological father and mother

Biological mother

Biological father

Biological father and stepmother

Biological mother and stepfather

Biological father and partner

Biological mother and partner

Biological parent and other family member (e.g., grandparent)

Adoptive parents  
Other persons (e.g., aunt & uncle, foster parents)

Did either of your parents remarry or repartner?

Yes, my mother only.  
Yes, my father only.  
Yes, both.  
Neither remarried or repartnered.

About how old were you when your mother or father remarried or repartnered?

Mother:

Father:

What was the outcome of the remarriage or repartnering?

Still together  
No longer together  
No longer together but with someone else.

### **Measures Assessing Parental Characteristics**

*The following questionnaires will be filled out for both a father figure and mother figure. The displayed questions illustrate the father figure template. Modifications are presented in red font.*

The following questions are about your relationship with your father or father figure (step-father, grandfather, uncle, family friend etc).

### **Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, Kentle & 1991)**

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to **your father or father like figure**. For example, do you agree that your **father figure** is someone who *likes to spend time with others*? Please **select the number that indicates** the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

1. Disagree strongly
2. Disagree a little
3. Neither agree nor disagree
4. Agree a little
5. Agree strongly

*I see my **father figure** as someone who...*

- 1 Tends to find fault with others
- 2 Does a thorough job
- 3 Is depressed, blue
- 4 Is original, comes up with new ideas

- 5 Is reserved
- 6 Is helpful and unselfish with others
- 7 Can be somewhat careless
- 8 Is relaxed, handles stress well
- 9 Is curious about many different things
- 10 Is full of energy
- 11 Starts quarrels with others
- 12 Is a reliable worker
- 13 Can be tense
- 14 Is ingenious, a deep thinker
- 15 Generates a lot of enthusiasm
- 16 Has a forgiving nature
- 17 Tends to be disorganized
- 18 Worries a lot
- 19 Has an active imagination
- 20 Tends to be quiet
- 21 Is generally trusting
- 22 Tends to be lazy
- 23 Is emotionally stable, not easily upset
- 24 Is inventive
- 25 Has an assertive personality
- 26 Can be cold and aloof
- 27 Perseveres until the task is finished
- 28 Can be moody
- 29 Values artistic, aesthetic experiences
- 30 Is sometimes shy, inhibited
- 31 Is considerate and kind to almost everyone
- 32 Does things efficiently
- 33 Remains calm in tense situations
- 34 Prefers work that is routine
- 35 Is outgoing, sociable
- 36 Is sometimes rude to others
- 37 Makes plans and follows through with them
- 38 Gets nervous easily
- 39 Likes to reflect, play with ideas
- 40 Has few artistic interests
- 41 Likes to cooperate with others
- 42 Is easily distracted
- 43 Is sophisticated in art, music, or literature

**Experiences in Close Relationship Scale (ECR)-Short form** (Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007)

1. It helps **my father figure** to turn to **me** in times of need.
2. **My father figure** needs a lot of reassurance that I love **him**.
3. **My father figure** wants to get close to **me**, but **he** keeps pulling back.
4. **My father figure** finds that **I** don't want to get as close as **he** would like.
5. **My father figure** turns to **me** for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
6. **My father figure's** desire to be very close sometimes scares **me** away.
7. **My father figure** tries to avoid getting too close to **me**.
8. **My father figure** does not often worry about being abandoned.
9. **My father figure** usually discusses **his** problems and concerns with **me**.
10. **My father figure** gets frustrated if **I** am not available when **he** needs **me**.
11. **My father figure** gets nervous when **I** get too close to **him**.
12. **My father figure** worries that **I** won't care about **him** as much as **he** cares about **me**.

**The Revised Central Relationship Questionnaire** (Revised CRQ; McCarthy, Connolly Gibbons, & Barber)

**Instructions:**

This questionnaire is about your feelings about your relationship with **your parental figures**. There are no right or wrong answers. Some items may not apply to you at all, **if so, please give them a 1 instead of omitting them**. Please answer all of the questions, even though some may look similar. Please try to be as honest as possible and respond how you feel --not how you think you should feel or how others think you should feel.

All people have a pattern of needs and expectations in their relationships with their parents. We want you to describe your relationship with **your father or father figure**. Please think about your various interactions with your **father figure** and give us your view of several aspects of this relationship. (Rating scale 1-7)

We would like you to rate this person on the following six questions using this scale:

- 1) How close is or was this person to you?
- 2) How intimate a relationship do you have, or did you have, with this person?
- 3) How much of an authority figure is or was this person for you?
- 4) How important is or was this person to you?
- 5) How enjoyable is or was the relationship at its best?
- 6) How difficult is or was the relationship at its worst?

Below is a list of different wishes, needs, or desires that people often have of other people. We want you to rate how much these wishes apply or applied to your relationship with your **FATHER FIGURE**, i.e., how typical they are or were for you **WHEN THE RELATIONSHIP IS/WAS AT ITS WORST**. Use the following scale (and please try to use a range of ratings):

## **IN MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY FATHER FIGURE:**

1. I wish for my father figure to know I am loyal
2. I would like my father figure to enjoy himself
3. I wish to be my own person
4. I wish for my father figure not to desert me
5. I wish to confide in my father figure
6. I would like to hurt my father figure
7. I wish to be dependent on my father figure
8. I wish to be distant
9. I wish for my father figure not to leave me
10. I wish to control my father figure
11. I wish to be a special person to my father figure
12. I wish for my father figure to respond to me
13. I wish to defy my father figure
14. I wish to connect with my father figure
15. I would like my father figure to feel proud of her/his accomplishments
16. I wish for my father figure to recognize my opinion
17. I wish to be trusted by my father figure
18. I wish for my father figure to pay attention to me
19. I wish to support my father figure when he is in pain
20. I wish to dominate my father figure
21. I wish for my father figure to be interested in me
22. I would like my father figure to feel at ease
23. I wish not to open up
24. I wish to avoid my father figure
25. I wish to be admired by my father figure
26. I wish for my father figure not to abandon me
27. I wish to encourage my father figure
28. I wish to be loved
29. I wish to do my own thing
30. I wish to make my father figure mad
31. I wish to be dominated
32. I wish to be independent
33. I wish to be emotionally close to my father figure
34. I wish to let my father figure make decisions for me
35. I would like to help my father figure
36. I wish to have power over my father figure

Now we would like you to think about the relationship in terms of the way you feel **YOUR FATHER FIGURE RESPONDS TO YOU**. We often see people as responding to us in a way that either prevents us from getting what we want, or helps us to get what we want. Below is a list of possible ways that your father figure can respond to you. We want you to rate how much these responses apply to this relationship, i.e., how typical these responses are or were of **your father figure WHEN THE RELATIONSHIP**

**IS/WAS AT ITS WORST.** Use the following scale (and please try to use a range of ratings):

**IN MY INTERACTIONS WITH MY ROMANTIC PARTNER:**

1. My **father figure** is his own person
2. My **father figure** is submissive
3. My **father figure** withdraws
4. My **father figure** cares for me
5. My **father figure** dominates me
6. My **father figure** is out of control
7. My **father figure** is emotionally close to me
8. My **father figure** is frantic
9. My **father figure** makes his own decisions
10. My **father figure** has power over me
11. My **father figure** hurts me
12. My **father figure** is compliant
13. My **father figure** is distant
14. My **father figure** feels I am a special person
15. My **father figure** controls me
16. My **father figure** acts irrationally
17. My **father figure** rejects me
18. My **father figure** is independent
19. My **father figure** treats me badly
20. My **father figure** does not open up
21. My **father figure** readily defers to me

Now we would like you to consider the same relationship in terms of **YOUR OWN RESPONSE TO YOUR FATHER FIGURE.** Other people can deny your desires or meet your desires in responding to you. Below is a list of different ways that you might react when your **father figure** denies or meets your desires. We would like you to rate how typical these reactions are or were for you in this relationship **WHEN IT IS/WAS AT ITS WORST.** Use the following scale (and please try to use a range of ratings):

**IN MY RELATIONSHIP WITH MY FATHER FIGURE:**

1. I feel respected by my **father figure**
2. I encourage my **father figure**
3. I achieve at work or school
4. I feel unsure about our relationship
5. I avoid difficulties with my **father figure**
6. I have power over my **father figure**
7. I feel rejected
8. I am independent
9. I accomplish my goals
10. I do not open up
11. I feel Unaliked
12. I am submissive

13. I feel my father figure is important to me
14. I distance myself
15. I am dominated
16. I feel torn about my relationship with my father figure
17. I give to my father figure
18. I avoid getting into conflicts with my father figure
19. I share my feelings
20. I am confused by my father figure with my partner
21. I am my own person
22. I feel mistreated
23. I act maturely
24. I feel competent
25. I avoid problems with my father figure
26. I feel held in high esteem by my father figure
27. I feel accepted by my father figure
28. I feel uncomfortable
29. I control my father figure
30. I dominate my father figure
31. I am not emotionally close
32. I connect with my father figure
32. I express my thoughts, feelings, and wishes
34. I am self-sufficient
35. I am controlled by my father figure
36. I am nervous

### **Measures used for Predictor Variables**

#### **The Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression scale (CES-D; Andresen et al., 2004)**

Rarely or none of the time, Some or a Little of the Time, Occasionally or a Moderate Amount of Time, or Most or All of the Time.

1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me.
2. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing.
3. I felt depressed.
4. I felt that everything I did was an effort.
5. I felt hopeful about the future.
6. I felt fearful.
7. My sleep was restless.
8. I was happy.
9. I felt lonely.
10. I could not get "going".

#### **The UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, 1996)**

INSTRUCTIONS: Indicate how often each of the statements below is descriptive of you.

3 "I often feel this way"

2 indicates "I sometimes feel this way"

1 indicates "I rarely feel this way"  
0 indicates "I never feel this way"

1. I am unhappy doing so many things alone
2. I have nobody to talk to
3. I cannot tolerate being so alone
4. I lack companionship
5. I feel as if nobody really understands me
6. I find myself waiting for people to call or write
7. There is no one I can turn to
8. I am no longer close to anyone
9. My interests and ideas are not shared by those around me
10. I feel left out
11. I feel completely alone
12. I am unable to reach out and communicate with those around me
13. My social relationships are superficial
14. I feel starved for company
15. No one really knows me well
16. I feel isolated from others
17. I am unhappy being so withdrawn
18. It is difficult for me to make friends
19. I feel shut out and excluded by others
20. People are around me but not with me

**Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI- Funk & Rogge 2007)**

1. Please indicate the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.
2. I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my partner.
3. How rewarding is your relationship with your partner?
4. In general, how satisfied are you with your relationship

**Brief Betrayal Trauma Survey (Goldberg & Freyd, 2008)**

We hope that you trust us to keep your responses in complete confidence and privacy; this is the reason that we ask you not to include your name on any of our questionnaires. Nonetheless, if you feel comfortable answering any of the more intimate questions in this section, just skip them, and go on to the next section. **For each item below, please mark one response in the columns labeled "Before Age 18" AND one response in the columns labeled "Age 18 or older."**

*Have each of the following events happened never, one or two times, more than that.*

Witnessed someone with whom you were very close (such as a parent, brother, sister, caretaker, or intimate partner) committing suicide, being killed, or being injured by another person so severely as to result in marks, bruises, burns, blood, or broken bones. This might include a close friend in combat.

Witnessed someone with whom you were not so close undergoing a similar kind of traumatic event.

Witnessed someone with whom you were very close deliberately attack another family member so severely as to result in marks, bruises, blood, broken bones, or broken teeth. You were deliberately attacked that severely by someone with whom you were very close.

You were deliberately attacked that severely by someone with whom you were not close. You were made to have some form of sexual contact, such as toughing or penetration, by someone with whom you were very close (such as a parent or lover).

You were made to have such sexual contact by someone with whom you were not close. You were emotionally or psychologically mistreated over a significant period of time by someone with whom you were very close (such as a parent or lover).

Experienced the death of one of your own children.

Experienced a seriously traumatic event not already covered in any of these questions.

## Voodoo Doll Task

Since we just had you report some responses about negative behaviors from your mother, we have to have you complete a short task to get out some of the negative energy you might have. Below, you'll be shown a doll that represents your mother. You will get to choose how much needles (up to 51) you would like us to put in the doll that represents your mother.

To give you an idea about what the doll will look like, below you are shown a picture of the doll with 0 pins in it and with 51 pins in it.



+ Add Question ▼ Split Page Here

Q62 Edit Question ▼ Move Copy Delete

1. Now you are given the chance to put as many pins as you would like into the doll that represents your mother.

Pins

Please select the number of pins

## Similarity to Parents

1. I perceive myself to be similar to my father/mother figure regarding our personality characteristics (e.g., introverted/extroverted, spontaneous/disciplined)
2. I perceive myself to be similar to my father/mother figure regarding the way we display emotion (e.g., affectionate/private).

3. I perceive myself to be dissimilar to my father/mother figure regarding the way we are comfortable with interpersonal closeness.

Appendix 3. Measures utilized during phase 2 in the study, after rating the four profile options, and questions asked for individuals who identified as a sexual minority.

### **Family and Interparental Conflict Scales** (Klein, Wood, & Moore, 2003)

This questionnaire is designed to measure your perception of conflict between your biological parents. Please think about your biological parents' relationship as **it was during your childhood**, whether or not they are still married.

(6-point response format ranging from “Definitely False” to “Definitely True.”)

#### Interparental Conflict

1. I never **saw** my parents arguing or disagreeing.
2. My parents **got** really mad when they argued.
3. They may think I **didn't** know it, but my parents argued or disagreed a lot.
4. When my parents **had** a disagreement, they discussed it quietly.
5. My parents **were** often mean to each other, even when I **was** around.
6. I often **saw** my parents arguing.
7. When my parents **had** an argument, they **said** mean things to each other.
8. My parents hardly ever argued.
9. When my parents **had** an argument, they yelled a lot.
10. My parents often nagged and complained about each other.
11. My parents hardly ever yelled when they had a disagreement.
12. My parents **would** break or throw things during arguments.
13. My parents **would** push or shove each other during arguments.

#### Family Environment Scale

1. We **fought** a lot in our family.
2. Family members rarely **became** openly angry.
3. Family members sometimes **got** so angry they throw things.
4. Family members hardly ever **lost** their tempers.
5. Family members often criticized one another.
6. Family members sometimes hit each other.
7. If there **was** a disagreement in our family, we **tried** hard to smooth things over and keep the peace.
8. Family members often **tried** to one-up or out-do one another.
9. Our family believed **d** you don't ever get anywhere by raising your voice.

#### **Unfinished Business**

When thinking about my relationship with my father figure, there are parts that are unresolved.

Unpleasant memories about my father figure still linger around today.

I have resentment towards my father figure.

When I think about my relationship with my father figure, I wish things were different.

I have not worked through the challenges I have experienced with my father figure.

## Differentiation of Self Inventory-Revised

These are questions concerning your thoughts and feelings about yourself and relationships with **your parents**. Please read each statement carefully and decide how much the statement is *generally true* of you on a 1 (not at all) to 6 (very) scale. If you believe that an item does not pertain to you (e.g., one or both of your parents are deceased), please answer the item according to your best guess about what your thoughts and feelings would be in that situation. Be sure to answer every item and try to be as honest and accurate as possible in your responses.

Not at all true of me/Very true of me (1-6)

1. People have remarked that I'm overly emotional.
2. I have difficulty expressing my feelings to people I care for.
3. I often feel inhibited around my family.
4. I tend to remain pretty calm even under stress.
5. I usually need a lot of encouragement from others when starting a big job or task.
6. When someone close to me disappoints me, I withdraw from him/her for a time.
7. No matter what happens in my life, I know that I'll never lose my sense of who I am.
8. I tend to distance myself when people get too close to me.
9. I want to live up to my parents' expectations of me.
10. I wish that I weren't so emotional.
11. I usually do not change my behavior simply to please another person.
12. My **parent(s)** could not tolerate it if I were to express to him/her my true feelings about some things.
13. When my **parent(s)** criticizes me, it bothers me for days.
14. At times my feelings get the best of me and I have trouble thinking clearly.
15. When I am having an argument with someone, I can separate my thoughts about the issue from my feelings about the person.
16. I'm often uncomfortable when people get too close to me.
17. I feel a need for approval from virtually everyone in my life.
18. At times I feel as if I'm riding an emotional roller-coaster.
19. There's no point in getting upset about things I cannot change.
20. I'm concerned about losing my independence in intimate relationships.
21. I'm overly sensitive to criticism.
22. I try to live up to my parents' expectations.
23. I'm fairly self-accepting.
24. I often feel that my **parent(s)** want too much from me.
25. I often agree with others just to appease them.
26. If I have had an argument with my **parent(s)**, I tend to think about it all day.
27. I am able to say "no" to others even when I feel pressured by them.
28. When one of my relationships becomes very intense, I feel the urge to run away from it.
29. Arguments with my parent(s) or sibling(s) can still make me feel awful.
30. If someone is upset with me, I can't seem to let it go easily.
31. I'm less concerned that others approve of me than I am in doing what I think is right.

32. I would never consider turning to any of my family members for emotional support.
33. I often feel unsure when others are not around to help me make a decision.
34. I'm very sensitive to being hurt by others.
35. My self-esteem really depends on how others think of me.
36. When I'm with my parent(s), I often feel smothered.
37. When making decisions, I seldom worry about what others will think.
38. I often wonder about the kind of impression I create.
39. When things go wrong, talking about them usually makes it worse.
40. I feel things more intensely than others do.
41. I usually do what I believe is right regardless of what others say.
42. Our relationship might be better if my parent(s) would give me the space I need.
43. I tend to feel pretty stable under stress.
44. Sometimes I feel sick after arguing with my parent(s).
45. I feel it's important to hear my parents' opinions before making decisions.
46. I worry about people close to me getting sick, hurt, or upset.

### **Questions for sexual minority identified participants**

1. Looking back on your relationships, have you noticed that you tend to date individuals that have similar personality characteristics as a parental figure? If so, please explain:
2. Do you think you tend to be attracted to partners who have a similar ways of displaying emotion as a parental figure? If so, please explain:
3. When you think about the type of relationship you have with a parental figure (e.g., warm, distant, independent, interconnected), have you noticed any similar or dissimilar traits in your current or previous partners? If so, please explain:

## CURRICULUM VITAE

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### EDUCATION

**Doctor of Philosophy: Counseling Psychology** August 2011 – Expected August 2015  
University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky  
Dissertation Defense Scheduled July 17, 2015:  
*Parental Influence on Romantic Attraction with Simulated Online Dating Profiles*

**Masters of Arts: Counseling Psychology** May 2010  
Towson University, Towson, Maryland  
*Awarded Outstanding Graduate Student in Counseling Psychology*

**Bachelor of Arts: Psychology Major, Ethnic and Intercultural Studies Minor** May 2007  
Salisbury University, Salisbury, Maryland

**Semester at Sea Study Abroad Program** September 2005  
University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
Visited nine developing countries including Venezuela, India, South Africa, Vietnam, and China

### CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

**Doctoral Psychology Intern** August 2014- August 2015  
*University of Illinois at Chicago Counseling Center*

- Provide brief and longer-term individual, couple, and group psychotherapy to undergraduate and graduate students with diverse cultural identities and clinical presentations.
- Conduct thorough intake assessments and collaborate with Counseling Center staff to provide internal and/or external referrals most appropriate for client needs.
- Provide weekly supervision to an advanced clinical extern and contribute to semester evaluations.
- Conduct interactive outreach presentations, including stress management programs with graduate students and introducing Counseling Center services to new students. Currently working with the Office of International Services with projects focusing

on cultural considerations with dating behaviors and a mentorship program with international students titled Trade Winds.

- Completing a year-long rotation working with the Marjorie Kovler Center providing long-term psychotherapy to a survivor of political torture. Receiving tailored, weekly supervision for working with this population and treatment of trauma.
- Provide overnight emergency coverage and conduct emergency intakes during the spring and summer semester.
- Participate in didactic seminars including multicultural psychotherapy, group psychotherapy, supervision theory and practice, psychiatry and college mental health, and outreach and consultation.

**Inpatient Hospital Psychology Trainee**

July 2013 – May 2014

*Central State Hospital, Louisville, Kentucky*

- Provided treatment to diverse clientele including individuals with physical and cognitive impairments, numerous cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and a myriad of different diagnoses and levels of symptom severity.
- Conducted intake sessions and provided individual therapy with patients experiencing depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, personality disorders, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, suicidal and homicidal ideation, and autism-spectrum disorders.
- Developed curriculum and conducted weekly group therapy sessions including treatment on coping skills, emotion regulation, self-esteem, and social skills.
- Administered, interpreted, and reported assessments for mental status, intellectual ability, personality, suicidal and violence risk, symptomatology, malingering, and independent living skills.
- Contributed to an interdisciplinary team with psychiatrists, nurses, psychologists, and mental health professionals and wrote court documents for unit psychologist testimonies.

**Research and Psychotherapy (RAP) Lab Couple Therapist**

January 2012 – July 2014

*Couple Therapy Commitment Study, University of Louisville*

- Provided emotion focused couple counseling for a research study examining commitment uncertainty and treatment gains.
- Trained and mentored junior therapists with case conceptualization and clinical interventions.
- Administered, interpreted, and entered assessment data such as measures of attachment, couple coping, and commitment.
- Worked with couples experiencing trauma, infidelity, and adjustment challenges with individuals from a variety of ethnic identities and sexual orientations.
- Attended weekly individual and group supervision meetings tailored for couple therapy.

**Research and Psychotherapy (RAP) Lab Individual Therapist** August 2013 – July 2014  
*Individual Therapy Feedback Study, University of Louisville*

- Administered short-term psychodynamic therapy to individuals experiencing depression, anxiety, relationship challenges, and abuse.
- Provided and discussed feedback measures regarding client treatment gains and alliance.
- Conducted cognitive and personality testing and collected data for measures assessing for anxiety, depression, and wellbeing.
- Responsible for administrative duties including creating data protocols, corresponding with interested participants, and assigning clients to therapists.

**University Counseling Center Intern** August 2012 – May 2013  
*Indiana University, Southeast Counseling Center, New Albany, Indiana*

- Provided individual and couple counseling to traditional and non-traditional college students experiencing depression, anxiety, grief, suicidal ideation, marital or relational conflicts, learning difficulties, family and cultural challenges, and interpersonal deficits.
- Conducted structured intakes and effectively managed crisis appointments.
- Co-created a psychotherapy group targeting college students with social anxiety and feelings of isolation.
- Connected students to appropriate referral resources across the community and within the university.

**Community Mental Health Clinical Intern** August 2009 - May 2010  
*Lighthouse Youth and Family Services Bureau, Catonsville, Maryland*

- Provided individual and family counseling to diverse clientele within a primarily low socio-economic community.
- Conducted group therapy sessions for children and adolescents on the autism spectrum.
- Co-created social skills therapy group for male high school students.
- Treated individuals with interpersonal conflicts, anger management, and conduct problems.
- Accounted for all case management responsibilities including corresponding with school systems, pediatricians, and non-profit organizations.

**PROFESSIONAL AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

**Graduate Assistant for Counseling Psychology Training Director** July 2013 – July 2014  
*University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky*

- Collaborated with program training director, Dr. Jesse Owen, to develop and coordinate student orientations and meet with prospective graduate students.

- Organized doctoral student meetings and assisted students with practicum placements.
- Supervised students in the Relationship and Psychotherapy (RAP) Lab with their clinical and research work.
- Assisted Dr. Owen with speaking engagements on relationships and marriage (e.g., Presentation on Marriage Trends for the Archdiocese of Louisville, Kentucky).

**Didactic Couple Therapy Seminar**

October 2013

*Couple Therapy for Beginners Workshop, University of Louisville*

- Developed and presented workshop seminar for students and practitioners on introductory clinical skills for couple therapy.
- Provided instruction on pantheoretical approaches for case conceptualization of couple distress, level of commitment, and communication patterns.
- Demonstrated couple therapy interventions and assisted participants during role-plays.

**Graduate Assistant**

August 2008 - May 2010

*Coordinator for Community Service and Leadership, Towson University*

- Advised college student groups and connected students to various volunteer opportunities.
- Organized and led first international volunteer trip for the Student Affairs Office to San Jose, Costa Rica.
- Planned and facilitated Alternative Spring Break volunteer trips to Miami, Florida and New Orleans, Louisiana.
- Coordinated fairs and events for the university.
- Led three day freshmen orientation program consisting of over 50 incoming freshmen students and 10 student facilitators.

**Teaching Assistant**

Fall 2009

*The Helping Relationship (Psyc 205), Towson University*

- Assisted professor with teaching undergraduate counseling techniques course.
- Facilitated group discussions and activities to process counseling experience.
- Observed students in practice counseling sessions and gave specific feedback on strengths and areas of growth.

**TEFL English Teacher**

November - June 2008

*Asian University, Chonburi, Thailand*

- Taught English to Thai students ranging from nine to eighteen years of age.
- Created all lesson plans and classroom activities.
- Worked effectively with teachers from Thailand, Canada, Australia, England, Russia, and Estonia.

- Certified through TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) program and completed student teaching hours throughout Thailand.

### **Guest Lecturer**

Strokoff, J. (2015, May). *Structuring an Intake Assessment and Informed Consent*. Guest Lecturer for Clinical Interviewing and Basic Skills Course (PSY-600-A), Adler University, Chicago, Illinois.

Strokoff, J. (2015, April). *The Advanced Group and Working with “Difficult Clients.”* Guest Lecturer for Group Psychotherapy Course (PSY-756-A), Adler University, Chicago, Illinois.

Strokoff, J. (2015, February). *Emotional Engagement and Consolidation of Skill Development: Enactments*. Guest Lecturer for Couple Counseling Course (CNP 4830), University of Denver, Denver, Colorado.

Strokoff, J. (2013, October). *Emotional and Personality Development*. Guest Lecturer for Human Development and Learning Course (EDTP 107), University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky.

Strokoff, J. (2013, October). *Introduction to Psychodynamic Theory and Techniques*. Guest Lecturer for Theories and Techniques of Counseling and Psychotherapy Course (ECPY 629), University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky.

### **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

**Ad Hoc Reviewer** June 2014 – June 2015  
*Archives of Sexual Behavior*

**Ad Hoc Reviewer** October 2014  
*Sexuality Research and Social Policy*

**Relationship and Psychotherapy (RAP)** August 2011 – July 2014  
*University of Louisville, Louisville, Kentucky*

- Participated in weekly lab meetings consisting of presenting current research projects, assisting colleagues with conceptual and methodological challenges with their research, and conducting couple counseling role plays and demonstrations.
- Contributed to various stages of the research process with multiple manuscripts related to couple and interpersonal functioning, including data analysis, collecting supporting literature, and submitting articles for publication.
- Appointed to a leadership role and facilitated lab activities from July 2013 – July 2014.

**Research Assistant** August 2011 - June 2013  
*Department of Teaching and Learning, University of Louisville*

- Assisted two professors with research projects studying learning abilities of elementary students.
- Gathered data through administering assessments including Woodcock Johnson III subtests and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-4.
- Scored, entered, and analyzed data using SPSS.
- Contributed to manuscript writing, literature searches, and manuscript editing.

**Research and Assessment Associate** July 2010 - July 2011  
*Research Triangle Institute International, Baltimore, Maryland*

- Administered multiple assessments and conducted physiological measures to kindergarten students in Baltimore City for a study assessing emotional regulation and inhibitory control in at risk youth.
- Achieved proficiency in administering the Kaufman Brief Intelligence Test (KBIT), Controlled Oral Word Association Test (COWAT), Peg Tapping Task, Delay of Gratification task (DoG), MacArthur Story Stem Battery (MSSB), and MindWare software for physiological data.
- Worked collaboratively with public school systems and families to recruit participants from racial and ethnic minority communities.
- Managed and entered data into specifically designed databases.

**Research Assistant** June 2010 - June 2011  
*Towson University, Towson Maryland*

- Assisted Director of Counseling Psychology Master's Program, Dr. Christa Schmidt, with research project examining positive psychological variables and physical health of college students.
- Recruited participants through corresponding with professors, speaking to college classes, attending student events, and designing and implementing Facebook advertisements.
- Supervised undergraduate and graduate students assisting with project.
- Managed and input data using SPSS.

## **PUBLICATIONS**

Strokoff, J., Halford, T., & Owen, J. (in press.) Men and Psychotherapy: Meta-Analysis, Empirical Case Study, and Theoretical Foundations. In *APA Handbook of Men and Masculinities*.

Strokoff, J., Owen, J., & Fincham, F. (in press). Diverse reactions to hooking up among U.S. university students. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*.

Quirk, K., Strokoff, J., Owen, J. J., France, T., & Bergen, C. (2014). Relationship Education in Community Settings: Effectiveness with Distressed and Non-Distressed Low-Income Racial Minority Couples. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 40, 442-453.

## **PRESENTATIONS**

Strokoff, J. (2015, May). *Theory and Interventions for Working with Survivors of Political Torture*. Professional Issues Presentation, University of Illinois at Chicago Counseling Center, Chicago, Illinois.

Lubin Langtiw, C., Strokoff, J. (2015, January). *Walking with Survivors of Torture Who are Navigating Immigration: Reflections of a Therapist and Supervisor*. Symposium presentation at the Cultural Impact Conference, Chicago School of Professional Psychology, Chicago, Illinois.

Owen, J., & Strokoff, J. (2013, November). *Infidelity and Commitment Uncertainty in Couple Therapy*. Symposium presentation at the Kentucky Psychological Association Conference, Lexington Kentucky.

Strokoff, J., Quirk, K., & Owen, J. (2013, October). *Group or Couple Format for Couple Interventions: Distress as a Moderator*. Poster presentation at the North American Society for Psychotherapy Research Conference, Memphis, Tennessee.

Sherretz, C. & Strokoff, J. (2013, April). *Mitigating Reading Loss through Summer Boost Reading Program*. Symposium presentation at the Commonwealth Commitment Summit, Morehead State University, Lexington, Kentucky.

Strokoff, J. & Owen, J. (2012, March). *Emotional Reactions and Predictors to Hookups*. Poster presentation at the Great Lakes Counseling Psychology Conference, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.

Strokoff, J. & Owen, J. (2012, March). *Emotional Reactions and Predictors to Hookups*. Poster presentation at the Spring Research Conference, University of Louisville, Louisville Kentucky.

## **OUTREACH EXPERIENCE**

- Mindfulness/Meditation Workshop May 2015  
*Nursing Retreat, University of Illinois at Chicago*
- Passport to Relationships: An Open Discussion on how Culture Influences our Friendship and Relationships April 2015  
*Office of International Services, University of Illinois at Chicago*
- Trade Winds Mentorship Program Skills Training January 2015  
*Office of International Services, University of Illinois at Chicago*
- Building Healthy Stress Management Habits September 2014  
*Occupational Therapy Master's Program, University of Illinois at Chicago*
- Stress Management Workshop September 2014  
*Latin American and Latino Studies Master's Program, University of Illinois at Chicago*
- Radio Guest Speaker about Couple Counseling and Relationships April 2012, June 2013  
*The Stan Frager Radio Show, Louisville, Kentucky*
- Hooking up: Is it just Sex? An Open Discussion about the Potential Benefits and Consequences of Hooking Up among College Students Supported by Recent Research April 2013  
*Indiana University, Southeast, New Albany, Indiana*
- Question, Persuade, Refer: Gatekeeper Training for Suicide Prevention April 2013  
*Indiana University Southeast, New Albany, Indiana*

## **PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

- Two-Day Trauma Training: The Body Keeps the Score November 2014  
*Conducted by Bessel van der Kolk*
- APA DIVISION 29 July 2013 - Present  
*The Division of Psychotherapy*
- APA DIVISION 44 April 2013 - Present  
*Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues*
- Student Member and Presenter October 2013-Present  
*Society of Psychotherapy Research*

Diversity Club Member  
*University of Louisville*

August 2011 – July 2014

Academic Club  
*University of Louisville*

August 2012 – July 2014

Doctoral Student Organization  
*University of Louisville*

August 2011 – July 2014