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Attitude Alignment in Close Relationships

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On the basis of principles of balance theory and interdependence theory, this research examined a phenomenon termed *attitude alignment,* or the tendency of interacting partners to modify their attitudes in such a manner as to achieve attitudinal congruence. The results of three experiments generally were consistent with the proposed model. First, tendencies toward attitude alignment were greater to the extent that attitudinal discrepancies were salient. Second, alignment tendencies were greater to the extent that an issue was central to the partner; there was also evidence that the degree to which an issue was peripheral to the self affected alignment processes (e.g., for changes in centrality of issue, with regard to persuasion methods). Third, degree of alignment tended to be greater in dating-partner interactions than in stranger interactions and tended to be greater among couples with high adjustment than among those with low adjustment.

What happens when close partners hold differing opinions regarding an attitude issue? Under what circumstances do individuals spontaneously change their opinions to develop attitudes that are congruent with those of their romantic partners? The empirical literature has emphasized attitude change arising from active influence attempts on the part of communicators who are strangers to the target of persuasion, examining the effects on attitude change of variables such as communicator expertise, central versus peripheral message cues, and communication context (for a review of the literature, see Petty & Wegener, 1998). Very little research has examined the role that close partners may play in bringing about attitude change.

The present work uses the principles of balance theory (Heider, 1958; Newcomb, 1968) and interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) to develop a model of attitude change in close relationships. We introduce the concept of *attitude alignment,* a phenomenon whereby interacting individuals change their opinions to achieve greater attitudinal congruence. In brief, we suggest that individuals experience discomfort when they discover that their attitudes are inconsistent with those of a close partner and are motivated to change their attitudes to achieve congruence with the attitudes of the partner. We advance hypotheses regarding the effects of salience of attitudinal discrepancy, centrality of issue to self and partner, and strength of unit relationship on attitude alignment and report the results of three experiments designed to test these hypotheses.

In what ways does the present work extend our knowledge of the attitude-change process? Some previous empirical work has examined alignment-relevant phenomena. For example, in previous work, researchers have examined group-induced attitude change in response to perceived group norms (e.g., Asch, 1951; Crutchfield, 1955; Newcomb, 1952; Schachter, 1951); however, the majority of such studies have examined alignment tendencies in experimentally created groups in which participants have quite limited histories of interaction and in which participants have little or no expectation of future interaction. Also, some previous work has explored alignment tendencies as a function of issue importance to the target of persuasion (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Johnson & Eagly, 1989; C. W. Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965; Zuwerink & Devine, 1996); few (or no) prior studies have examined alignment tendencies in relatively more realistic settings in which participants are confronted with an array of issues for which importance varies for both the self and other persons, and few (or no) prior studies have examined interactions in which persuasion attempts may be mutual rather than unilateral. In addition, previous studies typically have examined alignment tendencies with respect to relatively novel or trivial issues (e.g., Asch, 1951; Back, 1951; Sampson & Insko, 1964; M. Sherif, 1935; Steele & Aron, 2000); few prior studies have examined attitude change regarding "real" attitudinal issues, or issues about which participants are likely to have somewhat enduring, preexisting opinions.

On the basis of an interdependence theoretic analysis (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) of persuasion and influence, we assume that opinion change frequently transpires in the context of close involvements (cf. Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Miller & Boster, 1988). Accordingly, it becomes important to examine the process of attitude change in ongoing relationships in which participants have

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some degree of history with one another and some expectation of future interaction (e.g., Orina, Wood, & Simpson, 2000; Steele & Aron, 2000). Moreover, in examining the conditions under which alignment transpires in the course of everyday interaction, it is important to examine (a) alignment processes with respect to real attitudinal issues about which individuals are likely to hold somewhat enduring, preexisting opinions, (b) ecologically valid interpersonal settings in which individuals actively interact with one another, serving as both target and source of persuasion, and (c) alignment tendencies with respect to a variety of attitude issues, including issues that vary in importance to both individuals (e.g., partners may "give way" on some issues but "hold firm" on others). Moreover, it will be important to evaluate the extent to which alignment tendencies observed in an experimental context actually persist over time. To our knowledge, the present research represents the first attempt to explore alignment tendencies in this sort of ecologically valid, inherently interpersonal context.

Attitudinal Similarity and Attraction

What does the empirical literature tell us about attitude change in the context of close relationships? The empirical literature demonstrates that friends and romantic partners tend to be similar to one another in a variety of respects. Close partners exhibit greater than chance similarity with respect to nonattitudinal variables such as demographic characteristics, personality, achievement orientation, and physical attractiveness; such similarity to a close partner is positively associated with attraction and probability of persistence in a relationship (Feingold, 1988; Hill, Rubin, & Peplau, 1976; Kandel, 1978; Schoen & Wooldredge, 1989; Till & Freedman, 1978). Moreover, attitudinal similarity has been shown to yield enhanced attraction between strangers, and people with similar attitudes are preferred as potential coworkers, dates, and marital partners (Byrne & Nelson, 1965; Stroebe, Insko, Thompson, & Layton, 1971).

How does attitudinal similarity between close partners come into existence? Is similarity primarily the product of selection, such that relationships are more likely to be established and persist to the extent that partners possess similar attitudes? Is similarity the product of availability, resulting from the fact that we are more likely to encounter similar than dissimilar potential partners (i.e., de facto similarity)? We propose that although selection and availability may play some role in explaining why close partners possess similar attitudes, these factors at best represent a partial explanation of attitudinal similarity during later stages of ongoing relationships. Why so? First, attitudes do not remain static over the course of a lifetime. Partners sometimes change their attitudes about a given issue, and such change may create dissimilarity in the relationship. Second, the pool of attitude issues does not remain static over the course of a lifetime. As partners develop attitudes about novel issues, their new attitudes may be dissimilar. Thus, initial selection and availability would appear to provide an incomplete explanation of the existence of similarity in ongoing relationships.

We suggest that, at least in part, similarity between close partners is attributable to close partners' active attempts to create attitudinal similarity. Specifically, we propose that close partners engage in a phenomenon termed *attitude alignment*, defined as the extent to which individuals change their attitudes in such a manner as to bring their attitudes into closer alignment with the attitudes of another person (or group of persons). Indeed, the empirical literature suggests that people sometimes change their attitudes toward those of close partners and reference-group members, and that in cohesive groups people exhibit tendencies toward uniformity of opinion (e.g., Back, 1951; Festinger & Thibaut, 1951; Kelley & Volkhart, 1952; Newcomb, 1961; Steele & Aron, 2000). However, once again, no studies have examined alignment tendencies in the sort of rich, ecologically valid context that we propose is essential.

Balance Theory and Attitudinal Similarity

Why might individuals be motivated to achieve and sustain attitudinal similarity with close partners? Balance theory is a particularly useful framework from which to address this question (Heider, 1946, 1958; Newcomb, 1953, 1968). The fundamental tenet of balance theory is that cognitions tend to be organized in a harmonious manner. That is, the perceived associations among a perceiver (p), another person (o), and an attitude object (x) tend to be consistent (or balanced), such that (a) if p likes o, p feels comfortable when p and o hold similar attitudes about x and (b) if p dislikes o, p feels comfortable when p and o hold different attitudes about x. Consistent with these claims, imbalanced triads have been shown to yield negative affect, physiological arousal, and changes in the relationships among elements of the triad (e.g., Burdick & Burnes, 1958; Jordan, 1953; Taylor, 1967; Tsai & Levenson, 1997). Of particular relevance to the present work, previous research has demonstrated that individuals are more likely to align their attitudes toward people whom they like (vs. dislike; Chaiken & Eagly, 1983; Sampson & Insko, 1964).

Several properties of interaction situations may enhance the degree of tension experienced in response to imbalanced triads. Newcomb (1959) hypothesized that increases in any of the following should result in increased tension because of imbalance: (a) attraction to the other person, o; (b) importance of the attitude object, x; (c) degree of commitment to own attitude; or (d) relevance of x to the relationship. In short, the greater the strength of the relationships among elements of the triad, the greater should be imbalance-induced tension. Indeed, people report experiencing greater tension when imbalanced triads involve an "important" x, with *importance* defined in terms of self-reported importance of agreement with others regarding a given topic (Rodrigues, 1965). Consistent with Newcomb (1959), we suggest that imbalance-induced tension increases as a function of (a) relationship closeness, or the strength of the p–o relationship; (b) centrality of issue to the self, or the strength of the p–x relationship; and (c) centrality of issue to the partner, or the strength of the o–x relationship.

Thus, symmetrical relationships are argued to be more pleasant than asymmetrical relationships—that is, individuals presumably feel comfortable when their attitudes are similar to those of their close partners and experience discomfort when they hold dissimilar attitudes. The discomfort produced by dissimilarity is argued to be greater to the extent that p–o–x relationships are stronger. How might close partners reduce or eliminate the discomfort associated with attitudinal dissimilarity? First, partners may alter their attraction to one another, thereby modifying the p–o link. Second, partners may avoid confronting the issue about which they disagree, thereby eliminating awareness of p–o–x imbalance. Third, partners may change in such a manner as to bring their

attitudes into alignment, modifying either the *p–x* link or the *o–x* link. Alternatively, partners may address imbalance through less explicit means, such as by cognitively distorting the other person's attitude or by reducing the importance of the issue about which they disagree (e.g., Byrne & Blaylock, 1963).

Given that any of the above methods may reduce imbalance, by what process do people determine the optimal path toward attaining balance? We suggest that asymmetries typically are resolved according to the principle of least effort (Rosenberg & Abelson, 1960)—that is, individuals typically eliminate the discomfort associated with attitudinal discrepancy through the least psychologically effortful mechanism. We assume that in ongoing close relationships, it is generally unlikely that partners will reduce the discomfort associated with attitudinal dissimilarity by modifying the *p–o* link (e.g., reducing their attraction to one another). Rather, individuals are likely to engage in the less costly strategy of modifying the attitude-relevant *p–x* or *o–x* links, either directly (i.e., by changing their own attitudes or attempting to influence the partner's attitudes) or indirectly (i.e., by changing the strength or centrality of the issue about which they disagree). This mechanism for achieving balance—directly or indirectly modifying the *p–x* or *o–x* links—is the focus of the present work.

Newcomb (1953) proposed that "it is an almost constant human necessity to orient oneself toward objects in the environment and also toward persons associated with those same objects" (p. 294). In other words, orientations (attitudes toward objects and attraction to persons) are acquired interdependently toward persons and toward objects associated with those persons. Newcomb (1959) emphasized the importance of communication in resolving imbalance, proposing that communication occurs as an instrumental response to tension. Newcomb's (1959) analysis suggests that partners may resolve the discomfort associated with attitudinal dissimilarity through discussion leading to attitude change on the part of one or both partners.

Of course, attitudinal dissimilarity presumably produces discomfort only insofar as dissimilarity becomes salient to partners. So long as dissimilarity is implicit rather than explicit—or exists at the periphery of partners' awareness—discomfort should be minimal, in that partners can avoid confronting the issue about which they disagree (i.e., they can avoid addressing *p–o–x* imbalance). Accordingly, the first hypothesis guiding the present work is termed the *salience of misalignment hypothesis*: We predict that when partners become aware of attitudinal dissimilarities, they will change their attitudes in such a manner as to bring their attitudes into closer alignment. Specifically, we predict that greater attitude alignment will occur for salient attitudinal discrepancies than for nonsalient attitudinal discrepancies.

In addition—and based on the principle of least effort—we suggest that attitude alignment is more probable to the extent that a given issue is peripheral to personal identity; individuals should be disinclined to change attitudes about issues that are central to the self. *Centrality to self* is defined as the extent to which a given attitude issue is important to an individual's view of the self, or central to the individual's self-concept. Attitudes that are central to the self arguably are firmly embedded in the individual's belief system, being linked to other important attitudes, key values, firmly held beliefs, and personal identity (Pomeranz, Chaiken, & Tordesillas, 1995); indeed, past research has demonstrated that such important, or "ego-involved," attitudes are more resistant to change (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Johnson & Eagly, 1989; C. W. Sherif et al., 1965; Zuwerink & Devine, 1996). Thus, it should be relatively more effortful for individuals to change their attitudes when a given issue is central to the self than for an issue that is peripheral to the self.

In parallel manner, we suggest that attitude alignment is more probable to the extent that a given issue is central to the partner's identity; individuals should be disinclined to change attitudes about issues that are peripheral to the partner. Centrality to partner is defined as the extent to which a given attitude issue is important to the partner's view of the self, or central to the partner's self-concept. The second hypothesis guiding the present work is termed the *centrality of issue hypothesis*: We predict that for salient attitudinal discrepancies, greater alignment will occur (a) for issues that are peripheral to the self than for issues that are central to the self and (b) for issues that are central to the partner than for issues that are peripheral to the partner.

Moreover, we suggest that the discomfort associated with attitude misalignment will be related to strength of unit relationship. Specifically, we propose that attitudinal discrepancies produce greater discomfort to the extent that partners are relatively closer to one another. We offer two lines of reasoning in support of this prediction. First, on the basis of the balance theoretic perspective outlined above (Newcomb, 1959), to the degree that the *p–o* relationship is stronger—to the extent that partners perceive that they are close and "belong together"—there should be greater pressure on the dyad for change in either *p–x* or *o–x* (or both) associations. Second, on the basis of an interdependence theoretic perspective (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), attitude misalignment is relevant to the concept of "correspondence of outcomes." Correspondence describes the extent to which partners agree (vs. disagree) about the desirability of specific joint activities. When *p* and *o* disagree about issue *x*, such misalignment may directly yield noncorrespondence (e.g., differing party affiliation affects decisions about political contributions). Alternatively, misalignment may indirectly yield noncorrespondence (e.g., disagreement about finances affects decisions about whether to dine out on Friday or where to go on vacation). Irrespective of whether misalignment exerts direct or indirect effects on noncorrespondence, to the degree that interdependence is greater (the *p–o* relationship is stronger), noncorrespondent preferences (disagreement about *x*) become more problematic, and pressure toward alignment should be greater.

Thus, parallel predictions are advanced by balance theory and interdependence theory. Accordingly, our third hypothesis, termed the *strength of unit relationship hypothesis*, predicts that, for salient attitudinal discrepancies, greater attitude alignment will occur for close partners than for nonclose partners. Note that this prediction does not imply an absence of alignment among strangers. Simple agreement effects are quite probable in stranger dyads (e.g., Rodrigues, 1965), the precise form of which rests on the assumptions participants bring to the *p–o–x* situation. For example, to the extent that *p* is concerned with being liked by *o*, or to the extent that *p* is concerned about being "right" in his or her attitude about *x*, some degree of alignment is likely to be observed in nonclose dyads (Insko, 1984). (Indeed, much of the extant literature regarding conformity and persuasion processes concerns alignment processes among strangers.)

In the present work, we operationally define closeness in two ways. First, we assessed closeness among dating partners using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). The DAS is something of a "gold standard" for assessing couple well-being, in that it taps diverse components of subjective closeness such as companionship, shared activities, effective problem solving, emotional intimacy, and physical affection. (An index of subjective closeness and "belongingness," such as the DAS, is preferable to "objective" indexes, such as duration of relationship or relationship status [dating casually vs. exclusively], in that objective indexes do not capture the subjective experience of increasing interdependence [e.g., some relationships become close more quickly than others; e.g., Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998]). We anticipate that tendencies toward attitude alignment will be greater among couples with high dyadic adjustment than among couples with low dyadic adjustment. Second, we examined the process of attitude alignment in interactions between both dating partners and strangers, predicting that tendencies toward alignment would be greater in dating-partner interactions than in stranger interactions.

By what psychological mechanisms do close partners achieve attitude alignment? Although we did not examine precise mechanisms of change in the present work, we suggest that (a) alignment may come about as a consequence of either normative or informational social influence—individuals may change because they wish to gain acceptance by the partner or they may change because the partner provides evidence about reality; (b) alignment may be either partner-generated or self-generated—individuals may change as a consequence of pressure exerted by the partner or desire to change may reside primarily in the self; and (c) alignment may be a conscious phenomenon or an unconscious phenomenon—individuals may or may not be aware of the fact that they have changed their attitudes toward the partner's attitudes (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Insko, Smith, Alicke, Wade, & Taylor, 1985; Steele & Aron, 2000; Uleman & Bargh, 1989). For example, partners may exert active pressure on one another during the course of everyday interaction, delivering information in persuasive appeals intended to bring about attitude alignment. Alternatively, individuals may spontaneously—perhaps unconsciously—exhibit attitude change in the absence of new information, simply because they wish to become more similar to their partners.

We conducted three experiments to test predictions derived from our general model of attitude alignment. All three experiments examined attitude alignment among dating partners, exploring tendencies toward alignment for issues that varied in centrality to the self and centrality to the partner. Also, all three experiments examined tendencies toward attitude alignment as a function of strength of unit relationship, operationally defined in terms of dyadic adjustment. In addition, in Experiment 1, we examined tendencies toward alignment for salient versus nonsalient attitudinal discrepancies; in Experiment 2, we examined the persistence over time of alignment observed during laboratory sessions; and, in Experiment 3, we examined tendencies toward alignment in both dating-partner interactions and stranger interactions.

Experiment 1

In Experiment 1, dating partners completed a questionnaire that assessed each partner's attitudes about a variety of issues, as well as the centrality of each issue to each person's identity. We identified several attitude issues about which partners disagreed—some issues that were central to the men's identity but peripheral to the women's, and some issues that were central to the women's identity but peripheral to the men's. We asked partners to discuss half of the issues about which they disagreed. The issues that the partners discussed represented the salient-discrepancies condition, and the comparable issues that the partners did not discuss represented the nonsalient-discrepancies condition. Following their discussion, we assessed partners' attitudes once again. Attitude alignment was defined in terms of attitude change in the direction of the partner's initial attitude.

Experiment 1 was designed to test three hypotheses. First, and consistent with the principle of least effort, we anticipated that attitude misalignment would produce discomfort only insofar as a given attitudinal discrepancy becomes salient to partners. We assumed that, so long as attitude misalignment remains nonsalient, discomfort would be minimal or nonexistent. Accordingly, the salience of misalignment hypothesis predicted a main effect of salience of attitudinal discrepancy on attitude alignment, such that greater alignment would occur in the salient-discrepancies condition than in the nonsalient-discrepancies condition.

Second, and also consistent with the principle of least effort, we anticipated that attitude alignment would occur more readily to the extent that a given attitude issue was peripheral to personal identity, reasoning that individuals would be relatively reluctant to change their attitudes about issues that were central to their identities. In parallel manner, we anticipated that individuals would more readily engage in attitude alignment to the extent that a given issue was central to the partner's identity, reasoning that individuals would feel disinclined to change their attitudes about issues that were peripheral to the partner's identity. In addition, we anticipated that the effects of centrality of issue to self and partner would be evident only to the extent that attitude misalignment was salient; given that nonsalient misalignment arguably produces little or no discomfort, issue centrality should affect alignment only for salient misalignments. Accordingly, in Experiment 1 the centrality of issue hypothesis predicted an interaction of salience of discrepancy with centrality of issue to self and partner, such that in the salient-discrepancies condition, greater alignment would occur for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner than for issues that were central to the self and peripheral to the partner.

Third, we anticipated that the discomfort accompanying salient attitudinal misalignment would be a direct function of strength of unit relationship, such that salient misalignment would yield greater pressure toward alignment for strong unit relationships than for weak unit relationships. In the present research, we defined strength of unit relationship in terms of dyadic adjustment (Spanier, 1976), a frequently used index of quality of couple functioning. Given that strength of unit relationship is likely to influence attitude alignment only to the extent that attitudinal discrepancies become salient to partners, the strength of unit relationship hypothesis predicted an interaction of salience of discrepancy with dyadic adjustment, such that in the salient-discrepancies condition, greater alignment would occur among couples with high dyadic adjustment than among those with low dyadic adjustment.

Method

Participants. Participants were partners in 40 dating relationships (40 women, 40 men). Couples volunteered to take part in the experiment in partial fulfillment of the requirements for introductory psychology courses at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Sign-up sheets indicated that to participate it was necessary that participants be involved in a dating relationship of at least 1 week in duration. Participants were asked to bring their dating partners with them to take part in the experiment. If both partners were enrolled in introductory psychology courses, both received credit for participation; partners who were not enrolled in introductory psychology courses took part in the experiment on a voluntary basis.

Participants were 19.28 years old on average, the majority were freshmen or sophomores (40% freshmen, 35% sophomores, 13% juniors, and 10% seniors), and the majority were Caucasian (3% Asian American, 4% African American, and 94% Caucasian). Partners had been involved with each other for an average of 13.76 months, the majority described their involvements as steady dating relationships (11% dating casually, 9% dating regularly, 71% dating steadily, and 5% engaged or married), and the majority described their relationships as exclusive (83% said neither partner dated others, 7% said one partner dated others, and 11% said both dated others).

Procedure. When the couple arrived at the experimental session, they were seated in separate cubicles so that they could not view one another's questionnaire responses. Participants were asked to complete two instruments: (a) an attitudes questionnaire, in which they provided information regarding their attitudes about a variety of issues, as well as the centrality of each issue to their personal identity; and (b) a relationships questionnaire in which they provided information regarding relationship closeness. On the basis of participants' responses to the attitudes questionnaire, we selected eight issues about which partners in a given relationship disagreed—four issues that were central to the man but peripheral to the woman, and four issues that were central to the woman but peripheral to the man. Four of the eight issues were selected as issues for discussion—two issues that were central to the man but peripheral to the woman, and two issues that were central to the woman but peripheral to the man.[1]

The experimenter then escorted the partners to a central room, gave them note cards listing the issues for discussion, and asked them to spend 3 min discussing each issue. Participants were instructed to take turns telling one another "how you feel about each issue and why you feel the way that you do." The experimenter then left the room and allowed partners to discuss each issue. Following the discussion, participants completed the attitudes questionnaire a second time; they were assured that their partners would not be informed of their answers to the postdiscussion questionnaire. Throughout the experiment, we emphasized that there were "no right or wrong" attitudes or ways of discussing issues. At the end of the session, participants were thanked for their assistance and were thoroughly debriefed.

Manipulating salience of attitudinal discrepancy and centrality of issue to self and partner. We used information from the prediscussion attitudes questionnaire to select eight attitude issues about which partners in a given relationship disagreed. Disagreement was operationally defined as a disparity of four or more scale points on a 9-point scale. To manipulate centrality of issue to self and partner, we selected four discrepant issues that were rated as central to personal identity by the man but as peripheral to personal identity by the woman, and selected four discrepant issues that were rated as central by the woman but peripheral by the man. Centrality was operationally defined in terms of scores on a 9-point centrality scale—central issues were those rated 5 or higher on the scale and peripheral issues were those rated 4 or lower.

To manipulate salience of discrepancy, we asked couples to discuss four of the eight issues about which they disagreed; the four comparable issues that the partners were not asked to discuss represented the nonsalient-discrepancies condition. It should be recognized that in the "nonsalient"-discrepancies condition, issues to some degree were "salient," in that each issue was addressed in the questionnaire participants completed (presumably, some individuals were aware of the fact that they and their partners held differing opinions for some issues); at the same time, issues to some degree were nonsalient, in that we did not ask partners to discuss issue discrepancies. Thus, we believe it is appropriate to characterize issues in this discussion as relatively nonsalient. (To the extent that partners were completely unaware that they and their partners disagreed about a nonsalient issue, it may be suitable to characterize the nonsalient condition as a control condition designed to demonstrate that little or no opinion change occurs when partners do not actively address and discuss attitudinal discrepancies.) In both the salient- and nonsalient-discrepancies conditions, two issues were central to the man but peripheral to the woman, and two issues were central to the woman but peripheral to the man.

Questionnaires. The attitudes questionnaire included 51 morality-relevant issues adapted from the game Scruples (e.g., "A grisly murder in your area causes an outcry and a referendum on capital punishment. Do you vote to restore the death penalty?" "The restaurant which serves your favorite ethnic dishes is fined for exploiting immigrant labor. Do you leave a good tip?" "Your teenage daughter is dating a young man of another race. Do you try to break them up?"). Participants provided information regarding (a) attitudes about each issue (e.g., "You are a high school principal. Will you hire a competent teacher who is a homosexual?" 0 = *no chance*, 8 = *definitely hire*); and (b) the centrality of each issue to personal identity (i.e., "indicate the degree to which the issue is central to who you are and how you think about yourself" 0 = *do not feel strongly about the issue*, 8 = *feel very strongly about the issue*).[2] The relationships questionnaire included the DAS (Spanier, 1976), a 32-item instrument that assesses aspects of couple closeness such as intimacy, companionship, physical affection, and sexuality (e.g., "How often do you think things are going well between you and your partner?" 0 = *never*, 5 = *all the time*; $\alpha = .89$).

Measuring attitude alignment. Attitude alignment involves attitude change of a form that yields enhanced congruence with the attitudes of one's partner. Attitude alignment was operationally defined as the discrepancy between the participant's prediscussion and postdiscussion attitudes

[1] Did our selection criteria yield any systematic differences in issue content as a function of centrality of issue or participant sex? The probability with which each of 51 issues was selected as target varied from 0% to 4.69%—values that do not differ greatly from the expected probability of 1.96% (i.e., no issue was disproportionally selected as target). It is inherent in our selection criteria that issues selected as central for a given participant were peripheral for that individual's partner, so it is not possible (nor is it sensible) to assess differential selection as a function of issue centrality or participant sex. Sixteen percent of the issues (8 out of 51) might be loosely characterized as relationship relevant (e.g., "Your teenage son purchases a 'hot' car stereo from a friend for $25. Do you allow him to keep it?"). The probability with which a relationship-relevant issue was selected as target varied from 0% to 4.23%, with an average probability of 2.11%—values that do not differ greatly from the overall range reported above, or from the expected probability of 1.96%. The very small variations that were observed in probability of selection are largely attributable to order of issue in the questionnaire, in that the experimenter proceeded through the list of issues until she located an issue fitting the selection criteria. Given that issues were randomly ordered in the questionnaire—and in light of the rather narrow range of observed probabilities—there is little reason for concern that issue content varied in any systematic manner across conditions.

[2] SCRUPLES, trademark and copyright 1999 by Hasbro, Inc. Used with permission. Items in the attitudes questionnaire were phrased as hypothetical, attitude-relevant situations. We asked participants to imagine themselves in each situation and to indicate how they would behave. Thus, the attitude items were more similar to a measure of behavioral intentions than a measure of direct, evaluation-only attitudes.

about a given issue. This score was assigned a positive value if observed change represented movement toward the partner's prediscussion attitude and was assigned a negative value if observed change represented movement away from the partner's prediscussion attitude. We calculated measures of alignment for a total of eight issues—for four salient discrepancies (issues that were discussed) and for four nonsalient discrepancies (issues that were not discussed). Two of the salient discrepancies were central to the man but peripheral to the woman, and two were central to the woman but peripheral to the man; the same was true for the nonsalient discrepancies. Thus, for each condition in our 2 (salience of discrepancy) × 2 (centrality of issue) design, we calculated two measures of alignment for the man and two measures of alignment for the woman. To develop a single measure of each construct for each experimental condition, separately for each partner, we averaged the two relevant measures of alignment. Within a given couple, the combination of the two partners' scores represents total alignment for a given couple.

Results

Effects of salience of discrepancy and centrality of issue. To examine the effects of salience of attitudinal discrepancy and centrality of issue on attitude alignment, we performed a three-factor within-couple analysis of variance (ANOVA), including as independent variables salience of attitudinal discrepancy (salient vs. nonsalient), centrality of issue (central to self and peripheral to partner vs. peripheral to self and central to partner), and sex (male vs. female). Given that this is a within-couple analysis—that is, given that the couple is the unit of analysis rather than the individual—the sum of the eight alignment scores for a given observation (i.e., for a given couple) represents total alignment for each couple across the four types of issues (e.g., for the salient condition, the sum of his score for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner and her score for issues that were central to the self and peripheral to the partner represents the couple's total alignment for salient-issue discrepancies that are peripheral to the man and central to the woman). Figure 1 presents mean levels of attitude alignment as a function of salience of discrepancy and centrality of issue.

Consistent with the salience of misalignment hypothesis, the analysis revealed a significant main effect of salience of attitudinal discrepancy, with individuals exhibiting greater attitude alignment for salient discrepancies than for nonsalient discrepancies (Ms = 1.52 vs. 0.22), $F(1, 39) = 82.54$, $p < .01$. Additionally, consistent with the centrality of issue hypothesis, the analysis revealed a significant interaction of salience of discrepancy with centrality of issue to self and partner, $F(1, 39) = 18.20$, $p < .01$. As anticipated, follow-up tests of simple effects revealed that centrality of issue did not significantly affect attitude alignment in the nonsalient-discrepancies condition (Ms = 0.18 vs. 0.25), $F(1, 39) = 0.35$, $p < .56$, whereas, in the salient-discrepancies condition, individuals exhibited greater alignment for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner than for issues that were central to the self and peripheral to the partner (Ms = 2.15 vs. 0.89), $F(1, 39) = 21.41$, $p < .01$. The analysis also revealed a significant main effect of centrality of issue—on average, individuals exhibited greater alignment for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner than for issues that were central to the self and peripheral to the partner (Ms = 1.20 vs. 0.54), $F(1, 39) = 17.26$, $p < .01$. No other main effects or interactions were significant.[3]

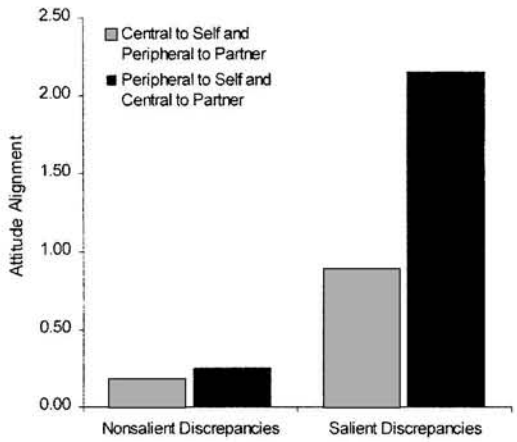

Figure 1. Attitude alignment as a function of salience of attitudinal discrepancy and centrality of issue: Experiment 1.

[3] In addition to measuring attitude alignment, we also measured prediscussion-to-postdiscussion changes in self-reported centrality of issue. We speculated that individuals might resolve the discomfort associated with misalignment by either changing their attitudes or by modifying their feelings regarding the centrality of misaligned attitudes. Thus, we performed a three-factor within-couple ANOVA on measures of change in self-reported centrality of issue, including as independent variables salience of attitudinal discrepancy, centrality of issue, and sex. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of salience of attitudinal discrepancy, with individuals exhibiting greater increases in self-reported centrality of issue for salient discrepancies than for nonsalient discrepancies (Ms = 0.81 vs. 0.21), $F(1, 39) = 14.93$, $p < .01$. The analysis also revealed a significant main effect of centrality of issue—on average, partners exhibited greater increases in self-reported centrality for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner than for issues that were central to the self and peripheral to the partner (Ms = 1.34 vs. −0.32), $F(1, 39) = 134.67$, $p < .01$. The interaction of salience of discrepancy with centrality of issue was also significant, $F(1, 39) = 27.86$, $p < .01$. Follow-up tests revealed that salience of discrepancy did not significantly affect change in centrality for issues that were central to the self and peripheral to the partner (Ms = −0.40 vs. −0.24), $F(1, 39) = 1.20$, $p < .28$, whereas, for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner, individuals exhibited greater change in centrality for salient discrepancies than for nonsalient discrepancies (Ms = 2.02 vs. 0.66), $F(1, 39) = 28.17$, $p < .01$. In short, when salient discrepancies concerned issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner, individuals not only changed their attitudes to bring them into closer alignment with those of the partner, they also came to believe that the attitudes were more important, or central to their personal identity. (The analysis also revealed a significant interaction of salience of discrepancy with sex, $F[1, 39] = 5.59$, $p < .02$. Follow-up tests revealed that in the salient-discrepancies condition, men exhibited greater increases in self-reported centrality than did women [Ms = 1.05 vs. 0.57], $F[1, 39] = 5.91$, $p < .02$; in the nonsalient-discrepancies condition, men and women did not exhibit differential change in centrality [Ms = 0.19 vs. 0.24], $F[1, 39] = 0.13$, $p < .72$.)

Do changes in centrality and changes in attitude operate in parallel? We performed correlational analyses to examine the relationship between attitude change and change in centrality. These analyses were performed only for the salient-discrepancies condition (there is little reason to further explore behavior in the nonsalient-discrepancies condition). When issues were peripheral to the self and central to the partner, there was a positive relationship of attitude change with change in centrality. That is, when

Effects of dyadic adjustment. To test the strength of unit relationship hypothesis, we averaged the male and female partners' adjustment scores within each couple and performed a median split to divide couples into high- versus low-adjustment groups. To examine the association of dyadic adjustment with attitude alignment, we performed a four-factor ANOVA, including salience of attitudinal discrepancy, centrality of issue, and sex as within-couple variables and including dyadic adjustment (low vs. high adjustment) as a between-couples variable. Figure 2 presents mean levels of attitude alignment as a function of salience of discrepancy and dyadic adjustment. Figures 3a and 3b present mean levels of attitude alignment as a function of salience of discrepancy and centrality of issue, separately for couples with high versus low dyadic adjustment.

Inconsistent with the strength of unit relationship hypothesis, the two-factor interaction of dyadic adjustment with salience of discrepancy was nonsignificant (see Figures 2a and 2b), $F(1, 38) = 0.91, p < .35$. However, follow-up tests revealed suggestive evidence relevant to this prediction: In the salient-discrepancies condition, the simple effect of adjustment approached marginal significance, with high-adjustment couples exhibiting somewhat greater alignment than low-adjustment couples (Ms = 1.67 vs. 1.39), $F(1, 38) = 2.60, p < .12$; in the nonsalient-discrepancies condition, the simple effect of adjustment was nonsignificant (Ms = 0.22 vs. 0.22), $F(1, 38) = 0.00, p < .99$. In addition, follow-up tests revealed that the simple effect of salience of discrepancy was slightly stronger among couples with high dyadic adjustment (Ms = 1.66 vs. 0.22), $F(1, 19) = 43.37, p < .01$, than among those with low dyadic adjustment (Ms = 1.38 vs. 0.22), $F(1, 19) = 39.24, p < .01$. No other main effects or interactions were significant.[4]

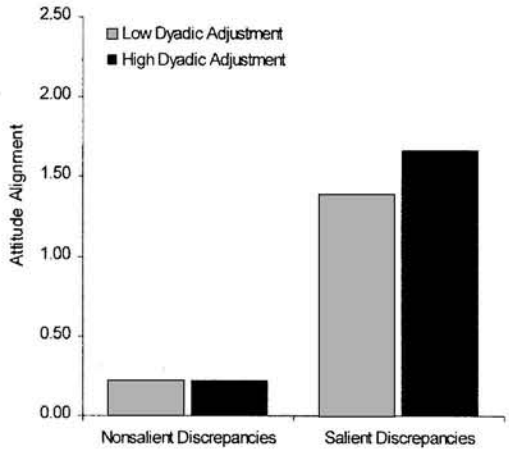

Figure 2. Attitude alignment as a function of salience of attitudinal discrepancy and dyadic adjustment: Experiment 1.

Discussion

Consistent with the salience of misalignment hypothesis, in Experiment 1 individuals exhibited greater attitude alignment in the salient-discrepancies condition than in the nonsalient-discrepancies condition. Should the nonsalient-discrepancies condition be construed as substantively meaningful, or should this condition be construed as a straightforward control group? Arguing that this condition is substantively interpretable as a nonsalient-discrepancies condition, we might note that in the nonsalient condition, issues were brought to mind by virtue of the fact that participants completed questionnaire responses for all issues; presumably, some participants knew that they and their partners held differing opinions regarding some issues. Arguing that this condition is more suitably described as a control condition, we might note that, to the extent that partners were completely unaware of disagreement regarding issues, they could not reasonably be expected to change their opinions. Whether the nonsalient condition is described as substantively meaningful or as a straightforward control group, it was important to include this condition as a baseline against which to assess the amount of alignment that transpires in the absence of actively confronting and discussing discrepant issues. The observed findings are consistent with the assumption that holding an attitude that is discrepant with a partner's attitude produces discomfort only insofar as the partners cannot avoid confronting a given issue. Indeed, we found that so long as dissimilarity remained implicit—or low in salience—partners were able to avoid the discomfort that otherwise might be associated with attitudinal dissimilarity, and no attitude change occurred. When close partners confront attitude discrepancies, they are motivated to correct this imbalance in the p–o–x system by changing their attitudes.

Consistent with the centrality of issue hypothesis, when attitudinal discrepancies were salient, individuals exhibited greater alignment for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner than for issues that were central to the self and peripheral to the partner. That is, dating partners changed their attitudes to create congruence with a partner's attitudes when it was not particularly difficult for them to change (for peripheral to self issues) but it would be difficult for the partner to change (for

individuals aligned peripheral-to-self, central-to-partner attitudes toward the attitudes of their dating partners, they also tended to exhibit increases in the centrality of those issues (for men, $r = .21, p < .19$; for women, $r = .41, p < .01$). In contrast, when issues were central to the self and peripheral to the partner, there was a negative relationship of attitude change with change in centrality. That is, when individuals did not align central-to-self, peripheral-to-partner attitudes toward the attitudes of their partners, they instead tended to exhibit increases in self-reported centrality; when they aligned such attitudes, they tended to exhibit decreases in self-reported centrality (for men, $r = -.37, p < .02$; for women, $r = -.30, p < .06$).

[4] Using a continuous measure of dyadic adjustment, we performed a four-factor analysis, including salience of attitudinal discrepancy, centrality of issue, and sex as categorical within-couple variables and including dyadic adjustment as a continuous between-couples variable. As in the analysis representing adjustment as a categorical variable, the interaction of adjustment with salience of discrepancy was nonsignificant, $F(1, 38) = 0.91, p < .35$. Once again, follow-up tests revealed suggestive evidence relevant to the strength of unit relationship hypothesis: In the salient-discrepancies condition, the simple effect of adjustment approached marginal significance, $F(1, 38) = 2.44, p < .13$, with high-adjustment couples exhibiting greater alignment than low-adjustment couples; in the nonsalient-discrepancies condition, the simple effect of adjustment was nonsignificant, $F(1, 38) = 1.25, p < .27$.

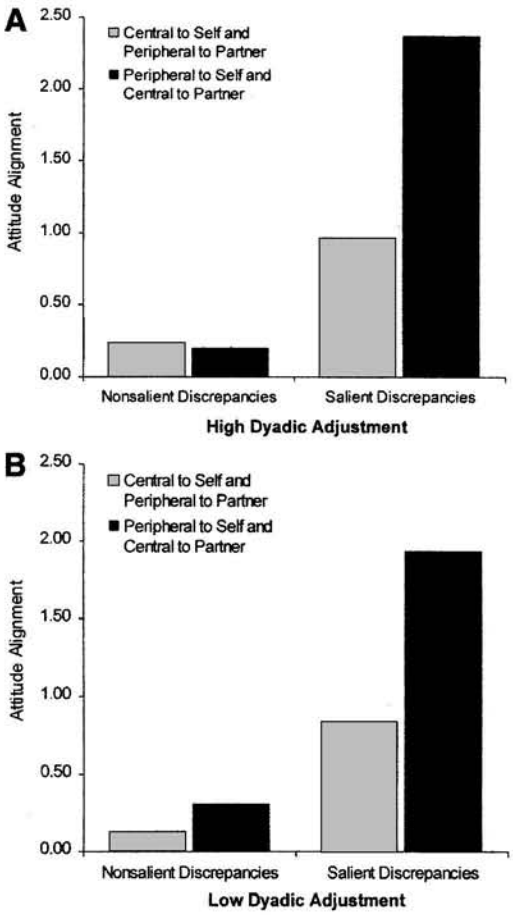

Figure 3. Attitude alignment as a function of salience of attitudinal discrepancy, centrality of issue, and dyadic adjustment: Experiment 1.

central to partner issues). (Or people expected their partners to change when it was not particularly difficult for the partner to change but it would be difficult for the self to change.)

The strength of unit relationship hypothesis was not directly supported in Experiment 1, in that the interaction of salience of discrepancy with dyadic adjustment was nonsignificant. However, we obtained suggestive evidence relevant to this prediction, in that in the salient-discrepancies condition the simple effect of dyadic adjustment approached marginal significance. That is, there was suggestive evidence that, compared with couples with poor adjustment, couples with good adjustment may be somewhat more likely to change their attitudes in such a manner as to produce attitudinal congruence.

Experiments 2 and 3

The results of Experiment 1 suggest that attitude alignment may be relatively more probable when one person feels very strongly about an attitude issue whereas the partner does not. The person for whom an issue is peripheral is inclined to change his or her attitude in the direction of the partner for whom the issue is central. However, in Experiment 1 we did not examine all possible combinations of issue centrality. Thus, we do not know whether people are willing to change attitudes when they and their partners disagree about issues that are equally central (or equally peripheral) to the partner and the self. In Experiments 2 and 3, we examined all four combinations of centrality of issue to self and partner. Accordingly, in Experiments 2 and 3, the centrality of issue hypothesis implies two predictions: (a) a main effect of centrality to self, with greater alignment occurring for discrepant issues that are peripheral to the self than for those that are central to the self, and (b) a main effect of centrality to partner, with greater alignment occurring for discrepant issues that are central to the partner than for those that are peripheral to the partner.

As in Experiment 1, in Experiments 2 and 3 strength of unit relationship was operationally defined in terms of dyadic adjustment. In Experiment 3, we also operationally defined strength of unit relationship in terms of relationship type: Individuals who were involved in dating relationships participated in a laboratory session with either an opposite-sex stranger or with the dating partner. Accordingly, in Experiments 2 and 3 the strength of unit relationship hypothesis implies two predictions: (a) a main effect of dyadic adjustment among dating partners in Experiments 2 and 3, with greater alignment occurring among couples with high adjustment than among those with low adjustment, and (b) a main effect of relationship type in Experiment 3, with greater alignment occurring in dating-partner interactions than in stranger interactions.

Given that Experiment 1 revealed unambiguous results regarding salience of misalignment, we did not manipulate salience of attitudinal discrepancy in Experiments 2 and 3. As in Experiment 1, attitude alignment was examined by calculating whether each person exhibited change in the direction of the partner's initial attitude. Does attitude alignment observed in an experimental setting reflect enduring attitude change? To determine whether observed attitude change was enduring, in Experiment 2 we also assessed attitudes 1 week following the initial laboratory session.

Method

Participants. Participants in Experiment 2 were partners in 45 dating relationships (45 women, 45 men), and participants in Experiment 3 were partners in 54 dating relationships (54 women, 54 men). We recruited couples in the same manner as in Experiment 1, asking participants to bring their dating partners with them to take part in the experiment. In Experiment 3, couples were randomly assigned to one of two relationship-type conditions (stranger vs. dating partner). We telephoned Experiment 3 couples the day before the scheduled session, informing those in the stranger condition that they would be directed to separate rooms when they arrived at the research session, and would interact with a stranger rather than with the dating partner.

Participants were 19.09 years old on average, the majority were freshmen or sophomores (46% freshmen, 28% sophomores, 17% juniors, and 9% seniors), and the majority were Caucasian (3% Asian American, 7% African American, 84% Caucasian, 3% Native American, and 3% other). Partners had been involved with each other for an average of 14.02 months, the majority described their involvements as steady dating relationships (1% friends, 9% dating casually, 5% dating regularly, 84% dating steadily, and 2% engaged or married), and the majority described their relationships as exclusive (93% said neither partner dated others, 4% said one partner dated others, and 3% said both dated others).

Procedure. In Experiment 2, individuals took part in the experiment with their dating partners. In Experiment 3, couples assigned to the stranger-interaction condition were paired with the opposite-sex member of a second couple scheduled for that session; those assigned to the dating-

partner interaction condition were paired with their actual dating partners. When individuals arrived at the experimental session, they were seated in separate cubicles.

Other than the manipulation of relationship type in Experiment 3, the procedure used in Experiments 2 and 3 largely paralleled that used in Experiment 1. Partners completed an attitudes questionnaire and a relationships questionnaire. On the basis of responses to the attitudes questionnaire, we selected four issues about which the partners disagreed.[5] The partners discussed one issue that was central to the man but peripheral to the woman and one issue that was central to the woman but peripheral to the man. We also examined two conditions that were not included in Experiment 1—the partners also discussed one issue that was central to both partners, along with one issue that was peripheral to both.

The experimenter escorted the partners to a room (dating partners in Experiment 2, dating partners or strangers in Experiment 3), gave them note cards listing the issues for discussion, and asked participants to spend 2 min discussing each issue. Participants were informed that

> We have no expectations about whether you will agree or disagree about these issues, either to begin with or at the end of the discussion. Rather, we are interested in the content of your interaction—what you say about these attitude issues. Your instructions are simple: Just take turns telling each other how you feel about each issue, and why you feel the way that you do.

The experimenter then left the room and allowed partners to discuss each issue. Following the discussion, participants completed the attitudes questionnaire a second time; they were assured that their partners would not be informed of their answers to the postdiscussion questionnaire. At the end of the session, participants in Experiment 3 were thanked for their assistance and were thoroughly debriefed.

At the end of Time 1 sessions for Experiment 2, partners indicated whether they were willing to take part in a second session 1 week later. Seventy-nine percent of the participants completed Time 2 activities (of those who participated at Time 2, 95% returned to the laboratory and 5% completed mailed materials). During Time 2 sessions, participants completed a final attitudes questionnaire and provided information about the status of their relationship. At the end of the Time 2 sessions, participants were thanked for their assistance and were thoroughly debriefed.

Manipulating centrality of issue to self and centrality of issue to partner. We selected items from the prediscussion attitudes questionnaire for partners to discuss. Disagreement was operationally defined as a disparity of 6 or more scale points on a 20-point scale. Partners discussed four issues about which they disagreed—one issue each for the four possible combinations of centrality of issue to self and partner. As in Experiment 1, centrality of issue was operationally defined in terms of scores on a 9-point centrality scale—central issues were those rated 5 or higher on the scale and peripheral issues were those rated 4 or lower on the scale.

Questionnaires. As in Experiment 1, participants completed an attitudes questionnaire (pre- and postdiscussion) and a relationships questionnaire; participants in Experiment 2 also completed a Time 2 attitudes questionnaire. As in the Experiment 1 attitudes questionnaire, participants reported (a) their attitudes regarding various issues (participants responded by placing a check mark along 20 dashed lines between *very unlikely* and *very likely*), and (b) the centrality of each issue to their self-concept, or how important each issue was to how they thought about themselves (0 = *very unimportant*, 8 = *very important*). (Note that, in an effort to clarify our measures for participants, the response scales used in Experiments 2 and 3 differed slightly from those used in Experiment 1.) The relationships questionnaire was identical to that used in Experiment 1 (for the DAS, α = .92). In the Time 2 attitudes questionnaire used in Experiment 2, participants (a) reported the number of hours they spent with the partner during the previous week and (b) completed a truncated version of the attitudes questionnaire. The Time 2 attitudes questionnaire included the four issues that the partners discussed during the experiment, along with four randomly selected issues that they did not discuss (the latter issues were not included in data analyses). Attitude alignment was measured as in Experiment 1—in terms of the discrepancy between the participant's prediscussion and postdiscussion attitudes about a given issue, and scored positively if observed change represented movement toward the partner's attitude.

Audiotaping and coding of issue discussions. In Experiment 3, we asked participants' permission to tape-record their discussions. Forty-five of 54 dyads consented; for 11 of the 45 discussions, audiotapes were not available for coding (e.g., because of equipment failure or because the tape-recorded discussion was inaudible). On the basis of a careful review of the audiotapes, we developed an eight-variable coding scheme. Two trained undergraduate research assistants coded each discussion with respect to each variable. For four variables, raters coded audiotapes separately for each partner for all four combinations of centrality of issue to self and partner: time spent talking about issue (in seconds; across the four conditions, average interrater Pearson r = .81, all $ps < .01$), strength of arguments offered in support of attitude (i.e., did the individual provide reasons for his or her attitude, backed by logic? 1 = *not at all*, 4 = *very much*; average Pearson r = .41, six of eight $ps < .04$), extent of pressure exerted on partner to change (i.e., did the individual work to convince the partner to change? 1 = *not at all*, 4 = *very much*; average Pearson r = .46; five of eight $ps < .01$), and interest expressed in hearing the partner's opinion (yes vs. no; average Spearman r = .26, five of eight $ps < .01$). For two variables, raters coded audiotapes for each dyad for all four combinations of centrality of issue to self and partner: pretending to agree (i.e., did the partners act as though they did not disagree? yes vs. no; average Spearman r = .45, all $ps < .06$), and who spoke first (man vs. woman; average Spearman r = .88, all $ps < .01$). For two additional variables, raters made overall ratings for each dyad: extent of congeniality (i.e., did partners seem to "hit it off" and like one another? 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*; Pearson r = .73, $p < .01$), and extent to which partners wanted to agree with one another (i.e., did partners simply state their opinions or were they motivated to reach agreement? 1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*; Pearson r = .38, $p < .04$). (Interrater agreement was lower than would be ideal for interest expressed in hearing the partner's opinion and for wanting to agree. Therefore, findings regarding these variables should be interpreted cautiously.)

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[5] Did our selection criteria yield any systematic differences in issue content as a function of centrality of issue or participant sex? The probability with which each of 47 issues was selected as target varied from 0% to 6.32% in Experiment 2, and varied from 0% to 7.79% in Experiment 3—values that do not differ greatly from the expected probability of 2.13%. It is inherent in our selection criteria that for the central–peripheral and peripheral–central conditions, issues selected as central for a given participant were peripheral for that individual's partner, so for these issues it is not possible to assess differential selection. However, we can examine differential selection for the central–central and peripheral–peripheral conditions. The differential probability that a given issue was selected as a central–central versus peripheral–peripheral target varied from 0% to 8.42% in Experiment 2 (the range was 0% to 7.00% in Experiment 3), with an average differential probability of 3.21% (3.35% in Experiment 3). Seventeen percent of the issues (8 out of 47) might be loosely characterized as relationship relevant. The probability with which a relationship-relevant issue was selected as target varied from 0% to 8.42% in Experiment 2 (and from 0% to 6.56% in Experiment 3), with an average probability of 2.63% (3.07% in Experiment 3)—values that do not differ greatly from the overall range reported above, or from the expected probability of 2.13%. As in Experiment 1, the very small variations that were observed in probability of selection are largely attributable to order of issue in the questionnaire. In light of the rather narrow range of observed probabilities, there is little reason for concern that issue content varied in any systematic manner across conditions.

Results

Effects of centrality of issue to self and centrality of issue to partner. To examine the effects of centrality of issue to self and partner, we combined the data for dating partners from Experiment 2 and Experiment 3 and performed a three-factor within-couple ANOVA, including as independent variables centrality of issue to self (central vs. peripheral), centrality of issue to partner (central vs. peripheral), and sex (male vs. female). Figure 4 presents mean levels of attitude alignment among dating partners in Experiments 2 and 3 as a function of centrality of issue to self and centrality of issue to partner.

Recall that the centrality of issue hypothesis predicted main effects of both centrality of issue to self and centrality of issue to partner. Inconsistent with expectations, the main effect of centrality of issue to self was nonsignificant—dating partners exhibited nonsignificantly greater attitude alignment for issues that were peripheral to the self than for issues that were central to the self (Ms = 3.40 vs. 2.84), $F(1, 71) = 1.52$, $p < .22$. However, consistent with expectations, the main effect of centrality of issue to partner was significant—dating partners exhibited significantly greater alignment for issues that were central to the partner than for issues that were peripheral to the partner (Ms = 3.77 vs. 2.48), $F(1, 71) = 10.68$, $p < .01$. No other main effects or interactions were significant.[6]

Effects of dyadic adjustment. To examine tendencies toward attitude alignment among couples with low versus high dyadic adjustment, we combined the data for dating partners from Experiment 2 and Experiment 3, averaged the male and female partners' adjustment scores within each couple, and performed a median split to divide couples into high- versus low-adjustment groups. To examine the association of adjustment with attitude alignment, we performed a four-factor ANOVA, including centrality of issue to self, centrality of issue to partner, and sex as within-couple variables and including dyadic adjustment (low vs. high adjustment) as a between-couples variable. Figures 5a and 5b present mean levels of attitude alignment as a function of centrality of issue to self and centrality of issue to partner, separately for couples with high versus low dyadic adjustment.

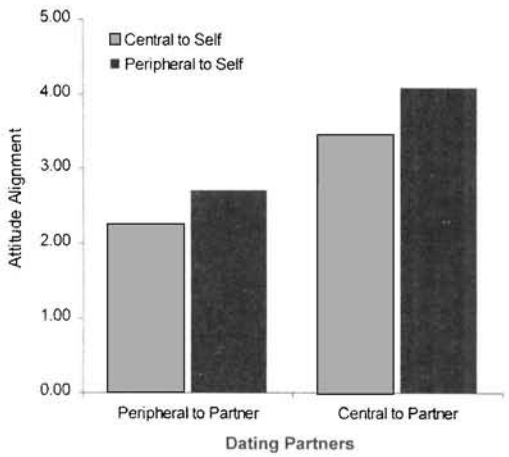

Figure 4. Attitude alignment as a function of centrality of issue to self and centrality of issue to partner: Experiment 2 and 3 dating partners.

Consistent with the strength of unit relationship hypothesis, this analysis revealed a significant main effect of dyadic adjustment—compared with couples with low adjustment, those with high adjustment exhibited greater attitude alignment (Ms = 2.67 vs. 3.57), $F(1, 70) = 5.49$, $p < .02$. The analysis also revealed a marginally significant interaction of dyadic adjustment with centrality of issue to partner, $F(1, 43) = 3.30$, $p < .07$. Follow-up tests revealed that, for issues that were peripheral to the partner, high- and low-adjustment couples did not differ significantly (Ms = 2.58 vs. 2.38), $F(1, 70) = 0.18$, $p < .67$; for issues that were central to the partner, high-adjustment couples exhibited significantly more attitude alignment than did low-adjustment couples (Ms = 4.57 vs. 2.96), $F(1, 70) = 6.98$, $p < .01$. Using an alternative means of

[6] As in Experiment 1, in Experiments 2 and 3 we also measured prediscussion-to-postdiscussion changes in self-reported centrality of issue, speculating that individuals might resolve the discomfort associated with misalignment by modifying their feelings regarding the centrality of misaligned attitudes. To explore this possibility, we combined the data for dating partners from Experiment 2 and Experiment 3 and performed a three-factor within-couple ANOVA on measures of change in self-reported centrality of issue, including as independent variables centrality of issue to self, centrality of issue to partner, and sex. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of centrality of issue to self, with individuals exhibiting greater increases in centrality for issues that were peripheral to the self than for issues that were central to the self (Ms = 1.82 vs. −0.59), $F(1, 70) = 215.96$, $p < .01$. The analysis also revealed a significant main effect of centrality of issue to partner, with individuals exhibiting greater increases in centrality for issues that were central to the partner than for issues that were peripheral to the partner (Ms = 0.76 vs. 0.48), $F(1, 70) = 4.21$, $p < .04$. The interaction of centrality of issue to self with centrality of issue to partner was nonsignificant, $F(1, 70) = 2.67$, $p < .11$. Follow-up tests revealed that centrality of issue to partner did not significantly affect change in centrality for issues that were central to the self (Ms = −0.56 vs. −0.62), $F(1, 71) = 0.15$, $p < .70$, whereas for issues that were peripheral to the self individuals exhibited greater change in centrality for issues that were central to the partner than for issues that were peripheral to the partner (Ms = 2.06 vs. 1.57), $F(1, 70) = 5.48$, $p < .02$. In short, individuals exhibited increases in self-reported centrality of issues that had been peripheral to their identity prior to discussion (although they did not necessarily change those attitudes toward the partner's attitudes). As in Experiment 1, when individuals changed their attitudes to bring them into closer alignment with those of the partner (for central to partner issues), they also came to believe that the attitudes were more important, or central to their identity.

Do changes in centrality and changes in attitude operate in parallel? When issues were peripheral to the self, the association of attitude change with change in reported centrality tended to be positive or null (for men, $r = .43$, $p < .01$; for women $r = -.01$, $p < .96$). On the other hand, when issues were central to the self, the association of attitude change with change in reported centrality tended to be negative (for men, $r = -.22$, $p < .07$; for women, $r = -.33$, $p < .01$). In parallel manner, when issues were central to the partner, the association of attitude change with change in reported centrality tended to be positive (for men, $r = .23$, $p < .05$; for women, $r = .17$, $p < .15$). When issues were peripheral to the partner, men and women exhibited somewhat different associations of attitude alignment with change in centrality: Men exhibited a nonsignificant positive relationship of attitude change with change in centrality ($r = .19$, $p < .11$), whereas women exhibited a negative relationship of attitude change with change in centrality ($r = -.23$, $p < .05$).

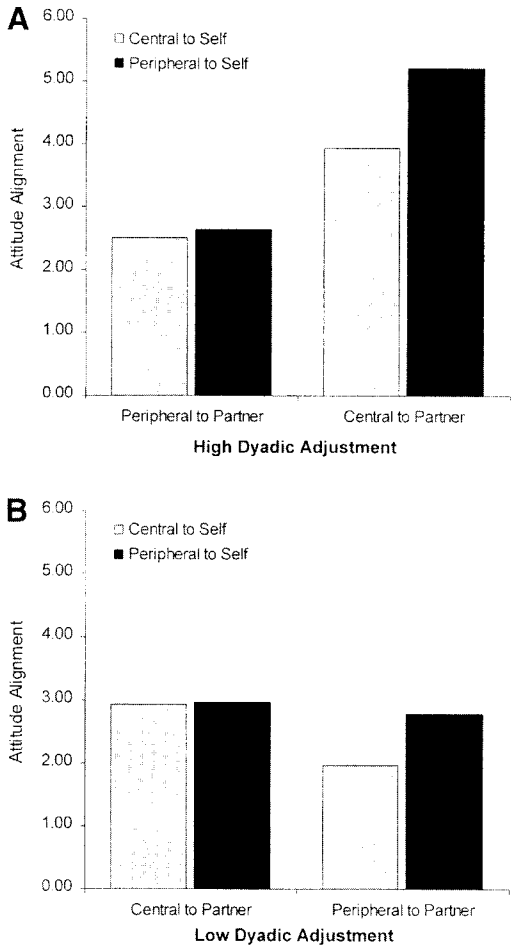

Figure 5. Attitude alignment as a function of centrality of issue to self, centrality of issue to partner, and dyadic adjustment: Experiment 2 and 3 dating partners.

describing this interaction, follow-up tests revealed that the simple effect of centrality of issue to partner was significant among couples with high dyadic adjustment, $F(1, 35) = 13.86$, $p < .01$, but nonsignificant among couples with low adjustment, $F(1, 35) = 1.08$, $p < .31$. No other main effects or interactions were significant.[7]

Effects of relationship type. To examine the effects of relationship type, we performed a four-factor ANOVA on the data for dating-partner interactions and stranger interactions in Experiment 3, including centrality of issue to self, centrality of issue to partner, and sex as within-couple variables and including relationship type (stranger vs. dating partner) as a between-couples variable. Figure 6 presents mean levels of attitude alignment in Experiment 3 as a function of centrality of issue to self and centrality of issue to partner, separately for dating-partner interactions and stranger interactions.

The analysis revealed a significant three-factor interaction of relationship type, centrality of issue to self, and centrality of issue to partner, $F(1, 52) = 5.07$, $p < .03$. Follow-up tests revealed that for issues that were peripheral to the partner, the two-factor interaction of relationship type with centrality of issue to self was nonsignificant, $F(1, 52) = 0.07$, $p < .79$. However, for issues that were central to the partner, the two-factor interaction of relationship type with centrality of issue to self was significant, $F(1, 52) = 5.53$, $p < .02$: For issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner, the simple effect of relationship type was significant, $F(1, 52) = 5.96$, $p < .02$; the effect of relationship type was nonsignificant for other experimental conditions, Fs(1, 52) ranged from 0.05 to 1.76, all *ns*. Using an alternative means of describing this interaction, follow-up tests revealed that the two-factor interaction of centrality of issue to self and centrality of issue to partner was significant in dating-partner interactions, $F(1, 26) = 4.44$, $p < .05$, but not in stranger interactions, $F(1, 26) = 1.23$, $p < .28$. In short, and in partial support of the strength of unit relationship hypothesis, for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner, dating partners exhibited greater attitude alignment than did strangers (Ms = 4.70 vs. 2.31, respectively). No other main effects or interactions were significant.[8]

Persistence of attitude alignment. Is it possible that the attitudes individuals report at the end of the laboratory sessions reflect desire to present the self in a socially desirable manner? Participants were assured that their answers to the postdiscussion questionnaire would remain private, so it seems unlikely that impression management accounts for the tendency to report attitudes that are congruent with those of the partner. Also, it seems unlikely that we would observe differential tendencies toward alignment as a

[7] Using a continuous measure of dyadic adjustment, we performed a four-factor analysis, including centrality of issue to self, centrality of issue to partner, and sex as categorical within-couple variables and including dyadic adjustment as a continuous between-couples variable. As in the analysis conceptualizing dyadic adjustment as a dichotomous variable, the main effect of dyadic adjustment was significant, $F(1, 70) = 4.14$, $p < .05$. Also, the interaction of dyadic adjustment with centrality of issue to partner approached marginal significance, $F(1, 70) = 2.56$, $p < .11$: Follow-up tests revealed findings consistent with those reported earlier—the simple effect of adjustment was nonsignificant for issues that were peripheral to the partner, $F(1, 70) = 0.13$, $p < .72$, but for issues that were central to the partner, high-adjustment couples exhibited greater alignment than did low-adjustment couples, $F(1, 70) = 5.29$, $p < .03$.

[8] Other researchers have operationally defined importance of attitude in terms of extremity of attitude (e.g., Abelson, 1995); however, the present research operationally defines importance in terms of the centrality of issue to an individual's self-concept. It seems plausible that the degree to which participants report polarized attitude ratings might vary across centrality conditions: for example, participants reporting highly central attitudes might also tend to report extreme, or polarized attitudes. To examine extremity of attitude ratings, we transformed the 20-point attitude scale into a 10-point attitude-polarity scale, such that extreme ratings at either end of the scale were assigned high scores (e.g., ratings of 20 and of 1 on the initial scale were assigned scores of 10 on the polarity scale, ratings of 10 on the initial scale were assigned scores of 1 on the polarity scale, and so on). In Experiment 3, average attitude-polarity ratings within each centrality condition were (a) 7.31 for issues that were central to the self and central to the partner, (b) 6.71 for issues that were central to the self and peripheral to the partner, (c) 6.79 for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner, and (d) 5.92 for issues that were peripheral to the self and peripheral to the partner.

To the extent that participants are more likely to report extreme attitudes for particular conditions of the design, the amount of disagreement between partners for a given issue might vary as a function of centrality of issue to self and/or partner. The reason for concern about this issue is the possibility

function of centrality of issue to partner, dyadic adjustment, or relationship type if postdiscussion attitudes were a product of self-report artifacts. Nevertheless, to determine whether attitudes observed at the end of the Time 1 session are relatively enduring, in Experiment 2 we assessed attitudes at Time 2 sessions, 1 week following the initial research session. Attitude alignment was measured in terms of the discrepancy between the participant's Time 1 prediscussion attitude and his or her Time 2 attitude about a given issue, scored positively if observed change represented movement toward the partner's Time 1 prediscussion attitude.

We performed a three-factor within-couple ANOVA on the Time 2 measures of attitude alignment, including as independent variables centrality of issue to self, centrality of issue to partner, and sex. Consistent with the analysis reported earlier, this analysis revealed a significant main effect of centrality of issue to partner—dating partners exhibited greater alignment for issues that were central to the partner than for issues that were peripheral to the partner (Ms = 3.85 vs. 2.57), $F(1, 38) = 8.52$, $p < .01$. No other main effects or interactions were significant.

We also calculated correlations between Time 1 and Time 2 measures of attitude alignment. Given that the attitudes expressed by male and female partners in a given dating relationship are not independent, we performed these analyses separately for women and men. As can be seen in Table 1, for issues that were both central and peripheral to the self and for issues that were both central and peripheral to the partner, significant associations between Time 1 and Time 2 attitudes were evident among both women and men.

Is it possible that the attitude change that occurred during Time 1 research sessions persisted over time because partners spent a good deal of time together between Time 1 and Time 2 (and perhaps discussed their attitudes during the intervening time)? We performed correlational analyses to examine the possible association of attitude alignment with number of hours spent with the partner during the previous week. These analyses revealed no significant associations of attitude alignment with number of hours spent together (rs ranged from −.25 to .25, all *ns*). Thus, it appears that persistence of attitude change is not simply a product of spending time with the partner.

Content of issue discussions. What sorts of persuasion-relevant behaviors do interacting individuals exhibit during issue discussions? To address this question, in Experiment 3 we tape-recorded partners' issue discussions. On the basis of a review of the audiotapes, we can informally characterize the discussions as follows: In virtually all instances, both partners stated an opinion regarding the issue at hand. Interestingly, for some individuals this information was deceptive—some dyads acted as though they agreed with one another even though their prediscussion attitudes were discrepant. Some individuals explicitly provided centrality information, indicating whether the issue was important to them. In addition to stating their opinions and (perhaps) conveying whether an issue was central, some individuals offered support for their attitudes, elaborating on the opinion and developing logical arguments for their point of view; some exerted pressure on one

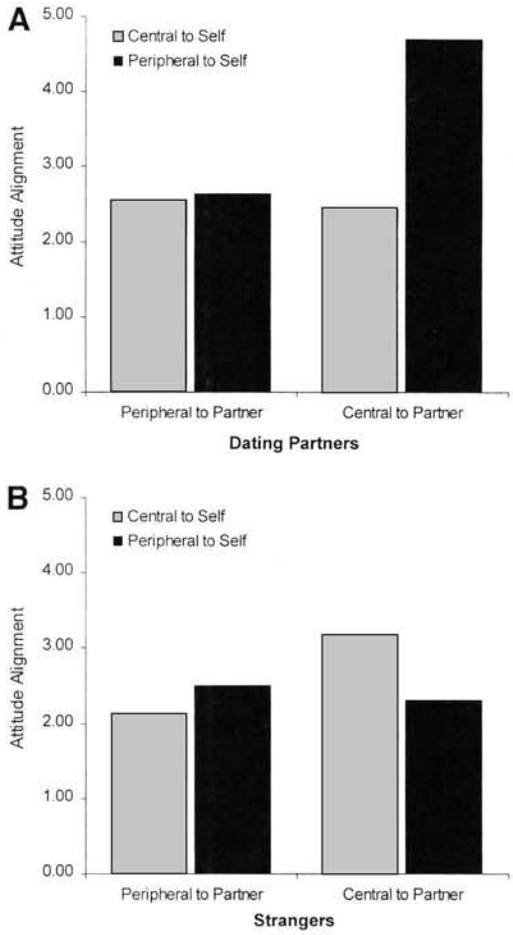

Figure 6. Attitude alignment as a function of centrality of issue to self, centrality of issue to partner, and relationship type: Experiment 3.

that degree of misalignment might affect the opportunity for attitude change; that is, greater attitude alignment might occur when partners disagree by the greatest number of scale points (i.e., attitude alignment is more possible to the degree that partners' attitudes are more discrepant). Thus, a measure of amount of disagreement was calculated by computing the absolute value of the difference between male and female partners' attitude ratings (the measure of amount of disagreement is necessarily linked to a particular issue, such that issues that are central to the self and peripheral to the partner for male partners are peripheral to the self and central to the partner for female partners). The greatest amount of disagreement was evident for issues that were central to both partners, compared with issues that were central to one partner but peripheral to the other or issues that were peripheral to both partners (Ms = 12.83, 7.15, and 9.19). Given that the greatest degree of attitude alignment occurred for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner (among dating partners), this centrality condition is of particular interest; however, the average amount of disagreement for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner was not greater than the amount of disagreement for the other centrality conditions (Ms = 7.15 vs. 12.83). Indeed, the means were descriptively opposite in direction from what would have supported this alternative explanation.

Thus, it appears that greater opportunity for attitude change is not a plausible explanation of the observed attitude alignment effects. The condition in which attitude alignment was greatest (i.e., when issues were peripheral to the self and central to the partner) is the condition in which attitude polarity was intermediate and degree of misalignment was smallest. Therefore, the observed tendency toward attitude alignment does not appear to be attributable to amount of disagreement.

Table 1
Correlations of Time 1 Attitude Alignment With Time 2 Attitude Alignment: Experiment 2

Centrality	Men	Women
Central to self		
Central to partner	.73**	.73**
Peripheral to partner	.38*	.58**
Peripheral to self		
Central to partner	.74**	.65**
Peripheral to partner	.94**	.76**

Note. Time 1 attitude alignment was calculated by comparing participants' prediscussion attitudes with their postdiscussion attitudes during the initial research session. Time 2 attitude alignment was calculated by comparing participants' prediscussion attitudes with their attitudes 1 week following the initial research session.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

another to change; some digressed, talking about tangential matters (e.g., described experiences that were indirectly relevant to the issue); and some adopted the role of "persuasion target" by expressing interest in hearing the partner's point of view; in addition, there were some periods of silence. The tone of the discussions was quite pleasant—whether interacting with a stranger or a dating partner, participants were congenial, and most appeared to be more comfortable with agreement than disagreement.

We also obtained formal codings of the data. Although three coded variables were dichotomous, we analyzed all variables using ANOVA techniques because the proportion of observations across conditions typically did not exceed a ratio of two-to-one (i.e., the data were approximately normally distributed; cf. Tabachnick & Fidell, 1996). For the four variables for which we obtained codings separately for male and female partners for all four centrality conditions, we performed four-factor ANOVAs, including centrality of issue to self, centrality of issue to partner, and sex as within-couple variables and relationship type as a between-couples variable. For the two variables for which we obtained scores for each dyad for all four centrality conditions, we performed three-factor ANOVAs, including centrality of issue to self and centrality of issue to partner as within-couple variables and including relationship type as a between-couples variable. For the remaining two variables (for which we did not obtain scores for all four centrality conditions), we performed one-way between-couple ANOVAs as a function of relationship type. (All effects reported in the paragraphs below were significant unless described as "marginal.") There were no significant differences across conditions for the extent to which partners appeared to want to agree ($M = 2.82$) or for who talked first (women talked first 62% of the time), so we will not address these variables in the following paragraphs.

The analyses revealed six significant or marginal main effects of relationship type: In comparison with dating partners, strangers spent more time talking about issue-relevant matters (Ms = 26.92 vs. 35.71), offered stronger arguments in support of their opinions (Ms = 2.07 vs. 2.39), were marginally more likely to pretend that they agreed with one another (Ms = .43 vs. .63), and exhibited marginally greater congeniality (Ms = 2.86 vs. 3.50), Fs(1, 30) ranged from 3.02 to 9.04, all ps $< .09$; compared with dating partners, strangers were marginally less likely to express interest in hearing one another's opinions (Ms = .25 vs. .13) and exerted significantly less pressure on one another to change (Ms = 1.48 vs. 1.16), Fs(1, 30) = 3.76 and 6.07, both ps $< .06$. Thus, the persuasion techniques exhibited by dating partners and strangers tended to differ in character. Strangers' persuasion techniques rested relatively more on informational social influence—strangers actively sought to change one another's opinions by spending time talking about issue-relevant matters and offering strong supportive arguments. In addition, strangers exhibited somewhat greater superficial pleasantness, being marginally more likely to pretend that they agreed with one another and exhibiting marginally greater congeniality. In contrast, dating partners' persuasion techniques might be characterized as resting somewhat more on normative social influence: In the role of communicator, dating partners pressured one another to change; dating partners also placed themselves in the role of target, expressing marginally greater interest than did strangers in hearing the partner's opinion.

The analyses also revealed three significant or marginal main effects of centrality of issue to self: Compared with issues that were peripheral to the self, for issues that were central to the self, individuals spent marginally more time talking about issue-relevant matters (Ms = 31.11 vs. 34.34), offered stronger supportive arguments (Ms = 2.17 vs. 2.38), and exerted greater pressure on the partner to change (Ms = 1.23 vs. 1.30), Fs(1, 30) ranged from 3.93 to 5.80, all ps $< .06$. The analyses also revealed two significant main effects of centrality of issue to the partner: Compared with issues that were peripheral to the partner, for issues that were central to the partner, individuals offered stronger supportive arguments (Ms = 2.17 vs. 2.38) and exerted greater pressure on the partner (Ms = 1.22 vs. 1.31), Fs(1, 30) = 6.27 and 4.80, both ps $< .04$. Out of a total of 32 possible main effects or interactions involving participant sex, only three effects were even marginally significant. Given that this number of effects might well emerge by chance, we do not describe these findings.[9]

Discussion

Consistent with the centrality of issue hypothesis, in Experiments 2 and 3 dating partners exhibited greater attitude alignment for issues that were central to the partner than for issues that were

[9] We performed correlational analyses to examine how behavior during issue discussions relates to extent of attitude alignment. For the four variables for which we obtained codings separately for male and female partners, we examined associations of coded behavior with both own alignment (within-participant) and partner alignment (across-partner). For the remaining variables, we examined associations with own alignment. We performed a total of 288 correlational analyses, many of which were based on rather small subsamples. Accordingly, we used a broad brushstroke in reviewing the findings, emphasizing trends across conditions and emphasizing associations for which the average correlation across conditions for dating-partner dyads or stranger dyads (or both) exceeded an absolute value of .20; because the analyses are based on differing sample sizes, we do not report significance tests. Thus, the following summary is wholly descriptive.

Several interesting trends were evident in the correlational analyses: First, the more time individuals spent talking about issue-relevant matters, the less they tended to align their own attitudes toward the partner's attitude (average $r = -.22$); this association was descriptively stronger in dating-partner dyads than in stranger dyads (average rs = $-.35$ vs. $-.09$). Second, the strength of the arguments individuals offered in support of

peripheral to the partner. However, the main effect of centrality of issue to self was nonsignificant (although the means were in the predicted direction). These results are consistent with the results observed in Experiment 1—insofar as we can compare the findings—in that in Experiment 1 dating partners exhibited greater attitude alignment for issues that were central to the partner (and peripheral to the self; in Experiment 1 we did not orthogonally manipulate centrality of issue to self and partner). The results of Experiments 2 and 3 suggest that people may change their attitudes to create congruence with the partner's attitudes when it would be difficult for the partner to change (for central-to-partner issues). (Or people expect their partners to change when it is not particularly difficult for their partners to do so [for peripheral-to-partner issues].)

In Experiment 3, we tape-recorded issue discussions to explore the sorts of persuasion behaviors participants exhibited. To begin with, we note that, when discussing issues that were central to either the self or partner, individuals offered stronger arguments and exerted greater pressure on the partner to change; for issues that were central to the self, individuals also spent marginally more time talking about issue-relevant matters. At the same time, for issues that were peripheral to the self, individuals offered weaker arguments, exerted less pressure on the partner, and spent marginally less time talking about issues. On the basis of these findings, we suggest that, when discussing issues that are central to one partner and peripheral to the other, the individual for whom the issue is central plays a relatively stronger "communicator" role, whereas the individual for whom the issue is peripheral plays a relatively more passive "target" role. This characterization of partners' issue discussions has implications for our discussion of unit-relationship effects, described below.

Experiments 2 and 3 also supported the strength of unit relationship hypothesis, in that the main effect of dyadic adjustment was significant. Compared with couples with low adjustment, those with high adjustment were more likely to change their attitudes in such a manner as to achieve attitudinal congruence with one another. It is interesting that the interaction of adjustment with centrality of issue to partner was also marginally significant—for issues that were central to the partner, couples with high adjustment exhibited substantially greater attitude alignment than did those with low adjustment. That is, strength of unit relationship appears to most powerfully influence attitude alignment precisely when alignment is most difficult for the partner—individuals in high-adjustment relationships were especially likely to change their attitudes when a given issue was central to the partner's identity—as suggested earlier, when the partner adopts a relatively stronger communicator role.

In Experiment 3, we also tested the strength of unit relationship hypothesis by comparing the process of attitude alignment in dating-partner versus stranger interactions. In partial support of predictions, relative to stranger interactions, in dating-partner interactions partners exhibited greater attitude alignment for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner. These findings suggest a possible blend of our reasoning regarding strength of unit relationship with reasoning regarding the principle of least effort, in that, compared with strangers, dating couples exhibited especially strong tendencies to change their attitudes to create congruence when it was not particularly difficult for them to change (for peripheral to self issues) but it would be difficult for the partner to change (for central to partner issues). We return to a discussion of this finding below, after presenting related findings.

Individuals may change their attitudes toward greater congruence with another person's attitudes as a result of either normative social influence (i.e., the desire to be liked) or informational social influence (i.e., the desire to be right; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Insko et al., 1985). Through exploratory analyses of partners' issue discussions, we observed somewhat differing styles of persuasion among dating partners versus strangers; specifically, we noted that (a) strangers were more likely to rely on informational influence, in that they spent more time talking about issue-relevant matters and offered stronger arguments in support of their opinions, whereas (b) dating partners were more likely to rely on normative influence, in that they were more likely to exert pressure on the partner to change and to express interest in hearing the partner's

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their opinions was weakly negatively associated with own alignment (average $r = -.12$); this association was descriptively stronger in dating dyads (average $rs = -.26$ vs. $-.10$). Third, the extent to which partners pretended to agree was negatively associated with own alignment (average $r = -.24$); this association was descriptively stronger in dating dyads (average $rs = -.35$ vs. $-.12$). Fourth, the amount of pressure individuals exerted on their partners to change was weakly negatively associated with own alignment (average $r = -.15$); this association was descriptively stronger in dating dyads (average $rs = -.28$ vs. $-.13$). Also, exerting pressure on the partner to change was positively associated with partner alignment in dating dyads but not in stranger dyads (average $rs = .20$ vs. $-.02$). And fifth, interest expressed in hearing the partner's opinion was essentially unrelated to own alignment for the sample as a whole (average $r = .05$); however, a positive association was evident in dating dyads but not in stranger dyads (average $rs = .23$ vs. $.01$). Also, expressing interest in hearing the partner's opinion was negatively associated with partner alignment in dating-partner dyads but not in stranger dyads (average $rs = -.21$ vs. $-.06$).

Thus, the within-participant analyses revealed some evidence that individuals tended to be less likely to align their own attitudes toward the partner's attitude to the extent that they spent more time talking about issues, offered stronger arguments in support of their opinions, pretended to agree with the partner, and exerted greater pressure on the partner to change; they tended to be more likely to align their own attitudes to the extent that they adopted the target role by expressing interest in the partner's opinion. If anything, these associations tended to be descriptively stronger in dating-partner dyads than in stranger dyads. The descriptive differences in correlational results between dating dyads and stranger dyads are particularly intriguing in light of the fact that stranger dyads exhibited higher overall levels of these coding variables for three of the six variables under consideration (see ANOVA results in the body of this article regarding the effects of relationship type; two effects were significant, one was marginal). The across-partner analyses revealed some evidence that partners were more likely to align their attitudes to the extent that the individual exerted pressure on the partner to change and were less likely to align their attitudes to the extent that the individual expressed interest in the partner's attitude. These across-partner associations are particularly intriguing in light of the fact that these two discussion variables are the ones we characterize as relevant to normative social influence—the variables for which dating dyads exhibited higher scores than stranger dyads (one effect was significant, the other was marginal). (Standard deviations for coding variables and alignment measures did not differ substantially for dating and stranger dyads, suggesting that these descriptive differences are not attributable to restricted range.)

opinion (the latter effect was marginal). In hindsight, it makes intuitive sense that normative concerns would be particularly relevant to dating partners. In addition, we obtained suggestive evidence that persuasion techniques may yield somewhat more powerful effects for dating partners than for strangers (i.e., descriptively, targets were more likely to yield and communicators were less likely to yield; see Footnote 9), and that normatively based techniques may more reliably yield across-partner effects (i.e., yield attitude change by the target).

For example, in the role of communicator (for central-to-self issues), individuals in dating relationships may exert pressure on the partner to change; dating-partner targets (for peripheral-to-self issues) may indeed yield to such pressure, exhibiting attitude alignment. Also, in complementary manner, individuals in dating relationships may request the role of target (for peripheral to self issues), expressing interest in hearing the partner's opinion; in the target role, individuals in dating relationships may likewise exhibit attitude alignment. Of course, this explanation is post hoc and somewhat speculative, but is consistent with the general logic underlying our work—a logic that takes into consideration imbalance-induced tension arising from attitudinal discrepancies, the least-effort rule as a guide to imbalance-reduction, and the interdependence theoretic insight that, across diverse attitude issues varying in importance to the individual and partner, partners may adopt the role of both communicator and target.

In an effort to explain the earlier noted three-way interaction of relationship type with centrality of issue to self and partner (i.e., when issues are peripheral to self but central to the partner, dating partners exhibit greater attitude alignment than strangers), we invoke the tenets of dual-process theories of persuasion (cf. Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Smith & DeCoster, 2000) in combination with our findings regarding issue discussions. Because the route to balance is obvious and simple when discrepancies are peripheral to the self but central to the partner (the partner who feels less strongly simply changes his or her attitude), we assume that this condition of imbalance requires less thought (compared with the other centrality conditions), making it more likely that partners engage in peripheral processing. We suggest that the solution to this sort of interaction dilemma does not require systematic, rule-based processing; the resolution of attitudinal discrepancies of this sort is likely to rest on persuasion heuristics, or associative processing involving non-message-relevant factors. We suggest that when issues are peripheral to the self and central to the partner, dating partners are likely to make use of heuristics in such a manner as to yield attitude alignment. Dating partners may have used either a direct "relationship heuristic" (e.g., "If my partner believes this then it must be true"; e.g., Steele & Aron, 2000), or an indirect relationship heuristic (as revealed by the coding of issue discussions; e.g., "My partner is exerting pressure on me, so it's important for me to change").

In Experiment 2, we also sought to determine whether the attitude change observed during laboratory sessions to some degree reflected "real" change. To explore this possibility, we assessed individuals' attitudes 1 week following the initial research session. Analyses performed on the Time 2 alignment measures revealed findings paralleling those observed at Time 1: In comparison with their prediscussion attitudes, individuals' attitudes 1 week following the laboratory session were more congruent with the attitudes of their partners for issues that were central to the partner. In addition, correlational analyses revealed that Time 1 and Time 2 measures were significantly positively correlated. Moreover, degree of Time 2 alignment was essentially unrelated to the number of hours partners spent with one another during the intervening time. These results suggest that attitude change resulting from partners' discussion of discrepant attitudes may well reflect internal, enduring change.

General Discussion

Existence and Persistence of Attitude Alignment

The results of three experiments suggest the existence of a phenomenon that we have termed *attitude alignment*. In brief, we suggest that when individuals discover that their attitudes are different from those of another person, they are motivated to change their opinions, bringing their attitudes into closer alignment with others' attitudes. In the language of balance theory, it appears that tension is experienced in positive p–o relationships accompanied by disagreement in attitudes regarding x. The individuals who participated in our experiments resolved this tension by changing their attitudes.

All three experiments examined the process of attitude alignment in dyadic relationships. Whereas Experiments 1 and 2 focused on attitude alignment in dating relationships, Experiment 3 examined interactions involving both dating partners and strangers. The fact that some degree of attitude alignment was evident in all three experiments—in both dating-partner interactions and in stranger interactions (albeit to differing degrees)—pays testimony to the robustness of this phenomenon. Moreover, it appears that the attitude change observed in the context of our experimental sessions represented more than trivial change. In Experiment 2, we examined the persistence over time of attitude change observed during initial research sessions, and found evidence of substantial consistency over time in attitude alignment.

We anticipated that attitudinal dissimilarity would produce discomfort only insofar as it became salient to partners, suggesting that, so long as dissimilarity remained implicit rather than explicit, discomfort would be minimal. In support of the salience of misalignment hypothesis, Experiment 1 revealed a significant effect of salience of attitudinal discrepancy. Partners exhibited attitude alignment only when they became aware of differences through discussion of discrepant attitudes. When discrepancies were not discussed, little or no attitude alignment was evident. It might be argued that our findings regarding salience of discrepancy are hardly "nonobvious," in that interacting individuals cannot change discrepant attitudes about which they are completely unaware (although, as mentioned earlier, it seems plausible that close partners are aware of the partner's opinion regarding some issues). At the very least, our findings regarding change under conditions of nonsalient discrepancies serve as a baseline from which to evaluate the existence and meaning of attitude change when partners actively address and discuss attitudinal discrepancies. Presumably, partners in ongoing relationships do manage to live with a certain amount of attitudinal dissimilarity. The present findings suggest that couples are unlikely to experience tension so long as they manage to avoid confronting such disagreements.

Centrality of Issue to Self and Partner

In all three experiments, we also sought to determine whether tendencies toward attitude alignment differed depending on whether a given issue was central versus peripheral to the individual's self-concept and central versus peripheral to the partner's self-concept. Consistent with the centrality of issue hypothesis, Experiment 1 revealed a significant interaction of centrality of issue with salience of attitudinal discrepancy, and analyses performed on dating-partner interactions in Experiments 2 and 3 revealed a significant main effect of centrality of issue to partner. Once attitudinal misalignment becomes salient to dating partners, the resulting attitude change is likely to involve movement toward the attitude of the partner who holds stronger feelings regarding the issue at hand. Consistent with reasoning inspired by the principle of least effort, individuals were disinclined to change attitudes unless the dating partner had very strong feelings about the issue (e.g., "Why bother to change if this issue isn't important to my partner?"). It is noteworthy that the centrality of a given issue to the dating partner exerted more powerful effects on attitude alignment than did the centrality of an issue to the self, highlighting the fact that attitude alignment is an inherently dyadic phenomenon. Consistent with the interdependence theoretic perspective, our findings suggest that centrality of issue to the communicator of a message is a variable that, although having been largely neglected in the persuasion literature, is worthy of inclusion in studies of attitude change.

On the basis of the principle of least effort, we anticipated that attitude alignment would be more probable to the extent that a given issue is peripheral to the individual's self-concept. Why is it that in Experiments 2 and 3, variations in centrality of issue to self did not significantly influence tendencies toward attitude alignment? The logic underlying this prediction rested on the assumption that when a given p–x link is weak (i.e., the issue is peripheral to an individual's self-concept), attitude change is easier. In retrospect, it seems plausible that centrality of issue may exert two types of effect on p–x and o–x associations. First, we advanced a "least effort" argument, suggesting that attitude change is more difficult as a function of the strength of p–x and o–x relationships. But second, we presented a "greatest tension" argument, suggesting that the tension resulting from awareness of attitudinal dissimilarity may be greater to the extent that p–x and o–x relationships are stronger. The combination of these two principles may predict the extent to which attitude change is the most viable mechanism for attaining balance (i.e., as opposed to other paths, such as modifying the centrality of issues).

In the case of o–x associations—associations involving centrality of issue to partner—the tension and effort arguments combine in a complementary manner: When discrepancies involve issues that are central to the partner, (a) it is relatively difficult for the partner to change his or her attitude (on the basis of effort, own motivation to change is strong), and (b) imbalance-induced tension is acute (on the basis of tension, own motivation to change is strong), so pressure to change one's attitude is great; when discrepancies involve issues that are peripheral to the partner, (a) it is relatively easy for the partner to change (on the basis of effort, own motivation to change is weak), and (b) imbalance-induced tension is weak (on the basis of tension, own motivation to change is weak), so there is little or no pressure to change one's attitude. But in the case of p–x associations—associations involving centrality of issue to self—these effects to some extent may "cancel" each other: For discrepancies involving issues that are central to the self, (a) it is relatively difficult for the self to change (on the basis of effort, own motivation to change is weak), but (b) imbalance-induced tension is acute (on the basis of tension, own motivation to change is strong), so possible pressures to change oppose one another; for discrepancies involving issues that are peripheral to the self, (a) it is relatively easy for the self to change (on the basis of effort, own motivation to change is strong), but (b) imbalance-induced tension is weak (on the basis of tension, own motivation to change is weak), so possible pressures to change one's attitude once again oppose one another.

This reasoning suggests that attitude alignment is a simple proposition when discrepancies involve issues that are central to the dating partner—imbalance-induced tension is strong, and it is relatively difficult for the partner to change his or her attitude. In contrast, predicting the likelihood of attitude alignment is not so straightforward when it comes to variations in the centrality of an issue to the self: When imbalance-induced tension is great, the effort involved in alignment is also great (for central-to-self issues); when the effort involved in alignment is minimal, imbalance-induced tension is weak (for peripheral-to-self issues). Interestingly, the present research revealed some evidence of possible interactions of centrality of issue to self and partner, with individuals exhibiting greatest alignment for issues that were simultaneously peripheral to the self and central to the partner (for which both tension and effort align to promote change): (a) in Experiment 1, attitude alignment was greater for issues that were central to the partner and peripheral to the self than for issues that were peripheral to the partner and central to the self (we did not orthogonally manipulate centrality of issue to self and partner in Experiment 1); and (b) in Experiment 3, attitude alignment among dating partners was greatest for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner.

At the beginning of this article, we proposed that individuals might reduce the discomfort accompanying dissimilarity by reducing the importance of the issue about which partners disagree. To explore this possibility, we performed auxiliary analyses to examine prediscussion to postdiscussion changes in self-reported centrality of issue. In Experiments 2 and 3, dating partners exhibited shifts in self-reported centrality of issue as a function of both centrality of issue to partner and centrality of issue to self (see Footnotes 3 and 6; i.e., in addition to changing their attitudes, dating partners exhibited increases in self-reported centrality for issues that were central to the partner). Shifts in self-reported centrality of issue sometimes paralleled attitude alignment but in other cases appeared to serve a compensatory function.

For issues that were central to the partner, shifts in self-reported centrality of issue paralleled shifts in attitude: Dating partners exhibited greater increases in self-reported centrality for issues that were central to the partner than for issues that were peripheral to the partner. That is, when individuals changed their attitudes to bring them into closer alignment with those of the dating partner, they also came to believe that the attitudes were more important, or central to their personal identity. Indeed, correlational analyses revealed a positive association of attitude alignment with change in reported centrality of issue when issues were central to the partner. These results suggest that, at least for the phenomenon of attitude

alignment, changes in valence of attitude may be accompanied by changes in strength of attitude (cf. Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1975).

What did we observe for issues that were central to the self? Whereas dating partners did not exhibit significantly different levels of alignment as a function of variations in centrality of issue to self, they did exhibit greater increases in centrality for issues that were peripheral to the self than for issues that were central to the self. Indeed, correlational analyses revealed suggestive evidence of negative associations of attitude alignment with change in centrality when issues were central to the self, but positive (or null) associations of attitude alignment with change in centrality when issues were peripheral to the self. It seems possible that individuals increased the centrality of peripheral-to-self issues in an attempt to justify not changing their attitudes, and decreased the centrality of central-to-self issues in an attempt to reduce the degree of tension. The question of when attitude change and centrality change operate in parallel versus in a complementary manner remains to be further explored in future research.

Strength of Unit Relationship

Earlier we offered two complementary theoretical rationales for the prediction that attitudinal dissimilarity would produce greater tension to the extent that it emerges in the context of a strong unit relationship. One explanation rested on the balance theoretic claim that when the *p–o* link is stronger, there should be greater pressure on the dyad to change the *p–x* or *o–x* link (or both). A second explanation rested on the interdependence theoretic claim that when the *p–o* link is stronger, noncorrespondence arising from *p–o* disagreement about *x* should be more problematic, and pressure toward alignment should be greater. We examined the effects of differing strength of unit relationship in two ways: (a) among dating partners in Experiments 1, 2, and 3, strength of unit relationship was operationally defined in terms of dyadic adjustment level and (b) in Experiment 3, strength of unit relationship was operationally defined in terms of relationship type—individuals interacted with either the dating partner or a stranger.

In Experiment 1, the interaction of salience of attitudinal discrepancy with dyadic adjustment was nonsignificant, although couples with high adjustment exhibited descriptively greater alignment for salient discrepancies than did couples with low adjustment (this effect approached marginal significance). In Experiments 2 and 3, the strength of unit relationship hypothesis received good support. The main effect of dyadic adjustment was significant among dating partners, with high-adjustment couples exhibiting greater attitude alignment than low-adjustment couples. In addition, there was a marginally significant interaction of adjustment with centrality of issue to the partner: For issues that were peripheral to the partner, high- and low-adjustment couples did not differ in alignment tendencies; for issues that were central to the partner, high-adjustment couples exhibited significantly greater alignment than did low-adjustment couples.

Moreover, Experiment 3 revealed a three-way interaction of relationship type (stranger vs. dating partner) with centrality of issue to self and partner, such that dating partners exhibited significantly greater attitude alignment than did strangers for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner. These results suggest that when the method of addressing imbalance-induced tension is clear ("I do not have strong feelings about this issue, but my partner does."), dating partners exhibit rather energetic attitude alignment, whereas strangers do not. Why is it that centrality of issue to partner did not significantly affect tendencies toward attitude alignment in stranger interactions and among couples with low adjustment? When the strength of unit relationship is weak, individuals may either (a) fail to discern whether a given issue is important to the partner or (b) discern that a given issue is important to the partner, but feel unconcerned about the partner's feelings regarding the issue.

It is interesting that as strength of unit relationship increased, the effects of centrality on alignment increased as well—the stronger the unit relationship, the stronger the support for our hypotheses. These findings are consistent with Newcomb's (1959) claim that increases in the strength of association among elements in a triad yield increases in the discomfort resulting from dissimilarity. Such results suggest a multiplicative model of imbalance-induced tension: The tendency toward attitude alignment appears to be especially acute when *p–o* and *o–x* links are particularly strong, suggesting that the "motivational product" of misalignment may be a multiplicative function of the discomfort arising from *p–o* tension and *o–x* tension.

How might such a multiplicative model function? What sorts of mechanisms might account for the fact that relationship type had the most impact for issues that were peripheral to the self and central to the partner? On the basis of exploratory analyses performed on the coding of issue discussions, we suggest that, when partners discuss issues that are central to one person and peripheral to the other, the person for whom the issue is central acts as communicator, whereas the person for whom the issue is peripheral acts as target. When a communicator cares deeply about an issue that is of peripheral concern to the target, the solution to the problem of imbalance is likely to rest on persuasion heuristics rather than on systematic information processing (cf. Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). During issue discussions, strangers (vs. dating partners) were more likely to use persuasion techniques that relied on informational social influence, whereas dating partners were more likely to use persuasion techniques that relied on normative social influence. Thus, when dating partners confront issues that are central to one partner and peripheral to the other, there is a simple, heuristically driven solution to the problem of imbalance—a solution that would seem to involve associative processing (cf. Smith & DeCoster, 2000): "My beloved seems to care deeply about this, so I'll change my opinion."

Why is it that strangers and dating partners exhibited similar (or nonsignificantly different) tendencies toward alignment for the remaining centrality conditions? Previous research has demonstrated the existence of "agreement effects"—the tendency of triads in which *p* and *o* agree about *x* to be rated as more pleasant than triads in which *p* and *o* disagree (Rodrigues, 1965). Zajonc (1968) and Newcomb (1968) originally interpreted agreement effects—along with other unanticipated effects observed in the balance theory literature, such as attraction effects—as antithetical to the predictions of balance theory. More recently, Insko and his colleagues presented a broad framework from which to interpret such effects (e.g., Insko, 1984; Insko, Sedlak, & Lipsitz, 1982). As it turns out, by taking into account participants' assumptions about the *p–o–x* system, balance theory can readily account for agreement effects (as well as other unanticipated effects).

We believe that the Insko et al. (1985) account of agreement effects may be relevant to the alignment tendencies observed among strangers in the present work. Depending on what expectations or beliefs individuals bring to a given interaction, a triad other than the *p–o–x* triad may be salient. For example, an individual who is particularly concerned with making a "correct" judgment may achieve consistency among elements of a triad such that: *p* (+) has a positive evaluation of self, *p* (+) believes that *o* holds the correct opinion, and *p* (+) believes that a positive self should hold correct opinions. In this scenario, attraction to the other person is irrelevant—*p*'s tendency to adopt an opinion similar to *o*'s opinion is attributable to (a) *p*'s belief that *o* holds the correct opinion and (b) *p*'s desire to hold the correct opinion. As argued by Insko et al., holding attitudes that are similar to those of another person may imply that our attitudes are correct—a positive implication for individuals who have positively evaluated self-concepts. Indeed, the fact that issue discussions in our stranger dyads were characterized somewhat more by informational influence and somewhat less by normative influence provides indirect support for this information-based account of influence among strangers.

Strengths, Limitations, and Directions for Future Work

Before closing, we should comment on some of the notable strengths and limitations of our work. First, it is important to note that the attitude change observed in the present research resulted from active discussion of salient discrepancies—interacting individuals were asked to directly address attitudinal dissimilarity by discussing issues about which they disagreed. Thus, it might be argued that our findings are colored by demand characteristics or by participants' desire to present themselves in a consistent or socially desirable manner. We think it is unlikely that we would have observed reliable differences in alignment as a function of centrality of issue and strength of unit relationship if our findings were solely a product of such experimental artifacts. Also, it seems unlikely that we would observe consistency over time in attitude change (as was observed in Experiment 2) if our results were substantially colored by response bias. Nevertheless, in future work it would be helpful to use more subtle procedures to make discrepancies salient and to obtain somewhat more indirect measures of postdiscussion attitudes (e.g., subtle behavioral measures). Ongoing work regarding attitude alignment is designed to take such matters into consideration.

At the same time, it is important to note that our work examined real attitude issues (e.g., attitudes regarding gun control and homosexuality), and that individuals reacted to one another's real opinions regarding each issue. That is, we did not resort to the use of novel or trivial attitude issues, nor did we deliver false feedback regarding a partner's opinions. Participants were allowed to express their personal attitudes, and their feelings regarding the importance of attitude issues, in whatever manner they chose. It is noteworthy that, in the conformity literature, alignment tendencies have been shown to be relatively weaker when individuals respond privately rather than publicly and when individuals record prior commitment to an attitude (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955; Insko et al., 1985). The conditions under which attitude alignment is likely to be weak are precisely the conditions that characterize our research paradigm—private response and prior commitment. Thus, the present findings should be regarded as quite striking (in many respects it is remarkable that we observed any attitude change at all); if anything, our results may underestimate everyday tendencies toward alignment. We believe that the method adopted in the present work represents an important first step toward the goal of examining real-world attitude alignment, in that we adopted an ecologically valid technique, examining attitude alignment across multiple issues that varied in importance, about which individuals presumably held preexisting opinions, in interaction situations in which individuals operated as both target and source of persuasion.

A second limitation of our work concerns the motivations and mechanisms underlying attitude alignment. Although not the primary focus of the present research, through an analysis of audiotapes of partners' issue discussions, we discovered suggestive evidence regarding the mechanisms underlying attitude alignment. In future research, it will be important to directly address such issues, seeking to determine whether (a) alignment results from normative influence, informational influence, or both; (b) alignment is partner-generated, self-generated, or both; and (c) alignment is a conscious or unconscious phenomenon.

A third potential limitation concerns the stranger interaction operational definition of "zero unit relationship" in Experiment 3. Expressed in the language of balance theory, it was assumed that individuals interacting with strangers would experience a weak or null unit relationship with the partner. However, the experimental procedure required that strangers discuss a variety of self-relevant issues; in some sense, strangers underwent a self-disclosure experience similar to "closeness induction" manipulations used in prior research (e.g., Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997; Sedikides, Campbell, Reader, & Elliot, 1999). Thus, it might be argued that "strangers" in Experiment 3 developed greater than anticipated levels of closeness over the course of the experiment (thereby overestimating the extent of attitude alignment in real-world stranger interactions). However, we believe that the stranger-interaction condition represents a suitable baseline against which to examine tendencies toward attitude alignment among dating partners. In our ongoing research regarding attitude alignment, we have adopted procedures that minimize contact between individuals assigned to the stranger condition, thereby attenuating the emergence of closeness during experimental sessions.

Conclusions

The existing empirical literature regarding attitude change has emphasized change arising from persuasive messages delivered by communicators who are strangers to the target of persuasion. Very little research has examined the role that close partners may play in bringing about attitude change. The present research diverges from classic and contemporary approaches to the study of attitude change in that we examined interactive attitude change regarding nontrivial issues in the context of ongoing relationships. Consistent with central tenets of balance theory, the present research demonstrated that, above and beyond any similarity that may result from the tendency of preexisting attitudinal similarity to promote later increases in closeness, preexisting closeness also promotes later increases in attitudinal similarity. Among dating partners, tendencies toward attitude alignment appear to be greater to the extent that attitudinal discrepancies are relatively more salient, to the extent that a given issue is relatively more central to the partner's

self-concept, and to the extent that relationship closeness is greater; the centrality of an issue to an individual's own self-concept does not reliably affect attitude alignment (although some evidence suggests that this variable may be relevant to understanding persuasion methods and changes in self-reported centrality of issues). Thus, the present research suggests that the process of attitude alignment may be an integral component of the means by which partners manage to sustain (and possibly, to promote) healthy functioning in ongoing close relationships.

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