

UC Santa Barbara

UC Santa Barbara Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

When Class Meets Closeness: The Role of Social Class Similarity in Relationship Development

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/96r9t4pq>

ISBN

9798276020907

Author

Papadakis, Viki

Publication Date

2025-09-19

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

**When Class Meets Closeness: The Role of Social Class Similarity in Relationship
Development**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Psychological & Brain Sciences

by Viki Papadakis

Committee in Charge:

Professor Heejung Kim, Chair

Professor Nancy Collins

Professor Shelly Gable

Professor Yuedong Wang

December 2025

The dissertation of Viki Papadakis is approved

Dr. Nancy Collins

Dr. Shelly Gable

Dr. Yuedong Wang

Dr. Heejung Kim, Chair

September 2025

**When Class Meets Closeness: The Role of Social Class Similarity in Relationship
Development**

Copyright © 2025

by

Viki Papadakis

Viki Papadakis

(she/hers)

vpapadakis@ucsb.edu

Education

University of California, Santa Barbara 2018 – 2025

Ph.D. in Social Psychology, Psychological & Brain Sciences Department

Dissertation: *Social Class & When Class Meets Closeness: The Role of Social Class Similarity in Relationship Development & Connection*

Emphasis: *Quantitative Methods for the Social Sciences*

Funding: Graduate Research Fellowship Program, National Science Foundation

University of California, Santa Barbara 2021 – 2024

M.A. in Data Science, Probability & Statistics Department

University of California, Santa Barbara 2014 – 2016

Bachelor of Arts, Psychology

Bachelor of Arts, Anthropology

Emphasis: *Cultural Anthropology*

Minor in Applied Psychology

GPA: 3.95, Summa Cum Laude

Folsom Lake Community College 2012 – 2014

Associate of Arts, Interdisciplinary Studies: Social and Behavioral Sciences

GPA: 4.0, Valedictorian

Professional Experience

UC Santa Barbara, Hybrid 2018 – 2025

Quantitative Research Analyst & Cultural Psychologist

- Directed large-scale research initiatives on behavior, policy, and strategy in collaboration with university leaders and community stakeholders.
- Supervised a 15-person team of research staff and students, providing mentorship, assigning tasks, and coordinating deliverables across multiple projects.
- Translated data insights into institutional strategy and policy recommendations on student retention, housing, and campus belonging.

PHEMA (Nonprofit), Remote 2025 – Present

Data Consultant

- Partnered directly with the CEO to launch the organization's digital and analytics infrastructure, supporting rapid nonprofit scale-up.
- Led technical development of the website (WordPress/BuddyBoss) and integrated data systems to track engagement and outreach metrics.
- Managed internal dashboards and workflows to support mutual aid programs focused on mental health and harm reduction.
- Played a senior leadership role in organizational strategy, coordinating across volunteer teams and managing cross-platform data systems.

Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University 2016 – 2018

Project Manager, Culture, Diversity & Inequality Lab

- Managed multi-year, multi-site research on educational equity, career access, and cultural inclusion across universities and companies.
- Led teams of 50+ researchers across institutions—including MBA cohorts, field staff, and academic collaborators.
- Developed research protocols and tracked project timelines; ensured data quality and compliance across global and local sites.
- Oversaw survey design, recruitment strategy, and high-volume data cleaning and analysis in support of peer-reviewed publications and institutional reports.

Teaching & Mentorship

Transfer Advising Project, UCSB 2021 – 2022
Project Lead

- Led a university-wide initiative to improve transfer student outcomes in the Psychological & Brain Sciences Department.
- Oversaw a team of 10 undergraduate research assistants and coordinated with faculty and administration across 50+ institutions.
- Directed outreach campaigns to California community colleges and delivered informational workshops and transfer talks, both in-person and remotely.

Graduate Division, UCSB 2020 – 2022
Graduate Grant Writing Tutor

- Delivered individualized mentorship and strategic writing support to graduate and undergraduate students applying for competitive national fellowships.
- Led grant writing workshops and presentations for interdisciplinary audiences, providing targeted guidance on proposal development, structure, and reviewer expectations.
- Supported applicants in securing prestigious awards, including NSF Graduate Research Fellowships at UCSB and other top graduate institutions.

Psychological & Brain Sciences Honors Program, UCSB 2021 – 2023
Undergraduate Honors Thesis Advisor

Access Grads, UCSB 2018 – 2021
Graduate Student Mentor

Psychological & Brain Sciences Department, UCSB 2018 – 2015
Teaching Assistant, Course Coordinator, Lab Coordinator

- PSY1 – Introduction to Psychology
- PSY10A – Introductory Research Methods in Psychological & Brain Sciences
- PSY10B – Statistical Methods in Psychological & Brain Sciences
- PSY149 – Close Relationships
- PSY150L – Laboratory in Social Psychology
- PSY154 – Cultural Psychology

Grants & Scholarships

Graduate Research Fellowship Program, National Science Foundation	2020–2023
Methods University Graduate Student Scholarship, UCSB	2019
Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Grant, UCSB	2015
Faculty Research Assistance Program, Emotion, Motivation, Behavior, and Relationships Lab	2015
Faculty Research Assistance Program, Memory, Emotion, Thought, and Awareness Lab	2015
Gilman Scholarship, United States Department of State	2015
Education Abroad Program Promise Award, University of California	2015

Honors, Awards & Distinctions

The Morgan Award for Research Promise, UCSB Dept. of Psychological & Brain Sciences	2016
Distinction in the Major, UCSB Dept. of Psychological & Brain Sciences	2016
Exceptional Academic Performance in the Major, UCSB Dept. of Psychological & Brain Sciences	2016
Award for Research Promise, Dept. of Anthropology	2016
Exceptional Academic Achievement Award by a Transfer Student, UCSB Dept. of Anthropology	2016
Academic Excellence, UCSB College of Letters & Science	2016
Honors Program, UCSB College of Letters & Science	2014–2016
Honors Program, UCSB Dept. of Psychological & Brain Sciences	2014–2016
Psi Chi: The National Honor Society in Psychology, UCSB	2015–2016
Psi Beta: Community College National Honor Society in Psychology, Folsom Lake College	2014
Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, Folsom Lake College	2012–2014

Publications

Eom, K., Papadakis, V., Sherman, D. K., & Kim, H. S. (2019). The psychology of pro-environmental support: A global problem in need of global solutions. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 28(5), 490–495.

Conference Posters & Talks

Yin, G., **Papadakis, V.**, & Kim, H. S. (2023, May). *Stereotypes and friendship development: Perceived similarity and bias in early college relationships*. Presented at the Undergraduate Research Colloquium, Santa Barbara, CA.

Li, S., **Papadakis, V.**, & Kim, H. S. (2022, May). *Chinese international vs. Asian domestic interaction partner: Self-disclosure amongst White college students*. Presented at the Undergraduate Research Colloquium, Santa Barbara, CA.

Papadakis, V., & Wu, V. (2021, October). *Harnessing field-specific knowledge: Transforming graduate students into peer writing tutors*. Presented at the International Writing Centers Association Annual Conference, Remote.

Papadakis, V., & Kim, H. K. (2020, February). *Social tuning, social class, and pro-environmental behavior*. Presented at the Society for Personality and Social Psychology 2020 Annual Convention, New Orleans, LA.

Papadakis, V., & Kim, H. K. (2016, June). *Bicultural priming and social support*. Presented at the Undergraduate Research Colloquium, Santa Barbara, CA.

Morseth, B. K., & **Papadakis, V.** (2015, June). *Socially aware and environmentally mindful: The mediating role of self-construal in the relationship between mindfulness, pro-environmentalism, and pro-sociality*. Presented at the Mind & Life Summer Research Institute, Garrison, NY.

Morseth, B. K., & **Papadakis, V.** (2015, June). *Brief mindfulness induction increases pro-environmental and pro-social behavior*. Presented at the Mindfulness and Compassion Conference: Art and Science of Contemplative Practice, San Francisco, CA.

Morseth, B. K., **Papadakis, V.**, & Noah, K. L. (2015, May). *Consciously navigating environmental spaces: Mindfulness improves social, environmental, and spatial perspective taking*. Presented at the Spatial Search Conference, Santa Barbara, CA.

Professional Development

Visual Analytics in Tableau, Trailhead Academy	2025
Summer Institute in Computational Social Science (SICSS), UCLA	2021
<i>Instructional program involving lectures, group problem sets, and participant-led research projects with social scientists and data scientists in academia and industry.</i>	
Free the Ph.D	2021
<i>Career Development Course</i>	
BioPac Human Physiology Conference & Training	2019
Teaching Assistant Training, UCSB	2018–2019

Skills

- **Project Management & Leadership:** Multi-site coordination, cross-institutional team leadership, stakeholder alignment, deadline management, personnel supervision, strategic planning, cross-functional collaboration, logistical oversight, onboarding and training, quality assurance, workflow optimization.
- **Communication:** Research synthesis, technical reporting, grant and proposal writing, presenting complex findings to academic and non-academic audiences, curriculum development, instructional communication.
- **Applied Experience:** Field research leadership, program evaluation, cross-cultural data interpretation, data consultation, service delivery in clinical, educational, and nonprofit settings.
- **Data Science & Statistical Methods:** Regression (linear, logistic, multilevel), GLMs, SEM, factor analysis, causal inference, Bayesian modeling, clustering, classification, data mining, NLP/sentiment analysis, hierarchical linear modeling, survey design, QA testing, automation pipelines.
- **Programming & Technical Tools:** Python (pandas, NumPy, scikit-learn, matplotlib), R (tidyverse, ggplot2, lme4), SQL, PySpark, Bash, HTML/CSS, SPSS syntax, SPSS Process, MPlus, Stata, SAS.
- **Platforms & Infrastructure:** GitHub, Tableau, Excel (advanced; VBA/macros), Qualtrics, SONA, WordPress, AWS (S3, IAM), FileMaker Pro, Jupyter Notebook, VirtualBox, Microsoft Access, cPanel, MySQL, PostgreSQL, Apache Spark.
- **Data Collection & Research Tools:** MTurk, TurkPrime, digital trace collection (e.g., Reddit web scraping), behavioral experiments, survey platforms, dashboard development (e.g., Tableau, WordPress-based), BioPac Systems (basic).
- **Languages:** English (fluent), Greek (fluent), Spanish (proficient), Russian (beginner), French (beginner)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to begin this dissertation by thanking three powerful and inspirational women: my advisor, Dr. Heejung Kim; my cohort-mate and best friend, Paige Harris; and my yiayia, Vaso Bountouvas. Each of them embodies a different kind of strength, and I admire and respect them deeply for the ways they have served as role models in my life.

Heejung has been a source of quiet and steady support throughout these years. She is never loud or showy in her guidance, but instead always thoughtful, aware, and present in the ways that matter. Her patience, kindness, and unassuming generosity have been an anchor for me, and I am profoundly grateful for the ways she has guided me. Heejung, I am eternally grateful for you.

Paige is by far the best thing that came out of this Ph.D. She embodies kindness to the point that, at first, you almost can't believe someone could be so thoroughly kind. But I've had the privilege of knowing her deeply and intimately over the years, and I can attest to the fact that her kindness truly has no bounds. She is endlessly generous, loving, and good. Her friendship has been the single greatest gift of this experience, and I am so lucky to leave graduate school with a sisterhood that will last a lifetime.

My yiayia, Vaso Bountouvas, was my person, the first love I knew, and my guiding light. She sacrificed so much so that I could have opportunities she never had, including the chance to go to school. She may never have had a formal education, but the wisdom she learned and imparted on me was the most valuable and sacred of my life. Yiayia carried herself with a quiet, beautiful grace and a fierce love for her family, and I feel incredibly lucky to share her name and to continue her legacy. Not a day goes by that I don't think about her, and I will go through life carrying her spirit with me, trying to honor her and everything she dreamed of. I am grateful beyond measure to have been loved by her, and I know she will continue to guide me through her loving memory. Yiayia, σε αγαπώ πάρα πάρα πάρα πολύ και μου λείπεις κάθε μέρα.

Alongside my yiayia, I thank my pappou, Stavro Bountouvas, who also sacrificed so much and who has taught me to laugh, to stay lighthearted, and to embrace life with humor and generosity. Pappou, I would give anything to play cards with you and yiayia again, despite your tendency to peek at the cards before it's your turn.

I am grateful to my aunt and uncle, Mary and Theo Kotseroglou, for their steadfast support. When I graduated from high school, they gave me *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* by Dr. Seuss, a book that has stayed with me as a symbol of their belief in me. Thank you both so much for your love and support throughout my life. You believed in me when no one else (including myself) did, and you saved me from that cycle.

To Audrey Westerlund, I feel so fortunate to have a friend in you. You have been such a consistent and loving source of friendship, love, support, and wisdom since our teenage years

– how lucky am I to have met you so young? You understand my soul. I truly feel so lucky that we have grown in such similar ways, and that we are continuing through life with our friendship as part of our foundation. We are lucky. Thank you for always being there for me.

To Julie Brody, thank you for everything. I know you know.

To Dr. Nancy Collins, thank you for the kindness and grace you share with everyone you meet. You're a special person, and I thank you for all the support over the years.

To my cohort, thank you for walking through graduate school alongside me. I'd like to send a special thanks to Courtney Durdle; thank you for reminding us all to "do the work." I know we will all work hard to honor you and your memory throughout our lives.

To my Santa Barbara friends, Sam Cohen, Katie Keane, Chloe Lobdell, Bert Neal, Shannon Seaver, and Cortney Teyber, you have all become my chosen family, and I am endlessly grateful for the love, laughter, and solidarity we've shared. I am equally grateful to the Thornton family, Tom, Rachel, Arlo, Hugh, Leonie, and Eddy, for welcoming me into your lives. The joy and laughter you've all brought into my life have been a bright spot through all of this. To Donna Peterson, I am inspired by your devotion to your interests, your generosity, and your loving nature. I really look up to you.

To Sam Babichenko, thank you for your love, support, and statistical wisdom and help on this dissertation. You've taught me how to not take some things too seriously, and to take other things more seriously. Thank you for being you.

To my music friends: Allen Axelband, thank you for being a steadfast friend and concert companion. We've laughed a lot over the last few years, and I'm grateful to have met someone who understands my snark and love for music. To John and Kristen Labonte, thank you for always cheering me on and supporting me. To Maggie Kazmierowski, thank you for believing in me and building me up at every turn. Thank you all for understanding a piece of my soul that may seem strange to others.

To my Chicago girls, Samantha Stanley, Julianne Heller, and Allison Gregory, thank you all for your friendship, and the lesson that good intentions, love, and companionship can overpower any West Coast-Midwest cultural difference. You all helped shape me and have a piece of my heart. I hope you know that.

To my animals, Layla, Stella, Lady, and Don. Thank you for your love in the purest form. Layla, my 13-year-old border collie and best friend, has been with me through my twenties and all of graduate school. She has been by my side through late nights, data collection, and long stretches of writing. She cannot read these words, but she is the best girl in the whole world, and I am so grateful for her constant companionship. Stella, Lady, and Don, too, have brought comfort, cuddles, and joy, reminding me daily of the power of simple love.

I also want to thank my collaborators, especially Billy Jankowski at UCSB Residential Housing, for supporting this research over the years. And I am indebted to my research assistants, who spent countless hours helping to collect data and make these projects possible. I am grateful to the National Science Foundation for awarding me the Graduate Research Fellowship, and making this research possible.

Finally, I want to thank the music that has been alongside me and guided me through all these years. It has been a source of light, grounding, and joy throughout this journey. Let there be songs to fill the air. And whatever you do, take care of your shoes.

ABSTRACT

When Class Meets Closeness: The Role of Social Class Similarity in Relationship Development

by

Viki Papadakis

Despite structural integration in higher education, students often fail to form cross-social class relationships. This dissertation applies a sociocultural lens to investigate how social class similarity shapes interpersonal connection through two complementary studies. Study 1, a field study of randomly assigned college roommates, shows that income and first-generation status mismatch predict reduced perceived financial and interpersonal similarity, which in turn undermine relationship quality. Study 2, a laboratory experiment examining initial interactions, reveals a counterintuitive pattern: first-generation status mismatch sometimes leads to higher perceptions of common ground, emotional similarity, empathic accuracy, and interest in the partner, perhaps due to impression-management when class differences are made salient in a laboratory setting. Together, these findings suggest that social class similarity fosters sustained relationship quality over time, while class dissimilarity may temporarily boost initial interaction quality in some contexts. By framing social class as a cultural orientation, this work underscores that fostering meaningful connection requires not just structural diversity, but also careful attention to interpersonal dynamics.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction.....	1
A. Statement of the Problem.....	1
B. Conceptual Framework.....	2
C. Research Questions.....	3
D. Studies Overview.....	4
II. Review of Literature.....	5
A. Understanding Class-Based Relational Divides.....	6
1. Multiculturalism and Challenges.....	6
2. Homophily and Social Network Segregation.....	7
3. From Structure to Subjectivity: The Interpersonal Barrier.....	7
B. A Sociocultural Perspective.....	8
1. Social Class as Culture.....	8
2. Cultural Match vs. Mismatch in Social Contexts.....	9
3. Similarity and Relationship Development.....	10
4. Cross-Cultural Relationships: The Challenge of Dissonant Norms.....	11
5. Social Psychological Findings on Cross-Group Interactions.....	11
C. Foundations of Interpersonal Connection.....	12
1. Intimacy Process Model.....	12
2. Self-Disclosure.....	13
3. Emotions.....	14
D. The Present Dissertation.....	15
1. Summary & Theoretical Framework.....	15

2. Studies Overview.....	16
III. Study 1.....	20
A. Methods.....	20
1. Overview.....	20
2. Participants.....	21
3. Procedure.....	22
4. Measures.....	23
B. Results.....	44
1. Analytic Plan.....	44
2. Relationship Quality.....	47
3. Affective Tone.....	59
4. Behavioral Comfort.....	64
5. Synchrony.....	73
6. Exploratory Alternative Model.....	78
7. Study 1 Discussion.....	80
IV. Study 2.....	83
A. Methods	83
1. Overview.....	83
2. Participants.....	84
3. Procedure.....	85
4. Measures.....	86
B. Results.....	95
1. Analytic Plan.....	95

2. Social Class Predicting Interaction Quality.....	96
3. Social Class Predicting Affective Outcomes.....	98
4. Social Class Predicting Approach & Avoidance.....	99
5. Summary of Results.....	100
6. Exploratory Test of First- vs. Continuing-Generation Students.....	101
7. Study 2 Discussion.....	104
V. Discussion.....	107
A. Summarizing Results.....	107
B. Interpretation & Theoretical Implications.....	109
C. Limitations & Future Directions.....	111
D. Practical & Broader Implications.....	114
E. Conclusion.....	115

When Class Meets Closeness: The Role of Social Class Similarity in Relationship

Development

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

A. Statement of the Problem

In recent years, institutions across higher education, business, and government have made concerted efforts to foster diversity and inclusion. However, a persistent challenge remains: merely bringing people from different backgrounds into the same physical or institutional spaces does not necessarily lead to meaningful interpersonal connection. Despite the promise of diverse environments, people tend to form closer relationships with others who share similar social characteristics, a robust phenomenon known as *homophily* (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). This tendency undermines the potential benefits of diversity by limiting cross-group interaction and reinforcing social divisions (Page-Gould et al., 2008).

Social class is a particularly salient and underexamined dimension along which homophily persists. Even in contexts where cross-class interactions are structurally encouraged, such as college campuses, students often struggle to form close relationships across class lines (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013; Stuber, 2011). Much of the existing research on social class homophily has focused on structural explanations, such as limited opportunity for exposure or institutional segregation. Yet these explanations fall short in settings where cross-class contact is not only possible but routine (Jack, 2015; Stephens, Townsend, et al., 2012). Even in integrated environments like universities, class-based divides remain. This

raises a critical and unresolved question: why does social class homophily endure in settings designed to facilitate diverse interpersonal connections?

This dissertation proposes that part of the answer lies in subtle sociocultural processes that influence relationship formation. While individuals from different class backgrounds may be equally open to forming friendships, they may enter interactions with differing expectations, communication styles, and emotional norms shaped by their respective cultural contexts. These class-based mismatches may create invisible but powerful barriers to connection, even when opportunity and motivation are present (Stephens et al., 2014; Kraus et al., 2009). If true, this would suggest that structural diversity alone is insufficient to foster genuine inclusion; attention must also be paid to the interpersonal and cultural dynamics that shape how relationships form and unfold.

B. Conceptual Framework

This dissertation draws on a sociocultural framework that conceptualizes social class as more than an economic variable, but as a cultural context that shapes how people think, feel, and interact (Stephens et al., 2014). Research has shown that individuals from working-class backgrounds are more likely to adopt an *interdependent* model of self, emphasizing humility, responsiveness, and sensitivity to others' needs, while those from middle- and upper-class backgrounds tend to adopt an *independent* model of self, emphasizing autonomy, influence, and self-expression (Stephens et al., 2011; Stephens et al., 2012). These class-based cultural models shape expectations for how people navigate the world, including how they initiate and build relationships.

The concept of *cultural match* versus *mismatch* helps explain why individuals from lower-social class backgrounds may feel out of sync in institutional or interpersonal contexts

dominated by middle- to upper-class norms. Prior work has applied this lens to educational and workplace outcomes, but less is known about how it shapes relationship development (Stephens et al., 2014). This dissertation extends the cultural mismatch framework to the relational domain, asking how class-based differences might disrupt the subtle processes that build interpersonal closeness.

To explore this, I integrate the cultural mismatch perspective with the Intimacy Process Model (Reis & Shaver, 1988), which proposes that intimacy develops through cycles of self-disclosure and responsive communication. When individuals disclose personal information and receive responses that feel understanding, validating, and caring, they experience increased closeness and trust. However, when disclosure is met with discomfort, misinterpretation, or silence, intimacy can stall. If people from different class backgrounds come into interactions with divergent norms around emotional expression or responsiveness, these early cycles of disclosure may falter, creating interpersonal friction even in well-intentioned, integrated spaces. By connecting social class mismatch to core mechanisms in the development of intimacy, this framework helps explain why social class homophily persists not only for structural reasons, but also through subtle and often invisible cultural dynamics.

C. Research Questions

Building on the cultural mismatch framework and the Intimacy Process Model, this dissertation investigates how social class similarity shapes the development of interpersonal relationships in peer contexts. Specifically, it explores how subtle sociocultural differences may influence early interaction processes and long-term relationship outcomes among college students.

The core research questions are:

Research Question 1. Does social class similarity predict stronger peer relationships in early adulthood? I.e., when two individuals come from similar social class backgrounds, are they more likely to form close, high-quality relationships?

Research Question 2. What mechanisms account for the link between social class match and relationship outcomes? Specifically, do notions of similarity mediate the association between objective social class match and relationship quality?

Research Question 3. How do early relational processes, such as self-disclosure and emotional similarity, vary as a function of social class similarity? That is, when two individuals from different class backgrounds meet for the first time, how do their interaction patterns differ compared to class-matched dyads?

These research questions are examined through two complementary studies: a field study of randomly assigned college roommates (Study 1), and a laboratory study of initial dyadic interactions between strangers (Study 2). Together, they aim to clarify not only whether social class shapes relationship formation, but also how and why such effects emerge. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to shed light on how subtle interpersonal dynamics shaped by class-based cultural backgrounds may reinforce social divisions, even in the most diverse and well-intentioned settings. In doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of both the promise and the limits of multicultural integration.

D. Studies Overview

This dissertation includes two studies designed to examine the role of social class similarity in shaping peer relationship development. Together, they offer complementary insights: one capturing real-world outcomes over time, and the other zooming in on interaction processes in a controlled setting.

Study 1 is a field study that examines how social class background shapes the development of interpersonal relationships in a naturalistic context. Using data from randomly assigned college roommate pairs, this study investigates whether objective social class match (e.g., income, first-generation college status) predicts differences in perceived similarity and relationship quality. Although not an experimental test of mechanism, this study provides ecological validity by capturing how social class influences relationship development over the course of an academic year.

Study 2 is a laboratory study that focuses on the earliest moments of social connection. It investigates how objective social class match or mismatch shapes the unfolding of a first-time interaction between unacquainted peers. Drawing on the Intimacy Process Model, this study examines emotional similarity and empathic accuracy as potential mechanisms that influence perceived connection and interaction quality. Unlike Study 1, which observes relationship outcomes over time, Study 2 isolates specific behavioral and emotional dynamics during initial encounters. It is important to note that Study 2 is underpowered, so results should be interpreted with caution and viewed as an exploratory, descriptive snapshot.

By integrating field and lab approaches, these studies aim to provide both ecological and mechanistic insights into how social class background shapes peer relationships. Together, they shed light on the subtle cultural processes that may either facilitate or impede connection, even in environments designed to promote integration.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Understanding Social Class-Based Relational Divides

People from different social class backgrounds occupy vastly different social worlds, which in turn shape distinct psychological tendencies. These differences in cognition, emotion, and behavior often carry into interpersonal interactions, potentially impeding the development of meaningful relationships across class lines. Although structural constraints (e.g., neighborhood segregation, educational inequality) are commonly cited as explanations for class-based relational divides, social class-based social segregation also persists in highly integrated settings such as colleges and workplaces (Thomas, 2019). This raises a central question: why do cross-class relationships remain rare, even when people from different class backgrounds occupy the same spaces?

This dissertation takes an intercultural lens to explore this question, proposing that sociocultural psychological differences underlie some of the difficulty in forming cross-social class connections. Drawing on research in cultural psychology, close relationships, and social networks, I argue that interpersonal dynamics shaped by social class may produce subtle mismatches in expectations, communication norms, and emotional expression. These mismatches can act as invisible barriers to connection.

1. Multiculturalism and the Challenge of Cross-Social Class Connection

Diversity initiatives have become increasingly central across institutions, grounded in the idea that exposure to culturally diverse individuals promotes innovation, inclusion, and more equitable outcomes (Fowers & Richardson, 1996). One important but often neglected dimension of diversity is social class (Rubin, 2012). As economic inequality grows (Heathcote

et al., 2010), individuals from different social class backgrounds are increasingly likely to come into contact, but not necessarily to connect.

Despite integration efforts, social class homophily (i.e., the tendency to form relationships with others of similar social class) remains widespread (Thomas, 2019). Even in college dorms or multicultural workplaces, people tend to build closer relationships with class-similar others. This trend limits the potential of multicultural environments to serve as catalysts for cross-class understanding and opportunity.

2. Homophily and Social Network Segregation

Sociologists have long noted that social networks are shaped by homophily, which is the principle that similarity breeds connection (McPherson & Smith-Lovin, 1987). Homophily patterns are well-documented along many dimensions, including race, religion, and particularly socioeconomic status. High-social class individuals tend to form networks rich in resources, opportunities, and social capital; lower-social class individuals are more likely to remain in resource-poor networks. This social class-based network stratification reinforces existing inequalities and impedes upward mobility (Granovetter, 1973; Cattell, 2001).

Structural constraints certainly shape these patterns, but even when those constraints are lifted, such as on diverse college campuses, homophily persists. This suggests that interpersonal or psychological mechanisms are also at play.

3. From Structure to Subjectivity: The Interpersonal Barrier

The social psychological literature has examined cross-group relational difficulty through the lens of intergroup processes. This includes group-level emotions, bias, power dynamics, and threat responses (Fiske, 2002; Mackie et al., 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

For example, Mendes et al. (2002) found that initial cross-race interactions can elicit physiological threat responses, reducing affiliative behaviors and cooperation.

Recent work suggests similar patterns in cross-class interactions. Côté et al. (2017) found that cross-SES interactions are associated with reduced social warmth and affiliative behavior. Cheng & Tracy (2013) emphasize the role of class-based dominance hierarchies in shaping interpersonal dynamics. Very recently, Tan et al. reported that dyads from similar social class backgrounds expressed greater liking for one another compared to dyads from dissimilar backgrounds (2025). While this intergroup work highlights status-based tensions, it does not fully explain how even well-intentioned individuals may struggle to connect across class lines. For that, we turn to a sociocultural perspective.

B. A Sociocultural Perspective

1. Social Class as Culture

Culture can be broadly defined as a system of shared norms, values, beliefs, and behavioral expectations shaped by one's social environment (Kim, 2002; Kim & Markus, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Cultural differences are often implicit, shaping how individuals interpret social cues and structure relationships (Chu et al., 2024; Kim, 2002; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These tacit assumptions operate largely outside conscious awareness, meaning cultural mismatches, differences between expected and actual relational norms, can lead to misunderstanding, emotional discomfort, or subtle relational withdrawal even in the absence of explicit bias (Stephens et al., 2012).

One key insight from cultural psychology is that social class itself functions as a form of culture (Stephens et al., 2014). Individuals from lower-social class backgrounds tend to develop interdependent self-construals, prioritizing relational harmony, humility, and

responsiveness to others. In contrast, higher-social class individuals are more likely to develop independent self-construals, emphasizing autonomy, self-expression, and control (Stephens et al., 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 2010). These differences shape interpersonal behaviors, such as eye contact, emotional expressiveness, and self-disclosure (Kraus & Keltner, 2009).

2. Cultural Match vs. Mismatch in Social Contexts

Across domains, cultural match has been shown to promote psychological well-being, smoother interactions, and a sense of belonging, whereas cultural mismatch often induces stress and social disconnect (Stephens et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 2011). For instance, students from interdependent backgrounds may struggle in academic environments that reward independent, self-promoting behavior, leading to lower performance, higher anxiety, and a diminished sense of fit (Markus & Kitayama, 2003; Stephens et al., 2014).

Cultural mismatch can impair communication and connection by disrupting mutual expectations about appropriate behavior. When individuals differ in their assumptions about how to express warmth, disclose emotion, assert themselves, or manage interpersonal space, they may misread each other's intentions, experience awkwardness, or feel socially distant (Butler et al., 2007; Fujiwara & Daibo, 2022). These mismatches can trigger *expectancy violations*, where behavior deviates from what one implicitly anticipates in a social exchange, leading to discomfort or even negative evaluations (Burgoon, 1993).

Moreover, cultural mismatch often introduces *attributional ambiguity*: individuals may struggle to determine whether a strained interaction reflects a personal shortcoming, cultural misunderstanding, or subtle bias (Crocker et al., 1991). This ambiguity can increase cognitive load and emotional strain during social encounters, undermining authenticity and ease (Richeson & Shelton, 2003). In intergroup contexts, even fleeting moments of mismatch can

reduce affiliative behavior, stifle rapport, and diminish the desire for future contact (Mendes et al., 2002; Trawalter et al., 2009).

In this dissertation, I extend the concept of cultural match/mismatch to dyadic interactions. I propose that social class-based cultural differences in communication norms and emotional expression may lead to interpersonal mismatch during initial interactions, reducing the likelihood of comfort, resonance, and deeper connection, even in the absence of explicit bias or negative intent.

3. Similarity & Relationship Development

One of the most robust findings in relationship science is that similarity predicts attraction and closeness. Meta-analytic evidence suggests that both objective similarity (e.g., shared attitudes) and subjective perceptions of similarity foster more positive relationship outcomes (Byrne, 1971; Montoya et al., 2008). Notably, perceived similarity is the stronger predictor in early relationship formation. Perceived similarity is a foundational element of interpersonal attraction and relationship development (Byrne et al., 1971; Montoya et al., 2008). Individuals tend to feel more comfortable, validated, and connected with others they perceive to be similar to themselves across a range of domains, including values, interests, background, and socioeconomic standing. These effects are thought to arise because similarity enhances mutual understanding, validates one's worldview, and reduces the likelihood of conflict (Byrne, 1971).

Research in social and cultural psychology suggests that perceived similarity is not uniformly influential across domains; rather, some forms of similarity may be more salient or identity-relevant than others. For example, perceived similarity in financial background may activate shared assumptions, behaviors, or comfort levels related to social class, while

similarity in non-financial domains (e.g., values, habits, academic orientation) may influence day-to-day compatibility and social connection (Kraus et al., 2011; Stephens et al., 2012).

4. Cross-Cultural Relationships: The Challenge of Dissonant Norms

Cross-cultural relationships introduce additional challenges, as differing cultural norms can lead to misunderstandings, misattributions, and mismatches in emotional expression. For example, differences in how affection or disagreement is expressed may be interpreted as lack of care or even hostility (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). Important work has highlighted cultural differences in social support norms and expectations, with detrimental effects noted with violation of these norms and expectations (Kim et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2021). Without shared frameworks for interpreting behavior, even well-meaning interaction partners may find it difficult to build trust and intimacy.

5. Social Psychological Findings on Cross-Group Interactions

Social interactions broadly refer to situations in which individuals engage with one another. The social psychological literature provides some insight as to why we might notice homophilic trends at an *interpersonal* level, through the perspective of what happens during social interactions. Specifically, the intergroup interactions literature has examined interpersonal interactions from the perspective of *cross-group* vs. *same-group* interactions. Overall, the findings point to difficulty in cross-group (vs. same-group) interactions (Fiske, 2002).

To explain these trends, the intergroup literature has identified and examined processes such as group-level emotions, stigma, power, threat, and bias, among others (Fiske, 2002; Mackie et al., 2008; Tropp, 2006). For example, research has found that, during initial cross-race interactions, individuals experience physiological threat responses, which negatively

affects cooperation with cross-race interaction partners (Mendes et al., 2002). The intergroup approach has also found that cross-social class (vs. same-social class) interactions are associated with *less* social affiliative behaviors and emotions (Côté et al., 2017), and the importance of social class rank begetting differential levels of dominance and prestige during these interactions has been noted (Cheng & Tracy, 2013).

This intergroup approach, as well as the empirical evidence therewithin, provide evidence that there is indeed relational difficulty in cross-group interactions at an interpersonal level, but another literature may provide some important guidance to understanding these interpersonal interactions, albeit, from a different angle: the relationship *development* literature that exists within the social psychological sub-field of close relationships.

C. Foundations of Interpersonal Connection

1. The Intimacy Process Model

We now turn to the social psychological literature of close relationships to understand the building blocks to close relationship development; in this literature, the most typical way of discussing the development of close relationships is through discussion of the development of *intimacy*. Intimacy is an important process involved in all close relationships, as it refers to the development of a deep, shared connection between individuals, including features of both cognitive and affective closeness (Reis & Shaver, 1988). All close relationships, including those that are platonic and romantic, are predicated on the existence of intimacy; as such, the *development* of intimacy is important to elucidate.

The Intimacy Process Model (Reis & Shaver, 1988) is a seminal work in the social psychological literature that delineates the process for close relationship (i.e., intimate

relationship) development and maintenance¹. Reis & Shaver operationalize intimacy as a process involving several key steps, including self-disclosure, and emotional displays. We will now parse these key components in order to understand their role in the development of intimacy, which will inform our discussion of cross-group relationship development.

2. Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosures refer to information about the self that are shared during social interactions. These self-disclosures are usually spoken, and can vary in depth (i.e., the intimacy level of the disclosure; e.g., “I am nervous about meeting you.” being a disclosure with more depth, vs. “I was born in Iowa.” being a disclosure with less depth) and breadth (i.e., the amount of the disclosure; e.g., “I was born to a poor family in a rural town in Iowa.” being a disclosure with more breadth, vs. “I was born in Iowa.” being a disclosure with less breadth (Collins & Miller, 1994).

Self-disclosure has consistently been found to promote the development of intimate relationships (Collins & Miller, 1994). Self-disclosure can serve as both a gauge and a signal to indicate how much liking and trust there is in the relationship (as more disclosure is perceived to be associated with more liking and trust; Collins & Miller, 1994), and serves as a positive relationship behavior, since self-disclosure from one person encourages self-

¹ It is important to note that, while the Intimacy Process Model is involved in both the development *and* maintenance of intimacy, in the present paper, we are interested in the *initial development* of close relationships. While the development of intimacy is an ongoing process, its initial processional iterations (i.e., initial times going through the Intimacy Process Model) are fundamental in the decision to pursue subsequent interactions (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Because of this, the Intimacy Process Model as related to *initial* intimacy-developing steps are important to our sociocultural discussion of why dissimilar-social class close relationships may fail to develop.

disclosure from another, often gradually increasing between interaction partners in terms of depth and breadth (i.e., social penetration; Taylor, 1968).

As such, self-disclosure plays a central role in relationship development and maintenance, especially in emerging adult peer contexts such as college roommates (Collins & Miller, 1994; Sprecher et al., 2013). The willingness to disclose personal information signals openness, trust, and emotional investment, all of which contribute to relationship closeness and quality (Laurenceau et al., 1998).

However, not all types of disclosure carry the same psychological or relational weight. Research in social psychology suggests that financial disclosure is particularly sensitive, norm-violating, and identity-relevant, especially in contexts where social class differences may be salient (Piff et al., 2012; Kraus et al., 2011). Individuals from lower-social class backgrounds may be more reluctant to discuss financial matters due to stigma or a mismatch with institutional norms that privilege openness in non-financial domains (Stephens et al., 2011). Conversely, financial disclosure may be a particularly strong signal of social class match or mismatch in peer relationships, influencing comfort and trust.

3. Emotions

Another important process involved in intimate relationship formation involve our emotional responses and displays to one another. These emotional responses may take the form of verbal behaviors (e.g., saying, “That’s a cool story!”, as a response to an interaction partner’s self-disclosure) or non-verbal behaviors (e.g., smiling as a response to an interaction partner’s self-disclosure), with both being important parts of the intimacy development process. The emotional and behavioral responses one receives during an interpersonal interaction serve as important signals of the other person’s internal states (e.g., their liking of you; Reis & Shaver,

1988). Reis & Shaver posit that “appropriate responses enhance feelings of connectedness, whereas inappropriate responses...keep interactants at a distance” (1988, p. 379).

What constitutes an “appropriate [emotional] response”? An array of social psychological research has elucidated the importance of emotional match in social interactions. Schachter’s *emotional similarity hypothesis* posits that people prefer interacting with interaction partners who are experiencing similar emotions to their own (1959). Emotional similarity may allow for individuals to feel validated in their perceptions, as well as allow a social interaction to feel more predictable (Townsend et al., 2014). Indeed, various empirical studies have found that emotional similarity is associated with increased social interaction quality (Locke & Horowitz, 1990; Townsend et al., 2014), as well as more positive relationship outcomes (Gonzaga et al., 2007; Verhofstadt et al., 2008). For example, during initial dyadic interactions where a stressful stimulus is presented, having emotional similarity with one’s interaction partner is associated with lower stress levels, both reported and physiologically as measured through cortisol (Townsend et al., 2014).

D. Present Dissertation

1. Summary and Theoretical Framework

The present dissertation aims to explore potential impedances to the development of meaningful cross-social class relationships utilizing a *sociocultural* perspective. There is novelty in the subtlety involved in our perspective. People learn cultural assumptions through their social class backgrounds, and this cultural learning is expressed in norms, expectations, perspectives, and behaviors that differ across social class groups (Stephens, Markus, et al., 2014). Our sociocultural approach attempts to make visible these typically-invisible cultural assumptions, which we argue are at play during mismatched-social class interactions. In other

words, an individual's social class background shapes their cultural assumptions and expectations about their social world, which in turn influences how they think, feel, and behave during social interactions (Fiske, 2002). We argue that, during mismatched-social class interactions, these cultural differences pose subtle, yet consequential, feelings of discomfort or unease, which, in turn, may hinder the development of these cross-cultural relationships.

It is important to note that these effects may be realized even in willing and well-intended interactions. Whereas the intergroup approach is predicated on status and group-based differences, we argue (without denying that the intergroup approach certainly plays a role in many contexts) that subtle sociocultural differences in relationship norms and behaviors will hinder relationship development in cross-group pairs, even when both parties are well-intended and interested in potentially forming a relationship. Our sociocultural perspective offers a subtle and unintentional interpersonal perspective on a process that may hinder the development of dissimilar-social class relationships.

Together, the literature reviewed here supports a sociocultural model of class-based relationship development. This model suggests several key points. First, that social class is a cultural orientation that shapes interpersonal expectations and behaviors. Second, that similarity, especially perceived similarity, is critical for relationship development. And mechanistically, that cultural mismatch in early interactions may impede intimacy formation via differences in self-disclosure and emotional expression. The next chapters will test this framework through two complementary studies, as described below.

2. Studies Overview

This dissertation includes two complementary studies that examine how social class similarity shapes peer relationships at different stages of development. Study 1 is a field study

of randomly assigned college roommates, which captures the ecological dynamics of naturally unfolding relationships over time. This design allows us to test whether objective indicators of class similarity (income and first-generation status) shape perceived similarity and, in turn, relationship quality. Study 2 is a laboratory study of first-time interactions between previously unacquainted peers. By focusing on the earliest moments of connection, it provides a window into how class similarity and dissimilarity influence affective alignment, empathic accuracy, and perceived interaction quality at the outset of a potential relationship. Together, these studies offer both ecological and mechanistic insights into how social class shapes the processes by which new relationships begin and develop.

Study 1 Hypotheses. Drawing on a sociocultural perspective, we propose that subtle but impactful differences in culturally-shaped norms, expectations, and relational behaviors, as engendered by social class background, influence how individuals interpret and engage in relationship development processes. According to the Intimacy Process Model (Reis & Shaver, 1988), intimacy develops through reciprocal self-disclosure and appropriate emotional responsiveness. We extend this model by proposing that structural factors such as objective social class similarity (e.g., shared generational college status or similar parental income) shape *perceptions* of similarity, which in turn influence the interpersonal processes that foster intimacy and relationship quality.

We hypothesize a sequential mediation process in which:

1. Social class similarity between roommates (e.g., similar parental income, matched first-generation status) predicts greater *perceived financial similarity*.
2. Greater *perceived financial similarity* then predicts greater *perceived interpersonal similarity*, such as shared values and interests.

3. Greater *perceived non-financial similarity* and *self-disclosure levels* in turn, predict higher *relationship quality*.

Thus, our central hypothesis is as follows: *social class similarity will indirectly predict higher relationship quality through a sequential pathway involving perceived financial similarity and perceived interpersonal similarity*. This model builds on prior work showing that cultural mismatch impairs relationship quality (Stephens, Hamedani et al., 2014; Townsend et al., 2014), and that perceived similarity enhances dyadic closeness (Gonzaga et al., 2007; Locke & Horowitz, 1990). By focusing on both financial and interpersonal perceived similarity as mediators, this work uniquely captures the psychological mechanisms that translate structural social class configurations into relational outcomes.

Additionally, we hypothesize that *social class similarity will indirectly predict higher relationship quality through a sequential pathway involving increased self-disclosures*. Self-disclosure further provides a critical interpersonal mechanism linking similarity to relationship quality. In emerging adult peer contexts such as college roommates, willingness to disclose personal information reflects comfort, emotional investment, and a readiness to build closeness (Sprecher et al., 2013; Laurenceau et al., 1998). Thus, we propose that social class similarity may foster greater self-disclosure between roommates, which in turn contributes to higher-quality relationships. Exploratory analyses will examine whether financial vs. non-financial self-disclosures affect this pathway differently.

Study 2 Hypotheses. Building on the same framework as Study 1, we propose that similarity in social class background fosters more positive interpersonal dynamics during the earliest stages of relationship formation, whereas dissimilarity may impede them. Because initial interactions are critical for shaping impressions and determining whether new

connections continue, we focus on interaction quality as a primary outcome and consider affective alignment and interpersonal goals as key mechanisms.

Hypothesis 1. Social class similarity (vs. dissimilarity) will predict greater interaction quality, reflected not only in participants' global evaluations of the interaction (e.g., enjoyment, satisfaction, desire to continue engaging) but also in their perceptions of common ground and interest in their partner.

Hypothesis 2. Social class similarity will predict more positive affective processes during the interaction. Specifically, similar dyads will exhibit greater emotional similarity, higher empathic accuracy, more positive affect, and less negative affect.

Hypothesis 3. Social class similarity will predict stronger endorsement of approach-oriented interpersonal goals and weaker endorsement of avoidance-oriented goals during the interaction.

Together, these hypotheses reflect the view that structural similarity in social class can shape the affective, cognitive, and motivational dynamics that lay the groundwork for rapport and connection in early encounters. Given the small sample size of Study 2, these hypotheses should be treated as exploratory and descriptive rather than definitive tests.

Chapter III

STUDY 1

METHODS

1. Overview of Study 1

To investigate how social class similarity shapes the development of close relationships, we conducted a field study of first-year college roommates who were previously unacquainted prior to move-in. Participants were randomly assigned roommates by university housing, allowing us to examine the early development of naturally-occurring dyadic relationships with high ecological validity. Both members of each dyad completed individual survey measures assessing perceived financial and non-financial similarity with their roommate, self-disclosure willingness (for both financial and non-financial topics), and relationship quality, using the Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI). Dyadic-level objective financial similarity was operationalized based on differences in parental income and college-generation status (first-generation vs. continuing-generation). In addition to survey data, behavioral interactions between roommates were video-recorded and coded for key interpersonal dynamics implicated in the intimacy process, including affective tone, expressed comfort, observed self-disclosure, and multiple dimensions of synchrony (movement synchrony, speech synchrony, and sitting synchrony).

Taken together, this approach allowed us to examine both perceived and objective markers of similarity, and to test a conceptual model grounded in the *Intimacy Process Model* (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Specifically, we hypothesized that social class similarity would predict perceived financial similarity, which would in turn predict perceived interpersonal similarity, and ultimately relationship quality.

2. Participants

Participants were 262 undergraduate students (131 roommate dyads) at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), who were living in on-campus residence hall doubles and had not previously known their assigned roommate. All dyads were required to have both roommates participate concurrently. Recruitment took place in residence halls during three academic cohorts: 2019, 2022, and 2023. Eligibility criteria required that participants had lived with their current roommate for at least 10 weeks at the time of data collection.

All participants completed a survey, and a subset additionally participated in a video-recorded interaction task. Full sample sizes for each component are described in the relevant sections below.

The average age of participants was 18.61 years ($SD = 0.69$, range = 18-21). The majority of participants identified as female (69.5%, $n = 182$), followed by male (28.7%, $n = 75$), with a small number selecting “Other” (1.1%, $n = 3$) or “Prefer not to answer” (0.8%, $n = 2$). By comparison, the UCSB undergraduate population is 56% women, 41% men, and 2% identifying with another gender identity or unknown. Relative to this distribution, our sample overrepresented women (69.5% vs. 56%) and underrepresented men (28.7% vs. 41%), while the proportion identifying as another gender identity was similar (1.1% vs. 2%; University of California, Santa Barbara, 2025).

Approximately 34.4% of participants were classified as first-generation college students ($n = 90$), meaning neither parent had completed a four-year college degree. The remaining 65.6% were classified as continuing-generation students ($n = 172$). By comparison, the UCSB undergraduate population includes 31% first-generation students and 65%

continuing-generation students (with 4% unknown). As such, our sample closely reflected the university-wide distribution (University of California, Santa Barbara, 2025).

Participants were racially diverse, with the largest proportion identifying as White (30.2%), followed by Asian (24.0%) and Latinx (19.8%). Additional racial identities included Asian-White (6.9%), Latinx-White (6.1%), South Asian (4.6%), Black (1.9%), Middle Eastern (1.1%), Native American-White (0.8%), Pacific Islander (0.8%), and Undisclosed (0.8%). Several participants reported multiracial identities, including combinations such as Black-White-Other, Asian-Latinx, Asian-Middle Eastern, Asian-Pacific Islander, Latinx-White-Native American, Indian-White, Black-White, and Black-Indian (each $\leq 0.4\%$). By comparison, the UCSB undergraduate population is 35% White, 29% Hispanic/Latinx (22% Chicano, 7% Latino), 19% Asian, 9% International, 5% African American, 5% South Asian/E. Indian/Pakistani, 4% Filipino, 1% American Indian/Alaskan, and 3% reporting 'Decline to State.' Relative to this distribution, our sample overrepresented Asian students (24.0% vs. 19%) and underrepresented Latinx students (19.8% vs. 29%), while the proportion of White students was similar (30.2% vs. 35%); other racial groups were present in smaller numbers consistent with their lower prevalence in the UCSB undergraduate population (University of California, Santa Barbara, 2025).

3. Procedure

Participants were recruited through a combination of email announcements, printed flyers, and in-person outreach conducted in partnership with residence hall staff and resident assistants at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Recruitment targeted students living in double-occupancy rooms who had not previously known their assigned roommate.

Interested students were informed that both roommates needed to participate concurrently and must have lived together for at least 10 weeks to be eligible.

After providing in-person informed consent, participants completed an online survey hosted on Qualtrics using tablets supplied by the research team. Survey sessions were conducted in person, with both roommates completing the survey simultaneously in a shared space. All survey materials were completed individually and confidentially.

A subset of participants consented to the video-recorded portion of the study. These participants completed a brief, video-recorded interaction task. Roommates were seated side-by-side in a common room or other quiet, semi-private space near the dorms. Participants were instructed to “Tell us about the time you two first met in person,” and were given up to two minutes to respond. No additional structure or turn-taking rules were provided, allowing for natural variation in the conversational dynamic. Although most interactions lasted under two minutes, some extended slightly beyond the time limit.

All participants received a \$5 Amazon gift card as compensation. In some cases, additional food was provided during recruitment or data collection sessions, including items such as pizza and donuts.

4. Measures

Individual-Level Social Class Indicators

Generational College Status. In this study, we used first-generation college status as one indicator of participants’ social class background. While social class can be measured in a variety of ways, including income, parental education, and occupational prestige, research in social psychology highlights the particular salience of first-generation status in higher education contexts (Stephens et al., 2011; Stephens et al., 2012). At universities, where

institutional norms often reflect middle- and upper-middle-class cultural expectations, whether or not one's parents completed college can signal alignment or mismatch with those dominant norms (Johnson et al., 2011; Ostrove & Long, 2007). As such, first-generation status can shape how students experience belonging, academic engagement, and social interaction.

The distinction between first-generation and continuing-generation students has been widely used in social-class research, especially in studies conducted within university settings (e.g., Stephens et al., 2012; Snibbe & Markus, 2005). First-generation students, typically defined as those whose parents did not complete a four-year college degree, are more likely to come from working-class backgrounds and to endorse cultural models of self that emphasize interdependence and family obligation (Stephens et al., 2007). In contrast, continuing-generation students often reflect middle-class norms of independence and individual achievement, which are more closely aligned with institutional values in higher education.

Given the specific social and cultural dynamics of college roommate relationships, we expected that first-generation status would be a particularly meaningful and visible indicator of social class difference in this context. For this reason, we included first-generation status as a categorical measure of social class background, alongside subjective and perceived SES.

To determine first-generation college student status, participants were asked to report the highest level of education completed by each parent or guardian. Participants were categorized as first-generation if neither parent had completed a four-year college degree (i.e., highest education was an associate's degree or lower). Participants were categorized as continuing-generation if at least one parent had completed a four-year degree (B.A. or higher). This operationalization aligns with prior research in social psychology and education that defines first-generation status based on parental completion of a bachelor's degree (Stephens

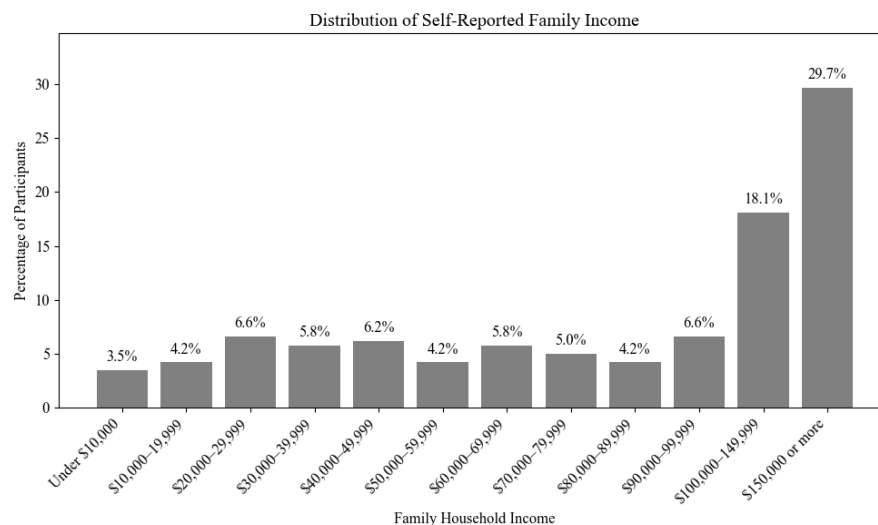
et al., 2012; Harackiewicz et al., 2014). Responses were coded dichotomously (0 = continuing-generation, 1 = first-generation) for use in primary analyses.

In the final sample, 34.4% of participants were classified as first-generation college students ($n = 90$), and 65.6% were classified as continuing-generation ($n = 172$). This distribution is consistent with national trends at public universities, where continuing-generation students remain the majority, but first-generation students represent a sizable and meaningful subgroup (Cataldi et al., 2018).

Household Income. Participants reported their family household income using a 12-point ordinal scale ranging from “Under \$10,000” to “\$150,000 or more.” The mean reported income was 8.52 ($SD = 3.61$), corresponding roughly to the \$70,000-79,999 income bracket. The distribution was negatively skewed (-0.67) and platykurtic (-1.01), indicating a modest clustering toward higher income brackets. Responses ranged from 1 to 12, with the median at 10 (“\$90,000-99,999”). To see a visual depiction of the distribution of household income, see Figure 1.

Figure 1

Household Income Distribution of Participants in Study 1



Relationship Between Individual-Level Social Class Indicators. To examine whether income level differed by first-generation status, we conducted an independent-samples Welch's t test. Continuing-generation students ($n = 172$) reported significantly higher family income levels ($M = 9.78$, $SD = 3.03$) compared to first-generation students ($n = 90$; $M = 6.17$, $SD = 3.46$), $t(161.9) = 8.34$, $p < .001$. The effect size was large, Cohen's $d = 1.13$, indicating that continuing-generation students reported substantially higher income levels than their first-generation peers.

Dyadic-Level Social Class Indicators

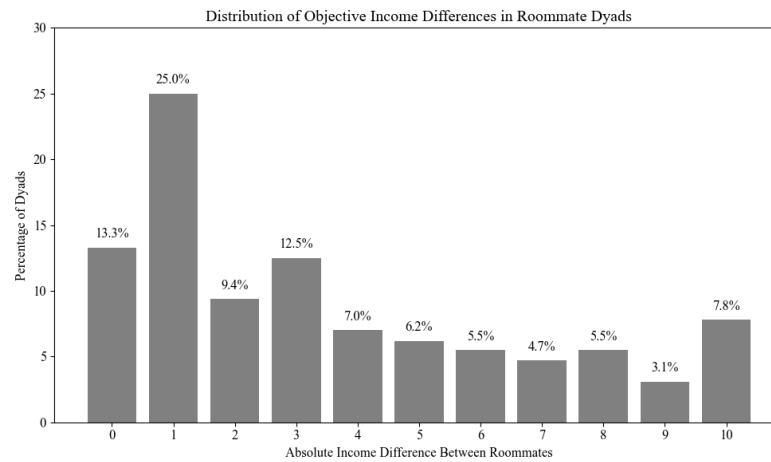
Generational College Status Match vs. Mismatch. To capture social class similarity within dyads, we categorized roommate pairs as either matched or mismatched in generational college status. Dyads in which both roommates were continuing-generation students or both were first-generation students were coded as social class matched, whereas dyads composed of one first-generation and one continuing-generation student were coded as social class mismatched. This approach aligns with prior research using social class match versus mismatch to examine cultural and interpersonal dynamics in dyadic and peer relationships (e.g., Stephens et al., 2012; Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Côté et al., 2017). In the final sample, 67 dyads (51.5%) were continuing-generation matches, 38 dyads (29.2%) were mismatched, and 26 dyads (19.3%) were first-generation matches.

Household Income Difference. As a dyad-level indicator of social class difference, we calculated the absolute difference in reported household income between roommates. Each participant reported their family's household income using a 12-point categorical scale (e.g., 1 = "Under \$10,000"; 12 = "\$150,000 or more"), and we computed the absolute value of the difference between the two roommates' responses. This resulted in a dyad-level income

difference score ranging from 0 (same income category) to 11 (maximum distance on the scale). Three dyads had missing data for one or both roommates and were excluded from this variable. Among the remaining dyads ($n = 128$), income difference scores ranged from 0 to 10, with a mean of 3.56 ($SD = 3.15$), a median of 3, and an interquartile range of 1 to 6, indicating substantial variability in within-dyad income differences. To see a visual depiction of the distribution of income difference in our dyads, see Figure 2.

Figure 2

Distribution of Absolute Income Difference in Roommate Dyads in Study 1



Relationship Between Dyadic-Level Social Class Difference Indicators. To test whether first-generation status match was associated with dyadic income differences, we conducted an independent-samples Welch's t test. Dyads in which both roommates were matched in first-generation status (either both first-generation or both continuing-generation; $n = 93$) reported significantly smaller income differences ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 2.84$) compared to dyads who were mismatched in first-generation status ($n = 38$; $M = 5.32$, $SD = 3.19$), $t(63.0) = -4.17$, $p < .001$. The effect size was large, Cohen's $d = -0.85$, indicating that mismatched dyads tended to come from substantially more divergent income backgrounds than matched dyads.

Racial Match as a Covariate. Dyadic racial match is a concept of interest informed by prior social psychological research emphasizing the importance of sociocultural and racialized experiences in shaping interpersonal relationships, particularly within dyads such as college roommate pairs (Gaither, 2013; Shook & Fazio, 2008). As such, a racial match variable was created at the dyad level based on participants' self-identified racial categories. Dyads were coded as "race matched" if the two roommates shared at least one racial identity, regardless of whether they identified exclusively or multiracially (e.g., a Latinx-White participant paired with a White participant was considered matched). Dyads in which no racial categories overlapped were coded as "race mismatched."

This inclusive coding approach was adopted in alignment with our theoretical emphasis on similarity and shared experience, particularly in the context of social class. Just as class similarity is theorized to foster interpersonal understanding through shared lived experiences, overlapping racial identities may similarly reflect common cultural backgrounds, experiences of marginalization, or social positioning that shape interpersonal dynamics (Gaither, 2013; Mendoza-Denton & Page-Gould, 2008; Shook & Fazio, 2008). Therefore, we considered even partial racial overlap to be meaningful for the purposes of race match.

Of the 127 codable dyads, 72 (56.7%) were classified as race matched, and 55 (43.3%) were classified as race mismatched (RaceMatch variable where 0 = race mismatch and 1 = race match). Four dyads were excluded due to missing racial information for one or both roommates.

Self-Disclosure

Self-Disclosure Willingness Scale. Based on prior work highlighting the role of class-based norms in shaping communication and openness (Stephens et al., 2012; Kraus & Tan,

2015), we developed a 17-item *Self-Disclosure Willingness Scale*. This scale includes both *financial similarity-related disclosures* (e.g., family income, spending habits, financial struggles) and *non-financial similarity-related disclosures* (e.g., political views, academic challenges, social fears). We expected these to form two distinct but related latent constructs.

Willingness to self-disclose was measured using a 17-item scale developed for this study. The scale was designed to assess participants' openness to sharing a range of personal topics with their assigned roommate. Guided by social psychological theories of intimacy, trust, and cultural norms surrounding social class and disclosure (Collins & Miller, 1994; Laurenceau et al., 1998; Stephens et al., 2012), items were developed to represent two theoretically distinct domains of self-disclosure: financial similarity-related topics and non-financial similarity-related topics. See Appendix 1A for the full self-disclosure scale.

Sample items from the *financial disclosure* subscale included: "My family's current financial situation", "My spending habits" and "My eating out habits". Sample items from the *non-financial disclosure* subscale included: "My political views", "My academic struggles", and "My social fears". Participants were instructed: "Please indicate which personal topics you have shared or would share with your roommate. Select all that apply." Responses were binary (0 = not selected, 1 = selected). The scale was presented as part of an online survey approximately two weeks after the roommate relationship began, allowing time for early rapport to develop. Descriptive statistics for the full scale indicated that participants disclosed an average of 13.71 topics (SD = 3.73) out of 17.

However, the endorsement distributions were *extremely* skewed toward maximum disclosure. For the full scale, scores ranged from 1 to 17, with a negative skew (-1.24) and kurtosis (1.04). For the disclosure subscales, scores for financial disclosure were $M = 0.78$ (SD

= 0.28, skew = -1.11) and non-financial disclosure scores were $M = 0.82$ ($SD = 0.22$, skew = -1.30). Many participants selected *all* items in one or both categories, producing pronounced ceiling effects and severely restricted variability. This pattern renders the measure statistically unsuitable for mediation or regression modeling, as extreme skew and ceiling effects (Lodder, 2023). Given the extreme skew and ceiling effects, self-disclosure was excluded from primary analyses despite its conceptual centrality.

Perceived Similarity

Perceived Similarity Scale. In this study, we hypothesized that perceived similarity would function as a key predictor of relationship quality, and as a potential mechanism linking SES match to interpersonal outcomes. To assess this construct, we developed a 10-item Perceived Similarity Scale that asked participants to rate how similar they felt to their assigned roommate across a variety of domains. Each item was rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all similar*) to 4 (*Very similar*), capturing subjective perceptions of shared background, values, and experiences. See Appendix 1B for the Perceived Similarity Scale.

Consistent with theoretical distinctions in the literature, items were designed to reflect two subdomains: perceived financial similarity (e.g., “The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you in your financial situations,” “...in your spending habits”) and perceived non-financial similarity (e.g., “...in your level of sociability,” “...in your political attitudes,” “...in what you like to do for fun”). This distinction aligns with research highlighting the psychological and social significance of perceived class-based similarity (Piff et al., 2012) and the broader role of similarity in fostering interpersonal comfort, communication, and bonding (Montoya & Horton, 2013).

Descriptive statistics for the full scale indicated that participants perceived moderate levels of overall similarity with their roommates. The mean score was 2.71 (SD = 0.56) on a 4-point scale, with scores ranging from 1.2 to 4.0. The distribution showed slight negative skew (-0.22) and near-zero kurtosis (-0.09), suggesting relatively symmetric responses clustered toward the higher end of the scale. The internal consistency of the full scale was slightly below modern conventions (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$), indicating moderate reliability across the 10 similarity items.

We tested a two-factor confirmatory model in which the financial similarity items loaded onto one latent factor and the remaining non-financial items loaded onto a second. These latent variables were then used in structural equation models testing whether perceived SES similarity influences roommate relationship quality through domain-specific similarity perceptions.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis on Perceived Similarity Scale. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using the *semopy* package in Python to evaluate the hypothesized two-factor structure of the Perceived Similarity Scale. The model demonstrated acceptable fit to the data: $\chi^2(34) = 102.86$, $p < .001$, CFI = .88, TLI = .85, RMSEA = .088. All items loaded significantly onto their theorized latent variables, with standardized loadings ranging from 0.66 to 1.02 ($ps < .001$). The two factors, financial and non-financial similarity, were positively correlated ($r = .23$), suggesting they represent related but distinct dimensions of perceived similarity. The internal consistency of the subscales was moderate (financial similarity Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$; non-financial similarity Cronbach's $\alpha = .73$), indicating acceptable reliability across subscale items. These two latent variables were subsequently used in structural equation models to examine indirect effects of social class match on relationship

quality via domain-specific similarity perceptions. See Appendix 1C for the full report of this CFA.

Perceived Non-Financial Similarity Subscale. Perceived non-financial similarity was assessed using a 6-item subscale of the Perceived Similarity Scale. This subscale measured the extent to which participants felt similar to their assigned roommate in domains unrelated to finances, such as values, habits, and social preferences. Participants rated each item on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all similar) to 4 (Very similar), with higher scores reflecting greater perceived similarity in non-financial domains. Sample items included “The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you in your level of sociability” and “...in your political attitudes.”

As discussed, internal consistency for the subscale was acceptable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .73$). Descriptive statistics indicated that participants generally perceived moderate-to-high non-financial similarity with their roommates ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 0.61$). Scores ranged from 1.33 to 4.00, with a median of 3.00 and an interquartile range of 2.50 to 3.33. The distribution exhibited slight negative skew (-0.51) and near-zero kurtosis (-0.13), suggesting that most participants perceived their roommates as at least somewhat similar across these non-financial dimensions. To see the distribution of perceived non-financial similarity, see Figure 3 below.

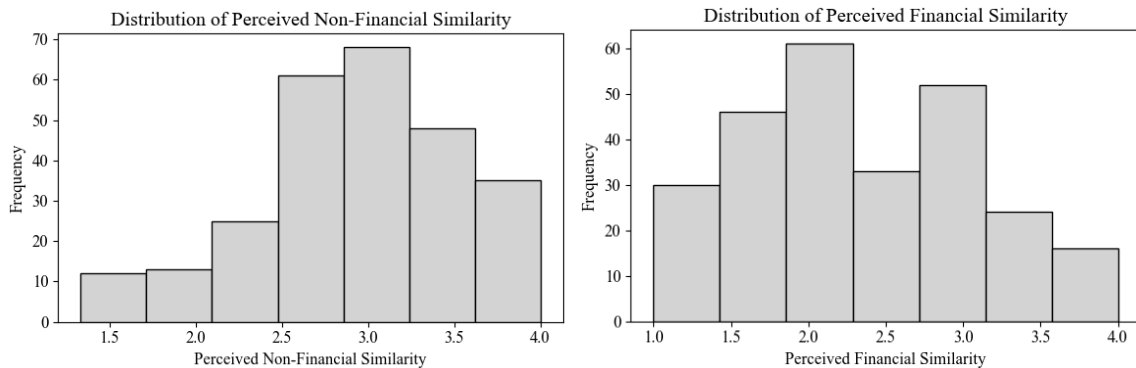
Perceived Financial Similarity Subscale. Perceived financial similarity was assessed using a 4-item subscale drawn from the broader Perceived Similarity Scale. Items asked participants to rate the extent to which they felt their roommate was similar to them in their financial situation, spending habits, childhood neighborhood, and travel/vacation experiences. These items were selected to capture shared class-based background and lifestyle patterns that may contribute to interpersonal ease, comfort, or misalignment. Example prompts include:

“The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you in your financial situations” and “...in the neighborhood where you grew up.” Ratings were made on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (*Not at all similar*) to 4 (*Very similar*).

The scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .75$). Descriptive statistics indicated that participants perceived modest levels of financial similarity with their roommates. The mean score was 2.35 (SD = 0.76), with scores ranging from 1.0 to 4.0. The distribution was slightly positively skewed (skew = 0.17) and moderately platykurtic (kurtosis = -0.73), indicating a relatively normal shape with a concentration of responses toward the lower-to-moderate end of the scale. To see the distribution of perceived financial similarity, see Figure 3 below.

Figure 3

Distributions of Perceived Non-Financial Similarity & Financial Similarity in Study 1



Quality of Relationships Inventory

The quality of the roommate relationship was assessed using a modified version of the Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI; Pierce et al., 1991). The QRI is a widely used measure of perceived relationship quality, originally developed to assess close relationships such as romantic partners or close friends. It assesses multiple dimensions of relational functioning, including support, conflict, and depth.

For the purposes of this study, we selected a subset of 10 conceptually relevant QRI items and adapted their wording to refer specifically to “your roommate” rather than a romantic or chosen relationship partner. One additional item was included as an attention check and excluded from scale scoring. The modified scale allowed us to assess participants’ perceptions of their roommate relationship in terms of emotional closeness, dependability, and conflict. Given the QRI’s strong psychometric record and flexibility across relationship types, it was well suited for assessing relationship quality in the context of newly assigned college roommates.

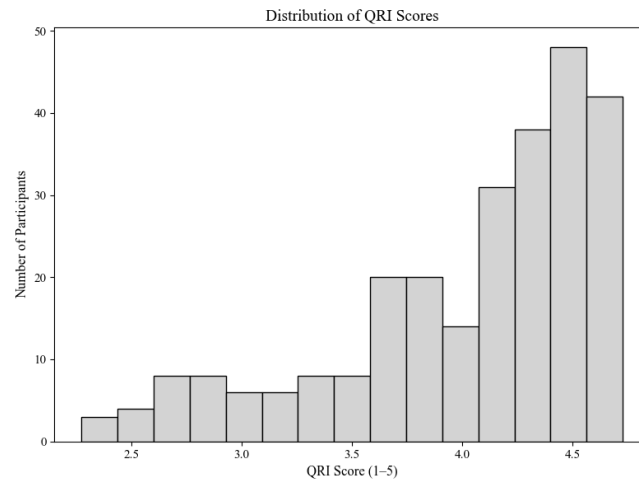
Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Very much*), indicating the extent to which each item described their current relationship with their assigned roommate. The modified QRI included items spanning relational support (e.g., “To what extent can you count on your roommate to help with a problem?”), emotional closeness (e.g., “How significant is your roommate in your life?”), and conflict (e.g., “How often do you need to work to avoid conflict with your roommate?”; this item was reverse-coded). Higher scores reflected greater overall relationship quality. To see the Quality of Relationships Inventory, see Appendix 1D.

Descriptive statistics indicated that participants generally reported high levels of roommate relationship quality. The average score on the modified QRI was 4.03 (SD = 0.60) on a 5-point scale, with observed values ranging from 2.23 to 4.73. The distribution was moderately negatively skewed (-1.05) with light positive kurtosis (0.29), suggesting that most participants perceived their roommate relationship as quite positive, with a clustering of scores toward the higher end of the scale (to see the distribution, see Figure 4). The internal

consistency of the full scale was high (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$), indicating strong reliability across the 10 relationship quality items.

Figure 4

Distribution of Individual-Level QRI Scores in Study 1



Behavioral Video Coding

Overview of Coding Procedure. A subset of participants ($n = 87$ dyads) consented to take part in a brief, video-recorded interaction task (see Procedure). Videos were recorded in-person by trained research assistants. Two independent coders, blind to study hypotheses, rated each video on several behavioral dimensions (affective tone, comfort, and synchrony). Coders worked independently for all ratings, and their scores were averaged after establishing acceptable interrater reliability. This approach follows common practices in social psychology for observational coding of dyadic interactions (e.g., Heyman et al., 2014).

Coder Training & Calibration. Coder training occurred over approximately four sessions (~8 total hours). Coders practiced on a subset of videos drawn from the full dataset, using a detailed codebook (see Appendix 1E). During training, coders discussed their practice ratings to calibrate interpretations of behavioral cues. Based on feedback from these sessions,

certain coding guidelines were refined to improve clarity and consistency. After training, all videos, including those used for practice, were re-coded independently by each coder as part of the formal coding process. Interrater reliability reached acceptable thresholds for each variable before final scores were averaged across coders (see individual variable descriptions below).

Variables Coded. Coders provided ratings for the dyad as a whole, rather than for individual participants. Each interaction video was evaluated on three behavioral dimensions: affective tone, comfort, and synchrony (sitting, movement, and speech synchrony). These dimensions were selected based on their theoretical relevance to interpersonal connection and relationship development in early-stage interactions. In the subsections that follow, we describe each variable in detail, outline the rationale for its inclusion, and report the interrater reliability (intraclass correlation coefficients; ICCs) for each.

Affective Tone. Affective tone refers to the general emotional atmosphere conveyed during interpersonal exchanges, encompassing cues like warmth, tension, positivity, or awkwardness, regardless of what is being said. In dyadic interactions, affective tone plays a central role in shaping perceptions of relational quality, comfort, and connection (Anderson et al., 2003; Gonzaga et al., 2001). Because nonverbal emotional cues often emerge through facial expressions, vocal tone, and body language, affective tone is well-suited for video-based behavioral coding and has been used in past research to evaluate interpersonal dynamics in romantic couples, friends, and strangers (Axelrod & Hone, 2006; Gonzaga et al., 2001).

In the present study, we adapted our coding scheme to be sensitive to variation within a sample skewed toward positive tone. Rather than assuming symmetrical dispersion across negative to positive affect, we designed a scale that allows for finer differentiation among

degrees of positive tone (e.g., distinguishing between mild friendliness and sustained emotional warmth) while still capturing rare but meaningful instances of low or neutral affect. As such, to assess the overall emotional tone of the interaction, coders rated the general affective quality of each conversation on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated *negative*, in which the recorded interaction was somewhat cold, emotionally flat, distant, awkward, or disengaged; 2 indicated *neutral*, in which the recorded interaction was polite but reserved, minimal warmth or emotional expression; 3 indicated *moderately positive*, in which the recorded interaction had some friendliness or light emotion, but it was unclear if the displayed affect reflected genuine connection or social politeness; 4 indicated *positive*, in which the recorded interaction was noticeably positive or good-humored tone at least part of the time (e.g., clear warmth, laughing, playfulness, or relaxed rapport, but not sustained throughout); 5 indicated *very positive*, in which the recorded interaction was warm, affectionate, or joyful tone across most or all of the interaction; includes frequent laughter, giggling, easy rapport, and emotionally expressive delivery.

Two trained coders independently rated the affective tone of each dyadic interaction on a 5-point Likert scale (for the full coding scheme, see Appendix 1E.1). Their ratings were averaged to create a single composite score per dyad. Interrater reliability was assessed using a two-way random-effects model with absolute agreement (McGraw & Wong, 1996), implemented via the ICC() function from the *psych* package in R (Revelle, 2023). The resulting average-measures ICC indicated high agreement between coders, $ICC(2,2) = 0.90$, 95% CI [0.85, 0.93]. The single-measure ICC was 0.82, 95% CI [0.74, 0.88], indicating good agreement between individual raters. Affective tone scores ranged from 1 to 5, where higher scores indicate more positive affective tone, with a mean of 3.08 (SD = 1.26).

Comfort. Comfort refers to the observable ease, relaxation, or awkwardness present during interpersonal interactions (Sundstrom & Altman, 1976). In video-coded dyadic contexts, comfort captures how naturally the conversation flows and how at ease participants appear with one another, regardless of the specific content being discussed. Nonverbal indicators of comfort, such as posture, pauses, conversational flow, and informal affect, offer important cues about social connection, relational attunement, and mutual engagement (Anderson et al., 2003; Gonzaga et al., 2001). In prior research, comfort has been used to assess emotional safety and rapport in romantic relationships, friendship formation, and stranger interactions, often serving as a key predictor of interpersonal outcomes (Gonzaga et al., 2001; Heerey & Kring, 2007; Schachner et al., 2005).

In the present study, we adapted our coding scheme to reflect the distribution of observed behaviors in a sample skewed toward relatively high comfort. Rather than assuming a symmetrical distribution of awkwardness and ease, we emphasized finer distinctions among mid-to-high levels of comfort, ranging from mild ease to fluent, spontaneous engagement, while still capturing lower levels of conversational strain or stiffness when present. As such, coders rated the overall level of interpersonal comfort on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated low comfort and 5 indicated high comfort. A rating of 1 indicated *low comfort*, in which the recorded interaction seemed stilted, awkward, or emotionally tense, with minimal ease or mutual engagement. A rating of 2 indicated *somewhat low comfort*, where the interaction appeared mildly strained or self-conscious, with some signs of nervousness or effortful communication. A rating of 3 indicated *moderate comfort*, in which the interaction was generally neutral, neither particularly awkward nor notably smooth, suggesting a baseline level of social ease without strong indicators of closeness or tension. A rating of 4 indicated

high comfort, where the interaction showed visible ease, mutual responsiveness, and relaxed conversation, though not consistently throughout. A rating of 5 indicated *very high comfort*, in which the interaction was fluid, relaxed, and natural across most or all of the conversation, with evidence of warmth, shared humor, and a strong sense of ease. For the full coding scheme, see Appendix 1E.2.

Two trained coders independently rated the level of comfort expressed during each dyadic interaction on a 5-point Likert scale. Their ratings were averaged to create a single composite score per dyad. Interrater reliability was assessed using a two-way random-effects model with absolute agreement (McGraw & Wong, 1996), implemented via the ICC() function from the *psych* package in R (Revelle, 2023). The resulting average-measures ICC indicated excellent agreement between coders, $ICC(2,2) = 0.92$, 95% CI [0.88, 0.95]. The single-measure ICC was 0.85, 95% CI [0.78, 0.90], indicating good agreement between individual raters. Comfort scores ranged from 1 to 5, where higher scores indicate higher levels of comfort, with a mean of 3.09 (SD = 1.19).

Dyadic Synchrony. Dyadic synchrony refers to the degree to which interaction partners exhibit alignment in their behaviors, body language, and expressive rhythms during interpersonal exchanges. Synchrony is thought to reflect a form of implicit coordination that can signal connection, mutual attention, or rapport (Bernieri & Rosenthal, 1991; Koole & Tschacher, 2016). In the context of roommate interactions, synchrony may reflect how naturally or fluently the dyad engages with one another, even without conscious effort or intent. Because synchrony can manifest across different behavioral domains, we coded sitting synchrony, speech synchrony, and movement synchrony as distinct but related constructs.

Each synchrony dimension was coded on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = *low synchrony*, 2 = *moderate synchrony*, 3 = *high synchrony*) based on coders' subjective impressions. Coders were trained to focus on the ease, fluidity, and mirroring or alignment between roommates, rather than the content of speech. Ratings were made for the synchrony of the *dyad*, rather than each member of the dyad separately. Interrater reliability and descriptive statistics are reported separately for each synchrony type. For the full coding scheme, see Appendix 1E.3.

Sitting Synchrony. Sitting synchrony captured how similarly the roommates appeared in their seated posture and body orientation. Coders were instructed to evaluate alignment in sitting positions, body openness, and posture (e.g., crossed legs, leaning back or forward). A score of 1 indicated *low sitting synchrony*, in which there was mostly dissimilarity in the ways the roommates were sitting (e.g., one roommate with stiff posture and crossed legs, the other leaning back and relaxed). A score of 2 indicated *moderate sitting similarity*, in which there were some similarities and some mismatches. Finally, a score of 3 indicated *high sitting similarity*, in which roommates had similar seated positions and body language (e.g., both sitting upright with relaxed posture and uncrossed legs).

Two trained coders independently rated sitting synchrony in each dyadic interaction using the 3-point Likert scale described above. Their ratings were averaged to create a single composite score per dyad. Interrater reliability was assessed using a two-way random-effects model with absolute agreement (McGraw & Wong, 1996), implemented via the ICC() function from the *psych* package in R (Revelle, 2023). The resulting average-measures ICC indicated excellent agreement between coders, $ICC(2,2) = 0.88$, 95% CI [0.81, 0.92]. The single-measure ICC was 0.78, 95% CI [0.68, 0.85], indicating good agreement between individual raters.

Sitting synchrony scores ranged from 1 to 3, where higher scores indicate greater sitting similarity, with a mean of 2.21 (SD = .76).

Speech Synchrony. Speech synchrony reflected the degree to which roommates' verbal rhythms and turn-taking were coordinated. Coders looked for conversational pacing, overlapping speech or interruptions, and smooth exchanges. A score of 1 indicated *low speech synchrony*, in which there was little to no synchrony (e.g., one roommate dominating or speaking over the other). A score of 2 indicated *moderate speech synchrony*, in which there was occasional overlap or matched pacing). Finally, a score of 3 indicated *high speech synchrony* (e.g., fluid back-and-forth, similar pacing, and co-constructed conversation flow).

Two trained coders independently rated speech synchrony in each dyadic interaction using the 3-point Likert scale described above. Their ratings were averaged to create a single composite score per dyad. Interrater reliability was assessed using a two-way random-effects model with absolute agreement (McGraw & Wong, 1996), implemented via the ICC() function from the *psych* package in R (Revelle, 2023). The resulting average-measures ICC indicated good-to-excellent agreement between coders, $ICC(2,2) = 0.85$, 95% CI [0.78, 0.91]. The single-measure ICC was 0.75, 95% CI [0.64, 0.83], indicating good agreement between individual raters. Speech synchrony scores ranged from 1 to 3, where higher scores indicate greater speech synchrony, with a mean of 2.09 (SD = .76).

Movement Synchrony. Movement synchrony captured how much roommates moved in coordinated or parallel ways. This included gestures, shifts in posture, or small expressive movements that appeared responsive or mirrored. A score of 1 reflected *low movement synchrony* (e.g., one roommate moving frequently while the other remained still). A score of 2 reflected *moderate movement synchrony* (e.g., sporadic shared gestures or posture shifts).

Finally, a score of 3 reflected *high movement synchrony* (e.g., consistent mirroring, simultaneous movements, or physically expressive interaction flow).

Two trained coders independently rated movement synchrony in each dyadic interaction using the 3-point Likert scale described above. Their ratings were averaged to create a single composite score per dyad. Interrater reliability was assessed using a two-way random-effects model with absolute agreement (McGraw & Wong, 1996), implemented via the ICC() function from the *psych* package in R (Revelle, 2023). The resulting average-measures ICC indicated good-to-excellent agreement between coders, $ICC(2,2) = 0.87$, 95% CI [0.80, 0.91]. The single-measure ICC was 0.76, 95% CI [0.66, 0.84], indicating good agreement between individual raters. Movement synchrony scores ranged from 1 to 3, where higher scores indicate greater similarity in physical movement and body gestures across the dyad, with a mean of 2.12 ($SD = .78$).

Correlation Table of Outcomes

To provide a descriptive overview of the interrelations among Study 1 outcomes, we computed Pearson correlations among all dyad-level variables (pairwise $n = 64$ -131, depending on missing data). These correlations are reported at the dyadic level to align with the primary unit of analysis in Study 1. Table 1 is presented for descriptive purposes to illustrate the degree of overlap among constructs.

Table 1*Correlation Table of Study 1 Outcomes*

	QRI	Perceived Financial Similarity	Perceived Non- Financial Similarity	Self- Disclosure	Affective Tone	Comfort	Movement Synchrony	Sitting Synchrony	Speech Synchrony
QRI	1.00								
Perceived Financial Similarity	0.31***	1.00							
Perceived Non- Financial Similarity	0.68***	0.41***	1.00						
Self- Disclosure	0.56***	0.27**	0.39***	1.00					
Affective Tone	0.35**	0.12	0.30*	0.09	1.00				
Comfort	0.32*	0.19	0.29*	0.12	0.90***	1.00			
Movement Synchrony	0.13	0.14	0.07	0.01	0.62***	0.57***	1.00		
Sitting Synchrony	0.19	0.02	0.12	0.21	0.33**	0.26*	0.50***	1.00	
Speech Synchrony	0.25*	0.21	0.11	-0.03	0.74***	0.68***	0.75***	0.37**	1.00

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

STUDY 1

RESULTS

1. Analytic Plan

Analytic Goals

The analytic goals of Study 1 were to test whether structural indicators of social class similarity (i.e., matched generational college status and smaller household income gaps) predict higher roommate relationship quality through perceived similarity processes. Specifically, our models were designed to evaluate a sequential pathway in which objective social class similarity would predict greater perceived financial similarity, which would then foster perceptions of broader interpersonal similarity (sometimes referred to as non-financial similarity), ultimately leading to higher relationship quality. In this way, Study 1 extends the Intimacy Process Model (Reis & Shaver, 1988) by examining how structural social class configurations translate into interpersonal perceptions that support intimacy in new peer relationships.

A secondary analytic goal concerned self-disclosure, which was originally proposed as an additional interpersonal mediator. However, as detailed in the Measures section, endorsement distributions on the 17-item Self-Disclosure Willingness Scale were highly skewed toward maximum disclosure, producing ceiling effects and restricted variability. Many participants endorsed nearly all disclosure items, resulting in extreme skew and kurtosis values. Such patterns render the measure statistically inappropriate for mediation or regression analyses (Lodder, 2023). As a result, despite its theoretical importance for intimacy development (Collins & Miller, 1994; Laurenceau et al., 1998), self-disclosure was excluded from analyses in Study 1.

Structural Equation Modeling

To test our main hypotheses, we used a structural equation modeling (SEM) framework to evaluate how objective social class similarity predicts greater relationship quality via perceived financial similarity and, in turn, perceived non-financial similarity. Our dataset consisted of dyads of randomly assigned college roommates, with each dyad contributing two participants. As roommates were indistinguishable partners (i.e., they were not meaningfully labeled as “A” or “B” based on any theoretically relevant characteristic), it was important that our analyses account for this dyadic non-independence and use methods appropriate for modeling interdependent data structures (Cook & Kenny, 2005).

In dyadic research, standard statistical approaches (e.g., OLS regression) can lead to biased estimates and inflated Type I error rates when observations are not independent. SEM offers a flexible framework for modeling non-independent responses within dyads, including when dyads are indistinguishable (Ledermann & Kenny, 2012). As such, we use SEM as our overarching analytic framework, beginning with simpler dyad-level constrained models and progressing to a full dyadic SEM with indistinguishable partners. This approach allowed us to model each roommate’s responses while accounting for the covariance between partners’ perceptions and behaviors, an essential step when testing relationship-level processes that unfold between two individuals (Cook & Kenny, 2005).

These analytic decisions are aligned with best practices in social and personality psychology, where dyadic SEM approaches have been widely used to examine interpersonal dynamics, such as self-disclosure, emotional expression, and relational development (e.g., Kenny & Kashy, 2011). In particular, SEM is well-suited for our theoretical framework, which

posits that similarity in social class unfolds through psychological processes that are individually and interpersonally constructed within the dyad.

Sequential Modeling Technique

To examine the hypothesized associations, we implemented a sequential model testing strategy consistent with dyadic data analysis frameworks (e.g., Ledermann & Kenny, 2012). First, we estimated a total effects model (Model A) in which the primary predictor was specified to predict the outcome variable directly. Second, we estimated a mediation model (Model B) in which the primary predictor was specified to predict the mediators (perceived financial similarity and perceived interpersonal/non-financial similarity), which in turn predicted the outcome variable. Model C extended Model B by including race match as a covariate to evaluate whether mediation pathways remained robust when controlling for potential confounding due to racial similarity. For brevity's sake, Model C's results will be summarized in the main text, and provided in full in the Appendix. For these models, the dyad served as the unit of analysis: roommates' individual reports were included but equality-constrained across partners, producing dyad-level estimates of perceived similarity and relationship quality.

Finally, in Model D, we implemented a full dyadic SEM with indistinguishable partners, in which each roommate's responses were modeled separately while accounting for the interdependence between partners' perceptions and behaviors (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Ledermann & Kenny, 2012). This was implemented only when the actor-only models were predictive in Models B and C. This hierarchical analytic strategy ensured that partner effects were considered only in cases where actor effects were theoretically and empirically meaningful, balancing completeness with parsimony. This staged approach is consistent with

recommendations in the dyadic data analysis literature for moving from simpler to more complex models and for interpreting partner effects as extensions of actor pathways rather than as stand-alone findings (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Kenny & Kashy, 2011; Ledermann & Kenny, 2012).

Estimation of Confidence Intervals

By default, structural equation modeling packages, including *semopy* (as we used in the present dissertation) provide standard errors and significance tests based on large-sample normal-theory approximations. However, these methods can underestimate variability and produce biased confidence intervals for indirect effects, which are often non-normally distributed (MacKinnon et al., 2004). To address this, in most cases, I used nonparametric bootstrapping procedures to generate confidence intervals for indirect effects and model parameters at the dyadic level. Bootstrapping is widely recommended in mediation and SEM contexts because it does not rely on normality assumptions and provides more accurate coverage probabilities (Awang et al., 2015). In practice, this involved resampling the dataset (at the dyadic level) with replacement 1,000 times, re-estimating the model for each sample, and computing the empirical distribution of parameter estimates. Confidence intervals were then defined by the 2.5th and 97.5th percentiles of these distributions. This approach ensures more robust inferences about *indirect effects* and overall model fit. The bootstrapped confidence intervals did not differ much from the more standardly derived confidence intervals, so in some cases (specifically, for *direct effects*), I used standard SE-based confidence intervals.

2. Relationship Quality

Test 1A. Income Difference Predicting Relationship Quality

Model A. Total Effect

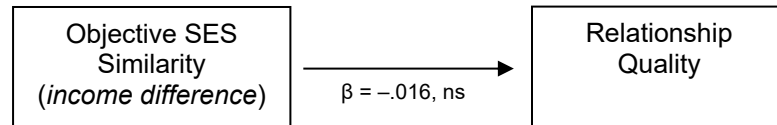
Model Fit. The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(2) = 0.22$, $p = .895$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, AIC = 8.00, BIC = 19.50.

Direct Effects. Objective SES difference (absolute income difference) did not significantly predict relationship quality, $b = -0.016$, $SE = 0.014$, $z = -1.11$, $p = .268$. The standardized coefficient was $\beta = -0.016$, indicating a very small effect size.

Summary. The total effect model indicated that income difference was not significantly associated with relationship quality when examined without mediators or covariates, suggesting that any association between income difference and relationship quality may operate indirectly through other variables. Figure 5 below presents the path diagram, illustrating the tested pathway with standardized coefficients.

Figure 5

Path Diagram of Income Difference $\rightarrow$ Relationship Quality, Model A



Note. Social class similarity = absolute difference in household income between roommates (higher scores indicate *less* social class similarity). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

Model B. Mediation (No Covariate)

Model Fit. The mediation model without the race-match covariate fit the data well, $\chi^2(15) = 19.74$, $p = .182$, CFI = .986, TLI = .979, RMSEA = .049, AIC = 25.70, BIC = 63.08.

Direct Effects. Objective SES difference significantly and negatively predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = -.095$, $SE = .017$, $p < .001$). Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .312$, $SE = .046$, $p < .001$), and

perceived non-financial similarity significantly predicted relationship quality ($\beta = .564$, $SE = .056$, $p < .001$). The direct path from perceived financial similarity to relationship quality was not significant ($\beta = .014$, $SE = .045$, $p = .754$).

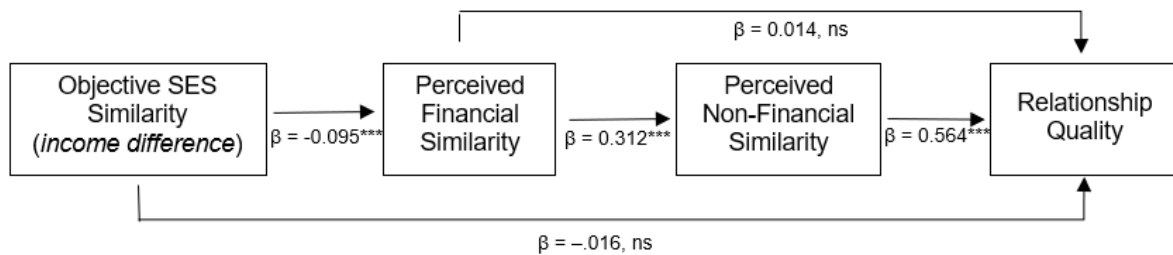
Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from objective SES difference to perceived financial similarity, to perceived non-financial similarity, and then to relationship quality was significant ($\beta = -.0167$, 95% CI $[-.0265, -.0083]$). The indirect effect from objective social class difference to relationship quality via perceived financial similarity alone was not significant ($\beta = -.0013$, 95% CI $[-.0104, .0062]$). The total indirect effect, combining both pathways, was significant ($\beta = -.0180$, 95% CI $[-.0311, -.0073]$). These results indicate that larger objective social class differences were associated with lower perceived financial similarity, which in turn was linked to lower perceived non-financial similarity and ultimately lower relationship quality.

Summary. In line with predictions, the results suggest that socioeconomic differences affect relationship quality indirectly through perceived similarity processes. Specifically, greater income differences lowered perceived financial similarity, which in turn lowered perceived non-financial similarity, leading to lower relationship quality. This pattern aligns with the proposed mediation model and supports the theoretical expectation that similarity perceptions are a key mechanism linking objective social class differences to relationship outcomes. Table 2 reports the full parameter estimates for Model B, including structural paths, variances, and covariances. Figure 6 presents the corresponding path diagram, illustrating the tested mediation pathways with standardized coefficients.

Table 2*Path Coefficients of Income Difference → Relationship Quality, Model B*

Path / Parameter	Estimate	95% CI	SE	p-value
Structural Paths				
Income Difference → Financial Similarity	-0.095	[-0.128, -0.062]	0.017	< .001
Financial Similarity → Non-Financial Similarity	0.312	[0.223, 0.402]	0.046	< .001
Non-Financial Similarity → Relationship Quality	0.564	[0.454, 0.674]	0.056	< .001
Financial Similarity → Relationship Quality	0.014	[-0.073, 0.101]	0.045	.754

Note. Social class similarity = absolute difference in household income between roommates (higher scores indicate *less* social class similarity). Estimates are standardized coefficients. 95% confidence intervals are bootstrapped.

Figure 6*Path Diagram of Income Difference → Relationship Quality, Model B*

Note. Social class similarity = absolute difference in household income between roommates (higher scores indicate *less* social class similarity). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

Model C. Mediation (with RaceMatch Covariate). When race match was included as a covariate, the model continued to fit the data well ($\chi^2(20) = 22.54$, $p = .312$, CFI = .993, TLI = .989, RMSEA = .031). The central mediation pathway remained intact: larger income differences predicted lower perceived financial similarity ($\beta = -.094$, $p < .001$), which in turn

predicted lower non-financial similarity ($\beta = .307, p < .001$), and ultimately lower relationship quality ($\beta = .569, p < .001$). Race match significantly predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .249, p = .019$), indicating that same-race roommates reported higher financial similarity, but it did not predict non-financial similarity ($\beta = .068, p = .434$) or relationship quality ($\beta = -.078, p = .253$). These results suggest that while racial similarity contributes to perceptions of financial similarity, the indirect effect of income differences on relationship quality through similarity processes ($\beta = -.0163, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.0263, -.0079]$) remains robust when controlling for race match. For the full report of this Model C with RaceMatch as a covariate, please see Appendix 1F.

Model D. Mediation with Partner Effect.

Model Fit. The partner-effects mediation model fit the data well, $\chi^2(16) = 22.52, p = .127$, CFI = .981, TLI = .970, RMSEA = .057, AIC = 23.65, BIC = 57.87.

Direct Effects. Absolute income difference significantly and negatively predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = -.09, SE = .018, p < .001$). In turn, perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity within person (actor effect: $\beta = .32, SE = .046, p < .001$), but not across partners (partner effect: $\beta = .02, SE = .046, p = .647$). Perceived non-financial similarity strongly predicted one's own perception of the relationship quality ($\beta = .58, SE = .057, p < .001$). The direct paths from perceived financial similarity to relationship quality ($\beta = .01, SE = .048, p = .884$) and from income difference to relationship quality ($\beta = -.005, SE = .012, p = .673$) were not significant.

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect pathway from income difference to perceived financial similarity to perceived non-financial similarity to relationship quality was significant at the actor level (95% CI $[-.027, -.009]$), indicating that greater income differences reduced

perceptions of financial similarity, which in turn lowered perceptions of non-financial similarity and ultimately reduced relationship quality. Cross-partner indirect effects through financial and non-financial similarity were not significant.

Summary. This dyadic mediation model supported the central hypothesized indirect pathway: larger income differences predicted lower perceived financial similarity, which reduced perceived non-financial similarity, which then decreased relationship quality. However, no reliable partner effects were observed, and neither the direct effect of income difference nor the direct effect of financial similarity on relationship quality was significant. Table 4 reports the full parameter estimates for Model D, including structural paths, variances, and covariances. Figure 7 presents the corresponding path diagram, illustrating the tested mediation pathways with standardized coefficients.

Table 4

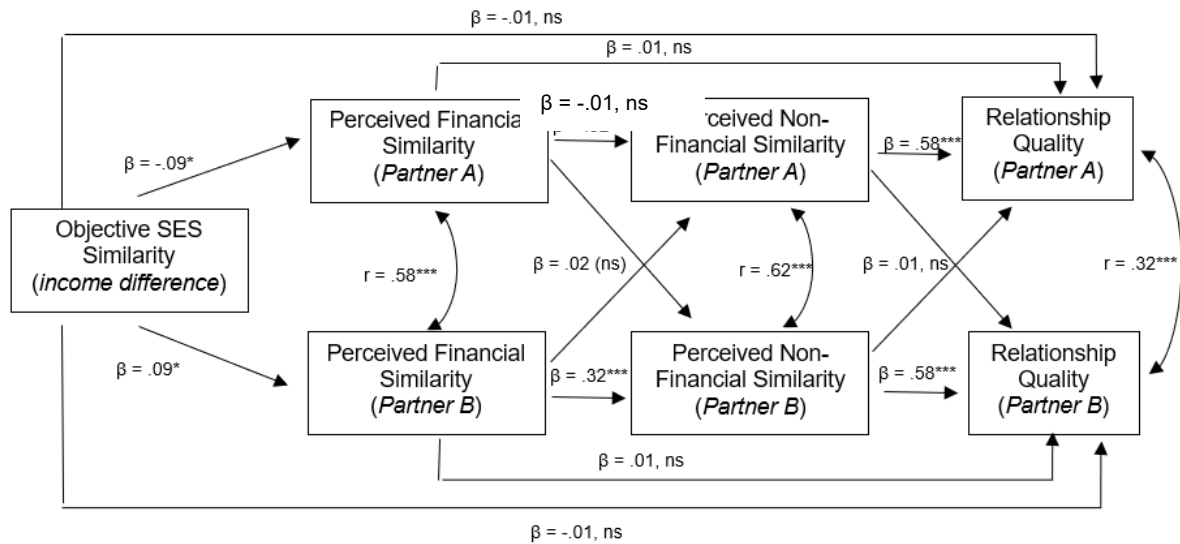
Path Coefficients of Income Difference → Relationship Quality, Model D

Effect	β / r	SE	z	p	95% CI
Direct Paths					
Income Difference → Perceived Financial Similarity (A, B)	-0.095	0.018	-5.41	< .001	[-0.129, -0.060]
Perceived Financial Sim. → Perceived Non-Financial Sim. (actor; A, B)	0.315	0.046	6.80	< .001	[0.224, 0.406]
Perceived Financial Sim. → Partner's Perceived Non-Financial Sim. (cross; A → B, B → A)	0.021	0.046	0.46	.647	[-0.070, 0.112]
Perceived Non-Financial → Relationship Quality (actor; A, B)	0.583	0.057	10.32	< .001	[0.472, 0.694]
Perceived Financial → Relationship Quality (actor; A, B)	0.007	0.048	0.15	.884	[-0.087, 0.101]
IncomeDiff → Relationship Quality (A, B)	-0.005	0.012	-0.42	.673	[-0.028, 0.018]
Cross-Partner Residual Correlations					
Corr(Perceived Financial Sim. A, B)	0.580	0.118	4.91	< .001	[0.348, 0.811]
Corr(Perceived Non-Financial Sim. A, B)	0.615	0.122	5.05	< .001	[0.376, 0.853]
Corr(Relationship Quality A, B)	0.320	0.097	3.29	.001	[0.129, 0.511]

Note. Social class similarity = absolute difference in household income between roommates (higher scores indicate *less* social class similarity). Estimates are standardized coefficients. 95% confidence intervals are bootstrapped.

Figure 7

Path Diagram of Income Difference → Relationship Quality, Model D



Note. Social class similarity = absolute difference in household income between roommates (higher scores indicate *less* social class similarity). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

Test 1B. Generational College Match Predicting Relationship Quality

Model A. Total Effect

Model Fit. The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(2) = 3.02$, $p = .221$, CFI = .977, TLI = .955, RMSEA = .063, AIC = 7.95, BIC = 19.45.

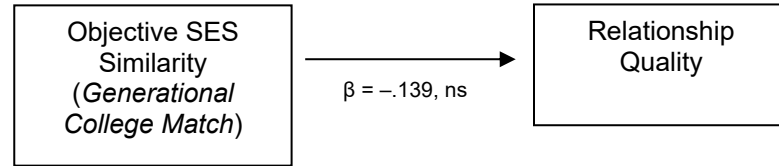
Direct Effects. Objective social class difference (first-generation match vs. mismatch) did not significantly predict relationship quality, $b = -0.139$, $SE = 0.099$, $z = -1.41$, $p = .160$. The standardized coefficient was $\beta = -0.139$, indicating a small effect size.

Summary. The total effect model indicated that objective social class difference (measured via first-generation college status match vs. mismatch) was not significantly associated with relationship quality when examined without mediators or covariates,

suggesting that any association between social class difference and relationship quality may operate indirectly through other variables. Figure 8 below presents the corresponding path diagram, illustrating the tested pathway with standardized coefficients.

Figure 8

Path Diagram of Generational College Match → Relationship Quality, Model A



Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

Model B. Mediation (No Covariate)

Model Fit. The mediation model without the race-match covariate fit the data well, $\chi^2(15) = 21.37$, $p = .125$, CFI = .980, TLI = .971, RMSEA = .057, AIC = 25.67, BIC = 63.05.

Direct Effects. First-generation match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match) significantly and positively predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .377$, SE = .128, $p = .003$), such that matched dyads reported greater financial similarity. Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .312$, SE = .045, $p < .001$), and perceived non-financial similarity significantly predicted relationship quality ($\beta = .564$, SE = .056, $p < .001$). The direct path from perceived financial similarity to relationship quality was not significant ($\beta = .014$, SE = .044, $p = .754$).

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from first-generation match to perceived financial similarity, to perceived non-financial similarity, and then to relationship quality was significant ($\beta = -.066$, 95% CI [-.124, -.017]). The indirect effect from first-generation match to relationship quality via perceived financial similarity alone was not significant ($\beta = -.005$,

95% CI [-.044, .026]). The total indirect effect, combining both pathways, was significant ($\beta = -.072$, 95% CI [-.145, -.016]). These results indicate that generational college mismatch was associated with lower perceived financial similarity, which in turn was linked to lower perceived non-financial similarity and ultimately lower relationship quality.

Summary. In line with predictions, the results suggest that generational college match affects relationship quality indirectly through perceived similarity processes. Specifically, matched dyads (vs. mismatched) perceived themselves as more financially similar, which in turn increased perceptions of interpersonal/non-financial similarity, leading to higher relationship quality. This pattern aligns with the proposed mediation model and supports the theoretical expectation that similarity perceptions are a key mechanism linking generational college match to relationship outcomes. Table 3 reports the full parameter estimates for Model B, including structural paths, variances, and covariances. Figure 9 presents the corresponding path diagram, illustrating the tested mediation pathways with standardized coefficients.

Table 3

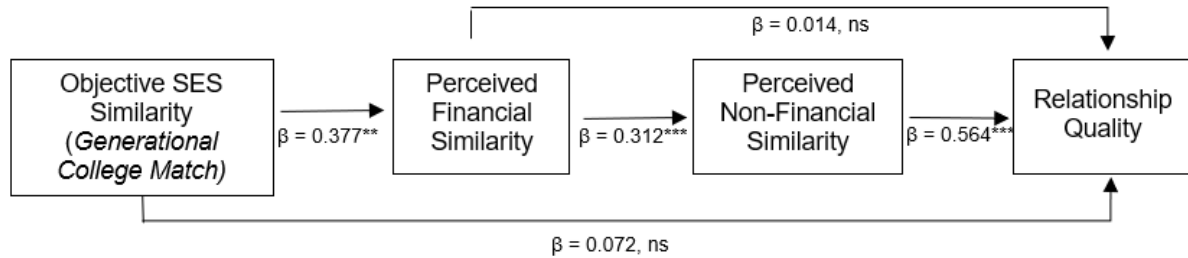
Path Coefficients of Generational College Match $\rightarrow$ Relationship Quality, Model B

Path / Parameter	Estimate	95% CI	SE	p-value
Structural Paths				
College Generational Match $\rightarrow$ Perceived Financial Similarity	0.377	[0.126, 0.628]	0.128	.003
Perceived Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Perceived Non-Financial Similarity	0.312	[0.223, 0.401]	0.045	< .001
Perceived Non-Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Relationship Quality	0.564	[0.454, 0.674]	0.056	< .001
Perceived Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Relationship Quality	0.014	[-0.073, 0.101]	0.044	.754

Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. 95% confidence intervals are bootstrapped.

Figure 9

Path Diagram of Generational College Match → Relationship Quality, Model B



Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

Model C. Mediation (with RaceMatch Covariate). When race match was included as a covariate, the model continued to fit the data well ($\chi^2(20) = 22.54$, $p = .312$, CFI = .993, TLI = .989, RMSEA = .031). The central mediation pathway remained intact: larger income differences predicted lower perceived financial similarity ($\beta = -.094$, $p < .001$), which in turn predicted lower non-financial similarity ($\beta = .307$, $p < .001$), and ultimately lower relationship quality ($\beta = .569$, $p < .001$). Race match significantly predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .249$, $p = .019$), indicating that same-race roommates reported higher financial similarity, but it did not predict non-financial similarity ($\beta = .068$, $p = .434$) or relationship quality ($\beta = -.078$, $p = .253$). These results suggest that while racial similarity contributes to perceptions of financial similarity, the indirect effect of income differences on relationship quality through similarity processes ($\beta = -.0163$, 95% CI [-.0263, -.0079]) remains robust when controlling for race match. For the full report of this Model C with RaceMatch as a covariate, please see Appendix 1G.

Model D. Mediation with Partner Level Effects

Model Fit. The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(16) = 22.52$, $p = .127$, CFI = .981, TLI = .970, RMSEA = .057, AIC = 23.65, BIC = 57.87.

Direct Effects. First-generation match significantly predicted more perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .361$, $SE = .13$, $p < .001$). Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity within partners (actor path: $\beta = .31$, $SE = .046$, $p < .001$), but not across partners (partner path: $\beta = .019$, $SE = .046$, $p = .683$). In turn, perceived non-financial similarity significantly predicted relationship quality within partners ($\beta = .57$, $SE = .055$, $p < .001$). The direct path from financial similarity to relationship quality was not significant ($\beta = .004$, $SE = .045$, $p = .933$). The direct effect of first-generation match on relationship quality was also nonsignificant ($\beta = .10$, $SE = .075$, $p = .174$).

Indirect Effects. The indirect effect of first-generation match on relationship quality through perceived similarities was small but significant for the actor pathway. Specifically, the actor-chain indirect effect was negative and significant (95% CI [-.027, -.009]). The partner-chain and “via-financial-only” pathways were not significant (95% CIs included zero). The total indirect effect was small but significant (95% CI [-.034, -.007]).

Covariates. No covariates were included in this model.

Summary. Consistent with predictions, perceived financial similarity predicted greater perceived non-financial similarity, which in turn predicted higher relationship quality. First-generation match predicted more financial similarity, but it did not directly predict relationship quality. Instead, its association with relationship quality emerged indirectly through the actor pathway, yielding a small but reliable indirect effect. Thus, although no direct effect of first-

generation match was observed, the mediation model indicates that class background match may shape relationship quality by influencing perceptions of similarity. See Table 5.

Table 5

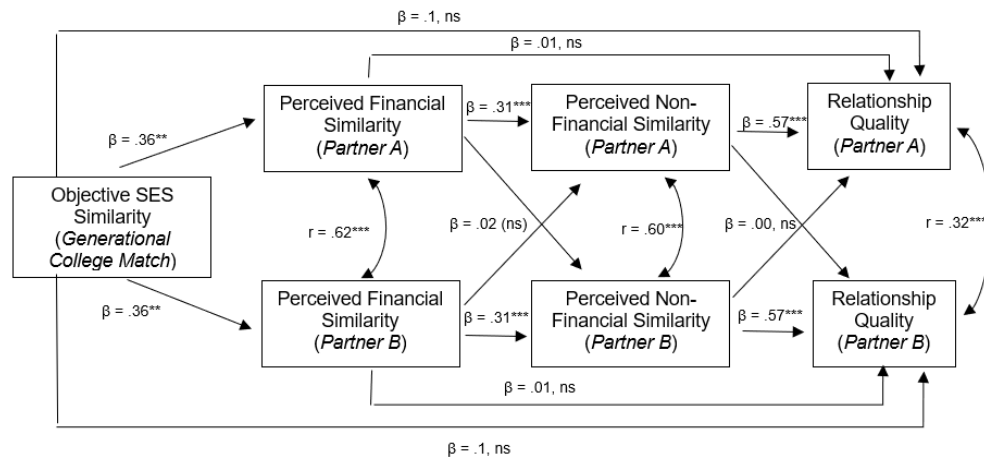
Path Coefficients of Generational College Match → Relationship Quality, Model D

Effect	β / r	SE	z	p	95% CI
Direct Paths					
FirstGenMatch → Perceived Financial Similarity (A, B)	0.361	0.128	2.81	.005	[0.109, 0.612]
Perceived Financial Sim. → Perceived Non-Financial Sim. (actor; A, B)	0.310	0.046	6.69	< .001	[0.219, 0.400]
Perceived Financial Sim. → Partner's Perceived Non-Financial Sim. (cross; A→B, B→A)	0.019	0.046	0.41	.683	[-0.072, 0.110]
Perceived Non-Financial → Relationship Quality (actor; A, B)	0.570	0.055	10.27	< .001	[0.461, 0.678]
Perceived Financial → Relationship Quality (actor; A, B)	0.004	0.045	0.08	.933	[-0.085, 0.093]
FirstGenMatch → Relationship Quality (A, B)	0.103	0.075	1.36	.174	[-0.045, 0.250]
Cross-Partner Residual Correlations					
Corr(Perceived Financial Sim. A, B)	0.623	0.121	5.14	< .001	[0.385, 0.861]
Corr(Perceived Non-Financial Sim. A, B)	0.600	0.119	5.05	< .001	[0.367, 0.833]
Corr(Relationship Quality A, B)	0.318	0.096	3.31	< .001	[0.130, 0.507]

Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. 95% confidence intervals are bootstrapped.

Figure 10

Path Diagram of Generational College Match → Relationship Quality, Model D



Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, † $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

3. Affective Tone

Test 2A. Income Difference Predicting Behavioral Affective Tone

Model A. Total Effect

Model Fit. The model was saturated, $\chi^2(1) = 0.00$, $p = 1.000$. As such, incremental fit indices such as CFI, TLI, and RMSEA are not informative and are therefore not reported. Model evaluation instead focuses on the parameter estimates. AIC = 4.00, BIC = 8.63.

Direct Effects. Objective SES difference (absolute income difference) did not significantly predict affective tone, $b = -0.054$, $SE = 0.046$, $z = -1.17$, $p = .244$. The standardized coefficient was $\beta = -0.054$, indicating a very small effect size.

Summary. The total effect model indicated that objective SES difference (measured via absolute household income difference) was not significantly associated with affective tone when examined without mediators or covariates, suggesting that any potential effect of SES difference on affective tone may operate indirectly through other processes.

Model B. Mediation (No Covariate)

Model Fit. The mediation model fit the data well, $\chi^2(10) = 11.28$, $p = .336$, CFI = .990, TLI = .984, RMSEA = .042, AIC = 21.70, BIC = 47.19.

Direct Effects. Objective social class difference significantly and negatively predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = -.098$, $SE = .023$, $p < .001$). Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .272$, $SE = .056$, $p < .001$), and perceived non-financial similarity significantly predicted affective tone ($\beta = .327$, $SE = .143$,

$p = .022$). The direct path from perceived financial similarity to affective tone was not significant ($\beta = .063$, $SE = .106$, $p = .552$).

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from income difference to financial similarity, to non-financial similarity, and then to affective tone was significant at the dyad level ($\beta = -.044$, 95% CI $[-.042, -.002]$), although the total indirect effect was not statistically significant ($\beta = -.056$, 95% CI $[-.074, .007]$).

Summary. As in the model with relationship quality (QRI) as the outcome, income differences predicted lower perceived financial similarity, which predicted lower perceived non-financial similarity. However, the overall indirect association with affective tone was not significant, suggesting that while similarity perceptions are related to observed positive tone, other factors likely play a stronger role in shaping tone during the recorded interaction.

Test 2B. Generational College Match Predicting Behavioral Affective Tone

Model A. Total Effect

Model Fit. The model was saturated, $\chi^2(1) = 0.00$, $p = .997$. As such, incremental fit indices such as CFI, TLI, and RMSEA are not informative and are therefore not reported. Model evaluation instead focuses on the parameter estimates. AIC = 4.00, BIC = 9.75.

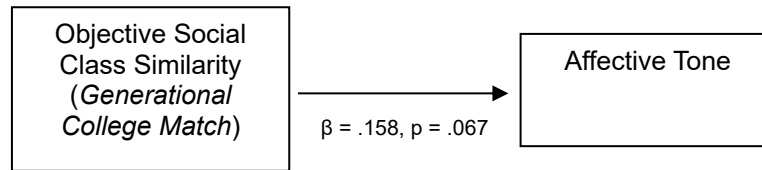
Direct Effects. First-generation college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match) marginally positively predicted affective tone, $b = 0.434$, $SE = 0.237$, $z = 1.83$, $p = .067$. The standardized coefficient was $\beta = 0.158$, indicating a small effect size.

Summary. The total effect model suggested that generational college match (vs. mismatch) was marginally associated with more positive affective tone during the recorded roommate interactions. Although this effect did not reach conventional significance ($p < .05$),

the direction of the estimate was consistent with the hypothesis that dyads with shared generational college status may exhibit somewhat more positive affective tone when interacting, though the effect appears small. See Figure 11 for the corresponding path diagram.

Figure 11

Path Diagram of Generational College Match → Affective Tone, Model A



Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

Model B. Mediation (No Covariate)

Model Fit. The mediation model fit the data reasonably well, $\chi^2(9) = 12.19$, $p = .203$, CFI = .961, TLI = .930, RMSEA = .075, AIC = 23.62, BIC = 49.53.

Direct Effects. First-generation match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match) significantly positively predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .421$, SE = .165, $p = .011$). Perceived financial similarity, in turn, significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .245$, SE = .061, $p < .001$), and perceived non-financial similarity significantly predicted affective tone ($\beta = .358$, SE = .166, $p = .031$). The direct path from financial similarity to affective tone was not significant ($\beta = .003$, SE = .125, $p = .981$), and the direct effect of first-generation match on affective tone was also not significant ($\beta = .167$, SE = .328, $p = .611$).

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from first-generation match to financial similarity to non-financial similarity to affective tone was significant ($\beta = .061$, 95% CI [.002,

.221]). Neither the indirect path via financial similarity alone ($\beta = -.011$, 95% CI [-.236, .213]) nor the overall total indirect effect ($\beta = .081$, 95% CI [-.137, .299]) reached significance.

Summary. The mediation model suggested that generational college match was associated with greater perceived financial similarity, which predicted greater perceived non-financial similarity, which in turn predicted more positive affective tone during the recorded roommate interaction. However, the overall indirect association was not significant, indicating that while similarity perceptions may help explain links between generational status match and affective tone, other unmeasured factors also likely contribute to observed affective dynamics. It is important to note that the marginal direct effect of first-generation match on affective tone observed in the total effect model (Model A) was reduced to non-significance once mediators were included, suggesting that the original association may have been explained by the sequential pathway through similarity perceptions rather than reflecting a robust direct effect. Table 6 reports the full parameter estimates for Model B, including structural paths, variances, and covariances. Figure 12 provides a path diagram of these effects.

Table 6

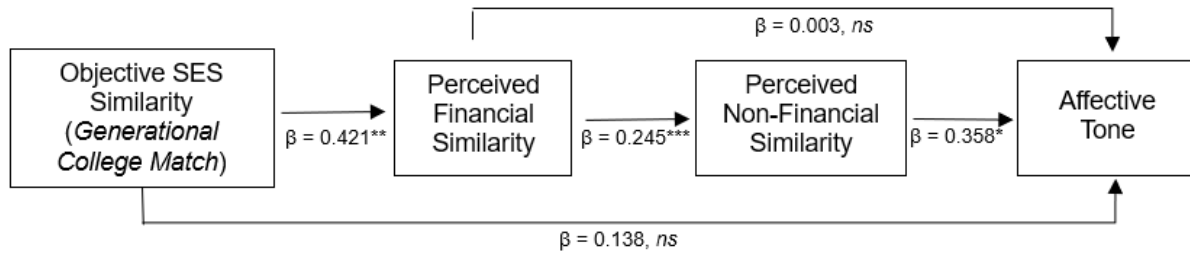
Path Coefficients of Generational College Match $\rightarrow$ Affective Tone, Model B

Path / Parameter	Estimate	95% CI	SE	p-value
Structural Paths				
College Generational Match $\rightarrow$ Perceived Financial Similarity	0.421	[0.090, 0.662]	0.165	.011
Perceived Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Perceived Non-Financial Similarity	0.245	[0.126, 0.364]	0.061	<.001
Perceived Non-Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Affective Tone	0.358	[0.035, 0.680]	0.166	.031
Perceived Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Affective Tone	0.003	[-0.242, 0.243]	0.125	.981
College Generational Match $\rightarrow$ Affective Tone	0.167	[-0.477, 0.811]	0.328	.611

Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. 95% confidence intervals are bootstrapped.

Figure 12

Path Diagram of Generational College Match → Affective Tone, Model B



Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

Model C. Mediation (with RaceMatch covariate). When race match was included as a covariate, the model continued to fit the data well ($\chi^2(13) = 13.87$, $p = .383$, CFI = .989, TLI = .981, RMSEA = .033). The mediation pathway remained intact: first-generation college match significantly predicted greater perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .137$, $p = .022$), which in turn predicted greater non-financial similarity ($\beta = .274$, $p < .001$), and non-financial similarity predicted more positive affective tone ($\beta = .289$, $p = .032$). The direct effects of financial similarity on affective tone ($\beta = -.017$, $p = .874$) and of first-generation match on affective tone ($\beta = .133$, $p = .617$) were not significant. Race match also significantly predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .131$, $p = .018$), but did not predict non-financial similarity ($\beta = .010$, $p = .882$) or affective tone ($\beta = .165$, $p = .491$). Importantly, the sequential indirect effect from first-generation match through financial similarity and non-financial similarity to affective tone was significant ($\beta = .059$, 95% CI [.002, .222]), and this effect remained robust with RaceMatch included. These findings suggest that perceptions of similarity play a key role in linking generational college match to affective dynamics, and that the mediation model holds

even when accounting for racial similarity. For the full report of this Model C with RaceMatch as a covariate, please see Appendix 1H.

Model D. Mediation with Partner Level Effects

Model Fit. The model fit the data adequately, $\chi^2(10) = 14.11$, $p = .168$, CFI = .95, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .08.

Direct Effects. First-generation match significantly predicted financial similarity ($\beta = .41$, $SE = .17$, $p = .014$). Financial similarity significantly predicted non-financial similarity within dyads (actor effect: $\beta = .25$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$) but not across partners (partner effect: $\beta = .00$, $SE = .06$, $p = .978$). Non-financial similarity significantly predicted affective tone ($\beta = .36$, $SE = .17$, $p = .031$). Financial similarity did not significantly predict affective tone directly ($\beta = .00$, $SE = .13$, $p = .982$). First-generation match did not significantly predict affective tone once mediators were included ($\beta = .17$, $SE = .33$, $p = .607$).

Indirect Effects. The indirect effect of first-generation match on affective tone through financial and non-financial similarity was partly supported. Specifically, the actor-path indirect effect was significant (95% CI [.002, .215]), whereas the partner-path indirect effect was nonsignificant (95% CI [-.034, .078]). The indirect effect via financial similarity alone was nonsignificant (95% CI [-.236, .213]). The total indirect effect was nonsignificant (95% CI [-.137, .317]). Thus, the primary mediated pathway was through the actor chain.

Covariates. No covariates were included in this model.

Summary. In line with predictions, perceived financial similarity and perceived non-financial similarity significantly predicted affective tone, and the actor-driven sequential mediation pathway from first-generation match to affective tone was supported. However,

partner effects were not significant, and the direct effect of first-generation match on affective tone was nonsignificant. These results suggest that the link between college generational match and affective tone is carried primarily through actor-driven perceptions of similarity, rather than partner processes. Table 7 reports the full parameter estimates for Model D, including structural paths and covariances. Figure 13 presents the corresponding path diagram, illustrating the tested mediation pathways with standardized coefficients.

Table 7

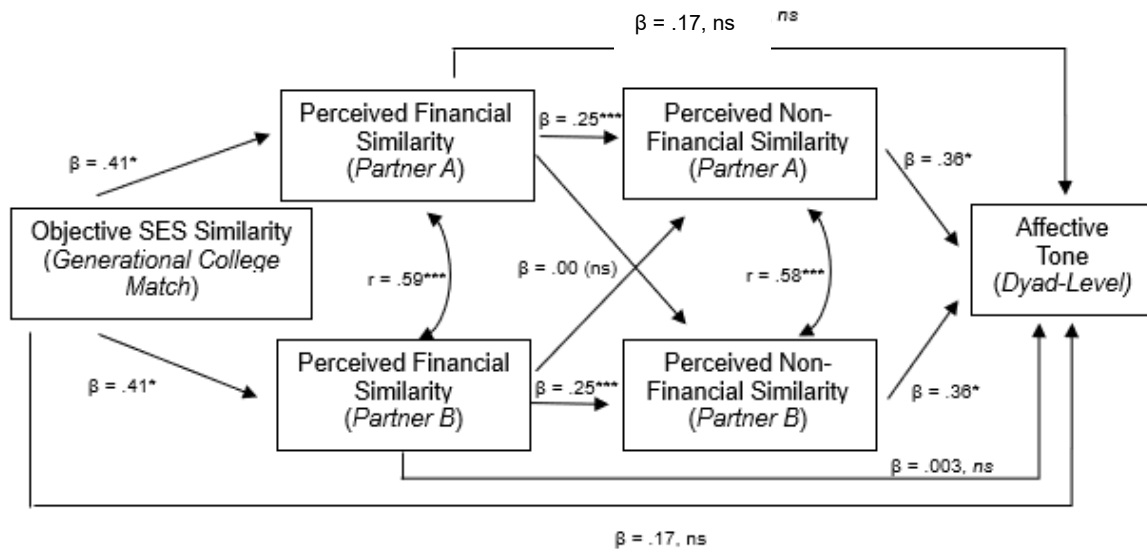
Path Coefficients of Generational College Match → Affective Tone, Model D

Effect	β / r	SE	z	p	95% CI
Direct Paths					
College Match → Perceived Financial Similarity (A, B)	0.408	0.165	2.46	.014	[0.083, 0.732]
Perceived Financial Sim. → Perceived Non-Financial Sim. (actor; A, B)	0.250	0.062	4.02	< .001	[0.128, 0.371]
Perceived Financial Sim. → Partner's Perceived Non-Financial Sim. (cross; A→B, B→A)	0.002	0.062	0.03	.978	[-0.120, 0.123]
Perceived Non-Financial → Affective Tone (A, B)	0.357	0.166	2.16	.031	[0.033, 0.682]
Perceived Financial → Affective Tone (A, B)	0.003	0.125	0.02	.982	[-0.243, 0.249]
College Match → Affective Tone	0.169	0.328	0.52	.607	[-0.473, 0.810]
Cross-Partner Residual Correlations					
Corr(Perceived Financial Sim. A, B)	0.586	0.168	3.49	< .001	[0.257, 0.915]
Corr(Perceived Non-Financial Sim. A, B)	0.578	0.167	3.47	< .001	[0.251, 0.905]

Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. 95% confidence intervals are bootstrapped.

Figure 13

Path Diagram of Generational College Match → Affective Tone, Model D



Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

4. Behavioral Comfort

Test 3A. Income Difference Predicting Behavioral Comfort

Model A. Total Effect

Model Fit. The model was saturated, $\chi^2(1) = 0.00$, $p = .999$. As such, incremental fit indices such as CFI, TLI, and RMSEA are not informative and are therefore not reported. Model evaluation instead focuses on the parameter estimates. AIC = 4.00, BIC = 8.63.

Direct Effects. Income difference did not significantly predict comfort, $b = -0.050$, $SE = 0.045$, $z = -1.12$, $p = .263$. The standardized coefficient was $\beta = -0.050$, indicating a very small effect size.

Summary. The total effect model indicated that income difference was not significantly associated with comfort when examined without mediators or covariates, suggesting that any

potential effect of social class difference on comfort may operate indirectly through other processes.

Model B. Mediation (No Covariate)

Model Fit. The mediation model without the race-match covariate fit the data well, $\chi^2(10) = 9.49$, $p = .487$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, AIC = 21.75, BIC = 47.24.

Direct Effects. Income difference significantly and negatively predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = -.098$, SE = .023, $p < .001$). Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .272$, SE = .056, $p < .001$), and perceived non-financial similarity predicted comfort ($\beta = .274$, SE = .139, $p = .049$). The direct path from perceived financial similarity to comfort was not significant ($\beta = .097$, SE = .103, $p = .349$).

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from income difference to perceived financial similarity, to perceived non-financial similarity, and then to comfort was marginally significant ($\beta = -.019$, 95% CI [-.040, 0.001]). The indirect effect from income difference to comfort via perceived financial similarity alone was not significant ($\beta = -.005$, 95% CI [-.061, .022]). The total indirect effect, combining both pathways, was marginal ($\beta = -.022$, 95% CI [-.075, .002]). This pattern suggests that greater income differences were associated with *lower* perceived financial similarity, which was linked to *lower* perceived non-financial similarity, and in turn to *lower comfort* with one's roommate.

Summary. In line with predictions, the results suggest that social class differences may affect comfort with one's roommate indirectly through similarity perceptions. Specifically, larger social class differences predicted lower perceived financial similarity, which was linked to lower perceived non-financial similarity, which in turn was associated with lower comfort.

Although the sequential indirect effect was only marginally significant, the pattern is consistent with the theoretical expectation that similarity perceptions are a key mechanism linking social class differences to comfort in roommate relationships. Table 8 reports the full parameter estimates for Model B, including structural paths, variances, and covariances. Figure 14 provides a path diagram of these effects.

Table 8

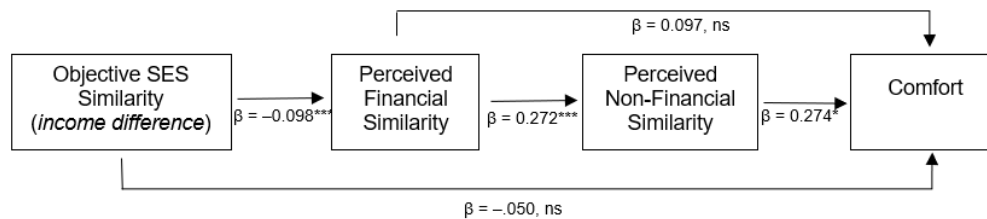
Path Coefficients of Income Difference → Comfort, Model B

Path / Parameter	Estimate	95% CI	SE	p-value
<i>Structural Paths</i>				
Income Difference → Perceived Financial Similarity	-0.098	[-0.142, -0.054]	0.023	< .001
Perceived Financial Similarity → Perceived Non-Financial Similarity	0.272	[0.162, 0.382]	0.056	< .001
Perceived Non-Financial Similarity → Comfort	0.274	[0.002, 0.546]	0.139	.049
Perceived Financial Similarity → Comfort	0.097	[-0.106, 0.300]	0.103	.349

Note. Social class similarity = absolute difference in household income between roommates (higher scores indicate *less* social class similarity). Estimates are standardized coefficients. 95% confidence intervals are bootstrapped.

Figure 14

Path Diagram of Income Difference → Comfort, Model B



Note. Social class similarity = absolute difference in household income between roommates (higher scores indicate *less* social class similarity). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

Model C. Mediation (with RaceMatch covariate). When race match was included as a covariate, the model continued to fit the data well ($\chi^2(14) = 9.84$, $p = .774$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000). Larger income differences significantly predicted lower perceived financial similarity ($\beta = -.097$, $p < .001$), which in turn predicted lower non-financial similarity ($\beta = .276$, $p < .001$), and non-financial similarity predicted greater behavioral comfort ($\beta = .280$, $p = .044$). The direct path from financial similarity to comfort was not significant ($\beta = .086$, $p = .409$). Race match did not significantly predict perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .204$, $p = .143$), non-financial similarity ($\beta = -.057$, $p = .600$), or comfort ($\beta = .151$, $p = .568$). The sequential indirect effect from income difference through financial and non-financial similarity to comfort was just *barely* not significant when examining the confidence intervals ($\beta = -.020$, 95% CI [-.040, .0003]). In sum, including RaceMatch did not change the overall results. For the full report of this Model C with RaceMatch as a covariate, please see Appendix 11.

Test 3B. Generational College Match Predicting Behavioral Comfort

Model A. Total Effect

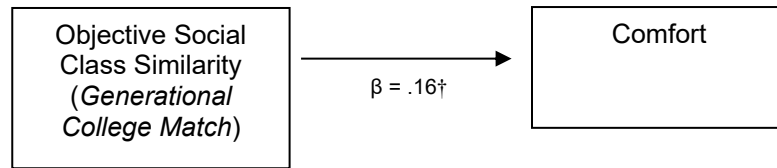
Model Fit. The model was saturated, $\chi^2(1) = 0.00$, $p = .994$. As such, incremental fit indices such as CFI, TLI, and RMSEA are not informative and are therefore not reported. Model evaluation instead focuses on parameter estimates.

Direct Effects. First-generation match marginally predicted comfort, $B = 0.42$, $SE = 0.23$, $z = 1.87$, $p = .061$, $\beta = .16$.

Summary. In Model A, the total effect of first-generation match on comfort was positive but only marginal, suggesting that matched dyads reported somewhat higher comfort than mismatched dyads. See Figure 15 for the path diagram.

Figure 15

Path Diagram of Generational College Match → Comfort, Model A



Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

Model B. Mediation (No Covariate)

Model Fit. The mediation model fit the data well, $\chi^2(9) = 10.98$, $p = .277$, CFI = .975, TLI = .956, RMSEA = .059, AIC = 23.66, BIC = 49.56.

Direct Effects. First-generation match significantly predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .42$, SE = .17, $p = .011$). Perceived financial similarity, in turn, significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .25$, SE = .06, $p < .001$). Perceived non-financial similarity marginally predicted comfort ($\beta = .30$, SE = .16, $p = .060$), whereas the direct path from perceived financial similarity to comfort was not significant ($\beta = .08$, SE = .12, $p = .495$). The direct effect of first-generation match on comfort was also not significant ($\beta = .13$, SE = .31, $p = .672$).

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from first-generation match to perceived financial similarity, to perceived non-financial similarity, and then to comfort was not

significant ($\beta = .06$, 95% CI [-.014, .19]). The indirect effect from first-generation match to comfort via perceived financial similarity alone was also nonsignificant ($\beta = .03$, 95% CI [-.14, .31]). The total indirect effect, combining both pathways, was not significant ($\beta = .07$, 95% CI [-.05, .38]). This pattern indicates that, although first-generation match predicted greater perceived similarity, these perceptions only marginally carried through to predict comfort.

Summary. In line with predictions, first-generation match was associated with greater perceived similarity (both financial and non-financial). However, these perceptions only marginally mediated comfort. Table 9 reports the full parameter estimates for Model B, including structural paths, variances, and covariances. Figure 16 provides a path diagram of these effects.

Table 9

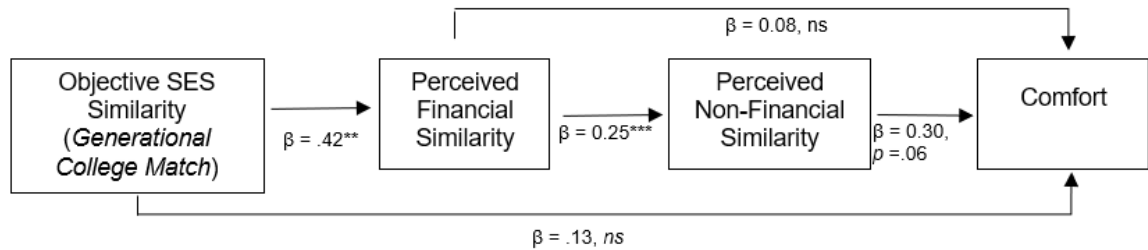
Path Coefficients of Generational College Match $\rightarrow$ Comfort, Model B

Path / Parameter	Estimate	95% CI	SE	p-value
Structural Paths				
College Generational Match $\rightarrow$ Perceived Financial Similarity	0.420	[0.096, 0.744]	0.165	.011
Perceived Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Perceived Non-Financial Similarity	0.245	[0.126, 0.364]	0.061	<.001
Perceived Non-Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Comfort	0.296	[-0.012, 0.603]	0.157	.060
Perceived Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Comfort	0.081	[-0.152, 0.314]	0.119	.495
College Generational Match $\rightarrow$ Comfort	0.132	[-0.478, 0.742]	0.312	.672

Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. 95% confidence intervals are bootstrapped.

Figure 16

Path Diagram of Generational College Match → Comfort, Model B



Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

Model C. Mediation (With RaceMatch as Covariate). When race match was included as a covariate, the model continued to fit the data well ($\chi^2(13) = 13.87, p = .383$, CFI = .989, TLI = .981, RMSEA = .033). First-generation college match significantly predicted greater perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .37, p = .022$), which in turn predicted greater non-financial similarity ($\beta = .24, p < .001$), and non-financial similarity significantly predicted comfort ($\beta = .35, p = .032$). The direct effects of financial similarity on comfort ($\beta = -.02, p = .874$) and of first-generation match on comfort ($\beta = .16, p = .617$) were not significant. Race match significantly predicted financial similarity ($\beta = .36, p = .018$), but not non-financial similarity ($\beta = .02, p = .882$) or comfort ($\beta = .21, p = .491$). The sequential indirect effect from first-generation match to comfort via financial and non-financial similarity was just *barely* not significant ($\beta = .04, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.004, .184]$), and the indirect effect via financial similarity alone was insignificant ($\beta = -.01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.272, .155]$) as was the total indirect effect ($\beta = -.02, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.164, .217]$). Including RaceMatch as a covariate revealed an independent effect of race

similarity on financial similarity but did not alter the overall mediation pattern for comfort. For the full report of this Model C with RaceMatch as a covariate, please see Appendix 1J.

5. Synchrony

Behavioral Synchrony: Latent Variable

We conceptualized behavioral synchrony as the coordinated timing of posture, speech, and movement between partners during the recorded interaction. This construct was modeled as a latent variable indicated by three coder-rated measures: sitting synchrony, speech synchrony, and movement synchrony (all aggregated to the dyad level). Modeling synchrony as latent allowed us to capture the common variance across these behavioral indicators while accounting for measurement error. Higher scores reflect greater moment-to-moment coordination between roommates.

Test 4A. Income Difference Predicting Synchrony

Model A. Total Effect (No Covariate)

Model Fit. The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(3) = 1.62$, $p = .655$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000, AIC = 13.96, BIC = 30.18.

Direct Effects. Income difference did not significantly predict synchrony, $\beta = -0.010$, SE = 0.016, $z = -0.64$, $p = .524$.

Summary. The total effect model indicated that income difference was not significantly associated with synchrony when examined without mediators or covariates, suggesting that any potential effect of SES difference on synchrony may operate indirectly through other relational or perceptual processes.

Model B. Mediation (No Covariate)

Model Fit. The mediation model without the race-match covariate fit the data well, $\chi^2(20) = 26.68$, $p = .145$, CFI = .969, TLI = .954, RMSEA = .067, AIC = 31.29, BIC = 68.37.

Direct Effects. Income difference significantly and negatively predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = -.099$, SE = .023, $p < .001$). Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .272$, SE = .056, $p < .001$). Neither perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .062$, SE = .054, $p = .252$) nor perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .030$, SE = .039, $p = .440$) significantly predicted synchrony.

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from income difference to perceived financial similarity, to perceived non-financial similarity, and then to synchrony was not significant ($\beta = -.007$, 95% CI [-.0136, .0022]). The indirect effect from income difference to synchrony via perceived financial similarity alone was also not significant ($\beta = -.005$, 95% CI [-.0118, .00697]). The total indirect effect, combining both pathways, was also non-significant ($\beta = -.014$, 95% CI [-.0284, .0077]). This pattern suggests that while income difference was associated with lower perceived financial similarity, and in turn with lower perceived non-financial similarity, these similarity perceptions did not significantly predict synchrony.

Summary. The results indicate that, although larger income differences predicted lower perceived financial similarity, and lower perceived financial similarity was associated with lower perceived non-financial similarity, these perceptions of similarity did not significantly translate into differences in observed synchrony. This diverges from the theoretical expectation that similarity perceptions may serve as a key mechanism linking SES differences to synchrony in roommate interactions. Full parameter estimates are provided in Table 10. Figure 17

presents the corresponding path diagram, illustrating the tested mediation pathways with standardized coefficients.

Table 10

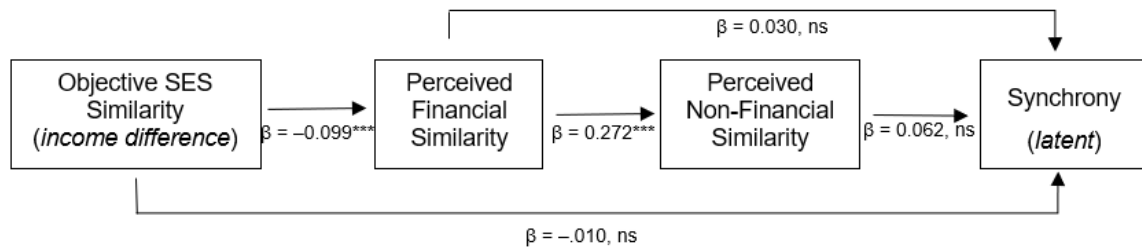
Path Coefficients of Income Difference → Synchrony, Model B

Path (Collapsed Across Dyad Members)	Estimate	SE	z	p
Structural Paths				
Income Difference → Perceived Financial Similarity	-0.099	0.023	-4.26	<.001
Perceived Financial Similarity → Perceived Non-financial Similarity	0.272	0.056	4.86	<.001
Perceived Non-Financial Similarity → Synchrony	0.062	0.054	1.15	.252
Perceived Financial Similarity → Synchrony	0.030	0.039	0.77	.440

Note. Social class similarity = absolute difference in household income between roommates (higher scores indicate *less* social class similarity). Estimates are standardized coefficients. 95% confidence intervals are bootstrapped.

Figure 17

Path Diagram of Income Difference → Synchrony, Model B



Note. Social class similarity = absolute difference in household income between roommates (higher scores indicate *less* social class similarity). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

Test 4B. College Generational Match Predicting Synchrony

Model A. Total Effect (No Covariate)

Model Fit. The model fit the data well, $\chi^2(3) = 3.29$, $p = .349$, CFI = .996, TLI = .990, RMSEA = .039, AIC = 13.90, BIC = 29.01.

Direct Effects. First-generation match did not significantly predict synchrony, $\beta = .04$, SE = .10, $z = 0.41$, $p = .679$.

Summary. The total effect model indicated that college generational match was not significantly associated with synchrony when examined without mediators or covariates. This suggests that any potential effect of generational college match on dyadic synchrony may operate indirectly through other perceptual or relational mechanisms, rather than directly.

Model B. Mediation (No Covariate)

Model Fit. The mediation model without the race-match covariate fit the data well, $\chi^2(19) = 24.00$, $p = .196$, CFI = .966, TLI = .947, RMSEA = .065, AIC = 33.25, BIC = 69.95.

Direct Effects. First-generation match significantly predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .42$, SE = .17, $p = .011$). Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .25$, SE = .06, $p < .001$). Neither perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .01$, SE = .05, $p = .868$) nor perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .04$, SE = .04, $p = .323$) significantly predicted synchrony. The direct path from first-generation match to synchrony was also not significant ($\beta = .01$, SE = .11, $p = .940$).

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from first-generation match to perceived financial similarity, to perceived non-financial similarity, and then to synchrony was not significant ($\beta = .002$, 95% CI [-.014, .019]). The indirect effect from first-generation match to

synchrony via perceived financial similarity alone was also not significant ($\beta = .03$, 95% CI [- .11, .15]). The total indirect effect, combining both pathways, was nonsignificant ($\beta = .03$, 95% CI [-.16, .22]).

Summary. In line with predictions, generational college match significantly predicted higher perceived financial similarity, which in turn predicted higher perceived non-financial similarity. However, neither similarity perception significantly translated into synchrony, and the indirect pathways from first-generation match to synchrony were nonsignificant. These results suggest that, while financial and non-financial similarity perceptions are related to one another, they do not appear to serve as a mechanism linking first-generation match to synchrony in roommate dyads. Full parameter estimates are provided in Table 11. Figure 18 presents the corresponding path diagram, illustrating the tested mediation pathways with standardized coefficients.

Table 11

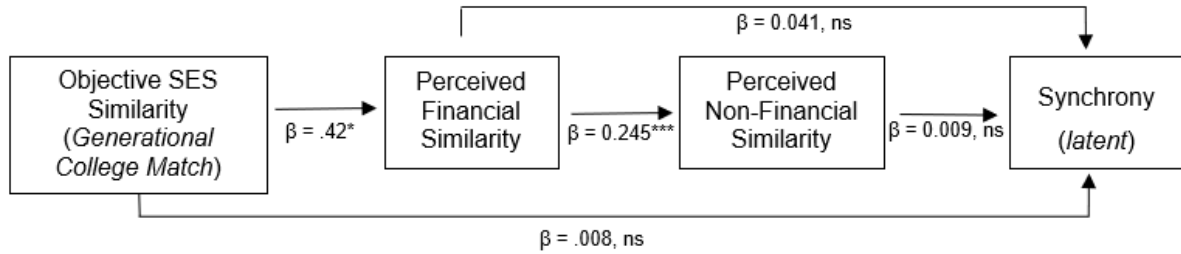
Path Coefficients of College Generational Match $\rightarrow$ Synchrony, Model B

Path (Collapsed Across Dyad Members)	Standardized B	SE	z	p
Structural Paths				
First-Generation Match $\rightarrow$ Perceived Financial Similarity	0.420	0.165	2.54	.011
Perceived Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Perceived Non-Financial Similarity	0.245	0.061	4.03	<.001
Perceived Non-Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Synchrony	0.009	0.054	0.17	.868
Perceived Financial Similarity $\rightarrow$ Synchrony	0.041	0.042	0.99	.323
First-Generation Match $\rightarrow$ Synchrony	0.008	0.106	0.08	.940

Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. 95% confidence intervals are bootstrapped.

Figure 18

Path Coefficients of College Generational Match → Synchrony, Model B



Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

6. Exploratory Alternative Model

Rationale for Test

Although our conceptual model specified that structural social class differences would predict perceived similarity, which in turn would predict relationship quality, it is also possible that the causal order operates in the opposite direction. Some prior research suggests that as relationships progress, people increasingly perceive themselves as similar to their partners (Morry, 2005). Thus, it is plausible that relationship quality predicts perceived similarity over time rather than the reverse. Because our data were cross-sectional and collected at a single time point, we could not examine this question longitudinally. To explore this possibility, we tested an alternative model in which social class differences and relationship quality predicted perceptions of similarity.

Model Specification

In this exploratory model, social class was operationalized as absolute income difference between roommates. Both social class differences and relationship quality (QRI) were specified as predictors of perceived financial similarity. Perceived financial similarity

was modeled as a predictor of perceived interpersonal/non-financial similarity, which served as the final outcome. Absolute income difference and QRI were also allowed to predict perceived non-financial similarity directly. This was an actor-only model, with no partner effects included, and equality constraints were applied across partners to reflect the indistinguishable dyad structure.

Model Fit

The model did not fit the data well, $\chi^2(14) = 27.06$, $p = .019$, CFI = .961, TLI = .933, RMSEA = .086. The significant chi-square, elevated RMSEA, and sub-threshold TLI indicate misfit, suggesting that this alternative ordering is not strongly supported.

Direct Effects

Social class differences significantly predicted lower perceived financial similarity, $\beta = -.09$, $SE = .02$, $p < .001$. Relationship quality significantly predicted higher perceived financial similarity, $\beta = .24$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$, and higher perceived non-financial similarity, $\beta = .47$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$. Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity, $\beta = .25$, $SE = .04$, $p < .001$. The direct effect of social class differences on perceived non-financial similarity was nonsignificant, $\beta = .01$, $SE = .01$, $p = .25$.

Indirect Effects

The indirect effect of social differences on perceived non-financial similarity via financial similarity was significant, $\beta = -.02$, 95% CI [-.07, -.02]. The indirect effect of relationship quality on perceived non-financial similarity via financial similarity was also significant, $\beta = .13$, 95% CI [.04, .22].

Summary

This exploratory model yielded some significant pathways but overall fit the data poorly, particularly with respect to chi-square, TLI, and RMSEA. These results suggest that although relationship quality is associated with perceptions of similarity, the alternative ordering does not adequately explain the observed data. This strengthens confidence in our original conceptual model, in which social class differences predict perceived similarity, which in turn predicts relationship quality.

7. Study 1 Discussion

The results of Study 1 provided partial support for the proposed mediation framework linking objective social class similarity to roommate relationship quality through perceptions of similarity. Across models, larger income differences and generational mismatch predicted lower perceived financial similarity, which in turn reduced perceptions of non-financial similarity and ultimately lowered relationship quality. Actor-only effects were particularly robust, suggesting that one's own perceptions of similarity played a stronger role in shaping relationship evaluations than the partner's. This underscores the importance of psychological perceptions and personal construals in driving relational outcomes, above and beyond shared structural background.

At the same time, several important limitations qualify these conclusions. First, the sample was biased toward relatively high-quality relationships. Because participation required both roommates to coordinate and voluntarily take part together, dyads with poor relationship quality were less likely to volunteer to participate. As a result, the observed range of relationship quality was somewhat truncated, clustering toward the higher end of the scale (see Figure 4). This selection process likely attenuated variability in key outcomes and may limit

the generalizability of findings to roommate pairs who struggle to coordinate or maintain positive relationships.

Second, the household income variable was not binned in an ideal way. Participants reported their family household income on a 12-point scale, but a disproportionately large proportion selected the top categories, particularly “\$150,000 or more” (29.7% of participants; see Figure 1). This clustering created a skew toward higher-income families, reducing variability in the income measure and limiting the precision of absolute income difference scores between dyads (see Figure 2). This measurement issue highlights the importance of designing income categories that provide finer distinctions at the upper end of the distribution, especially in university samples. Given this skew, analyses involving first-generation match may offer a more reliable indicator of structural class similarity than income differences alone in this dataset.

Third, the absolute income difference measure itself showed limited variability. Although some dyads differed substantially (e.g., 9-10 points on the scale), the most common differences were small, with many dyads clustered at differences of 0-1 (see Figure 2). This limited range may have constrained the strength of associations between income dissimilarity and relationship outcomes.

It is also important to note that because data were collected only once, causal pathways cannot be definitively established. To evaluate an alternative causal ordering, we tested a model in which relationship quality and income difference predicted perceived similarity rather than the reverse. This model was motivated by research suggesting that relationship quality may predict perceived similarity as relationships develop over time (Morry, 2005). However, this flipped-order model showed relatively poor fit, indicating that it did not adequately capture the

observed data. Thus, while relationship quality was significantly associated with greater perceived similarity in this model, its weaker overall fit suggests that our original conceptual ordering, in which social class differences shape relationship quality via perceived similarity, provides a more accurate representation. Future research using longitudinal data will be essential for disentangling directionality and testing how perceptions of similarity and relationship quality influence one another over time.

Finally, although exploratory partner-effects models revealed some cross-paths, the strongest effects consistently emerged at the actor level. This pattern suggests that perceptions of similarity primarily influence one's own relationship quality rather than reliably shaping the partner's experience. While consistent with prior dyadic research showing actor effects often dominate (Kenny & Kashy, 2011), the inability to detect partner effects may reflect both theoretical realities and/or the statistical challenges of modeling interdependence in modestly sized dyadic samples.

Taken together, these limitations point to several directions for future research. Studies should aim to recruit roommate dyads across the full spectrum of relationship quality, incorporate more fine-grained income measures, and test partner-level effects in larger samples. Longitudinal data will be especially valuable for clarifying the interplay between perceived similarity and relationship quality. Despite these caveats, Study 1 provides compelling evidence that structural class similarity shapes roommate relationship quality primarily through perceptions of similarity.

Chapter IV

STUDY 2

METHODS

1. Overview of Study 2

To investigate how social class similarity shapes the very earliest stages of relationship formation, we conducted a laboratory-based study of initial interactions between previously unacquainted college students. Whereas Study 1 focused on the development of roommate relationships over several months of shared living, Study 2 targeted the first moments of connection, when two strangers meet and begin to form impressions of one another. This design allowed us to examine how similarities and differences in socioeconomic background influence affective dynamics and perceived interaction quality at the outset of a potential relationship.

Participants were randomly paired into dyads and engaged in a brief, structured conversation over Zoom. Each participant first completed a short “Getting to Know You” questionnaire, and then discussed prompts adapted from the Fast Friends paradigm (Aron et al., 1997), designed to facilitate self-disclosure and interpersonal connection. Following the interaction, participants reported on their own emotions, their perceptions of their partner’s emotions, and their evaluations of the interaction itself. From these measures, we derived indices of emotional similarity (the extent to which partners reported feeling similar emotions), empathic accuracy (the extent to which participants correctly inferred their partner’s emotions), and interaction quality (enjoyment, satisfaction, and desire to continue engaging with the partner). We also assessed participants’ interpersonal goals during the interaction (approach vs. avoidance goals).

This approach enabled us to capture both objective and perceived markers of interpersonal alignment in initial encounters, and to explore how social class similarity might shape affective synchrony, empathic understanding, and evaluations of early interactions. Given the modest sample size, analyses of Study 2 should be considered preliminary and exploratory. Nevertheless, this design provides an important complement to Study 1 by shifting the focus from longer-term roommate relationships to the early moments of social connection, providing insight into how class-based dynamics may influence the likelihood of relationship development from the onset.

2. Participants

Participants were 48 undergraduate students (24 dyads²) at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). Dyads were composed of two students who had not previously known each other prior to the study. All dyads were required to have both members participate concurrently. Recruitment took place through the UCSB SONA Subject Pool during the 2022-2023 academic year(s). Eligibility criteria required that participants be currently enrolled UCSB undergraduates.

To create same-gender dyads, participants were pre-screened for gender identity, and time slots were restricted so that only students identifying as male could sign up for male time slots and only students identifying as female could sign up for female time slots. Participants were not informed that this matching process had been implemented. Race was not used as a matching criterion due to subject pool constraints.

² The sample size for this study (48 participants, 24 dyads) is extremely small by structural equation modeling standards, and falls well below established recommendations for achieving stable, reliable model estimation. Such a limited N violates core assumptions of SEM, including adequate power to detect effects and sufficient information to produce trustworthy parameter estimates (Maxwell, 2004; Wolf et al., 2013). With so few dyads, we are at increased risk of convergence problems and/or spurious and unstable parameter estimates.

The wide majority of participants identified as female (91.7%, $n = 44$), followed by male (8.3%, $n = 4$). The average age of participants was 18.8 years ($SD = 0.75$, range = 18-21). Participants were racially diverse, with the largest proportion identifying as Asian (27%), followed by LatinX (21%) and white (15%). Many participants reported multiracial identities (38%).

3. Procedure

Each dyad consisted of two participants who did not previously know each other. Upon arrival at the lab, participants were introduced to their partner and informed that they would first complete a short interaction task together, followed by individual surveys. Before beginning the interaction, each participant completed a brief *Getting to Know You* questionnaire (see Appendix 2A), which included demographic information and social class background. The completed questionnaire was exchanged with their partner so that each participant had some initial background information about the other.

Participants were then seated in separate rooms and connected to their partner via Zoom. This procedure both adhered to COVID-19 safety precautions (allowing participants to remove their masks) and enabled the interaction to be recorded for subsequent analysis. Research assistants reminded participants that the session would be audio- and video-recorded, and instructed them to set Zoom to “speaker view” and full screen.

The interaction task was modeled after the *Fast Friends paradigm* (Aron et al., 1997), a widely used method for inducing closeness between unacquainted partners through structured self-disclosure prompts. In the present study, participants completed three brief interaction prompts:

1. *What were some things you liked to do during your childhood?*

2. *What would constitute a perfect day for you?*
3. *Is there something that you've dreamed of doing for a long time? Why haven't you done it?*

For each prompt, the research assistant read the question aloud and then instructed participants to discuss the topic with their partner for three minutes. The research assistant turned off their camera and microphone during each discussion period but monitored the session. If participants were still actively engaged when time elapsed, the RA provided a 30-second warning in the chat, allowing the conversation to conclude naturally. Each discussion lasted no longer than 3 minutes and 30 seconds. After the final prompt, the RA returned to the Zoom call and ended the recording.

Following the interaction, participants were instructed to minimize the Zoom window and complete an online survey (~15 minutes). The survey assessed empathic accuracy, emotional synchrony, interaction quality, and approach/avoidance goals during the interaction (see Measures section). After completing the survey, participants were debriefed and compensated with course credit.

4. Measures

Individual-Level Social Class Indicators

Generational College Status. To determine first-generation college student status, participants were asked to report the highest level of education completed by each parent or guardian. Participants were categorized as first-generation if neither parent had completed a four-year college degree (i.e., highest education was an associate's degree or lower). Participants were categorized as continuing-generation if at least one parent had completed a four-year degree (B.A. or higher). This operationalization aligns with prior research in social

psychology and education that defines first-generation status based on parental completion of a bachelor's degree (Stephens et al., 2012; Harackiewicz et al., 2014). Responses were coded dichotomously (0 = continuing-generation, 1 = first-generation) for use in primary analyses.

In the final sample, 35.4% of participants were classified as first-generation college students ($n = 17$), and 64.6% were classified as continuing-generation ($n = 31$).

Household Income. Participants reported their family household income using a 12-point ordinal scale ranging from “Under \$10,000” to “\$210,000 or more.” The mean reported income was 6.27 ($SD = 3.38$), corresponding roughly to the \$90,000-\$109,999 income bracket. The distribution was negatively skewed (-0.90) and platykurtic (-1.17), indicating a modest clustering toward higher income brackets. Responses ranged from 1 to 12, with the median at 6 (“\$90,000-\$109,999”).

Dyadic-Level Social Class Indicators

Generational College Status Match vs. Mismatch. To capture social class similarity within dyads, we categorized roommate pairs as either matched or mismatched in generational college status. Dyads in which both roommates were continuing-generation students or both were first-generation students were coded as social class matched, whereas dyads composed of one first-generation and one continuing-generation student were coded as social class mismatched. This approach aligns with prior research using social class match versus mismatch to examine cultural and interpersonal dynamics in dyadic and peer relationships (e.g., Stephens et al., 2012; Kraus & Keltner, 2009; Côté et al., 2017). In the final sample, 11 dyads (45.8%) were mismatched, and 13 dyads (54.2%) were matched (10 continuing generation match; 3 first- generation match).

Household Income Difference. As a dyad-level indicator of social class difference, we calculated the absolute difference in reported household income between roommates. Each participant reported their family's household income using a 12-point categorical scale (e.g., 1 = "Under \$10,000"; 12 = "\$210,000 or more"), and we computed the absolute value of the difference between the two roommates' responses. This resulted in a dyad-level income difference score ranging from 0 (same income category) to 11 (maximum distance on the scale). Among the dyads ($n = 24$), income difference scores ranged from 0 to 10, with a mean of 3.96 ($SD = 3.20$), an observed range of 0 to 11, a skew of .79 and a kurtosis of -0.20. This indicates that there was substantial variability in within-dyad income differences.

Interaction Quality

Interaction Perception. Research on early interpersonal exchanges consistently highlights how the perceived quality of initial interactions predicts motivation for future engagement. High-quality social interactions tend to elicit feelings of enjoyment and satisfaction, which in turn lay the foundation for continued social connection and relationship development (Jolink & Algoe, 2024). As such, interaction quality was assessed using a custom-developed questionnaire designed to capture participants' overall evaluation of the social interaction. Following the interaction, participants indicated their agreement with four statements: "I think that interaction was enjoyable," "I feel satisfied with this interaction," "I would like to get to know my partner more," and "I would be open to meeting my partner to hang out after this study is over" on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). Higher scores reflect more positive evaluations of the interaction. Composite scores for interaction quality were calculated by averaging the four items, such that higher scores indicate better perceived interaction quality. The average score for interaction quality was M

= 4.41 (SD = .57), observed range = 2.75 to 5, skew = -0.90, kurtosis = 0.51, with internal consistency $\alpha = 0.86$. For the full Interaction Perception scale, see Appendix 2B.

Perceived Common Ground & Interest. Perceived common ground and interest during the interaction were assessed using a custom questionnaire designed for this study. Participants were prompted to indicate their agreement with seven statements about their interaction using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). Three items tapped common ground (e.g., *My partner and I have a lot in common*, *My partner and I have common ground on topics to discuss*, *I understood my partner as a person*) and four items assessed interest (e.g., *I was genuinely interested in what my partner had to say*, *I respect my partner*, *I wanted to listen to my partner*, *This interaction was interesting to me*). These item groupings were based on theoretical distinctions in interpersonal rapport and curiosity. Composite scores were computed by averaging the relevant items separately for common ground and interest, such that higher scores reflect greater perceived similarity and engagement. The average score for perceived common ground was $M = 4.1$ (SD = .56), observed range = 3 to 5, skew = -.08, kurtosis = -.55, with internal consistency $\alpha = .56$. The average score for interest was $M = 4.8$ (SD = .35), observed range = 3.5 to 5, skew = -1.8, kurtosis = 3.39, with internal consistency $\alpha = .81$; this was heavily skewed and results should be interpreted with caution. For the full Perceived Common Ground & Interest scale, see Appendix 2B.

Emotions

Emotions Felt During the Interaction. Participants' emotional experiences during the interaction were assessed using a modified version of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988). The PANAS is a widely used measure of affect that assesses momentary or dispositional emotional states through self-reported adjectives. It has

demonstrated excellent psychometric properties across diverse populations and contexts, and is often employed to capture emotional experience in social and experimental settings (Watson et al., 1998).

For the purposes of this study, the PANAS was adapted to fit the context of a brief, initial interaction between unacquainted partners. Specifically, in addition to the standard affect adjectives (e.g., “happy,” “nervous,” “calm”), the measure was expanded to include relationally relevant states likely to emerge during a first-time interaction (e.g., “respectful toward interaction partner,” “close to interaction partner,” “awkward”). This adaptation was intended to capture both general affect and socially oriented emotions, consistent with research highlighting the central role of interpersonal affect in early relationship development (e.g., Laurenceau et al., 1998).

Participants rated 18 affect adjectives on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Extremely*), indicating the extent to which they experienced each emotion during the interaction. Following PANAS conventions, items were grouped into positive affect (e.g., good, proud, happy, elated, calm, respectful toward interaction partner, close to interaction partner) and negative affect (e.g., bad, guilty, frustrated, angry, resentful, embarrassed, worried, nervous, sad, awkward). For the full Emotions Felt During Interaction Scale, see Appendix 2D.

Mean scores were computed separately for positive affect and negative affect, such that higher scores indicated greater intensity of positive or negative emotions during the interaction. The average score for positive affect was $M = 3.49$ ($SD = 0.53$), with observed scores ranging from 2.43 to 4.71. The skew was 0.32 and kurtosis was -0.32, indicating values were reasonably symmetric and not strongly peaked. Internal consistency was $\alpha = .73$.

The average score for negative affect was $M = 1.42$ ($SD = 0.28$), with observed scores ranging from 1.00 to 2.00. The distribution had a skew of -0.66. and kurtosis of -0.53. Internal consistency was less than ideal at $\alpha = .58$.

Emotional Similarity. Emotional similarity was computed by comparing the self-reported emotions of each dyad member during the interaction. For each of the 18 affect adjectives, we calculated the absolute value of the difference between the two partners' self-ratings (e.g., if one partner reported feeling "happy" at a level of 4 and the other partner reported feeling "happy" at a level of 2, the discrepancy score for that item was 2). These absolute difference scores were then averaged across all items to create a composite index of emotional similarity for each dyad. Lower scores on this index indicated greater emotional similarity (i.e., partners reported feeling more similar emotions), whereas higher scores indicated lower emotional similarity (i.e., partners reported more discrepant emotions). The average score for emotional similarity was $M = .62$ ($SD = .23$), observed range = .17 to 1.3, skew = .74, kurtosis = 1.73. For more complete explanation of Emotional Similarity computation, see Appendix 2E.

Perceptions of Partner's Emotions. Participants also reported their perceptions of the emotions experienced by their interaction partner during the conversation. This measure paralleled the modified Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988) described above, but items were phrased to assess what participants believed their partner felt (e.g., "How much do you think your partner felt proud during the interaction?"). As with the self-report measure, participants rated 18 affect adjectives on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Extremely*). Items were again divided into positive affect (good, proud, respectful toward interaction partner, happy, close to interaction partner, elated, calm,

surprised) and negative affect (bad, guilty, frustrated, angry, resentful, embarrassed, worried, nervous, sad, awkward). Mean scores were computed separately for perceived positive affect and perceived negative affect, such that higher scores indicated greater intensity of the corresponding type of affect participants attributed to their partner. For the full Perceptions of Partner's Emotions Scale, see Appendix 2F.

The average score for perceived positive affect was $M = 3.24$ ($SD = .57$), observed range = 1.86 to 4.7, skew = .08, kurtosis = .007, with internal consistency $\alpha = .76$. The average score for perceived negative affect was $M = 1.34$ ($SD = 0.30$), observed range = 1 to 2.27, skew = 1.41, kurtosis = 1.88, with internal consistency $\alpha = .67$.

Empathic Accuracy. Empathic accuracy was computed by comparing each participant's perception of their partner's emotions with their partner's self-reported emotions. For each of the 18 affect adjectives, we calculated the absolute value of the difference between a participant's rating of their partner's emotions and the partner's corresponding self-report (e.g., if Participant A believed their partner felt "happy" at a level of 4, and Participant B reported feeling "happy" at a level of 2, the discrepancy score for that item was 2). These absolute difference scores were then averaged across all items to create a composite index of empathic accuracy for each participant. Lower scores on this index indicated greater empathic accuracy, reflecting smaller discrepancies between perceived and self-reported emotions, whereas higher scores indicated lower empathic accuracy. The average score for empathic accuracy was $M = .63$ ($SD = .22$), observed range = .28 to 1.17, skew = 0.32, kurtosis = -0.74. For more complete explanation of Empathic Accuracy computation, see Appendix 2G.

Approach & Avoidance Goals

Participants' interpersonal goals during the interaction were assessed with a 10-item measure designed for this study, but adapted from Gable (2006). These items reflected participants' motivations to either pursue positive engagement with their partner (approach goals) or to prevent negative outcomes during the interaction (avoidance goals). Approach and avoidance orientations are theorized to be fundamental in shaping how individuals regulate behavior in interpersonal contexts, including initial encounters with new partners (Gable, 2006). Approach goals are associated with seeking positive relational outcomes (e.g., enjoyment, closeness), whereas avoidance goals focus on preventing negative experiences (e.g., conflict, discomfort). Both play an important role in determining the quality and trajectory of early social interactions.

Participants rated their agreement with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 5 = *Strongly Agree*). Items reflecting approach goals included, for example, *My goal in the interaction was to be friendly*, *I wanted to focus on having a good interaction*, and *I wanted my interaction partner to feel positive about the interaction*. Items reflecting avoidance goals included, for example, *I did not want to make my interaction partner feel uncomfortable*, *I wanted to avoid being unfriendly*, and *I did not want to treat my interaction partner unfairly*. Composite scores were created by averaging across the approach items and avoidance items separately, such that higher scores reflected stronger endorsement of approach or avoidance goals, respectively. For the full Approach & Avoidance Goals Scale, see Appendix 2H.

The average score for approach goals was $M = 4.8$ ($SD = .26$), observed range = 4 to 5, skew = -1.2, kurtosis = .98, with internal consistency $\alpha = .58$. The average score for

avoidance goals was $M = 4.7$ ($SD = .41$), observed range = 3.6 to 5, skew = -.91, kurtosis = -.10, with internal consistency $\alpha = .58$.

Correlation Table of Outcomes

To provide a descriptive overview of the interrelations among Study 2 outcomes, we computed Pearson correlations among all individual-level variables ($n=48$). These correlations are reported at the individual level to maximize sample size and yield more stable estimates. Although this approach does not adjust for non-independence within dyads, Table 12 is presented for descriptive purposes to illustrate the degree of overlap among constructs.

Table 12

Correlation Table of Study 2 Outcomes

	Interaction Quality	Perceived Common Ground	Partner Interest	Positive Emotions	Negative Emotions	Emotional Similarity	Empathic Accuracy	Approach Goals	Avoidance Goals
Interaction Quality	1.00								
Perceived Common Ground	0.63***	1.00							
Partner Interest	0.71***	0.49***	1.00						
Positive Emotions	0.63***	0.48***	0.52***	1.00					
Negative Emotions	-0.19	-0.22	-0.09	-0.13	1.00				
Emotional Similarity	0.16	0.29*	0.09	0.03	-0.31*	1.00			
Empathic Accuracy	0.18	0.19	0.15	0.09	-0.29*	0.77***	1.00		
Approach Goals	0.34*	0.21	0.48***	0.35*	-0.04	0.05	0.18	1.00	
Avoidance Goals	0.24	0.20	0.30*	0.24	0.16	0.11	0.04	0.69***	1.00

Note. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, †, $p < .10$, ns = not significant.

STUDY 2

RESULTS

1. Analytic Plan

Analytic Goals

The analytic goals of Study 2 were to examine whether social class similarity predicts more positive dynamics in the earliest stages of relationship formation. Specifically, our models were designed to test whether dyads matched on social class background report higher interaction quality, experience better affective outcomes (emotional similarity, empathic accuracy, more positive affect, and less negative affect), and endorse more approach-oriented and fewer avoidance-oriented interpersonal goals during their initial interaction. In this way, Study 2 extends the *Intimacy Process Model* (Reis & Shaver, 1988) to the earliest moments of peer interaction by investigating how structural social class configurations shape the affective, cognitive, and motivational processes that provide the foundation for potential new relationships.

Structural Equation Modeling

For Study 2, which involved a laboratory-based interaction task, I again used structural equation modeling to account for the non-independence inherent in dyadic data (Kenny & Kashy, 2011). However, this study was substantially underpowered, with a sample size that limited the feasibility of estimating complex models. Power considerations are especially critical for SEM, as small samples can yield unstable parameter estimates, convergence problems, and inflated Type I and Type II error rates (Wolf et al., 2013). Given these constraints, I restricted analyses to simple models testing direct associations between objective social class differences and relational outcomes from the initial interaction. Although

mediation pathways would have been theoretically meaningful, estimating them would require substantially larger sample sizes to achieve adequate statistical power and trustworthy estimates (MacCallum et al., 1996). Thus, in line with best practices for SEM in small samples, the analytic plan for Study 2 prioritized model parsimony and interpretability over complexity (Wolf et al., 2013).

In line with these constraints, the analytic approach for Study 2 consisted of estimating two simple models for each relational outcome. Model A tested whether first-generation college match versus mismatch predicted the outcome, while Model B tested whether the continuous measure of absolute household income difference predicted the outcome. This dual-model approach was applied separately to each dependent variable of interest, including empathic accuracy, perceived interaction quality, approach-avoidance tendencies, and interest in the partner, among others. The goal of these analyses was not to provide definitive evidence but rather to offer a descriptive snapshot of how social class differences may manifest in the very first moments of relationship development. By presenting the results in this systematic way, the analytic plan prioritizes transparency and consistency across outcomes while acknowledging the exploratory and underpowered nature of the study.

2. Social Class Difference Predicting Interaction Quality

Interaction Perceptions

Model A tested whether first-generation match versus mismatch predicted interaction perceptions (where increased interaction perception scores indicate increased perceptions of interaction quality). Results indicated a marginal negative association, $b = -0.27$, $SE = 0.16$, $p = .085$. Because 0 = mismatch and 1 = match, this result suggests that matched pairs reported marginally lower interaction quality than mismatched pairs, which is in the opposite direction

of theoretical expectations. Model B tested whether income difference predicted interaction quality. Results indicated no significant association, $b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .808$. Together, these models provide a descriptive snapshot suggesting that interaction quality was generally unrelated to social class differences in this small, exploratory sample, with only a weak, marginal pattern opposite to expectations for first-generation status.

Perceived Common Ground

Model A tested whether college generational match vs. mismatch predicted perceived common ground. Results indicated a significant negative association, $b = -0.31$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = .042$, such that matched pairs reported lower perceived common ground than mismatched pairs. Model B tested whether income difference predicted perceived common ground. Results indicated no significant association, $b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.03$, $p = .587$. Together, these models provide a descriptive snapshot suggesting that perceived common ground was somewhat related to social class differences, specifically with the counterintuitive finding that college generationally matched pairs reported less common ground than mismatched pairs.

Interest in Partner

Model A tested whether college generational match versus mismatch predicted partner interest. Results indicated a significant negative association, $b = -0.22$, $SE = 0.09$, $p = .022$, such that mismatched pairs reported more interest in their partner compared to matched pairs. Model B tested whether income difference predicted partner interest. Results indicated no reliable association, $b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .193$. Together, these models provide a descriptive snapshot suggesting that partner interest was somewhat related to social class differences, including a finding that mismatched pairs reported greater levels of interest in their partner than matched pairs.

3. Social Class Difference Predicting Affective Outcomes

Positive Emotions Felt

Model A tested whether college generational match vs. mismatch predicted positive emotions felt during the interaction. Results indicated no reliable association, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.15$, $p = .961$. Model B tested whether income difference predicted positive emotions felt. Results indicated a nonsignificant negative association, $b = -0.04$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .135$. Together, these models provide a descriptive snapshot suggesting that participants' reported positive emotions were generally unrelated to social class difference.

Negative Emotions Felt

Model A tested whether college generational match vs. mismatch predicted negative emotions felt during the interaction. Results indicated a marginal positive association, $b = 0.14$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .061$, suggesting that matched pairs reported somewhat higher negative emotions than mismatched pairs. Model B tested whether income difference predicted negative emotions felt. Results indicated no significant association, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .352$. Together, these models provide a descriptive snapshot suggesting that negative emotions were generally unrelated to social class differences, with only a weak marginal pattern emerging for first-generation status.

Emotional Similarity

Model A tested whether college generational match vs. mismatch predicted emotional similarity. Results indicated a significant association with emotional similarity, $b = 0.21$, $SE = 0.08$, $p = .012$. Because the variable was coded for emotional dissimilarity (i.e., higher scores indicate higher levels of emotional dissimilarity), this coefficient indicates that matched pairs reported less emotional similarity (i.e., greater dissimilarity) than mismatched pairs. Model B

tested whether income difference predicted emotional similarity. Results indicated no reliable association, $b = -0.02$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .254$. Together, these models provide a descriptive snapshot suggesting that emotional similarity was somewhat related to social class differences, where college generationally matched pairs reported lower emotional similarity than mismatched pairs.

Empathic Accuracy

Model A tested whether first-generation match versus mismatch predicted empathic accuracy, with higher dependent variable scores indicating greater error (i.e., lower accuracy in perceiving a partner's emotions). Results indicated a significant positive association, $b = 0.13$, $SE = 0.06$, $p = .029$, such that matched pairs showed greater error and therefore lower empathic accuracy compared to mismatched pairs. Model B tested whether income difference predicted empathic accuracy. Results indicated no reliable association, $b < -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .980$. Together, these models provide a descriptive snapshot suggesting that empathic accuracy was somewhat related to social class differences, where the generationally college matched pairs demonstrated lower empathic accuracy than mismatched pairs.

4. Social Class Difference Predicting Approach & Avoidance Goals

Approach Goals

Model A tested whether college generational match versus mismatch predicted approach goals. Results indicated no reliable association, $b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.07$, $p = .917$. Model B tested whether income difference predicted approach motivation. Results similarly indicated no significant association, $b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $p = .514$. Together, these models suggest that approach tendencies toward a new partner were generally unrelated to social class differences.

Avoidance

Model A tested whether college generational match versus mismatch predicted avoidance goals. Results indicated no reliable association, $b = -0.03$, $SE = 0.12$, $p = .827$. Model B tested whether income difference predicted avoidance. Results indicated no significant association, $b = 0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, $p = .572$. Together, these models suggest that avoidance goals during the interaction were generally unrelated to social class differences.

5. Summary of Results

Across models, income difference showed no reliable associations with any of the outcomes, suggesting that absolute income gaps were unrelated to participants' interaction experiences in this small sample. By contrast, first-generation match versus mismatch yielded several significant or marginal associations, though consistently in the opposite direction of theoretical expectations. Specifically, matched pairs reported lower interaction quality, less perceived common ground, less interest in their partner, lower emotional similarity, and reduced empathic accuracy compared to mismatched pairs. There were also marginal trends indicating that matched pairs reported somewhat higher negative emotions. Together, these results suggest that while income difference was unrelated to dyadic processes, first-generation match sometimes predicted outcomes in unexpected ways, with mismatched dyads showing more positive indicators of interaction quality. Below, see Table 13 for associations between generational college match and interaction outcomes, and see Table 14 for associations between absolute income difference and interaction outcomes.

Table 13*Associations Between Generational College Match and Interaction Outcomes*

Dependent Variable	b	SE	p	Direction
Interaction Quality	-0.27	0.16	.085	Marginal, opposite
Perceived Common Ground	-0.31	0.15	.042*	Significant, opposite
Partner Interest	-0.22	0.09	.022*	Significant, opposite
Positive Emotions Felt	0.01	0.15	.961	ns
Negative Emotions Felt	0.14	0.08	.061	Marginal, opposite
Emotional Similarity	-0.21	0.08	.012*	Significant, opposite
Empathic Accuracy (error)	0.13	0.06	.029*	Significant, opposite
Approach Goals	-0.01	0.07	.917	ns
Avoidance Goals	-0.03	0.12	.827	ns

Note. Social class similarity = generational college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match). Estimates are standardized coefficients.

Table 14*Associations Between Income Difference and Interaction Outcomes*

Dependent Variable	b	SE	p	Direction
Interaction Quality	-0.01	0.03	.808	ns
Perceived Common Ground	-0.01	0.03	.587	ns
Partner Interest	-0.02	0.02	.193	ns
Positive Emotions Felt	-0.04	0.02	.135	ns
Negative Emotions Felt	0.01	0.01	.352	ns
Emotional Similarity	-0.02	0.01	.254	ns
Empathic Accuracy (error)	< -0.01	0.01	.980	ns
Approach Goals	-0.01	0.01	.514	ns
Avoidance Goals	0.01	0.02	.572	ns

Note. Social class similarity = absolute difference in household income between roommates (higher scores indicate *less* social class similarity). Estimates are standardized coefficients.

6. Exploratory Test of First-Generation vs. Continuing Generation Participants***Rationale***

Study 2 revealed that dyads matched on college generation background reported less favorable outcomes than mismatched dyads. However, the matched condition included both

first-generation/first-generation dyads *and* continuing-generation/continuing-generation dyads, with the latter being much more common (3 first-generation vs. 9 continuing-generation dyads). This raised the possibility that the observed effects were driven primarily by differences between continuing-generation and first-generation students, rather than by the match versus mismatch structure itself. To probe this possibility, we compared outcomes between first-generation and continuing-generation students directly. These analyses were conducted first at the dyadic level, followed by individual-level analyses.

Dyadic Level Analytic Approach

We conducted a series of unpaired t-tests at the dyadic level, comparing the two first-generation match dyads against the nine continuing-generation match dyads. Equal variances were assumed, although results were largely unchanged when this assumption was relaxed (the only exception was empathic accuracy, which reached significance under unequal variance assumptions, such that first-generation-matched pairs had higher levels of empathic accuracy than continuing-generation-matched pairs, but not when variances were constrained to be equal).

Dyadic Level Results

Across all outcomes, no significant differences emerged between first-generation match and continuing-generation match dyads. Interaction quality did not differ between groups, $t(9) = 0.39, p = .71$. Perceived common ground, partner interest, and approach goals also showed no reliable differences (all $ps > .72$). Emotional outcomes were also nonsignificant: positive emotions, $t(9) = -0.98, p = .35$; negative emotions, $t(9) = 0.79, p = .45$; and emotional similarity, $t(9) = -1.01, p = .34$; empathic accuracy, $t(9) = 1.60, p = .14$; avoidance goals, $t(9) = 1.27, p = .24$.

Dyadic Level Summary

Overall, these dyadic-level comparisons indicate that the less favorable outcomes associated with first-generation match in Study 2 were not accounted for by systematic differences between first-generation match dyads and continuing-generation match dyads. Given the very small number of first-generation match dyads ($n=3$), power to detect meaningful differences was limited. In the next step, we examine this question at the individual level, comparing first-generation and continuing-generation students directly across outcome variables.

Analytic Approach

We next conducted a series of unpaired t-tests at the individual level, comparing first-generation students ($n = 17$) to continuing-generation students ($n=31$) across the same outcome variables. Because of the larger sample size, we did not constrain equal variances across groups; instead, Welch's unequal-variance t-tests were used. Results were unchanged when equal variances were assumed, indicating that conclusions did not depend on this specification.

Results

Consistent with the dyadic-level analyses, none of the comparisons between first-generation and continuing-generation students reached significance. Interaction quality did not differ between groups, $t(29.2) = 0.51$, $p = .61$. Perceived common ground was marginally higher among first-generation students, but the difference was not significant, $t(31.1) = 1.54$, $p = .13$. Partner interest, positive emotions, and negative emotions all showed negligible group differences (all $ps > .56$). Emotional similarity was not significant, $t(30.4) = -0.45$, $p = .65$, as well as empathic accuracy, $t(24.9) = 1.01$, $p = .32$. Finally, approach and avoidance goals did

not differ meaningfully between groups, $t(29.8) = 0.52$, $p = .60$ and $t(33.9) = 1.01$, $p = .32$, respectively.

Summary

At the individual level, first-generation and continuing-generation students did not differ significantly on any of the measured outcomes. Taken together with the dyadic-level analyses, these results suggest that the unexpected mismatch advantage observed in Study 2 cannot be attributed to systematic differences between first-generation and continuing-generation students.

7. Study 2 Discussion

In Study 2, several significant associations emerged across analyses, though most were in the opposite direction of initial hypotheses. Specifically, college generational match (vs. mismatch) significantly predicted lower empathic accuracy, lower perceived common ground, lower partner interest, marginally lower interaction quality, and marginally more negative affect, with matched pairs consistently reporting worse outcomes than mismatched pairs. In contrast, income difference was not significantly associated with any of the relational outcomes examined. Thus, the results suggest a counterintuitive pattern in which first-generation mismatch, rather than match, was associated with more favorable initial interaction experiences, at least in the context of an experimental setting.

Because the “match” condition combined both first-generation/first-generation dyads and continuing-generation/continuing-generation dyads (and the latter was far more common), we probed whether the surprising effects were driven by underlying differences between first-generation and continuing-generation students rather than by match per se. At the dyadic level, unpaired t-tests comparing first-generation-match dyads to continuing-generation-match dyads

showed no significant group differences across outcomes. At the individual level, Welch t-tests comparing first-generation vs. continuing-generation students also yielded no significant differences on any outcome (all $ps \geq .13$). Together, these follow-ups indicate that the mismatch advantage observed in Study 2 is not explained by differences between first-generation and continuing-generation participants.

One plausible explanation for these unexpected findings relates to the methodological salience of class status in the laboratory setting. Because participants' first-generation status was explicitly revealed in the *Getting to Know You* questionnaire, this difference may have been unusually salient, prompting compensatory behaviors in mismatched partners. In intergroup contexts, individuals often engage in impression-management strategies designed to appear open-minded, avoid prejudice, and maintain smooth interactions (Ickes et al., 1982; Philips & Olson, 2014). Thus, mismatched pairs may have been motivated to exert greater effort and positivity, while matched pairs lacked the same situational pressure to manage impressions. This mismatch advantage observed in Study 2 may represent a short-term result of class salience in a controlled laboratory interaction rather than a durable relational benefit.

Although several results reached statistical significance, they should be interpreted with caution given the extremely small sample size of Study 2. Small samples can yield unstable estimates and increase the likelihood of spurious findings, making firm conclusions difficult (Maxwell, 2004; Wolf et al., 2013). In addition, the brief Zoom interaction introduced artificial constraints that differ from face-to-face encounters, and the direct disclosure of first-generation status may limit generalizability to more organic initial meetings.

Methodologically, the null associations for income difference suggest that absolute household income gaps did not shape momentary interaction dynamics in this study's context,

whereas the counterintuitive match effects appear sensitive to the salience of class cues at first meeting. Substantively, the pattern is consistent with the possibility that when potentially sensitive differences are highlighted, partners sometimes display compensatory responsiveness in early interactions (Ickes et al., 1982; Philips & Olson, 2014). Future research should replicate with larger samples, vary the salience of class cues experimentally, and examine whether any mismatch advantages persist beyond initial encounters. When possible, designs that track dyads longitudinally can more directly test whether early compensatory behaviors translate into ongoing relational processes.

Furthermore, beyond sample size and design constraints, several additional considerations warrant attention. Because the study was restricted to gender-matched dyads and analyzed at the dyadic level, findings may not generalize to mixed-gender interactions or to group contexts where social dynamics are more complex. Future research should recruit larger and more diverse samples and incorporate more fine-grained analyses of the interaction itself. Coding video data for indicators such as dominance, responsiveness, attunement, and synchrony could illuminate the micro-level processes that distinguish matched from mismatched pairs. Similarly, examining patterns of self-disclosure across conditions could clarify whether perceived differences shape how openly partners share information, which in turn may influence perceptions of similarity and responsiveness. Integrating these behavioral indicators with self-report outcomes would provide a richer account of how social class differences and perceptions affect early interaction processes.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

A. Summarizing Results

Study 1 provided partial support for the proposed mediation framework linking objective social class similarity to roommate relationship quality through perceptions of similarity. Across multiple models, larger income differences and generational college mismatch were associated with lower perceived financial similarity, which in turn predicted lower perceived interpersonal similarity and ultimately reduced relationship quality. These sequential indirect pathways were robust in actor-only models and remained when race match was included as a covariate, suggesting that the effects of class dissimilarity on relationship quality operate primarily through perceptions of similarity rather than through social class-racial demographic overlap. Partner-effects models indicated that one roommate's perceptions of similarity predicted their own relationship quality more strongly than their partner's, with insignificant cross-partner effects. Analyses of behavioral outcomes further suggested that perceptions of similarity were linked to more observed positive affective tone and comfort during interactions. In contrast, synchrony did not show consistent associations with class similarity. Taken together, the results indicate that social class differences undermine the development of high-quality roommate relationships primarily by reducing perceived similarity.

In Study 2, several significant associations emerged across analyses, though most were in the opposite direction of initial hypotheses. Specifically, college generational match (vs. mismatch) significantly predicted lower empathic accuracy, lower perceived common ground, lower partner interest, marginally lower interaction quality, and marginally more negative

affect, with matched pairs consistently reporting worse outcomes than mismatched pairs. In contrast, income difference was not significantly associated with any of the relational outcomes examined. Thus, the results suggest a counterintuitive pattern in which first-generation mismatch, rather than match, was associated with more favorable initial interaction experiences, at least in the context of an experimental setting. Although several results reached statistical significance, they should be interpreted with considerable caution given the extremely small sample size of Study 2. Small samples can yield unstable estimates and increase the likelihood of spurious findings, making firm conclusions difficult (Maxwell, 2004).

Together, these two studies provide complementary but contrasting perspectives on how social class similarity shapes relationship processes. In the field context of Study 1, where roommates interacted over time in real living arrangements, class similarity consistently predicted higher relationship quality through perceptions of financial and non-financial similarity. These findings suggest that when relationships unfold across repeated interactions, structural differences in class background erode perceived similarity and undermine closeness. By contrast, in the laboratory setting of Study 2, where students engaged in a brief, structured first-time interaction, the opposite pattern emerged: mismatched pairs often reported more favorable outcomes than matched pairs, including greater empathic accuracy, common ground, and positive engagement. Although these results must be interpreted cautiously given the small sample, they align with the possibility that initial interactions in which differences are made salient can elicit compensatory impression-management behaviors, leading to short-term boosts in positivity that do not necessarily translate into deeper alignment. Thus, across studies, a nuanced picture emerges: social class similarity appears to promote sustained relationship

quality in naturalistic contexts, but in the very first moments of connection, class dissimilarity may sometimes prompt socially desirable efforts.

B. Interpretation & Theoretical Implications

Importance of Perceptions

A central theme across the dissertation is that subjective perceptions, especially perceived financial and non-financial similarity, operate as proximal drivers of relational outcomes. Actor-only effects³ were consistently stronger than partner effects, indicating that how people *construe* similarity primarily shapes their own evaluations of the relationship rather than reliably altering their partner's experience. Importantly, we did not observe robust direct effects from objective social class to relationship quality, reinforcing the idea that structural differences influence relationships largely through psychological appraisals. Taken together, these findings highlight the importance of perceived similarity as a proximal psychological process linking structural social class differences to longer-term relationship development.

By contrast, Study 2 yielded a counterintuitive pattern in which first-generation mismatch, rather than match, was associated with more favorable outcomes, including higher empathic accuracy and greater common ground. One plausible explanation for these unexpected findings relates to the methodological salience of class status in the laboratory setting. Because participants' first-generation status was explicitly revealed in the "Getting to Know You" questionnaire, this difference may have been unusually salient, prompting compensatory behaviors toward mismatched partners. In intergroup contexts, individuals often

³ This attenuation of actor-level effects once partner pathways were added likely reflects the redistribution of predictive variance across the model, reducing power to detect effects (Kenny & Kashy, 2011; Ledermann & Kenny, 2012).

engage in impression-management strategies designed to appear open-minded, avoid prejudice, and maintain smooth interactions (Cambon et al., 2015). Thus, mismatched pairs may have been motivated to exert greater effort and positivity, while matched pairs lacked the same situational pressure to manage impressions. Importantly, this explanation aligns with the Intimacy Process Model, in that responsiveness cues may be situationally driven: when a potentially sensitive difference is highlighted, partners may overcompensate with socially desirable signals of responsiveness, even if these do not reflect deeper interpersonal alignment (Ickes et al., 1982; Philips & Olson, 2014). This mismatch advantage observed in Study 2 may represent a short-term artifact of class salience in a controlled laboratory interaction rather than a durable relational benefit.

This unexpected mismatch advantage observed in Study 2 also underscores the centrality of perceptual psychological processes in shaping early interactions. These responses highlight that it was not necessarily objective class background that drove outcomes, but rather how individuals perceived and responded to those differences in the moment. In other words, perceptions of social cues, and the psychological motivations they trigger, played a more decisive role in shaping interaction quality than objective indicators of class. This suggests that even in brief, initial encounters, subjective perceptions can outweigh the influence of objective social class, though such effects are likely context-bound and short-lived rather than enduring relational advantages.

Taken together, the two studies suggest that the role of social class similarity in relationship development may shift across stages of interaction, with perceptions playing a central role in shaping outcomes. In the field context of Study 1, where roommates engaged in sustained, naturalistic relationships, structural similarity promoted relationship quality largely

by enhancing perceived similarity, while dissimilarity undermined it. In contrast, the laboratory design of Study 2 captured only the first moments of connection, where mismatch appeared to elicit compensatory impression-management behaviors that temporarily enhanced perceptions of engagement and alignment. These findings suggest that it is not objective background alone, but how individuals perceive and respond to differences, that organizes relationship processes. Thus, while similarity appears to matter most for sustaining high-quality relationships over time, dissimilarity may sometimes foster short-term displays of responsiveness in initial encounters. Together, these findings contribute to a more nuanced sociocultural model of class-based relationship development, in which the influence of similarity versus dissimilarity depends not only on structural factors but also on the psychological perceptions partners form and the situational salience of class differences.

C. Limitations and Future Directions

A major strength of Study 1 was its ecological validity: by leveraging randomly assigned first-year roommate pairs, the design captured naturally occurring relationships as they unfolded in real life. This strengthens confidence that the observed associations between class similarity, perceived similarity, and relationship quality reflect meaningful social processes rather than artificial laboratory artifacts. At the same time, several limitations merit consideration. First, reliance on self-report measures raises the possibility of subjective bias, although the inclusion of behavioral coding offered some triangulation. Second, unmeasured covariates could still have influenced both perceptions of similarity and relationship outcomes. Third, while actor-level mediation effects were robust, partner-effects models were less stable, with some hypothesized pathways attenuating once interdependence was fully modeled. This pattern highlights the challenges of detecting partner effects in dyadic SEM without very large

samples (Kenny & Kashy, 2011; Ledermann & Kenny, 2012). Fourth, the sample was biased toward relatively high-quality relationships: because participation required both roommates to coordinate and voluntarily take part together, dyads with poor relationship quality were less likely to participate. This self-selection process contributed to a truncated distribution of relationship quality, clustering toward the higher end of the scale. Fifth, the household income variable was not binned in an ideal way. A disproportionate number of participants selected the top categories, creating a skew toward higher-income families and limiting the precision of absolute income-difference scores. In addition, the absolute difference measure itself showed limited variability, with most dyads clustered at differences of 0–1. These measurement issues may have attenuated the strength of observed associations with income dissimilarity. Finally, because data were collected only once, causal direction could not be established. Our exploratory flipped-order test indicated that a model in which relationship quality predicted perceived similarity fit more poorly than our proposed conceptual ordering, but longitudinal data will be needed to more definitively test reciprocal influences.

The experimental design of Study 2 allowed for precise measurement of micro-level interaction processes in a controlled environment. However, the study was severely underpowered, with a sample size too small to draw firm conclusions. The “Getting to Know You” questionnaire also directly disclosed participants’ first-generation status, making social class salient in ways that may have shaped impression-management behaviors and limited generalizability to more organic first encounters. Additionally, the use of a brief Zoom interaction, while practical during COVID-19, introduced artificial constraints that differ from face-to-face social interactions. The design also restricted dyads to gender-matched pairs, which may not reflect the full range of interactions students encounter in real life. Future work

should replicate these analyses with larger samples, consider alternative designs that vary the salience of class cues, and code behavioral data from initial interactions to capture responsive cues beyond self-report.

Across both studies, several broader methodological considerations apply. Both studies treated the dyad as the unit of analysis, which provided analytic clarity but limited scope. Social life often unfolds in groups and networks rather than in isolated dyads. Focusing exclusively on dyads may therefore limit generalizability to more complex social settings where class differences are negotiated in multi-person interactions. More broadly, the use of UCSB undergraduates limits generalizability given the relatively selective and high-resource institutional context. Although race was included as a covariate in some models, power constraints prevented a full examination of how class and race intersect to shape relational outcomes. Finally, we were limited in probing potential asymmetries in power dynamics, for example, how relationship quality might differ when one partner comes from a substantially higher-social class background than the other.

Taken together, these limitations point to several promising future directions. Longitudinal designs are essential for testing causal directionality between perceived similarity and relationship quality. Multi-method approaches that include behavioral coding, physiological measures, and self-report would help triangulate processes. Larger samples would allow for more reliable estimation of partner effects and tests of moderation by relative status differences within dyads (e.g., higher- vs. lower-social class partner dynamics). Expanding beyond dyads, future research should examine how class-based similarity and perceptions operate in larger social groups and networks. Study 2 highlights the need for designs that vary the salience of class cues at initial meeting and assess whether short-term

compensatory behaviors translate into sustained relational benefits. Finally, future work should recruit more diverse samples across institutional contexts, incorporate intersectional analyses of class with race and gender, and develop interventions that directly target perception, such as structured opportunities for self-disclosure, perspective-taking, or common-ground building, as potential tools to mitigate the challenges posed by structural class differences.

D. Practical & Broader Implications

The findings from these studies have several practical and theoretical implications. For higher education contexts, the results underscore the importance of attending to social class dynamics in roommate assignments and student support initiatives. Although random roommate assignment offers many advantages, institutions may wish to consider how class similarity or dissimilarity shapes students' adjustment and relationship quality, particularly for first-generation students. Importantly, because the most proximal predictors of relationship quality were *perceptions of similarity*, institutions and programs need not view structural dissimilarity as an insurmountable barrier. Instead, interventions that deliberately foster perceptions of commonality and shared experience may help bridge divides. Embedding such opportunities into orientation programs or residence hall activities could help students from diverse backgrounds perceive more common ground, thereby buffering the challenges posed by structural differences.

More broadly, the results also speak to intergroup relations that extend beyond university roommate contexts. Study 2 suggests that the situational salience of class differences can elicit compensatory behaviors that enhance responsiveness and positivity in initial interactions, at least temporarily. While these impression-management strategies may not substitute for the deeper alignment necessary to sustain long-term relationships, they illustrate

that people are motivated to manage differences when they are salient. The broader implication is hopeful: if perceptions drive responsiveness more than objective background alone, then thoughtfully designed contexts and interventions can create conditions in which cross-class relationships flourish.

Finally, these studies contribute to broader psychological theory by demonstrating that social class has implications for how relationships are formed and maintained. Class differences do not merely shape access to resources; they also shape expectations, perceptions, and interpersonal processes central to intimacy and trust. By documenting both the sustained importance of perceived similarity in naturalistic roommate relationships and the situationally contingent effects of mismatch in initial encounters, this work highlights the complex but malleable ways in which social class affects and organizes the *perceptions* that affect interactions and relationships. The results suggest that friendships can indeed be made across class divides when contexts encourage shared perceptions, providing a foundation for interventions that empower people to connect despite structural inequalities.

E. Conclusion

Together, these studies show that across contexts, class similarity and dissimilarity influenced how students perceived one another, how aligned they felt in their relationships, and ultimately how much quality and closeness they reported. Study 1 showed that class similarity supports sustained relationship quality over time by fostering perceptions of both financial and interpersonal similarity, while Study 2 suggested that in initial encounters, class mismatch may sometimes prompt compensatory efforts that temporarily enhance responsiveness and engagement. This nuanced pattern highlights that the influence of class is

not uniform but shifts depending on the relational stage and the situational salience of differences.

The central takeaway is that understanding how class similarity and dissimilarity shape both immediate impressions and long-term relational outcomes is essential for explaining how close relationships form and develop. By treating social class not only as a structural variable but also as a cultural orientation, this work highlights the complex ways in which background and perception jointly organize relationship processes. Attending to these dynamics deepens our understanding of when and how new connections form, and offers a framework for future research on the conditions that allow cross-class interactions to evolve into enduring, high-quality relationships.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, C., Keltner, D., & John, O. P. (2003). Emotional convergence between people over time. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(5), 1054–1068.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.5.1054>
- Aron, A., Melinat, E., Aron, E. N., Vallone, R. D., & Bator, R. J. (1997). The experimental generation of interpersonal closeness: A procedure and some preliminary findings. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 23(4), 363-377.
- Armstrong, E. A., & Hamilton, L. T. (2013). *Paying for the party: How college maintains inequality*. Harvard University Press.
- Axelrod, L., & Hone, K. S. (2006). Affectemes and all affects: A novel approach to coding user emotional expression during interactive experiences. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 25(2), 159-173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01449290500331164>
- Awang, Z., Afthanorhan, A., & Asri, M. A. M. (2015). Parametric and non parametric approach in structural equation modeling (SEM): The application of bootstrapping. *Modern Applied Science*, 9(9), 58-67.
- Burgoon, J. K. (1993). Interpersonal expectations, expectancy violations, and emotional communication. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 12(2), 30–48.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X93121003>
- Butler, E. A., Lee, T. L., & Gross, J. J. (2007). Emotion regulation and culture: Are the social consequences of emotion suppression culture-specific? *Emotion*, 7(1), 30–48.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/1528-3542.7.1.30>
- Byrne, D., Gouaux, C., Griffitt, W., Lamberth, J., Murakawa, N. B. P. M., Prasad, M., ... & Ramirez III, M. (1971). The ubiquitous relationship: Attitude similarity and attraction: A cross-cultural study. *Human Relations*, 24(3), 201-207.

- <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872677102400302>
- Cambon, L., Yzerbyt, V., & Yakimova, S. (2015). Compensation in intergroup relations: An investigation of its structural and strategic foundations. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 54*(1), 140-158. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12067>
- Campbell, L., & Kashy, D. A. (2002). Estimating actor, partner, and interaction effects for dyadic data using PROC MIXED and HLM: A user-friendly guide. *Personal Relationships, 9*(3), 327-342. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6811.00023>
- Cataldi, E. F., Bennett, C. T., & Chen, X. (2018). *First-generation students: College access, persistence, and postbachelor's outcomes* (NCES 2018-421). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics.
- <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018421.pdf>
- Cattell, V. (2001). Poor people, poor places, and poor health: The mediating role of social networks and social capital. *Social Science & Medicine, 52*(10), 1501–1516.
- [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536\(00\)00259-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(00)00259-8)
- Cheng, J. T., Tracy, J. L., Foulsham, T., Kingstone, A., & Henrich, J. (2013). Two ways to the top: Evidence that dominance and prestige are distinct yet viable avenues to social rank and influence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 104*(1), 103–125.
- <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030398>
- Chu, H.-T.-P., Zhou, X., & Chu, M. (2024). Cross-cultural differences in using nonverbal behaviors to identify indirect replies. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior, 48*(3), 323–344.
- <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10919-024-00454-z>
- Côté, S., Kraus, M. W., Carpenter, N. C., Piff, P. K., Beermann, U., & Keltner, D. (2017). Social affiliation in same-class and cross-class interactions. *Journal of Experimental*

- Psychology: General*, 146(7), 948–959. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000258>
- Collins, N. L., Ford, M. B., Guichard, A. C., & Allard, L. M. (2006). Responding to need in intimate relationships: Social support and caregiving processes in couples. In P. Noller & J. A. Feeney (Eds.), *Close relationships: Functions, forms and processes* (pp. 149–164). Psychology Press.
- Collins, N. L., & Miller, L. C. (1994). Self-disclosure and liking: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin*, 116(3), 457–475. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.116.3.457>
- Cook, W. L., & Kenny, D. A. (2005). The actor–partner interdependence model: A model of bidirectional effects in developmental studies. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 29(2), 101–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01650250444000405>
- Crocker, J., Voelkl, K., Testa, M., & Major, B. (1991). Social stigma: The affective consequences of attributional ambiguity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(2), 218–228. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.60.2.218>
- Dovidio, J. F., Kawakami, K., & Gaertner, S. L. (2002). Implicit and explicit prejudice and interracial interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82(1), 62–68. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.82.1.62>
- Fiske, S. T. (2002). *An integrative theory of intergroup bias*. In A. W. Kruglanski & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (2nd ed., pp. 320–343). Guilford Press.
- Fowers, B. J., & Richardson, F. C. (1996). Why is multiculturalism good? *American Psychologist*, 51(6), 609–621. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.51.6.609>
- Fujiwara, K., & Daibo, I. (2022). Empathic accuracy and interpersonal coordination:

- Behavior matching can enhance accuracy but interactional synchrony may not. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 162(1), 71-88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2021.1983509>
- Gable, S. L. (2006). Approach and avoidance social motives and goals. *Journal of Personality*, 74(1), 175-222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2005.00373.x>
- Gable, S. L., Reis, H. T., Impett, E. A., & Asher, E. R. (2004). What do you do when things go right? The intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits of sharing positive events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(2), 228–245. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.87.2.228>
- Gaither, S. E., & Sommers, S. R. (2013). Living with an other-race roommate shapes Whites' behavior in subsequent diverse settings. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(2), 272-276. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.10.020>
- Gelbgiser, D. (2021). Socioeconomic segregation, campus social context, and disparities in bachelor's degree attainment. *Demography*, 58(3), 1039–1064. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00703370-9162131>
- Gonzaga, G. C., Keltner, D., Londahl, E. A., & Smith, M. D. (2001). Love and the commitment problem in romantic relations and friendship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 81(2), 247–262. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.81.2.247>
- Gonzaga, G. C., Campos, B., & Bradbury, T. (2007). Similarity, convergence, and relationship satisfaction in dating and married couples. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93(1), 34 –48. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.93.1.34>
- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). *The strength of weak ties*. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360–1380. <https://doi.org/10.1086/225469>

- Gudykunst, W. B., & Ting-Toomey, S. (1988). Culture and affective communication. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 31(3), 384–400. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276488031003009>
- Harackiewicz, J. M., Canning, E. A., Tibbetts, Y., Priniski, S. J., & Hyde, J. S. (2014). Closing achievement gaps with a utility-value intervention: Disentangling race and social class. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 111(5), 745–765. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000055>
- Heathcote, J., Storesletten, K., & Violante, G. L. (2010). The macroeconomic implications of rising wage inequality in the United States. *Journal of Political Economy*, 118(4), 681–722. <https://doi.org/10.1086/656632>
- Heerey, E. A., & Kring, A. M. (2007). Interpersonal consequences of social anxiety. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 116(1), 125–134. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.116.1.125>
- Heyman, R. E., Lorber, M. F., Eddy, J. M., & West, T. V. (2014). Behavioral observation and coding. In H. T. Reis & C. M. Judd (Eds.), *Handbook of research methods in social and personality psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 345–372). Cambridge University Press.
- Hu, L. T., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis: Conventional criteria versus new alternatives. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 6(1), 1-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10705519909540118>
- Ickes, W., Patterson, M. L., Rajecki, D. W., & Tanford, S. (1982). Behavioral and cognitive consequences of reciprocal versus compensatory responses to preinteraction expectancies. *Social Cognition*, 1(2), 160-190. <https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.1982.1.2.160>

- Jack, A. A. (2016). (No) harm in asking: Class, acquired cultural capital, and academic engagement at an elite university. *Sociology of Education*, 89(1), 1-19.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040715614913>
- Johnson, C., Richeson, J. A., & Finkel, E. J. (2011). Middle class and marginal? Socioeconomic status, stigma, and self-regulation at an elite university. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 100(5), 838–852.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021956>
- Jolink, T. A., & Algoe, S. B. (2024). What happens in initial interactions forecasts relationship development: Showcasing the role of social behavior. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 15(2), 142-156.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506231153438>
- Kenny, D. A., & Kashy, D. A. (2011). Dyadic data analysis using multilevel modeling. In *Handbook of advanced multilevel analysis* (pp. 335-370). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kim, H. S. (2002). We talk, therefore we think? A cultural analysis of the effect of talking on thinking. *Journal of Personality and Social psychology*, 83(4), 828-42.
doi: 10.1037//0022-3514.83.4.828
- Kim, H., & Markus, H. R. (1999). Deviance or uniqueness, harmony or conformity? A cultural analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77(4), 785 – 800. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.77.4.785>
- Kim, H. S., & Sherman, D. K. (2007). " Express yourself": culture and the effect of self-expression on choice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(1), 1–11.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.1.1>

- Kim, H. S., Sherman, D. K., & Taylor, S. E. (2008). Culture and social support. *American Psychologist*, 63(6), 518-526. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X>.
- Kim, H. S., Sherman, D. K., Ko, D., & Taylor, S. E. (2006). Pursuit of comfort and pursuit of harmony: Culture, relationships, and social support seeking. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32(12), 1595-1607. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167206291991>
- Kline, R. B. (2016). *Principles and Practice of Structural Equation Modeling* (4th ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Kraus, M. W., & Keltner, D. (2009). Signs of socioeconomic status: A thin-slicing approach. *Psychological Science*, 20(1), 99-106. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02251.x>
- Kraus, M. W., Piff, P. K., & Keltner, D. (2009). Social class, contextualism, and empathic accuracy. *Psychological Science*, 20(11), 1716–1723. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2009.02425.x>
- Kraus, M. W., Piff, P. K., & Keltner, D. (2011). Social class as culture: The convergence of resources and rank in the social realm. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(4), 246-250. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721411414654>
- Laurenceau, J. P., Barrett, L. F., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (1998). Intimacy as an interpersonal process: The importance of self-disclosure, partner disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness in interpersonal exchanges. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(5), 1238–1251. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.74.5.1238>
- Ledermann, T., & Kenny, D. A. (2012). The common fate model for dyadic data: variations of a theoretically important but underutilized model. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 26(1), 140 –148. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026624>

- Liu, Z., Wang, X., & Liu, J. (2019). How digital natives make their self-disclosure decisions: A cross-cultural comparison. *Information Technology & People*, 32(3), 538-558. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-10-2017-0339>
- Locke, K. D., & Horowitz, L. M. (1990). Satisfaction in interpersonal interactions as a function of similarity in level of dysphoria. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(5), 823–831. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.58.5.82>
- Lodder, P. (2023). Why researchers should not ignore measurement error and skewness in questionnaire item scores. *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, 13(3), 321-324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2022.2070250>
- MacCallum, R. C., Browne, M. W., & Sugawara, H. M. (1996). Power analysis and determination of sample size for covariance structure modeling. *Psychological Methods*, 1(2), 130–149. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1082-989X.1.2.130>
- Mackie, D. M., Smith, E. R., & Ray, D. G. (2008). Intergroup emotions and intergroup relations. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(5), 1866-1880. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2008.00130.x>
- MacKinnon, D. P., Lockwood, C. M., & Williams, J. (2004). Confidence limits for the Indirect effect: Distribution of the product and resampling methods. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 39(1), 99–128. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327906mbr3901_4
- Maxwell, S. E. (2004). The persistence of underpowered studies in psychological research: Causes, consequences, and remedies. *Psychological Methods*, 9(2), 147–163. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1082-989X.9.2.147>
- Maisel, N. C., Gable, S. L., & Strachman, A. M. Y. (2008). Responsive behaviors in good times and in bad. *Personal Relationships*, 15(3), 317-338. <https://doi.org/10.1111/>

j.1475-6811.2008.00201.x

- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, 98(2), 224-253.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.98.2.224>
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (2003). Models of agency: Sociocultural diversity in the construction of action. In V. Murphy-Berman & J. J. Berman (Eds.), *Cross-cultural differences in perspectives on the self* (pp. 18–74). University of Nebraska Press.
- Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (2010). Cultures and selves: A cycle of mutual constitution. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5(4), 420–430.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691610375557>
- McGraw, K. O., & Wong, S. P. (1996). Forming inferences about some intraclass correlation coefficients. *Psychological Methods*, 1(1), 30–46. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1082-989X.1.1.30>
- McPherson, M., & Smith-Lovin, L. (1987). Homophily in voluntary organizations: Status distance and the composition of face-to-face groups. *American Sociological Review*, 52(3), 370–379. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095356>
- Mendes, W. B., Blascovich, J., Hunter, S., Lickel, B., & Jost, J. T. (2002). Threatened by the unexpected: Physiological responses to social interactions with expectancy-violating partners. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(4), 698–716.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.92.4.698>
- Montoya, R. M., Horton, R. S., & Kirchner, J. (2008). Is actual similarity necessary for attraction? A meta-analysis of actual and perceived similarity. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 25(6), 889-922. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407508096700>

- Montoya, R. M., & Horton, R. S. (2013). A meta-analytic investigation of the processes underlying the similarity-attraction effect. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 30(1), 64-94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407512452989>
- Morry, M. M. (2005). Relationship satisfaction as a predictor of similarity ratings: A test of the attraction-similarity hypothesis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 22(4), 561-584. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407505054524>
- Ostrove, J. M., & Long, S. M. (2007). Social class and belonging: Implications for college adjustment. *The Review of Higher Education*, 30(4), 363–389. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2007.0028>
- Page-Gould, E., Mendoza-Denton, R., & Tropp, L. R. (2008). With a little help from my cross- group friend: Reducing anxiety in intergroup contexts through cross-group friendship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 95(5), 1080-1094. <https://doi.org/10.2008-14857-006>
- Pettigrew, T. F., & Tropp, L. R. (2006). A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90(5), 751-783. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.90.5.751>
- Phillips, J. E., & Olson, M. A. (2014). When implicitly and explicitly measured racial attitudes align: The roles of social desirability and thoughtful responding. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, 36(2), 125-132. <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000496>
- Pierce, G. R., Sarason, I. G., & Sarason, B. R. (1991). *Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI)*. APA PsycTests. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t00505-000>
- Piff, P. K., Kraus, M. W., Côté, S., Cheng, B. H., & Keltner, D. (2010). Having less, giving more: The influence of social class on prosocial behavior. *Journal of Personality and*

- Social Psychology*, 99(5), 771–784. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0020092>
- Piff, P. K., Stancato, D. M., Martinez, A. G., Kraus, M. W., & Keltner, D. (2012). Class, chaos, and the construction of community. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 103(6), 949–962. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029673>
- Reis, H. T., Lemay, E. P., Jr., & Finkenauer, C. (2017). Toward understanding understanding: The importance of feeling understood in relationships. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 11(3), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12308>
- Reis, H. T., & Shaver, P. (1988). Intimacy as an interpersonal process. In S. Duck, D. F. Hay, S. E. Hobfoll, W. Ickes, & B. M. Montgomery (Eds.), *Handbook of personal relationships: Theory, research and interventions* (pp. 367–389). John Wiley & Sons.
- Revelle, W. (2023). *psych: Procedures for psychological, psychometric, and personality research* (Version 2.3.12) [R package]. <https://CRAN.R-project.org/package=psych>
- Richeson, J. A., & Shelton, J. N. (2003). When prejudice does not pay: Effects of interracial contact on executive function. *Psychological Science*, 14(3), 287–290. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.03437>
- Rubin, M. (2012). Social class differences in social integration among students in higher education: A meta-analysis and recommendations for future research. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 5(1), 22–38. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0026162>
- Schachner, D. A., Shaver, P. R., & Mikulincer, M. (2005). Patterns of nonverbal behavior and sensitivity in the context of attachment relations. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 29(3), 141–169. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10919-005-4847-x>
- Shelton, J. N., Richeson, J. A., & Salvatore, J. (2005). Expecting to be the target of prejudice: Implications for interethnic interactions. *Personality and Social Psychology*

- Bulletin*, 31(9), 1189-1202. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167205274894>
- Shook, N. J., & Fazio, R. H. (2008). Interracial roommate relationships: An experimental field test of the contact hypothesis. *Psychological Science*, 19(7), 717-723. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02147.x>
- Sprecher, S., Treger, S., Wondra, J. D., Hilaire, N., & Wallpe, K. (2013). Taking turns: Reciprocal self-disclosure promotes liking in initial interactions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 49(5), 860–866. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2013.03.017>
- Snibbe, A. C., & Markus, H. R. (2005). You can't always get what you want: Educational attainment, agency, and choice. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88(4), 703–720. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.4.703>
- Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., & Markus, H. R. (2011). When choice does not equal freedom: A sociocultural analysis of agency in working-class American contexts. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 2(1), 33–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550610378757>
- Stephens, N. M., Fryberg, S. A., Markus, H. R., Johnson, C. S., & Covarrubias, R. (2012). Unseen disadvantage: How American universities' focus on independence undermines the academic performance of first-generation college students. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 102(6), 1178–1197. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027143>
- Stephens, N. M., Hamedani, M. G., & Markus, H. R. (2014). Social class disparities in health and education: Reducing inequality by applying a sociocultural self-model of behavior. *Psychological Review*, 119(4), 723–744. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034528>

- Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Phillips, L. T. (2014). Social class culture cycles: How three gateway contexts shape selves and fuel inequality. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65(1), 611–634. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115143>
- Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Townsend, S. S. M. (2007). Choice as an act of meaning: The role of agency and self in choice motivation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 93(5), 805–818. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.93.5.805>
- Stuber, J. M. (2011). Integrated, marginal, and resilient: Race, class, and the diverse experiences of White first-generation college students. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 24(1), 117-136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518391003641916>
- Sundstrom, E., & Altman, I. (1976). Interpersonal relationships and personal space: Research review and theoretical model. *Human Ecology*, 4(1), 47-67. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01531456>
- Tan, J. J., West, T. V., & Mendes, W. B. (2025). Socioeconomic status shapes dyadic interactions: Examining behavioral and physiologic responses. *Psychological Science* 36(8), 591-606. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976251350970>
- Taylor, D. A. (1968). The development of interpersonal relationships: Social penetration processes. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 75(1), 79-90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1968.9712476>
- Thomas, R. J. (2019). Sources of friendship and structurally-induced homophily across the life course. *Sociological Perspectives*, 62(6), 822–843. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07311214198283995>
- Townsend, S. S., Kim, H. S., & Mesquita, B. (2014). Are you feeling what I’m feeling?

- Emotional similarity buffers stress. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 5(5), 526-533. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550613511499>
- Trawalter, S., Richeson, J. A., & Shelton, J. N. (2009). Predicting behavior during interracial interactions: A stress and coping approach. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 13(4), 243–268. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868309345850>
- University of California, Santa Barbara (2025). *Campus profile*. Office of Budget & Planning. Retrieved September 14, 2025, from <https://bap.ucsb.edu/institutional-research/campus-profile>
- Verhofstadt, L. L., Buysse, A., Ickes, W., Davis, M., & Devoldre, I. (2008). Support provision in marriage: The role of emotional similarity and empathic accuracy. *Emotion*, 8(6), 792-802. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0013976>
- Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(6), 1063–1070. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.54.6.1063>
- Wolf, E. J., Harrington, K. M., Clark, S. L., & Miller, M. W. (2013). Sample size requirements for structural equation models: An evaluation of power, bias, and solution propriety. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 73(6), 913-934. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013164413495237>
- Wu, D. C., Kim, H. S., & Collins, N. L. (2021). Perceived responsiveness across cultures: The role of cultural fit in social support use. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 15(9), Article e12634. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12634>

APPENDIX 1

STUDY 1

Appendix 1A. Self-Disclosure Willingness Scale

Participants were presented with the following instruction: *“Please indicate which personal topics you have shared or would share with your roommate. Select all that apply.”*

Responses were binary (0 = not selected, 1 = selected). The full list of disclosure topics is shown below:

1. My political views
2. My religious views
3. My family’s educational background
4. My family’s current financial situation
5. Where my family has traveled/vacationed
6. My social fears
7. The parts of my personality that I dislike
8. My ambitions and goals
9. My academic achievements
10. My academic struggles
11. My romantic interests
12. My romantic relationships
13. If I was annoyed with one of my friends who my roommate doesn’t know
14. If I was annoyed with a mutual friend that my roommate and I share
15. Gossip about mutual acquaintance
16. My eating out habits
17. My spending habits

Appendix 1B. Perceived Similarity Scale

Participants were presented with the following instruction:

“To what extent do you believe that your roommate is similar to you in the following areas?”

Responses were made on a 4-point Likert scale:

1 = Not at all similar, 2 = A little similar, 3 = Moderately similar, 4 = Very similar

The full list of items is shown below:

1. The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you on **level of sociability**
2. The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you on **level of ambition and dedication in pursuing academic goals**
3. The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you on **political attitudes**
4. The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you on **moral and religious attitudes**
5. The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you in **music preference**
6. The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you in **what you like to do for fun**
7. The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you in your **financial situations**
8. The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you in your **spending habits**
9. The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you in the **neighborhoods where you grew up**
10. The degree to which you feel that your roommate is similar to you in your **travel/vacation experiences**

Appendix 1C. Perceived Similarity Scale Confirmatory Factor Analysis

This appendix presents the standardized factor loadings and standard errors from a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the Perceived Similarity Scale, conducted to test the hypothesized two-factor structure reflecting financial and non-financial similarity domains.

Model Fit Indices:

$$\chi^2(34) = 102.86, p < .001$$

$$CFI = .88, TLI = .85, RMSEA = .088$$

All items loaded significantly on their intended factors, supporting the conceptual distinction between financial and non-financial perceived similarity.

Item (Prompt Abbreviated)	Factor	Standardized Loading	SE
Similarity in financial situations (Item 7)	Financial Similarity	1.00	-
Similarity in spending habits (Item 8)	Financial Similarity	0.66	0.09
Similarity in neighborhood where you grew up (Item 9)	Financial Similarity	1.01	0.11
Similarity in travel/vacation experiences (Item 10)	Financial Similarity	0.90	0.10
Similarity in level of sociability (Item 1)	Non-Financial Similarity	1.00	-
Similarity in academic ambition and dedication (Item 2)	Non-Financial Similarity	0.80	0.12
Similarity in political attitudes (Item 3)	Non-Financial Similarity	0.82	0.12
Similarity in moral and religious attitudes (Item 4)	Non-Financial Similarity	0.86	0.13
Similarity in music preference (Item 5)	Non-Financial Similarity	0.72	0.12
Similarity in what you like to do for fun (Item 6)	Non-Financial Similarity	1.00	0.14

Appendix 1D. Modified Quality of Relationships Inventory (QRI)

Participants were presented with the following instruction:

“Select the item that best describes your relationship with your roommate.”

Responses were made on a 5-point Likert scale:

1 = Not at all, 2 = A little, 3 = Moderately, 4 = Quite a bit, 5 = Very much

Items marked with an asterisk (*) were reverse-coded so that higher scores reflected greater relationship quality.

1. How often do you need to work to avoid conflict with your roommate?*
2. To what extent can you count on your roommate to help with a problem?
3. How upset does your roommate sometimes make you feel?*
4. How much does your roommate make you feel guilty?*
5. How significant is your roommate in your life?
6. To what extent can you count on your roommate to listen to you when you are very angry with someone else?
7. How angry does your roommate make you feel?*
8. To what extent can you really count on your roommate to distract you from your worries when you feel under stress?
9. How likely would you be to ask your roommate to watch a movie with you?
10. How likely would you be to bring your roommate along to a party you were invited to?

Appendix 1E. Behavioral Coding Scheme

Appendix 1E.1 Affective Tone Coding Scheme

Affective tone was coded to capture the overall emotional atmosphere or feeling conveyed in each dyadic interaction, regardless of the specific conversational content. The goal of this code was to assess how emotionally positive or negative the interaction *felt* (e.g., whether it seemed warm, tense, friendly, strained, or neutral).

Coders were instructed to focus on the *emotional quality* of the interaction, not the actual content of what was being said. They were told: *“Try not to code the actual content of what they're saying here, but rather the way in which they're talking about things. That is, think about the feeling of the way they are speaking to each other now, rather than the conversation content.”*

This code was rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (negative tone) to 5 (positive tone). Ratings were made independently for each partner and then averaged to create a single affective tone score for the interaction. See the table below for coding anchors and descriptions.

Code	Description
1	negative: somewhat cold, emotionally flat, distant, awkward, or disengaged
2	neutral: polite but reserved, minimal warmth or emotional expression
3	moderately positive: some friendliness or light emotion, but unclear if it reflects genuine connection or social politeness (e.g., a few smiles, some soft vocal tone, but limited enthusiasm)
4	positive: noticeably positive or good-humored tone at least part of the time (e.g., clear warmth, laughing, playfulness, or relaxed rapport, but not sustained throughout)
5	very positive: warm, affectionate, or joyful tone across most or all of the interaction; includes frequent laughter, giggling, easy rapport, and emotionally expressive delivery

Appendix 1E.2 Comfort Coding Scheme

Comfort was coded to capture how behaviorally at ease participants appeared with one another during the dyadic interaction. This code reflected the overall sense of comfort, fluidity, and relaxation evident in the interaction—regardless of the specific conversational content. The goal of this code was to assess how naturally or easily the interaction unfolded, based on tone, body language, and conversational dynamics.

Coders were instructed to base their ratings on observable behavioral ease rather than the content of the conversation. They were told: *“Focus on how comfortable the interaction appears to be. Is the conversation flowing easily or does it feel effortful? Do the participants seem relaxed or stiff in how they’re engaging with each other?”*

This code was rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (low comfort) to 5 (high comfortable). Ratings were made independently for each partner and then averaged to create a single composite comfort score for the interaction. See the table below for coding anchors and descriptions.

Code	Description
1	low comfort: interaction felt stiff or effortful; participants showed little ease or engagement, with prolonged silences, rigid posture, or other signs of discomfort (though not necessarily nervous or distressed)
2	somewhat low comfort: some mild awkwardness, tension, or formality was evident; interaction showed hesitations or lack of ease, but also some attempts at connection
3	moderate comfort: interaction felt neutral or mixed—neither especially smooth nor awkward; participants seemed reasonably at ease, but without clear signs of warmth or flow
4	high comfort: participants appeared generally relaxed and conversational; interaction included moderate ease, informal tone, or signs of casual rapport
5	very high comfort: interaction was marked by warmth, fluidity, and mutual engagement; participants seemed genuinely at ease, with spontaneous conversation and visible comfort throughout

Appendix 1E.3. Dyadic Synchrony Coding Scheme

To assess nonverbal coordination between roommates during the interaction, we coded three distinct forms of synchrony: **sitting synchrony**, **speech synchrony**, and **movement synchrony**. Each was coded on a 3-point Likert scale where 1 = *low synchrony*, 2 = *medium synchrony*, and 3 = *high synchrony*. Ratings were based on coders' holistic impressions of each behavioral domain and were made independently for each partner. Scores were then averaged to create composite synchrony scores. Descriptions and anchors for each code are provided below.

Sitting Synchrony:

Code	Description
1	low sitting synchrony: roommates displayed noticeably different postures, body language, or ways of sitting (e.g., one roommate was stiff and closed off, the other leaned back and appeared relaxed).
2	medium sitting synchrony: roommates showed some similarities and some differences in posture or body language (e.g., both sitting upright but one more tense or formal than the other).
3	high sitting synchrony: roommates sat in visibly similar positions and postures (e.g., both with relaxed posture, similar leg placement, or body orientation).

Speech Synchrony:

Code	Description
1	low speech synchrony: little conversational flow; one person may have dominated or interrupted, or the conversation felt disjointed.
2	medium speech synchrony: some signs of reciprocal rhythm in conversation, with occasional overlap or turn-taking, but not fully fluid.
3	high speech synchrony: smooth, coordinated dialogue with balanced turn-taking, matched pacing, and natural conversational flow.

Movement Synchrony:

Code	Description
1	low movement synchrony: roommates' physical movements (e.g., gestures, posture shifts) appeared disconnected or mismatched.
2	medium movement synchrony: some moments of mirrored or responsive movement, but inconsistently or infrequently.
3	high movement synchrony: frequent and fluid coordination in physical movement, such as mirroring gestures or simultaneous posture changes.

Appendix 1F. Income Difference Predicting Relationship Quality - Model C (with RaceMatch Covariate) Full Report

Model Fit. The mediation model including the race-match covariate fit the data well, $\chi^2(20) = 22.54$, $p = .312$, CFI = .993, TLI = .989, RMSEA = .031, AIC = 31.66, BIC = 77.66.

Direct Effects. Objective SES difference significantly and negatively predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = -.094$, SE = .017, $p < .001$). Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .307$, SE = .046, $p < .001$), and perceived non-financial similarity significantly predicted relationship quality ($\beta = .569$, SE = .056, $p < .001$). The direct path from perceived financial similarity to relationship quality was not significant ($\beta = .021$, SE = .045, $p = .639$).

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from objective SES difference to perceived financial similarity, to perceived non-financial similarity, and then to relationship quality was significant ($\beta = -.0163$, 95% CI [-.0263, -.0079]). The indirect effect from objective SES difference to relationship quality via perceived financial similarity alone was not significant ($\beta = -.0020$, 95% CI [-.0110, .0058]). The total indirect effect, combining both pathways, was significant ($\beta = -.0183$, 95% CI [-.0319, -.0070]). These results indicate that larger objective SES differences were associated with lower perceived financial similarity, which in turn was linked to lower perceived non-financial similarity and ultimately lower relationship quality.

Covariates. RaceMatch significantly predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .249$, SE = .106, $p = .019$), indicating that same-race roommates reported higher financial similarity. RaceMatch did not significantly predict perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .068$, SE = .087, $p = .434$) or relationship quality ($\beta = -.078$, SE = .068, $p = .253$). Including RaceMatch did not meaningfully change the mediation results from Model B.

Summary. In line with predictions, the results again suggest that socioeconomic differences affect relationship quality indirectly through perceived similarity processes. Adding RaceMatch as a covariate did not alter the main pattern of effects but revealed that same-race pairs perceived greater financial similarity. This finding supports the robustness of the proposed mediation model and highlights the role of demographic similarity in shaping financial similarity perceptions.

Appendix 1G. Generational College Match Predicting Relationship Quality - Model C (with RaceMatch Covariate) Full Report

Model Fit. The mediation model including the race-match covariate fit the data well, $\chi^2(20) = 25.23$, $p = .193$, CFI = .984, TLI = .976, RMSEA = .045, AIC = 31.61, BIC = 77.62.

Direct Effects. First-generation college match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match) significantly and positively perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .355$, SE = .126, $p = .005$). Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .307$, SE = .046, $p < .001$), and perceived non-financial similarity significantly predicted relationship quality ($\beta = .568$, SE = .056, $p < .001$). The direct path from perceived financial similarity to relationship quality was not significant ($\beta = .021$, SE = .045, $p = .637$).

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from first-generation match to perceived financial similarity, to perceived non-financial similarity, and then to relationship quality was significant ($\beta = -.062$, 95% CI [-.118, -.016]). The indirect effect from first-generation match to relationship quality via perceived financial similarity alone was not significant ($\beta = -.007$, 95% CI [-.047, .023]). The total indirect effect, combining both pathways, was significant ($\beta = -.069$, 95% CI [-.144, -.016]). These results indicate that first-generation mismatch was associated with lower perceived financial similarity, which in turn was linked to lower perceived non-financial similarity and ultimately lower relationship quality.

Covariates. RaceMatch significantly predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .239$, SE = .115, $p = .038$), indicating that same-race roommates reported higher financial similarity. RaceMatch did not significantly predict perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .068$, SE = .087, $p = .434$) or relationship quality ($\beta = -.078$, SE = .068, $p = .253$). Including RaceMatch did not meaningfully change the mediation results from Model B.

Summary. As with Model B, the results suggest that first-generation match status affects relationship quality indirectly through perceived similarity processes. Adding RaceMatch as a covariate did not alter the main pattern of effects but revealed that same-race pairs perceived greater financial similarity. This finding supports the robustness of the proposed mediation model and highlights the role of demographic similarity in shaping financial similarity perceptions.

Appendix 1H. Generational College Match Predicting Affective Tone - Model C (with RaceMatch Covariate) Full Report

Model Fit. The mediation model including the race-match covariate fit the data well, $\chi^2(13) = 13.87$, $p = .383$, CFI = .989, TLI = .981, RMSEA = .033, AIC = 29.57, BIC = 61.95.

Direct Effects. First-generation match (0 = mismatch, 1 = match) significantly positively predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .137$, SE = .060, $p = .022$). Perceived financial similarity, in turn, significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .274$, SE = .061, $p < .001$), and perceived non-financial similarity significantly predicted affective tone ($\beta = .289$, SE = .134, $p = .032$). The direct path from perceived financial similarity to affective tone was not significant ($\beta = -.017$, SE = .126, $p = .874$), and the direct effect of first-generation match on affective tone was also not significant ($\beta = .133$, SE = .267, $p = .617$). RaceMatch significantly positively predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .131$, SE = .056, $p = .018$), but did not significantly predict perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .010$, SE = .112, $p = .882$) or affective tone ($\beta = .165$, SE = .314, $p = .491$).

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from first-generation match $\rightarrow$ perceived financial similarity $\rightarrow$ perceived non-financial similarity $\rightarrow$ affective tone was significant ($\beta = .059$, 95% CI [.002, .222]). Neither the indirect effect via financial similarity alone ($\beta = -.007$, 95% CI [-.236, .213]) nor the total indirect effect ($\beta = .077$, 95% CI [-.137, .299]) reached significance.

Covariates. RaceMatch was associated with higher perceived financial similarity, but it did not significantly predict perceived non-financial similarity or affective tone. Including RaceMatch as a covariate did not meaningfully alter the mediation pattern observed in Model B.

Summary. In line with predictions, first-generation match was associated with higher perceived financial similarity, which in turn predicted greater perceived non-financial similarity, which then predicted more positive affective tone. The sequential indirect effect of this pathway was significant, suggesting that similarity perceptions may partially explain why matched dyads show more positive affective dynamics. The inclusion of RaceMatch did not change the main results, underscoring the robustness of the hypothesized process.

Appendix 1I. Income Difference Predicting Relationship Quality - Model C (with RaceMatch Covariate) Full Report

Model Fit. The mediation model including the race-match covariate fit the data well, $\chi^2(14) = 9.84$, $p = .774$, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.00, RMSEA = .000.

Direct Effects. Income difference significantly and negatively predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = -.097$, SE = .023, $p < .001$). Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .276$, SE = .056, $p < .001$), and perceived non-financial similarity significantly predicted comfort ($\beta = .280$, SE = .139, $p = .044$). The direct path from perceived financial similarity to comfort was not significant ($\beta = .086$, SE = .104, $p = .409$). RaceMatch did not significantly predict perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .204$, SE = .139, $p = .143$), perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = -.057$, SE = .108, $p = .600$), or comfort ($\beta = .151$, SE = .265, $p = .568$).

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect from objective SES difference to perceived financial similarity, to perceived non-financial similarity, and then to comfort was just *barely* not significant ($\beta = -.020$, 95% CI [-.040, 0.0003]) - we can interpret these results as marginal. The indirect effect from objective SES difference to comfort via perceived financial similarity alone was also not significant ($\beta = -.018$, 95% CI [-.060, .026]). The total indirect effect, combining both pathways, was not significant ($\beta = -.037$, 95% CI [-.075, .004]). Although the chain path was close to significance, the confidence interval narrowly included zero, indicating that the pattern is suggestive but not statistically reliable in this sample.

Covariates. RaceMatch did not significantly predict any mediator or the outcome, and including RaceMatch as a covariate did not meaningfully change the mediation results from Model B.

Summary. In line with predictions, larger objective SES differences were associated with lower perceived financial similarity, which in turn was linked to lower perceived non-financial similarity and ultimately lower comfort. However, the sequential indirect effect was not statistically significant in this model, although the pattern was consistent with the hypothesized process. Adding RaceMatch as a covariate did not alter the main pattern of effects and revealed no significant race-match associations for this comfort outcome, supporting the robustness of the proposed mediation model.

Appendix 1J. Generational College Match Predicting Relationship Quality - Model C (with RaceMatch Covariate) Full Report

Model Fit. The mediation model including the race-match covariate fit the data well, $\chi^2(13) = 13.87$, $p = .383$, CFI = .989, TLI = .981, RMSEA = .033, AIC = 29.57, BIC = 61.95.

Direct Effects. First-generation match significantly predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .37$, SE = .16, $p = .022$). Perceived financial similarity significantly predicted perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .24$, SE = .06, $p < .001$). In turn, perceived non-financial similarity significantly predicted comfort ($\beta = .35$, SE = .17, $p = .032$). The direct path from perceived financial similarity to comfort was not significant ($\beta = -.02$, SE = .13, $p = .874$). The direct path from first-generation match to comfort was also not significant ($\beta = .16$, SE = .33, $p = .617$). RaceMatch significantly predicted perceived financial similarity ($\beta = .36$, SE = .15, $p = .018$), but did not significantly predict perceived non-financial similarity ($\beta = .02$, SE = .11, $p = .882$) or comfort ($\beta = .21$, SE = .31, $p = .491$).

Indirect Effects. The sequential indirect effect of first-generation match on comfort via perceived financial similarity and perceived non-financial similarity was just *barely* not significant, $\beta = .04$, 95% CI [-.004, .184] - these results can be interpreted as marginal. The indirect effect via perceived financial similarity alone was also nonsignificant, $\beta = -.01$, 95% CI [-.272, .155]. The total indirect effect, combining both pathways, was likewise nonsignificant, $\beta = -.02$, 95% CI [-.164, .217].

Covariates. RaceMatch significantly predicted perceived financial similarity but not perceived non-financial similarity or comfort. Including RaceMatch as a covariate did not alter the mediation pattern of results.

Summary. Consistent with predictions, first-generation match was associated with greater perceived financial similarity, which in turn predicted greater perceived non-financial

similarity, and subsequently higher comfort. Including race-match as a covariate revealed an independent effect of race similarity on financial similarity, but did not change the overall mediation pattern for comfort.

APPENDIX 2

STUDY 2

Appendix 2A. *Getting to Know You* Questionnaire

"Getting to Know You" Questionnaire

Please fill this out so we can share it with your partner. Your partner is filling one out to share with you too!



What is your first name?

How old are you?

When is your birthday?

Are you a first-generation college student (neither parent attended four-year university) or a continuing-generation college student (at least one parent attended four-year university)? Please circle one.

First-Generation

Continuing-Generation

Appendix 2B. Interaction Perception

Participants were asked: “*Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about the interaction.*”

Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Somewhat Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Items

1. I think that this interaction was enjoyable.
2. I feel satisfied with this interaction.
3. I would like to get to know my partner more.
4. I would be open to meeting my partner to hang out after this study is over.

Note. Scores were averaged across the four items, with higher scores indicating greater perceived interaction quality.

Appendix 2C. Perceived Common Ground & Interest Scale

Participants were asked: “*When thinking about the interaction with your partner, how much do you agree with the following statements?*”

Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Somewhat Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Common Ground Subscale

1. My partner and I have a lot in common.
2. My partner and I have common ground on topics to discuss.
3. I understood my partner as a person.

Interest Subscale

4. I was genuinely interested in what my partner had to say.
5. I respect my partner.
6. I wanted to listen to my partner.
7. This interaction was interesting to me.

Appendix 2D. Emotions Felt During Interaction Scale

Participants were asked: “*How much did you feel the following emotions during the interaction?*”

Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale:

1 = Not at all, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Moderately, 4 = A lot, 5 = Extremely.

Positive Affect Items

1. Good
2. Proud
3. Respectful toward interaction partner
4. Happy
5. Close to interaction partner
6. Elated (Excited)
7. Calm
8. Surprised

Negative Affect Items

9. Bad
10. Guilty
11. Frustrated
12. Angry
13. Resentful
14. Embarrassed
15. Worried
16. Nervous
17. Sad
18. Awkward

Note. Positive and negative affect composites were computed by averaging items within each set, with higher scores indicating greater intensity of the corresponding type of affect.

Appendix 2E. Emotional Similarity Computation

Emotional similarity was calculated by comparing each dyad member's self-reported emotions during the interaction. For each of the 18 affect adjectives listed in the *Emotions Felt During the Interaction* measure, a discrepancy score was computed as the absolute value of the difference between Partner A's rating and Partner B's rating (e.g., |Partner A - Partner B|). These absolute difference scores were then averaged across all items to create a composite index of emotional similarity for each dyad.

Lower scores indicate greater emotional similarity (i.e., partners reported feeling more similar emotions), whereas higher scores indicate lower emotional similarity (i.e., partners reported more discrepant emotions).

Example. If Partner A reported feeling “happy” at 4 and Partner B reported feeling “happy” at 2, the discrepancy score for that item would be $|4 - 2| = 2$. If Partner A reported feeling “nervous” at 3 and Partner B reported feeling “nervous” at 3, the discrepancy score for that item would be $|3 - 3| = 0$. These discrepancy scores were then averaged across all 18 emotions to yield the dyad's overall emotional similarity score.

Note. Lower values on this index reflect greater emotional similarity between partners.

Appendix 2F. Perceptions of Partner's Emotions During the Interaction

Participants were asked: *"How much do you think your partner felt the following emotions during the interaction?"*

Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale:

1 = Not at all, 2 = Somewhat, 3 = Moderately, 4 = A lot, 5 = Extremely.

Positive Affect Items

1. Good
2. Proud
3. Respectful toward interaction partner
4. Happy
5. Close to interaction partner
6. Elated (Excited)
7. Calm
8. Surprised

Negative Affect Items

9. Bad
10. Guilty
11. Frustrated
12. Angry
13. Resentful
14. Embarrassed
15. Worried
16. Nervous
17. Sad
18. Awkward

Note. Positive and negative affect composites were computed by averaging items within each set, with higher scores indicating greater intensity of the corresponding type of affect.

Appendix 2G. Empathic Accuracy Computation

Empathic accuracy was calculated by comparing each participant's perceptions of their partner's emotions with the partner's self-reported emotions. For each of the 18 affect adjectives listed in the *Emotions Felt* and *Perceptions of Partner's Emotions* measures, a discrepancy score was computed as the absolute value of the difference between the participant's rating of their partner's emotion and the partner's corresponding self-rating (e.g., $|\text{Perceived} - \text{Actual}|$). These absolute difference scores were then averaged across all items to create a composite index of empathic accuracy for each participant.

Lower scores indicate greater empathic accuracy (i.e., smaller discrepancies between perceived and self-reported emotions), whereas higher scores indicate lower empathic accuracy (i.e., larger discrepancies between perceived and self-reported emotions).

Example. If Participant A rated their partner as feeling “happy” at 4, while the partner's self-report for “happy” was 2, the discrepancy score for that item would be $|4 - 2| = 2$. If Participant A rated their partner as feeling “nervous” at 1, while the partner's self-report for “nervous” was 1, the discrepancy score for that item would be $|1 - 1| = 0$. These discrepancy scores would be averaged across all items to yield the participant's overall empathic accuracy score.

Appendix 2H. Approach-Avoidance Goals

Participants were asked: “*When thinking about your interaction with your partner, how much do you agree with the following statements?*”

Responses were provided on a 5-point Likert scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Somewhat Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Somewhat Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Items

1. I did not want to make my interaction partner feel uncomfortable. †
2. I wanted my interaction partner to feel positive about the interaction. *
3. My goal in the interaction was to be friendly. *
4. My goal was to not have a bad interaction. †
5. I wanted to focus on having a good interaction. *
6. I wanted to focus on not hurting my partner’s feelings. †
7. I wanted to avoid being unfriendly. †
8. I wanted to treat my interaction partner as I would anybody else. *
9. My aim was to make this a comfortable interaction for my partner. *
10. I did not want to treat my interaction partner unfairly. †

Note. * = Approach goal (striving toward positive outcomes); † = Avoidance goal (avoiding negative outcomes). Higher scores indicate stronger approach-avoidance goals overall. Items adapted to this interaction context from approach/avoidance relationship goal work; see Gable, 2006.