HOW WE REMEMBER OUR PARENTS AFFECTS HOW WE RELATE TO OUR PARTNERS: SIMILARITY BETWEEN PARTNERS BUT DIFFERENCES AMONG COUPLES?

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Assortative mating describes how individuals with similar characteristics mate each other and how the degree of similarity affects the course of mating. Attachment styles refer to the internal working models that guide how individuals relate to each other and are based on how individuals recollect their parents’ behaviours during their childhood. The literature suggests that attachment styles matter in assortative mating. This study investigates a) whether romantic partners recollect similar parental behaviours and b) whether the degrees of similarity in recollected parental behaviours differ between couples with different levels of relational commitment.

Participants were the partners of 142 heterosexual couples (mean age=33.7, SD=4.4 for men, and mean age=31.9, SD=4.5 for women). Partners in 50.7% of the couples were in long-term relationships; the rest were married. Partners in 35.2% of the couples had at least one child. The participants filled a demographic form and the Parental Bonding Inventory, a 40-item questionnaire that measures recollected overprotection and recollected control per parent. Whether romantic partners recollect similar parental behaviours was tested with the Pearson r. Statistically significant correlations were found in maternal care and overprotection and in paternal overprotection, but not in paternal care. The degree of similarity was operationalized per scale as the absolute difference between the scores of the two partners. The t-test for independent samples was used to test whether the degree of similarity in recollected parental behaviours differ between couples with different levels of relational commitment. No statistically significant differences were found.

This study replicated findings from the assortative mating literature on the existence of similarities in recollected parental behaviours but failed to provide support to the idea that the degree of similarity differs per level of relational commitment.