UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
POSTGRADUATE DOCTORAL STUDIES IN PSYCHOLOGY

Katarina Banov Trošelj

THE ROLE OF VOCATIONAL INTERESTS IN ASSORTMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF ROMANTIC PARTNERS

DOCTORAL THESIS

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SVEUČILIŠTE U RIJECI
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Katarina Banov Trošelj

UČINCI PROFESIONALNIH INTERESA NA UPARIVANJE I PSIHOLOŠKU DOBROBIT ROMANTIČNIH PARTNERA

DOKTORSKI RAD

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Abstract

Vocational interests are established predictors of behavior in educational and occupational contexts, but their role in romantic relationships remains largely unexplored. Applying Holland's RIASEC model, this dissertation investigates the role of vocational interests in partner selection and romantic relationship functioning across four empirical studies. Two overarching aims were pursued: (1) to investigate the role of vocational interests in the selection of a romantic partner, and (2) to examine the role of vocational interests in the prediction of relationship satisfaction and the work-family interface. In two samples of heterosexual romantic couples and one sample of single individuals, interests were assessed using the Self-Directed Search and the Personal Globe Inventory-Short. Analytical approaches included several conceptual congruence measures, actor–partner interdependence models, and dyadic response surface analysis. New insights into the role of vocational interests in mate selection and partner idealization include a modest to moderate positive assortment for Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, and Social interests, along with a consistent tendency for individuals to pair with partners who are similar to themselves across interest domains. The results support the active initial assortment hypothesis rather than convergence or social homogamy. Interest types, profile differentiation, and elevation showed predictive validity for relationship outcomes. Higher Investigative, Artistic, and Enterprising interests, along with greater interest elevation, predicted greater relationship satisfaction and satisfaction with partner attributes. Social and Enterprising interests, together with higher elevation, positively predicted work-family enrichment and negatively predicted work-family conflict, most consistently at the actor level. Alignment between individuals' vocational self-concepts and their ideal partner standards was confirmed among both singles and couples; among couples, partner-ideal congruence further predicted relationship satisfaction, highlighting the interpersonal relevance of vocational interests even prior to relationship initiation. This research extends Holland's model beyond educational and occupational settings and emphasizes the need to consider vocational interests in studies of partner selection and dyadic adjustment, opening new avenues for the integration of vocational and relational research.

Keywords: Vocational interests, Partner selection, assortment, interest congruence, dyadic analysis, ideal partner standard, Work-family conflict, Work-family enrichment

Prošireni sažetak

Profesionalni interesi predstavljaju relativno stabilne, dispozicijske sklonosti koje usmjeravaju pojedinca pri odabiru obrazovnih i profesionalnih okolina. Profesionalni interesi, vidljivi kroz obrazovanje i zanimanje, mogu signalizirati stil života potencijalnog partnera. Ipak, njihova uloga u odabiru partnera dosad je bila nedovoljno istražena. Ova disertacija imala je za cilj ispitati ulogu profesionalnih interesa u (1) izboru romantičnog partnera putem sličnosti interesa, (2) oblikovanju internalnih reprezentacija idealnog partnera te u (3) određenim aspektima interpersonalnog funkcioniranja u romantičnim vezama zaposlenih osoba.

Profesionalni interesi konceptualizirani su kroz Hollandov model šest RIASEC tipova, kao i kroz tri osnovne dimenzije sfernog modela: Ljudi–Stvari, Podaci–Ideje i Prestiž. Podaci su prikupljeni na ukupno tri uzorka: uzorku samaca (N = 335) te na dva uzorka romantičnih parova zaposlenih osoba (N_1 = 215 i N_2 = 272). Za mjerenje profesionalnih interesa korišten je Upitnik za samoprocjenu profesionalnih interesa (Self-Directed Search) te kratka verzije Upitnika profesionalnih interesa (Personal Globe Inventory – Short).

Mehanizmi uparivanja u profesionalnim interesima partnera mogu uključivati inicijalno aktivno uparivanje, konvergenciju ili socijalnu homogamiju. Ovi mehanizmi ispitani su korištenjem različitih operacionalizacija sličnosti, usporedbom stvarnih i slučajno uparenih parova, dekompozicijom indeksa sličnosti na normativne i jedinstvene komponente, te metaanalitičkom obradom. Uz to, analizirana je sličnost profila vlastitih interesa i procjena interesa mogućeg željenog (tzv. idealnog) partnera, međusobna suglasnost partnera u opisu idealnog partnera te usklađenost profila idealnog s interesima stvarnog partnera.

Osim odabira partnera, disertacija je istražila i prediktivnu vrijednost interesa za neke odrednice kvalitete romantične veze na dva uzorka romantičnih parova zaposlenika. Specifično, modelom međuzavisnosti aktera i partnera ispitani su učinci interesa na vlastito i partnerovo zadovoljstvo vezom dok su dijadnom analizom odzivnih površina ispitivani efekati interesa te partnerske sukladnosti u interesima na njihova iskustva konflikata i obogaćenje poslovnih i obiteljskih uloga.

Rezultati upućuju na slabu do umjerenu, pozitivnu asortativnost partnera za Realistične, Istraživačke, Umjetničke i Socijalne interese, kao i na profilnu sličnost kroz cijeli spektar interesa. Nalazi podržavaju hipotezu o aktivnom inicijalnom uparivanju. Određeni tipovi interesa, kao i karakteristike profila (diferenciranost i stupanj povišenosti), predviđaju veće zadovoljstvo romantičnim odnosom i partnerovim osobinama. Socijalni i Poduzetnički interesi,

zajedno s povišenim profilom interesa, pozitivno predviđaju obogaćenje obiteljske uloge iskustvima iz poslovne uloge dok su negativni efekti interesa pronađeni za ishode konflikta između radnih i obiteljskih uloga. Efekti sličnosti na konflikte uloga nisu potvrđeni. S druge strane, sličnost samoprocjena interesa i procjena idealnog partnera potvrđena je i kod samaca i kod ispitanika u vezi. Kod parova, usklađenost između osobnih standarda idealnog partnera i interesa stvarnog partnera predviđa zadovoljstvo vezom, što ukazuje na važnost interesa i prije početka veze.

Ova disertacija proširuje primjenu Hollandovog modela izvan područja obrazovanja i zapošljavanja, te ističe potrebu uključivanja profesionalnih interesa u istraživanja odabira partnera, kvalitete romantičnih odnosa i usklađivanja poslovnog i privatnog života kod zaposlenih odraslih osoba. Otvara se prostor za integraciju istraživanja iz područja profesionalnog i interpersonalnog funkcioniranja, uzimajući u obzir kako interesi, kao stabilni motivacijski obrasci, sudjeluju u oblikovanju različitih domena života – od karijere do bliskih odnosa.

Ključne riječi: profesionalni interesi, odabir partnera, asortativnost, sukladnost interesa, dijadna analiza, standard idealnog partnera, konflikt posla i obitelji, obogaćivanje odnosa posao-obitelj.

Contents

1.INTRODUCTION

No step in life, unless it may be the choice of a husband or wife, is more important than the choice of a vocation.

It is with this sentence that Frank Parsons, a historical pioneer in career counselling, opens his influential book *Choosing a Vocation*, published in 1909. The roots of the research on vocational interests trace back to the work of this social reformer, who emphasized self-awareness, particularly understanding one's interests as a crucial factor in selecting a suitable career, preferred to the convenient or accidental job hunt. The quest for a profession that aligns with one's character and selecting a romantic partner with whom one can build a fulfilling, lasting relationship, remain two major life decisions individuals face in early adulthood. The decision-making processes for these life choices often span decades, involving periodic reevaluations and uncertainty about whether the "right" decisions were made (Xu & Tracey, 2016). Among them, partner selection is particularly consequential, shaping relationship outcomes and individual wellbeing (Gonzaga et al., 2010; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Montoya et al., 2008; Sarpong, 2018; Schaffhuser et al., 2014), and even health-related behaviors (Hudek-Knezevic et al., 2023). Choosing a partner based on shared characteristics has also implications beyond personal relationships. For instance, estimates of heritability for traits such as vocational interests may be inflated if partner similarity is not considered (Reynolds et al., 2000; Thiessen et al., 1997). At a societal level, coupling patterns based on educational attainment or occupational status can contribute to widening income inequality within households (Greenwood et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2021).

While vocational interests play a critical role in career decision-making (Hoff et al., 2020; Xu, 2023a), their role in partner selection and romantic couple functioning recieved little empirical or theoretical attention. Vocational interests, defined as motivational dispositions that guide career choices, are increasingly relevant in today's dynamic labor market. The demands of modern careers often require individuals to adapt, self-manage, and make career transitions across their lifetimes (Haenggli & Hirschi, 2023). However, the interplay between vocational and relational contexts remains underexplored, partly due to the enduring myth that work and family spheres function independently. To address this gap, Kossek et al. (2021) called for integrative research that bridges the domains of work and family life. Published in the 50th-

anniversary issue of the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, they highlighted the importance of studying career decisions, including vocational choices, within dual-career partnerships, emphasizing the reciprocal interdependence of the work and family domains. Romantic dyadic relationships involve the mutual interdependence of two individuals who share attraction, attachment, affection, reciprocity, and a pursuit of shared goals (Finkel & Eastwick, 2015). Given the interdependence of dual-earning partners in stable romantic relationships (Ferguson et al., 2016; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), Given the interdependence of dual-earner partners in stable romantic relationships (Ferguson et al., 2016; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), this dissertation explores the role of vocational interests in interpersonal, romantic relationship dynamics. Bridging the work and family domains provides a more holistic understanding of how work-related constructs shape family functioning.

This dissertation applies a couple-centered perspective in assessing vocational interests, integrating John Holland's theory of vocational personalities and work environments (1959, 1997) into work-family research. This introductory chapter has three primary objectives. First, it establishes the theoretical framework for the vocational interest construct, introducing foundational structural models, including those by Holland (1959, 1997), Prediger (1982), and Tracey and Rounds (1996). Particular emphasis is placed on two key aspects of Holland's theory: the importance of person-environment congruence and the structural model of the RIASEC domains (i.e., the circumplex), along with the concepts of profile elevation and differentiation. Second, the introduction reviews the limited literature exploring the interpersonal relevance of RIASEC interests, laying the groundwork for this study's hypotheses about their role in romantic relationships. Finally, the chapter discusses the methodological challenges and opportunities of adopting a couple-centered perspective in analyzing interest-outcome relationships.

1.1. Conceptualizing Vocational Interests

Vocational interests represent enduring preferences for specific work-related activities and environments, reflecting the dynamic interplay between individuals and their surroundings. Assessing vocational interests typically involves exploring preferences for tasks and settings, reflecting both their motivational and affective components (Su, Stoll, et al., 2019). This definition inherently incorporates the person-environment interaction, as describing an individual often entails referencing the environment they gravitate toward. This dissertation

examines interests as stable traits. To define vocational interests clearly, it is necessary to distinguish individual (trait) interests from situational (state) interests.

Situational interest, or state interest, refers to the psychological experience of curiosity triggered by environmental stimuli (Silvia, 2006). It is characterized by heightened arousal, focused attention, and positive affect, driven by factors such as novelty, appropriate challenge relative to individual ability, and the enjoyment of learning (Chen et al., 1999). With a primarily motivational function, situational interest encourages exploration, deeper cognitive engagement, and learning (Krapp, 1999; O'Keefe & Harackiewicz, 2017). It reinforces repeated engagement with the same content, potentially transforming transient experiences into lasting preferences for specific domains (Hidi & Renninger, 2006). However, situational interest alone does not explain the persistence of individual preferences or variability in interests, among individuals. These longer-term preferences are better understood through the lens of trait interests.

Unlike situational interest, (Hidi & Renninger, 2006), the *Trait-State (Vocational) Interest Dynamics Model* (Su, Stoll, et al., 2019) explains how repeated experiences of *situational interest*, through direct and vicarious environmental interactions, solidify into enduring preferences. Over time, situational interests become integrated into an individual's identity, guiding future engagement with similar activities or environments. These, fully developed *individual interests* are not only enjoyable but also personally significant, becoming integral to one's self-concept (Renninger, 2009). Consequently, these interests evolve alongside other self-concept components, such as abilities, values, and roles. When such preferences pertain to specific tasks (e.g., "conducting surveys") or work setting (e.g., "coordinating classroom activities"), they are referred to as *vocational interests*.

1.1.1. Holland's Structural Model of Vocational Interests

Since Frank Parsons layed the foundation for modern career counseling practices (Holland, 1987, p. 29), interest inventories and psychometric tools were developed to systematically identify traits conducive to vocational choice and later successful job performance (Nye et al., 2017). In this tradition of differential psychology, John Holland (1997) proposed his influential *Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments.* This theory retains its practical relevance by offering a dual framework to describe both individual interests in occupational activities and the characteristics of various work environments. The model is built on several core principles.

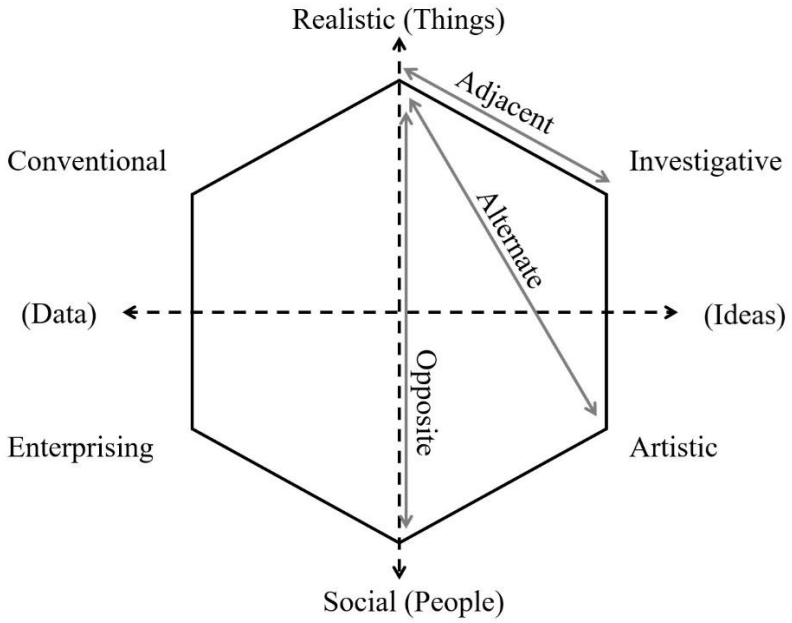
First, both individuals and environments can be classified into six overarching interest types, organized under the acronym RIASEC. Realistic (R) interests orient toward working with tools, machines, plants, animals, or engaging in mechanical or electrical tasks. Investigative (I) interests and environments value analytical and precise problem solving, involving research and abstract thinking. Artistic (A) interests describe a preference for creative expression, imaginative and intuitive approaches to problem-solving. Social (S) interests emphasize caregiving, team-work, and interpersonal engagement, relying on strong social skills and a desire to work with people. Enterprising (E) types are willing to take initiative for leadership, negotiation, guiding others toward achieving goals. Finally, Conventional (C) types involve order, detail-oriented tasks, and structured data manipulation, attending to details and rules. Holland posited that individuals' interest patterns, combined with their abilities, guide them toward environments where they can maximize their preferences and competencies.

As represented in Figure 1, the six RIASEC interests are arranged in a hexagonal structure, where the distance between types is inversely proportional to their degree of similarity. Adjacent types (e.g., Realistic and Investigative) share more in common, alternate types (e.g., Realistic and Artistic) reflect moderate similarity, while opposing types (e.g., Realistic and Social or Artistic and Conventional) are more distinct. This structural arrangement captures both the continuities and distinctions among interest categories, enabling detailed interpretations and comparisons of individual profiles as well as their compatibility with specific work environments.

Holland (1987) emphasized the importance of evaluating RIASEC profiles holistically, rather than focusing on a single interest type. Both individuals and occupational environments are often characterized by multiple highly expressed interest types, reflecting the inherently multivariate nature of vocational profiles. To capture this complexity, Holland introduced the use of three-letter summary codes, representing the three most dominant RIASEC types in descending order of relevance. For example, a career psychologist might be coded as ISE, whereas a web programmer could be described as CIR. Subsequent scholars have noted that not all profiles require three-letter codes; in some cases, one or two letters may more accurately reflect an individual's vocational orientation (Eggerth & Andrew, 2006).

Figure 1

Holland's (1997) RIASEC Model of Interest Scale Congruence for a Realistic Occupation with Dimensions Proposed by (Prediger, 1982). Figure adapted from (Nye et al., 2012; p. 385)



Note. Prediger's (1982) dimensions of People-Things and Data-Ideas are denoted by the arrowed dotted lines. Realistic interest corresponds to interest in working with Things; Social interest corresponds to interest in working with People.

Another central aspect of Holland's theory is the *congruence hypothesis*, which suggests that individuals experience greater satisfaction and perform more effectively in work environments that match their interest profiles. In order to operationalize this person–environment fit, a standardized classification system for occupational environments based on the RIASEC model was needed. Responding to this need, Gary Gottfredson contributed to the development of the first *Dictionary of Holland Occupational Codes*, which assigns RIASEC codes to over 12,860 occupations (Gottfredson & Holland, 1996). This taxonomy enables consistent comparison between individual profiles and occupational characteristics, facilitating the assessment of congruence and supporting evidence-based career counseling practices.

The effort to refine and expand Holland's model has continued through multiple approaches. One of the most influential developments was the integration of the RIASEC framework into the Occupational Information Network (O*NET; see U.S. Department of

Labor, 1998; Lewis & Rivkin, 1999), based on expert evaluations. In addition, alternative classifications have been proposed, such as those by Prediger (1982), Tracey and Rounds (1996), and Su, Tay, et al. (2019), which rely on the interest assessments of normative reference groups to further extend and enhance the applicability of Holland's model.

1.1.2. Holland's Secondary Constructs

Holland introduced additional constructs to enhance the interpretation of vocational profiles (summarized in Spokane et al., 2002). These secondary indicators provide nuanced insights into individual interests and their alignment with occupational environments.

Consistency measures the alignment between an individual's top two RIASEC types based on their proximity on the hexagonal model. Adjacent types (e.g., Realistic and Investigative) reflect harmonious preferences, while opposing types (e.g., Realistic and Social) may suggest conflicting tendencies. High consistency indicates a cohesive interest pattern, whereas low consistency might reflect diverse or contradictory vocational preferences within the same individual.

Differentiation assesses the degree of clarity in a vocational profile. It is quantified by the difference between the highest and lowest RIASEC scores or the standard deviation of all six scores. Profiles with a pronounced peak in one type demonstrate strong and specific occupational preferences, while flatter profiles suggest broader or less defined interests.

Elevation refers to the overall strength or intensity of a person's vocational interests, calculated as the sum or mean of their RIASEC scores. It reflects the degree to which an individual endorses interest items broadly, indicating general interest engagement, and can provide insight into personal motivation and response tendencies.

The *calculus coefficients* quantify the relationships among vocational interests by translating the spatial arrangement of the six RIASEC domains into measurable psychological similarity. The distance between domains on the hexagon (Figure 1) indicates these theoretical relationships. However, real-world data often deviate from the idealized equidistance or perfect symmetry, forming a "misshapen polygon" or quasi-circumplex, where positions are unevenly spaced (Gottfredson & Holland, 1996; Holland, 1997). Despite these deviations, the circumplex remains useful for interpreting the continuities and contrasts among interest dimensions, supporting both profile-level comparisons and predictions of environmental fit. The *Randomization Test of Hypothesized Order Relations* (RTHOR; Hubert & Arabie, 1987)

provides a formal method for testing whether empirical data conform to this circular ordering. Studies on various samples, including Croatian (Etzel et al., 2021; Šverko, 2008), support the circumplex model's validity, enabling the use of Holland's calculus hypothesis.

1.1.3. Alternative Vocational Interests' Classifications

While Holland's model provides the primary framework for this dissertation, additional approaches are incorporated to enrich the analysis of vocational interests. Specifically, this dissertation also applies few additional noteworthy frameworks building on Holland's foundation, which merit brief presentation.

Prediger (1982), described two overarching dimensions underlying vocational interests that are conceptually and mathematically aligned with Holland's interest circumplex: People-Things and Ideas-Data dimensions. The People-Things dimension reflects a preference for interpersonal, social activities over impersonal, realistic tasks. An orthogonal dimension, Ideas-Data, contrasts an interest in abstract, investigative, or artistic endeavors with a focus on conventional, data-driven tasks. These dimensions are central for understanding vocational interests, predicting individual choices, behaviors, and experiences in both occupational and educational contexts (e.g., Etzel et al., 2023; Armstrong et al., 2011; Su et al., 2019).

Tracey and Rounds (1996) proposed a broader, spherical model that builds on the circumplex by introducing eight basic interest scales and adding a third dimension, orthogonal to both People-Things and Ideas-Data dimensions: the High-Low Prestige. This dimension reflects the educational demands, effort, and social status associated with occupations. While the concept of Prestige enriches the understanding of vocational interests, it has been criticized for overlapping with other dimensions and for being more aligned with values than interests (Xu, 2023). Nonetheless, the Prestige dimension highlights the importance of social stratification in vocational choice, further extending the applicability of vocational interest models (Hughes et al., 2024; Tracey, 2002). This dissertation will extend beyond the RIASEC structural model of vocational interests, incorporating an evaluation of its hypotheses through the three-dimensional spherical model.

More recently, Su, Tay, et al. (2019) proposed a unifying dimensional model designed to better capture the structure of vocational interests in light of contemporary labor market demands. This framework organizes interests into eight dimensions - SETPOINT: Health Science, Creative Expression, Technology, People, Organization, Influence, Nature, and

Things. The model offers a promising foundation for future theory, particularly in integrating vocational interests with emerging fields such as STEM, healthcare, and green industries. However, its incremental validity and generalizability across diverse cultural contexts remain open questions for future research.

1.1.4. Differentiating Interests from Personality Traits

Understanding the relationship between personality and vocational interests is needed to evaluate the distinctive validity of interests in career and other life outcomes. According to the gravitational hypothesis, individuals are naturally drawn to occupations that align with their stable traits and both traits and interests may be regarded as sources of gravity. However, the influence appears reciprocal as the environments also shape the characteristics of their members. Wille and De Fruyt (2014) provided evidence of this dynamic in a 15-year longitudinal study, showing that involvement in Realistic work roles led to increases in Agreeableness and Conscientiousness while reducing Neuroticism. Although these effects were modest, they highlight the role of vocational environments in shaping personality over time. This section presents evidence of the relationship between interests and personality to clarify their distinctions while acknowledging their areas of overlap.

Holland (1997) discussed vocational interests as personality-like traits, shaped by both biological predispositions and environmental influences. Indeed, vocational interests meet two key criteria for classification as personality-like traits: stability and a genetic basis (Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). Vocational interests even surpass personality traits in their rank-order stability before age 30, with peak stability reaching approximately 0.70 (Hoff et al., 2018; Xu & Tracey al., 2016). Moreover, behavioral genetics studies reveal that vocational interests are influenced by genetic factors and share common genetic foundations with personality traits (Harris et al., 2006; Kandler et al., 2011; Lykken et al., 1993; Schermer & Vernon, 2008).

A more unidirectional influence is proposed in the Five-factor model of personality (McCrae et al., 2021), which describes traits as basic tendencies, largely biologically driven, while characteristic adaptations, including interests, develop through interactions with environmental experiences. Consistently, studies reveal cross-cultural variations in interest structures (Huang et al., 2019), whereas personality traits like the Big Five remain culturally invariant (McCrae et al., 2021).

Despite their similarities, various theoretical frameworks distinguish vocational interests from personality traits. For instance, Hogan and Sherman's (2019) socio-analytical model of identity development emphasizes the social function of personality traits, defining them as indicators of reputation, how individuals are perceived socially, while vocational interests reflect personal identity, guiding aspirations and career choices. These authors further note that interest assessments tend to focus more directly on self-concepts due to their thematic specificity, whereas personality assessments often encompass broader and more enduring patterns of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. The model therefore contribues to the conceptual differentiation of interests and personality traits.

Research has extensively explored the links between personality traits and vocational interests. Ackerman and Heggestad's (1997) meta-analysis of the correlations between personality traits, intellectual abilities and interests identified four *trait complexes* across domains: (1) the social trait complex (including Extraversion, Social and Enterprising interests), (2) the clerical/conventional complex (Conventional interests, Conscientiousness, Traditionalism and high Control traits), (3) the science/math (Realistic and Investigative interests, math reasoning and visual perception abilities), and (4) the intellectual/cultural complex (Artistic and Investigative interests, Openness, Absorption, and Crystallized Intelligence). Further meta-analyses consistently evidence the associations between interests and the five-factor model: Extraversion and Enterprising interests (ρ = .40), Openness and Artistic interests (ρ = .41), Extraversion and Social interests (ρ = .29), and Openness with Investigative interests (ρ = .25; (Larson et al., 2002; Mount et al., 2005). Other associations are generally modest, around or below .10. Further studies, found that a number of personality characteristics fit into the RIASEC structure in an arc encompassing the Social and Enterprising interests, intellectual facets of Openness were tied to Investigative and Artistic interests, while Conscientiousness correlated with Conventional interests (Armstrong et al., 2011). Similar findings have been replicated in Croatian samples (Krapić et al., 2008).

Building on extensive research, career counseling theorists emphasize that interests and personality, while related, are distinct constructs and should not be used interchangeably for prediction or guidance purposes. Nevertheless, due to their demonstrated interconnection, this study will account for personality traits when exploring the interpersonal roles of vocational interests.

1.1.5. Vocational Interests in Career Theory and their Predictive Value

Vocational interests hold significant importance in career guidance and personnel selection due to their strong external validity. Regarding theories of career development and validated counseling models, vocational interests are central constructs, considered in the Career construction theory (Savickas, 2005) and the Social cognitive career theory (Brown & Lent, 2023).

In Career construction theory, which emphasizes career adaptability, interests are seen as key elements of self-construction, developing in childhood through social contexts such as family, school, and community. While incorporating Holland's RIASEC model as a framework for vocational personality, the theory interprets each interest type as a self-constructing strategy, reflecting distinct goals and self-theories. These strategies are shaped through interpersonal experiences and cultural narratives, highlighting the co-constructed nature of interests within societal and relational contexts.

Social Cognitive Career Theory (Brown & Lent, 2023) identifies two core mechanisms in the development of vocational interests: self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations. Interests guide the formation of goals, while these goals promote sustained engagement in particular activities. This engagement influences performance outcomes, which then reinforce or reshape self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations in a continuous feedback loop. Although vocational interests tend to stabilize over time, the theory acknowledges that they can shift in response to restricted opportunities or exposure to new learning experiences—such as parenting or gaining insight into a partner's career—that alter self-perceptions and anticipated outcomes. While vocational interests often orient individuals toward others with similar work personalities, actual career choices may be constrained by external factors such as cultural expectations, socioeconomic circumstances, or access to education. The theory therefore recognizes that factors beyond personal interests play a crucial role in shaping career development and decision-making.

Empirical evidence demonstrates the predictive value of interests for academic and occupational outcomes. For instance, a meta-analysis of 92 studies revealed that the congruence between an individual's interests and job characteristics predicts job performance (ρ = 0.32), with congruence proving more predictive than interest scores alone (Nye et al., 2017). Similarly, meta-analytic findings from 194 samples highlighted that the fit between personal interests and workplace characteristics predicts job choice satisfaction (ρ = 0.34) and, to a lesser extent, overall job satisfaction (ρ = 0.19; Hoff et al., 2020). In addition, single-interest scales

have demonstrated predictive validity for workplace-training performance (ρ = 0.26), turnover intentions (ρ = - 0.19), and actual turnover (ρ = -0.15; Van Iddekinge et al., 2011). Vocational interests also exhibit incremental validity over cognitive ability and personality traits in predicting job performance (Van Iddekinge, Putka, & Campbell, 2011) and career success (Rounds & Su, 2014; Stoll et al., 2017). The size of these associations, reasonable for social sciences, is however moderated by the selection of the measures of congruence (Nye et al., 2017; Xu & Li, 2020). Therefore, while vocational interests play a significant role in guiding educational and career decisions, fostering both personal fulfillment and organizational success, their role in the interpersonal context is to be evaluated applying different operationalizations of congruence.

1.2. Application of Holland's Theory in the Interpersonal Context

Holland's theory, widely used in vocational counseling for career guidance and candidate selection (Oswald et al., 2019), has strong predictive validity. However, its applicability in predicting non-work-related outcomes remains underexplored. Here I present some existing evidence for the interpersonal relevance of vocational interests.

Research suggests that vocational interests are often viewed through an interpersonal lens. For example, children associate Enterprising interests with traits like bossiness and arrogance, Artistic interests with warmth and submissiveness, and Conventional interests with helpfulness and consideration. Adults, however, perceive these domains differently, linking them to qualities such as dominance, independence, and interpersonal warmth (Sodano, 2011).

Vocational interests also offer interpersonal benefits in professional settings and beyond. Among soldiers, for instance, Social interests were linked to stronger interpersonal job knowledge, whereas Artistic interests were associated with weaker interpersonal skills, even after controlling for cognitive ability and personality traits (Van Iddekinge et al., 2011). However, research on vocational interests and well-being remains scarce. Cotter and Fouad (2011) found no significant links between RIASEC themes and subjective well-being in a small student sample, whereas Xu and Li (2020) reported that interest congruence, measured through various methods, positively predicted life satisfaction (r = .15). A ten-year longitudinal study by Stoll et al. (2017) revealed that RIASEC interests assessed during high school were predictive of several life outcomes. Realistic and Enterprising interests were associated with a higher likelihood of full-time employment and higher income. Conversely, Artistic and Social

interests were linked to lower income, with Artistic interests also predicting a greater likelihood of unemployment. Surprisingly, RIASEC dimensions were not predictive of perceived health status. The above-mentioned longitudinal study found that Investigative interests are associated with delays in starting a family, Social interests predispose individuals to caregiving and predict a higher probability of being married or having children, and Enterprising interests are related to greater experience with romantic relationships, such as having been involved in more romantic partnerships (Stoll et al., 2017).

Although some evidence suggests that vocational interests differentially contribute to non-work outcomes, studies using dyadic samples of romantic partners, whose outcomes are interdependent (Van Lange & Balliet, 2015), remain scarce, with only a few notable exceptions (Etzel et al., 2019; Grotevant et al., 1977; Mayrand et al., 2023; Ton & Hansen, 2001). Recently, Fouad et al. (2023) proposed that person-environment fit theories could extend beyond the workplace to predict outcomes such as marital satisfaction. Addressing this opportunity, the present study makes a unique contribution by examining the role of vocational interests in romantic partner selection, relationship satisfaction, and the work–family interface of dual-earner couples. The following sections present the theoretical framework and empirical evidence supporting the role of vocational interests in relationship dynamics and introduce hypotheses regarding their predictive value for non-work outcomes.

1.2.1. Vocational Interests and Partner Selection

Vocational interests may play a meaningful role in romantic partner selection and relationship formation. These interests are relatively stable, particularly during young adulthood, a life stage when individuals often form long-term relationships or develop ideals for potential partners (Hoff et al., 2018; Xu & Tracey, 2016). As motivational constructs, vocational interests guide individuals' educational and occupational pathways, positioning them as relevant individual differences that may play a role in partner selection and relationship formation even prior to the onset of a romantic relationship. However, the specific mechanisms through which interests contribute to partner selection remain largely underexplored.

The tendency of partners to be systematically matched based on specific characteristics is referred to as assortative mating (Buss, 1984; Kardum et al., 2019; Thiessen et al., 1997). Two primary forms are positive assortment (homogamy), where partners share greater similarity, and negative assortment (heterogamy), emphasizing complementarity between partners' characteristics. Most human assortative mating is positive, with varying levels across

characteristics. Strong demographic homogamy is observed for age, religiosity, race, socioeconomic status, and increasingly for educational attainment (Luo, 2017; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Watson et al., 2004).

The functions of assortative mating include psychological, social and evolutionary dimensions. From a social psychological perspective, based on Festinger's (1957) cognitive dissonance theory, similarity between partners fosters mutual, consensual validation, which is rewarding for both partners as it satisfies their need for consistency, creates positive feelings, and eventually leads to attraction (Byrne, 1997). Adopting an evolutionary understanding, assortative preferences are explained through their functional benefits. Specifically, assortative mating for a heritable trait leads to a non-random distribution of the genetic variants important for that trait as spouses will be more similar genetically than expected by chance. Greater phenotypic similarity also increases the genetic relatedness of parents to their offspring beyond the expected 50%, strengthens mating bonds, and promotes altruism within families(Sunde et al., 2024; Thiessen et al., 1997; Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). Therefore, partner similarity in a trait should be taken into account when evaluating the heritability of that trait, as well as when examining the heritability of vocational interests. Evolutionary niche construction theory (Bahns et al., 2017; Laland et al., 2001) offers another perspective, framing mate selection as an adaptive strategy. According to this view, selecting a similar partner allows individuals to build harmonious relationships and cultivate stable, mutually supportive social environments. For instance, partners may engage with each other’s professional contexts as part of a shared social niche, aligning with each other’s needs and advancing shared goals.

Assortative mating occurs through various mechanisms and patterns of partner selection, and it is yet to evaluate these mechanisms for the case of assortment for vocational interests. While a detailed discussion of all theories is beyond this section (for details see: (Kardum et al., 2019; Luo, 2017), four possible mechanisms have been suggested to account for similarity: (1) initial, active choice of a similar partner due to personal preference; (2) a passive product of mating market forces, competition for desirable partner characteristics, (3) social homogamy, meeting potential partners in one’s social surroundings entails sharing similarity; (4) convergence or becoming similar over time.

Previous research has documented moderate similarity among romantic partners in psychosocial traits, including verbal intelligence (correlations of .20 to .40), attitudes, values, and religiosity (Gonzaga et al., 2010; Montoya et al., 2008; Vinkhuyzen et al., 2012). Modest to moderate assortative correlations have also been noted for personality traits in couples

(Kardum et al., 2019; Luo, 2017; Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Mehić, 2021; Watson et al., 2004), and similarity preferences are evidenced in individuals (De La Mare & Lee, 2023). Studies of occupational assortative mating reveal that individuals value vocational similarity (S. Han & Qian, 2021), with benefits for work-family dynamics, especially when partners share the same occupation or industry (Halbesleben, 2010; Halbesleben et al., 2012; Sarpong, 2018). For example, Ferguson et al. (2016) found that work-related spousal support contributed to work-family balance, family satisfaction, and job satisfaction.

Estimates of occupational homogamy vary depending on how it is measured. In a German panel study of 12,245 couples, Hennecke and Hetschko (2021) reported that 6.28% of couples worked in the same occupation and 18.84% in the same industry. Meanwhile, Schwartz et al. (2021) found that in the United States, 33% of couples shared occupational categories, with higher rates among professionals and service workers. Notably, occupational homogamy has increased among upper professionals, with men more likely to marry within their occupational class compared to the 1970s (e.g., a 16% increase for doctors, 12% for lawyers, 6% for professors, 5% for computer specialists). These data suggest that a certain degree of couple similarity in vocational interests is reasonable to expect, potentially varying across different interest dimensions.

Research on couple similarity of vocational interests remains limited, with previous studies not specifically designed to test assortment hypotheses or the mechanisms underlying this phenomenon. Early studies of interest heritability documented positive correlations between RIASEC scale scores. First, Grotevant et al. (1977) reported positive associations (between .20 and .28) for Enterprising, Artistic, and Realistic interests in American adolescent parents. Thiessen and Gregg (1980) report a correlation of .40 between interests of spouses. More recently, Etzel et al. (2018) reported stronger evidence of positive assortment among German adolescent parents for all RIASEC scale scores (between .36 for Realistic interests and .56 for Investigative). These authors also emphasised the importance of considering not only the scale scores, since the implied structure of interests assumes their interrelatedness, but rather the consideration of the entire profile. For their sample Etzel et al. (2018) stated that the associations found within couples were largely attributable to the high correlation between profile mean levels (.68), or in other words the elevation of interest profiles, while the similarity of other aspects of vocational interest profiles was modest.

It remains to address how assortment in vocational interests occurs and which mechanisms of assortment are most likely to operate. Another question concerns the degree of

assortment that can be observed in a sample of couples heterogeneous in age and educational level. This dissertation applies different measurement instruments of vocational interests and various operationalizations of congruence. In addition, it considers multiple theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing interest types, to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

1.2.2. Exploring Ideal-Partner Preferences

Understanding assortative processes in romantic relationships requires examining individuals' expectations regarding future partners' traits, behaviors, and attitudes - often conceptualized as ideal partner preferences, ideal standards, mate preferences, or romantic ideals (Eastwick & Neff, 2012; Fletcher & Simpson, 2000). If assortment for a particular characteristic is active and initiates early in mate selection, then individuals should exhibit a preference for similarity in their ideal standards. Empirical evidence supports this, showing that people are generally more attracted to potential partners who resemble themselves in key domains (Dijkstra & Barelds, 2008).

The investigation of ideal partner preferences is grounded in the social perspective, the interdependence theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), which highlights the role of individual traits in shaping mutual perceptions and relationship dynamics within any dyadic interaction, including romantic couples and extending to group interactions. The dominant model building on this perspective is the Ideal Standards Model (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000), which posits that individuals hold representations of ideal partners, which guide partner selection (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015; Driebe et al., 2024; Fletcher & Simpson, 2000b; Gerlach et al., 2018). The model proposes that three factors can be applied to describe mate ideals: warmth-trustworthiness, vitality-attractiveness, and status-resources (Fletcher et al., 1999; Campbell & Fletcher, 2015). However, other qualities can be applied to describe an ideal partner. For instance, self-ideal similarity, or congruence between self-ratings and ideal-partner descriptions, has been observed in singles for HEXACO personality traits (Liu & Zhang, 2023). Notably, despite the centrality of vocational identity to self-concept and its visibility in social contexts (Hogan & Sherman, 2019), vocational interests have yet to be explored as a meaningful basis for ideal partner.

An extension of the Ideal Standards Model by Anderson (2017) offers further support for considering vocational interests in this context. Anderson identified seven domains of ideal standards informed by underlying values and attitudes. While domains such as *Athletic*, *Balanced*, and *Image-conscious* may bear limited connection to vocational interests, several

others show strong conceptual alignment with Holland's RIASEC model. For instance, the domain of *Artistic* ideal-partner preference, as conceptualized by Anderson (2017) reflects a partner's appreciation for aesthetics, creativity, and nonconformity, and conceptually aligns with Artistic vocational interests. The *Caring* domain, emphasizing empathy, generosity, and collaboration, is conceptually related to Social interests. The *Sociable* domain, associated with social engagement, disinhibition, and popularity, closely resembles Enterprising interests. Moreover, vocational interests related to prestigious and high-status occupations align with Anderson's *Successful* domain, encompassing educational attainment, professional achievement, and financial stability. Occupational prestige serves as a well-established indicator of socioeconomic status (Hughes et al., 2024), a dimension frequently highlighted in evolutionary theories of mate selection. The spherical model of interests (Tracey & Rounds, 1996), which incorporates occupational prestige, may therefore offer a valid and structured framework for operationalizing partner preferences. These promising areas of research are implemented into the present dissertation.

The study of ideal-partner preferences for vocational interests raises two important methodological considerations. First, moderate self-ideal congruence in psychological and social characteristics has been observed across cultural contexts (Liu et al., 2018), suggesting a blend of universal and culturally and generationally distinctive mate preferences. Normative patterns reflect shared cultural and generational biases (Guvensoy & Erdem, 2023; Locke et al., 2020), whereas distinctive patterns capture individual-specific preferences. This dissertation employs a methodological approach that controls for normative similarity in order to isolate unique, distinctive individual preferences, an issue further elaborated in the following section on stereotype accuracy.

Second, ideal standards are not static. They often shift in response to the characteristics of actual romantic partners, particularly within ongoing relationships (Conroy-Beam & Buss, 2016; Driebe et al., 2024). Individuals frequently adjust their ideals to reduce discrepancies with their current partners, thereby minimizing relational dissatisfaction and intrapersonal conflict. Consequently, to capture aspirational rather than adaptive preferences, the current study includes single participants, whose ideals are presumably less influenced by accommodation to a current partner (Fletcher et al., 1999; Fletcher & Simpson, 2000).

1.2.3. Vocational Interests and Relationship Outcomes – a Dyadic Approach

Romantic partners form an interdependent system, meaning that their psychological states, behaviors, and perceptions are mutually influenced (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Social interdependence theory suggests that relationship outcomes depend on both partners' dispositions and behaviors, with each partner's individual characteristics shaping mutual perceptions, interactions, and relationship evaluations (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Consistently, vocational interests may affect romantic dynamics, including relationship satisfaction and work-family balance in cohabiting couples.

Previous research has shown that personality traits play a significant role in couple functioning and romantic relationship satisfaction. For example, a meta-analysis found that lower neuroticism and higher agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion predict greater relationship satisfaction (Malouff et al., 2010). Moreover, dissimilarity in neuroticism and openness (Weidmann et al., 2017), as well as in psychopathy and narcissism (Kardum et al., 2023), has been linked to higher relationship satisfaction. These findings align with Karney and Bradbury's, (1995) vulnerability-stress-adaptation model, which emphasizes the role of enduring vulnerabilities, stressful events, and adaptive processes in marital quality and stability. However, the interpersonal consequences of other stable dispositions beyond personality traits remain understudied (Back & Vazire, 2015).

In one of the few studies examining vocational interests at the couple level, Mayrand et al. (2023), found that overall interest similarity explained between 5% and 7% of the variance in couple adjustment. Using a sample of 104 cohabiting couples, the study showed that similarity in Artistic and Enterprising interests particularly enhanced adjustment, potentially due to shared unconventional perspectives or income levels. Vocational interests also shape the selection of work or educational environments, leading to variations in factors such as typical work hours, occupational risks like higher fatalities in Realistic occupations (Bauerle et al., 2016), and differences in expected income levels (higher for Realistic, Enterprising, and Investigative interests, and lower for Artistic interests; Huang & Pierce, 2013; Stoll et al., 2017). These factors eventually contribute to work-family dynamics, with interests shaping the exposure to stressors like time constraints and occupational strain (Allen et al., 2012; Rounds & Su, 2014).

The differential exposure perspective (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995) suggests that individual differences influence well-being through self-selected roles and environments. The spillover–crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013) extends this perspective by accounting

not only for how stressors affect individuals across domains (spillover) but also how they transfer across partners (crossover). At the spillover level, stressors from one domain (e.g., workload, time pressure, interpersonal conflict) undermine resources for the other domain, reducing well-being and functioning (e.g. in the family or partnership commitment). At the crossover level, stress extends to partners, either directly through emotional contagion or indirectly via reduced support and withdrawal (Li et al., 2021). Meta-analytic evidence indicates that role conflicts are negatively associated with both individuals' well-being (r = –.19, k = 49) and their partners' outcomes (r = –.17, k = 26; Li et al., 2021). Supporting this, another meta-analysis by Matei et al. (2021), which examined 36 dyadic studies, found similar negative effects for both individuals (r = –.26) and partners (r = –.14), though partner effects often weaken when controlling for the individual's own conflict levels. Given the interconnected nature of dual-earner couples, vocational interest characteristics such as elevation (interest strength) and differentiation (interest distinctiveness) may play an important role in shaping outcomes for both partners.

Direct research on vocational interests and work-family conflict is scarce. Han and Sears (2020) found that Realistic, Social, Enterprising, and Investigative interests correlated with work-family conflict, while Artistic interests were linked to lower work-family time conflict. Research using couple-level data supports the dyadic transmission of work-family conflict experiences from one partner to the other (Steiner & Krings, 2016; Yucel & Latshaw, 2020), yet no study has explored how vocational interests impact a partner's work-family interface. A dyadic approach is needed to examine both actor effects (how one's interests influence personal outcomes) and partner effects (how one's interests influence their partner's experiences). Also, it should not be neglected that engaging in multiple roles within work and family contexts can also benefit functioning in both domains. Work-family enrichment represents a process where participation in one life domain helps to gain instrumental or affective resources that are transferred to another domain (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). It is yet unexplored if vocational interests may present psychological resources, contributing to these, positive aspects of work-family balance.

While research suggests that vocational interests influence outcomes beyond the workplace, most studies have focused on individual effects rather than examining interpersonal processes at the couple level. To address this gap, this dissertation aims to replicate and extend the findings of Mayrand and colleagues (2023) by assessing the predictive validity of vocational interest types for relationship satisfaction. In addition, it draws on the work of Han and Sears

(2020) to explore how vocational interests relate to work–family conflict and enrichment in dual-earner couples.

1.2.4. Similarity Effects

Beyond main effects, partner's dispositional (dis)similarity has been linked to relationship outcomes, reflecting assortative mating and self-ideal similarity preferences. These effects are also to be evaluated in this dissertation.

Two key hypotheses dominate (dis)similarity research: similarity and complementarity. The similarity hypothesis suggests shared traits foster closeness through mutual understanding and self-verification (Luo, 2017). Empirical evidence partially supports this view, showing positive effects of similarity in attitudes and leisure interests on well-being, attraction, and satisfaction (Gonzaga et al., 2010; Montoya et al., 2008). However, evidence on similarity effects of personality traits is inconsistent: while some studies found gender specific similarity effects for agreeableness and openness on higher relationship quality (Luo & Klohnen, 2005), larger studies report negligible effects, with similarity explaining less than 0.5% of satisfaction variance (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Leikas et al., 2018). Conversely, dissimilarity in dark triad traits (Kardum et al., 2024) and openness (Weidmann et al., 2017) is associated with lower satisfaction.

The complementarity hypothesis proposes that differences enhance relationships by balancing skills, reducing conflicts, and promoting synergy in familial roles. For instance, Xie et al. (2017) found that partners with complementary work-family priorities experienced less conflict and greater satisfaction. Career-related dissimilarities also shape preferences - women anticipating breadwinner roles preferred partners with caregiving qualities over financial resources (Croft et al., 2019). This shift reflects changing gender roles, with some women favoring caregiving, family-oriented partners over career-focused ones.

Cognitive factors, such as information salience, have been shown to moderate the similarity–attraction effect (Montoya & Horton, 2013). As a result, noticeable traits like vocational interests, reflected in a partner's work or education, could be relevant for the attraction process based on similarity. While Mayrand et al. (2023) provided pivotal evidence of the predictive validity of interest profile correlation on couple adjustment and relational stability, the effects of each interest type have not been evaluated, as is common practice for personality traits. This dissertation simultaneously accounts for both main and similarity

effects. Since the profile similarity of vocational interests in couples may be based not only on the dominant interest type but also on the overall level of interest elevation, this information alone is not fully informative. Instead, we may be more interested in whether the level of expression of each interest type, particularly in men and women in heterosexual relationships, differentially predicts outcomes such as relationship satisfaction or work-family interface. Gender differences in these effects are particularly important to evaluate, as gender role constraints influence occupational selection for both sexes, though to a lesser extent for men (Blažev et al., 2024; Croft et al., 2020). Research shows that men and women in gender-atypical occupations face higher rates of romantic relationship dissolution (Yu & Kuo, 2021), with men experiencing lower marriage likelihood (McClintock, 2020). Given these patterns, it appears particularly important to assess the Realistic and Social interest domains, where gender disparities are most pronounced. This dissertation therefore explores the effects of various types of interest congruence in couples on work-family interface, and romantic relationship satisfaction.

1.3. Methodological Challenges in adopting a dyadic perspective

1.3.1. Capturing Congruence

Throughout previous sections, I have emphasized the importance of adopting an interdependence perspective (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) when evaluating couple-level outcomes and dyadic processes. In this final section of the introduction, I outline methodological approaches for considering partner interdependence in relational research. These approaches are commonly used in studies of assortative mating and dispositional effects on dyadic outcomes (Kenny et al., 2006; Luo & Klohnen, 2005) and will be applied here to assess the interpersonal relevance of vocational interests.

Research shows that the way interest congruence is measured has a major impact on its estimated validity in predicting career outcomes (Nye et al., 2017; Tracey, 2003; Xu & Li, 2020). Congruence indices emphasize different aspects of the RIASEC model, and only some align with Holland's assumption of a circular or hexagonal structure. In career counseling practice, this means that the choice of congruence index can lead to different occupational recommendations for the same interest profile (Su et al., 2015). To bring clarity, Xu and Li (2020) categorize congruence indices into three groups: top-letter(s)-oriented approaches,

profile-based empirical approaches, and profile-based conceptual approaches. Table 1 provides a summary of how these indicators are computed.

Table 1

The Summary of Congruence Operationalizations

		Adherence to the theorized structure	Calculation
Top-letter(s) congruence	**Based on individual's top interest type(s)**		given two Holland code profiles $X_1X_2X_3$ and $Y_1Y_2Y_3$ where the subscripts indicate the first, second, and third code letters:
	First letter distance (Holland, 1973): agreement of the top RIASEC scale score	Yes, the normative hexagon	Each pair of letters is assigned a congruence value based on their relationship: Corresponding letter - 4; Adjacent letter – 3; Alternate letter – 2; Opposite letter - 1
	3-letter codes (e.g. C index by Brown & Gore (1994)): agreement of the top three letters	Yes, the normative hexagon	$C = 3\ (X_1, Y_1) + 2\ (X_2, Y_2) + 1\ (X_3, Y_3)$; Here, corresponding letters are asigned a value 3, adjacent 2, alternate 1, and opposite 0
Profile-based congruence	**Based on empirical congruenceased of scale scores**		Here, X denotes a scale score reported for one role, and Y for the other (e.g. each partner in a couple, two employees, or a candidate and a job position)
	Polynomial regression: Operationalizes congruence using the estimated score of a congruence criterion (e.g., job performance) in a regression model (Edwards, 1994; Nye et al., 2018).	No, computed separately for each RIASEC type	$Z = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Y + b_3X^2 + b_4XY + b_5Y^2$ Here, the outcome variable Z is regressed on the predictors (X and Y), their respective squared terms (X^2 and Y^2) for non linear effects, and their interaction
	Dyadic response surface analysis: tests simple main effects of two predictors along with the effects of their congruence on two interdependent outcomes		$Z_f = b_{0f} + b_{1f}X + b_{2f}Y + b_{3f}X^2 + b_{4f}XY + b_{5f}Y^2 + e_f$ $Z_m = b_{0m} + b_{1m}X + b_{2m}Y + b_{3m}X^2 + b_{4m}XY + b_{5m}Y^2 + e_m$ $e_f \sim\sim e_m$
	Conceptual congruence quantifies the similarity or complementarity of a		Given that X denotes a scale score reported for one role, and Y for the other (e.g. women and men, candidate and average employee)

specific dyad and applies apriori considerations		
Euclidean distance	Yes, the normative hexagon and Prediger's (1982) dimensional model	Profile-level similarity $D = SQRT((X_{People-Things} - Y_{People-Things})^2 + (X_{Ideas-Data} - Y_{Ideas-Data})^2)$
	No, computed separately for each RIASEC type	Trait-wise similarity (one-dimensional formula in the case of comparisons of each pair's scores on each RIASEC interest type) $D = SQRT\ (X_{Realistic} - Y_{Realistic})^2)$
Angular agreement	Yes, the normative hexagon and the dimensional model	Two operationalisations are possible: a) D/90, where D represents the angular discrepancy between two role's vectors on the P/T–I/D plane b) the application of the structural summary method (SSM; Gurtman & Balakrishnan, 1998
Profile deviance	No	the square root of the aggregated squared difference between RIASEC scores for two roles
Profile correlation	No	Three operationalisations are possible: a) Item-level profile similarity Pearson correlation between all assessed items for each role, based on the organization of responses on the applied interest inventory b) Scale-level profile similarity Pearson correlation between six average RIASEC scores of all dimensions for each role c) Scale-item-level profile similarity As the Item-level profile similarity but includes only the items of the specific RIASEC type

Among the measures of congruence applied in vocational research, top-letter(s) congruence, which relies only on the rank order of interests, has become less common in recent literature because it disregards important information, such as the intensity of endorsement for each interest type and the least preferred or disliked options. Profile correlation, by contrast, has demonstrated greater stability and stronger predictive power than alternative indices (Schultz et al., 2017). Empirical findings support its predictive validity for career outcomes, including college success, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions (Allen & Robbins, 2010; Tracey et al., 2012; Xu & Li, 2020). Unlike Euclidean distance or angular agreement, which depend on normative RIASEC structures, profile correlation is independent of structural assumptions, such as the two-dimensional People–Things and Ideas–Data arrangement. Xu and Li (2020) emphasize that while circular order relations among RIASEC types are supported at the sample level, individual profiles often deviate from this normative pattern. For example, interests considered opposite in the normative model, such as Artistic and Conventional, may coexist in the same individual (Tracey, 2008). Such discrepancies highlight the risk of inaccuracies when population-level structures are inappropriately applied to individual profiles, underscoring the importance of nuanced approaches to operationalizing vocational congruence at the couple level.

To examine couple-level similarity and assortment mechanisms, similarity and dissimilarity indices will be applied. Within the broader concept of partner similarity, different congruence indices test various similarity hypotheses, each capturing distinct qualities of similarity. For example, some indices may capitalize more on whether partners share their dominant interests (e.g. profile correlation which measures the pattern of responses) whether partners share their dominant interests (e.g., profile correlation, which measures the pattern of responses), whereas others are sensitive to mismatches in interest elevation or intensity (e.g., profile deviance, which reflects both elevation and pattern). Accordingly, multiple operationalizations of partners' vocational interest similarity will be employed in this dissertation. Beyond the effects of interest types and their similarity, profile characteristics such as elevation and differentiation will also be evaluated.

1.3.2. Correcting for Stereotype Accuracy in the Analysis of Profile Similarity

Stereotype accuracy refers to the tendency for dyad members to appear similar not due to actual similarity but because they respond in a stereotypical manner. Since this problem has been noted by Cronbach (1955), it has also been named as the problem of normativeness.

Failing to account for normativeness, the mean level of responses to items in the profile, can lead to inflated similarity estimates, distorting true distinctive similarity by reflecting shared cultural values, social desirability, or response biases.

To control for stereotype accuracy at the sample level, Kenny et al. (2006) propose the pseudo-couple analysis, where data recruited from a sample of dyads is recombined in a way that each person is randomly paired with a person who is not their actual partner. This method determines whether actual partners are more similar than randomly paired individuals. Furr (2008) notes individuals may vary in their endorsement of the stereotype such that some individuals endorse the stereotype more than others. Therefore, pair-level strategies which decompose the similarity between each pair of profiles into elements of normativeness or distinctiveness are appropriate. Rogers et al. (2018) refined Furr's (2008) approach, defining overall similarity as the correlation between two raw vocational profiles and distinctive similarity as the similarity in partners' deviations from the average person. A normative, average profile is a global mean profile that includes scores averaged across all individuals (of the same gender in the case of heterosexual couples), describing the profile of the average person. Controlling for normativeness typically lowers similarity estimates but provides a more accurate assessment (Rogers et al., 2018). For instance, Rogers et al. (2018) found that Big Five trait profile similarity dropped from 0.39 to 0.02 after adjusting for normativeness. This dissertation employs both sample-level and pair-level strategies to address stereotype accuracy.

1.3.3. Predicting Outcomes in a Dyadic Design

To examine how one partner's attributes and behaviors influence the other's outcomes, a dyadic analysis of mixed independent variables is required. Here I briefly present the Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) as a conceptual model that accounts for the non-independence in couple-data and enables researchers to explore mutual interdependence in relationships. This approach accounts for between-dyad variation (differences between dyads) and within-dyad variation (differences between individuals within a dyad).

Actor–Partner Interdependence Model

In this study, each dyad consists of two members, each with a specific vocational interest assumed to relate to two outcomes. Three estimation techniques can be applied: pooled

regression, multilevel modelling, and structural equation modelling, however this study applies the latter.

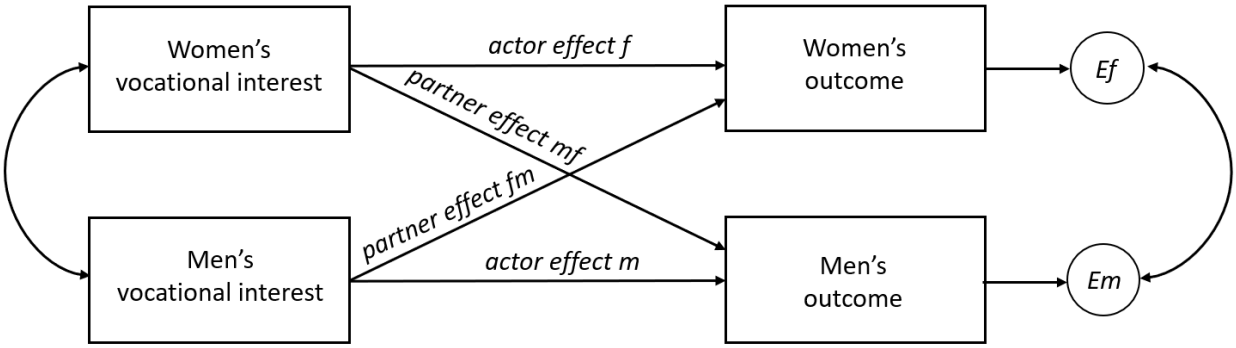
Written in the form of two linear equations, where Y_m and Y_f are the man's and woman's outcomes, X_m and X_f are their respective vocational interests (centered around the grand mean across both men and women). Here, the partner effect, p_{fm}, is the effect of the man's interest on his partner's outcome (e.g. relationship satisfaction), and p_{mf} is the effect of the woman's interests on her partner's outcome.

$$Y_m = a_m X_m + p_{mf} X_f + e_m, \qquad (1.1)$$
$$Y_f = p_{fm} X_m + a_f X_f + e_f.$$

In distinguishable dyads, members differ on a within-dyad variable: for instance, gender in heterosexual couples, or roles in mother - daughter and supervisor - subordinate pairs. The model is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Diagrammatic Illustration of the Actor Partner Interdependence Model



Although the sizes of actor and partner effects are independent, specific combinations of these effects are particularly relevant to the study of couples. Following Kenny and Cook (1999), four patterns emerge in relationships research. In the *Actor-Oriented Pattern* outcomes are influenced only by one's own traits. Kenny et al., (2006) propose that if a researcher believes that a process is individualistic, and actor only, it is still necessary to estimate partner effects to show that they are zero. For instance, if vocational interests are related only to the person's own

work-family interface, the individualistic perspective should yet be validated because, if there were unestimated partner effects, the estimated actor effects would be biased. In the *Partner-Oriented Pattern* outcomes are affected by the partner's traits rather than one's own. In the *Couple-Oriented Pattern* actor and partner effects are equal, meaning both partners equally influence each other. Finally, in the *Social Comparison Pattern*, actor and partner effects are similar in magnitude but opposite in sign. This pattern implies that the outcome increases when the difference between own score and the partner's score increases. As an example, men's Social interests might promote their experiences of enrichment of the family role with characteristics of the working role since they might transfer caregiving skills from one role to the other. However, if their partner, a woman, also has high Social interests, that might produce lower experiences of work-family enrichment in a man, since he might in that case accept their gender-normative breadwinner role and leave the caregiving role to their partner.

The Dyadic Response Surface Analysis

To examine (dis)similarity effects while accounting for each partner's individual impact on interdependent outcomes, we apply Dyadic Response Surface Analysis (DRSA). If a single between-dyad outcome (e.g., household income) is analysed, Response Surface Analysis (RSA; Schönbrodt, 2016; Shanock et al., 2010) is an appropriate tool for a graphical and statistical interpretation of the regression equation in a three-dimensional plot. For two interdependent (dyadic) outcome variables, the dyadic response surface analysis defined by two polynomial regressions can be applied. While DRSA is increasingly used in relationship research (Humberg et al., 2019), its application in vocational psychology is novel. This study is the first to explore the similarity effects of Holland's vocational interests in romantic partners within a work-family context.

Combining the APIM with the response surface analysis (RSA), based on the polynomial regression, DRSA estimates polynomial regression coefficients for linear actor, curvilinear actor, linear partner, curvilinear partner, and interaction effects. The operationalization of similarity in DRSA doesn't rely on a single parameter, a departure from conventional measures such as difference scores and profile correlations. The interpretation of the congruence effects is instead based on the combination of additional parameters which define the shape and position of the response surface in a three-dimensional space (for details and to avoid the persistent misconceptions related to the interpretation of these parameters, see Humberg et al., 2019). In the application of this method, this study will compare each dyadic polynomial regression model with a model including only linear main effects to test whether

simpler models are equally able to explain the association between interests and satisfaction in couples.

1.4. Research Questions, Objectives, and Hypotheses of the Present Dissertation

Based on the theoretical and methodological considerations presented in this introductory chapter, the present dissertation comprises four empirical studies aimed at examining the role of vocational interests in the formation of romantic relationships and couple functioning. The objective of this dissertation is to provide an empirical evaluation and interpretation of the application of Holland's model to the research of assortative mating, ideal-partner standards, relationship satisfaction, and the work-family interface.

To achieve these aims, the set of four studies was conducted. The studies used two different measures of vocational interests and combined data from two samples of heterosexual couples and one sample of heterosexual individuals who were not in a romantic relationship. These studies focus on various aspects of romantic relationship functioning and union formation, ultimately validating Holland's theory in the domain of relationship functioning.

Study 1 (Banov et al., 2023) examined assortment in vocational interests among 215 heterosexual romantic partners using the Croatian adaptation of the *Self-Directed Search* inventory (SDS; Holland, 1994; Šverko & Babarović, 2006). Similarity was assessed at two levels: (1) scale scores for each interest type (variable-centered approach; VCA) and (2) intra-couple similarity across the full item-based vocational profile (couple-centered approach; CCA). Congruence was operationalized using profile correlations and Euclidean distances. A pseudo-couple approach was also applied to control for normative similarity, ensuring that observed effects were not merely cultural.

Hypothesis 1.1 - Positive assortment will be confirmed for each interest type as well as the overall interest profile which considers all interest items simultaneously.

The study further provides a test for three possible mechanisms of assortment in vocational interests: first, the initial active preferential selection based on a preference for a similar partner before relationship initiation; second, convergence, with similarity growing later in the relationship due to partner interactions, and third, a passive mechanism social homogamy which would explain the similarity of partners with a simple propensity of similar candidate in

the immediate proximity and social environment of the individual. Evidence of interest congruence would support, but not conclusively prove, preferential selection. Stronger similarity among longer-term couples would suggest convergence. Greater similarity among couples matched on demographic factors would be consistent with social homogamy.

Hypothesis 1.2 - Relationship length will not be related to evidence of assortment in vocational interests.

Hypothesis 1.3 - Demographic characteristics indicative of social homogamy (level of education, age, and their interaction) will show small or no relations with assortment in vocational interests.

Finally, the study examined whether systematic partner matching on vocational interests could be explained as a by-product of assortment in other stable individual differences, particularly personality traits.

Hypothesis 1.4 - Vocational interests will be significant predictors of the forming of romantic couples over and above the similarity in the Big Five personality traits.

Study 2 (Banov et al., 2022) examines the intrapersonal and interpersonal effects of vocational interests on two indicators of romantic relationship satisfaction: individuals' perceived relationship quality and satisfaction with partner attributes. The study uses the same community sample as Study 1, consisting of 215 Caucasian heterosexual urban couples who reported their vocational interests and also completed measures of relationship satisfaction, including the *Satisfaction Index* (SI; Simpson, 1987) - a composite measure of satisfaction with partner attributes - and the *Perceived Relationship Quality Components* (PRQC; Fletcher et al., 2000) relationship satisfaction scale. In addition to examining the effects of each RIASEC interest dimension, the study evaluates the predictive validity of two interest profile attributes: differentiation and elevation. Actor partner interdependence models (Kenny et al., 2006) are tested. Based on Holland's (1997) description of the interest types, prior evidence linking them to affiliation motives (Sodano, 2011), and predictive validity for life-outcomes (Stoll et al., 2017), the following hypotheses were formulated:

Hypothesis 2.1 - Realistic and Conventional interests will not exert significant actor and partner effects on the satisfaction with partner characteristics and the perceived relationship quality of romantic partners.

Hypothesis 2.2 - Higher actor and partner relationship satisfaction will be observed (both the satisfaction with partner characteristics and the perceived relationship quality) in individuals with higher Investigative, Artistic, Social, or Enterprising interests.

Hypothesis 2.3 - Higher interest differentiation and elevation will contribute to higher relationship satisfaction (both the satisfaction with partner characteristics and the perceived relationship quality) in romantic partners.

Study 3 (Banov et al., 2024) extends the pivotal investigation by Han and Sears (2019) on the prediction of work-family conflict and work-family enrichment. This study was conducted on a second dyadic sample consisting of 271 heterosexual married, cohabiting, or dating urban couples, all of whom were employed at least part-time. Vocational interests were assessed using the short form of the Personal Globe Inventory (Šverko, 2008; Šverko & Babarović, 2016; Tracey, 2002b; Tracey, 2021). The study employed four subscales of the multidimensional Work-family conflict scale (Carlson et al., 2000; Maslić Seršić & Kurtović, 2020) to measure both directions of conflict (work-to-family and family-to-work), as well as to distinguish whether the conflict arises in the allocation of time or energy devoted to each role. Additionally, the Short measure of work-family enrichment (Kacmar et al., 2014) was used. In this study, the trait level of a single interest scale was considered, along with two of Holland's secondary constructs, interest differentiation and elevation, in order to account for the multivariate nature of each partner's interest profiles. To simultaneously test the actor and partner effects of two predictors (e.g., each partner's interests) on two interdependent outcome variables (e.g., each partner's work-family conflict), the APIM (Kenny et al., 2006) was applied, considering the interdependence of predictors. In addition to evaluating the main effects of Holland's interest themes, the effects of couple (dis)similarity were tested using DRSA.

There is a lack of research on the interpersonal effects of vocational interests; however, hypotheses can be drawn from prior findings suggesting that certain interest profile characteristics contribute to positive relationship outcomes (Mayrand et al., 2023) and from evidence linking Social interests to caregiving tendencies (Holland, 1987).

Hypothesis 3.1 - Investigative, Artistic, Social, and Enterprising interests, will exert positive actor effects on individual's own work-family enrichment and negative actor on both work-family conflict and family-work conflict.

Hypothesis 3.2 - Social interests will exert positive partner effects on work-family enrichment, but negative partner effects on work-family conflict and family-work conflict.

Previous studies have found that Holland's secondary constructs demonstrate predictive validity. Specifically, greater vocational clarity or differentiation is associated with improved work-related outcomes (Tracey et al., 2014), while elevation is positively related to career exploration and an enthusiastic style in career counselling (Bullock & Reardon, 2005).

Hypothesis 3.3 - Higher levels of interest differentiation, and higher elevation will positively predict work-family enrichment.

Prior findings suggest that similarity in vocational profiles may enhance couple adjustment (Mayrand et al., 2023), while marital similarity in leisure interests promotes relationship satisfaction (Gonzaga et al., 2010), Therefore,

Hypothesis 3.4 - Partner's interest similarity will positively predict work-family enrichment.

Study 4 (Banov et al., 2025a) combines data from Study 3 and an additional sample of 335 single participants to evaluate the alignment between individuals' vocational self-concepts and their vocational ideal-partner standards. Using the same interest inventory (Personal Globe Inventory-Short (Šverko, 2008; Šverko & Babarović, 2016; Tracey, 2002b; Tracey, 2021), participants rated their own vocational interests and those they desired in an ideal partner. Various dimensions of similarity were evaluated. Specifically, the study evaluates the similarity between individuals' self-concepts and their ideal-partner representations (self-ideal similarity) in both singles and couples. For couples, the study further examines alignment in vocational interests between romantic partners (actual partner congruence), agreement between partners' ideal preferences (ideals agreement), and whether one partner's vocational characteristics match the ideal described by the other (partner-ideal congruence). Finally, it explores the predictive validity of these congruence indices for relationship satisfaction among women and men in a relationship. Given the gender normative component of psychological and interest profiles (Du et al., 2024; Furr, 2008), the gender-shift pattern of preferences was tested, in line with the propositions of the social role theory (Cunningham & Russell, 2004):

Hypothesis 4.1: Heterosexual individuals will exhibit stronger assortative preferences for vocational characteristics that are less gender-typed. In other words, for both singles and couples, trait-wise self-ideal similarity will be stronger for the Ideas-Data and Prestige dimensions compared to the People-Things dimension.

Hypothesis 4.2: In couples, partner-ideal congruence will be higher than both self-ideal similarity and actual partner congruence.

Hypothesis 4.3: Among coupled participants, distinctive partner-ideal congruence will positively predict relationship satisfaction for both women and men.

2. ELABORATION

This section critically reviews the results of the four empirical studies presented in this dissertation, addressing the overarching theme of vocational interests as a dispositional factor in close relationships. The review is structured to reflect both theoretical development and empirical contributions across several key areas. I begin with an examination of assortative mating for vocational interests (Section 2.1), drawing on findings from Studies 1 and 4. These results are contextualized within the broader literature on partner similarity, and are further evaluated through a meta-analytic reanalysis of the collected data to offer a comprehensive assessment of partner concordance based on vocational interests. Special attention is given to the mechanisms driving assortment, with a focused case study on social homogamy in relation to Investigative interests. In this and subsequent sections effect sizes are interpreted based on Cohen's guidelines (Cohen, 1992), with values of $d = 0.20$ or $r = .10$ considered small, $d = 0.50$ or $r = .30$ medium, and $d = 0.70$ or $r = .50$ large.

The second major theme (Section 2.2) explores the application of vocational interest measures to the assessment of ideal partner preferences. Specifically, I extend the elaboration on findings from Study 4, exploring whether individuals' own vocational interests align with their preferences in an ideal partner, whether these preferences correspond to the actual partner's vocational interests, and how gender differences shape ideal-partner vocational profiles. Section 2.3 shifts focus to the role of vocational interests in predicting relationship satisfaction. This section synthesizes findings on how RIASEC types contribute to individual and dyadic romantic satisfaction. Section 2.4 then extends the investigation to the work-family interface, examining how individual and partner vocational interests predict both work-family enrichment and conflict across work and family roles, including actor, partner and similarity effects. Throughout the chapter, methodological considerations are integrated into each subsection, offering a critical reflection on the design, measurement, and analytic approaches used. The final section (2.5) outlines the theoretical and practical implications of these findings, highlighting the scientific contributions of each study within the broader field of personality, career development, and relationship research.

2.1. Assortative Mating for Vocational Interests

This dissertation investigates the degree of congruence in vocational interests between romantic partners, employing both VCA and CCA across two independent samples. It utilizes two established vocational interest inventories and multiple methods of operationalizing congruence. Study 1 applied the *Self-Directed Search* (SDS, Holland, 1994; Šverko & Babarović, 2006; N = 215; Banov et al., 2023), revealing at the VCA level significant assortative correlations for all RIASEC dimensions except Enterprising. In contrast, Study 4 used the *Personal Globe Inventory-Short* (Šverko, 2008; Šverko & Babarović, 2016; Tracey, 2002b; N = 271; Banov et al., 2025a) and found modest VCA evidence of assortment, limited to Investigative, Social, and Enterprising interests. While overall profile similarity was statistically significant in both studies, its magnitude was lower in Study 4.

To address inconsistencies and strengthen generalizability, a meta-analysis was conducted that combined the present samples with prior research findings (Çoğaltay & Karadağ, 2015). This analysis tested Hypothesis 1.1 that positive assortative correlations would be observed for each individual interest type, as well as for the overall vocational interest profile encompassing all six RIASEC dimensions simultaneously. To date, only a few studies have examined vocational interest similarity in romantic couples using most consistently the VCA. Mayrand et al. (2023) examined 104 French Canadian couples using the SDS, finding modest similarity across most interest types, with moderate similarity for Conventional interests (r_p = .41). Grotevant et al. (1977), using the 291-item Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory on 114 American couples with biological children and 101 couples with adoptive children, finding mostly non-significant assortative correlations ranging from .00 to .28. Using the 30-item General interest structure test, Etzel et al. (2018) examined 1231 mother-father dyads in Germany and found stronger assortative correlations ranging from .36 to .56. Only three studies reported item-level profile correlations for each RIASEC interest separately (Banov et al., 2023; Banov et al., 2025a; Mayrand et al., 2023), while another study provided item-level profile correlations for the overall vocational profile (Etzel et al., 2018). Additionally, Grotevant and colleagues (1977) reported trait-wise Pearson correlations between all men and women in their sample for two datasets. To synthesize findings across studies, Pearson correlation coefficients were transformed using Fisher's approximate variance-stabilizing transformation (z-transformation), combined, and then converted back to Pearson's r. Statistical heterogeneity, reflecting variation in effects beyond chance, was assessed using I^2 statistics, with higher values indicating greater heterogeneity.

Table 2 presents the results of separate random-effects meta-analyses for each RIASEC interest type and overall interest profile similarity between partners, analysed using both VCA and CCA.

Table 2

Meta-Analytic Results: Effect-Size Summary for Variable-Centered and Couple-Centered Approaches

	N samples	Total sample size ($N_{couples}$)	Combined Pearson *r*	*p*	LLCI	ULCI	I^2 heterogeneity (%)
			VCA				
Realistic	5	1932	.19	.001	.05	.34	84.77
Investigative	5	1932	.28	.001	.07	.51	92.46
Artistic	5	1932	.24	.01	.03	.46	92.38
Social	5	1932	.20	.05	-.01	.43	93.22
Enterprising	5	1932	.28	.001	.08	.51	91.89
Conventional	5	1932	.12	>.05	-.05	.30	89.57
			CCA				
Realistic	3	590	.21	>.05	-.05	.48	0.00
Investigative	3	590	.17	>.05	-.24	.58	0.00
Artistic	3	590	.17	>.05	-.12	.46	0.00
Social	3	590	.25	.05	.01	.49	0.00
Enterprising	3	590	.23	>.05	-.03	.50	0.00
Conventional	3	590	.33	.01	.08	.57	0.00
Overall items	4	1821	.18	.09	-.02	.38	0.00

No publication bias was identified. As seen in Table 2, the meta-analysis of VCA assortative coefficients indicates substantial heterogeneity across samples (I^2 ranging from 84.77 to 93.22). The VCA data representing bivariate correlations between observed RIASEC scores of women and men partially confirm the Hypothesis 1.1: small assortative correlations were significant for Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, and Enterprising interests (ranging from .11 to .18), for Social interests were marginally significant, while for Conventional interests were non-significant. Confidence intervals were generally wide. Evidenced small effects were comparable to meta-analytic findings for traits such as locus of control, openness, positive affectivity, psychopathy, emotional intelligence, and conscientiousness (Mehić, 2021). Moderate effects (from .19 to .29) were observed for Investigative, Artistic, and Enterprising interests, similar to effect sizes reported for assortative mating in Machiavellianism and

narcissism (Mehić, 2021). No negative effects were observed, indicating that assortment for vocational interests is not negative.

The meta-analysis of CCA profile correlations yielded mixed findings. It combined data from four studies (Banov et al., 2023; Banov et al., 2025a; Mayrand et al., 2023; Etzel et al., 2018), each of which reported modest but statistically significant item-level profile similarity between partners (mean *r* ranged from .12 to .24; *SD*s from .17 to .76). Despite including all samples used in the VCA approach (except for the sample by Grotevant et al., 1977), the heterogeneity of the data could not be accounted for. Confidence intervals were wide, and the total sample size for the CCA analyses represented only 31% of the VCA sample, reducing statistical power.

When analysing item-level CCA coefficients separately by RIASEC dimension, modest to moderate partner similarity emerged only for Social and Conventional interests. Following Borenstein's (2009) guidelines for interpreting meta-analytic findings, it would not be inappropriate to conclude that other interest domains exhibit no effect. Rather, despite limitations, the CCA approach still identified robust evidence of positive assortment for two interest types. Notably, the non-significant overall profile correlation pertains only to the first-level (item-level) CCA analyses. The limited sample size available for CCA analyses at the level of individual RIASEC interests, as opposed to the overall vocational interest profile, constrained the statistical power of this part of the meta-analysis. Moreover, the included studies employed different methods to partial out the normative component of profile similarity, adding further complexity to the synthesis. Some studies corroborated the significance of profile similarity correlations using the pseudo-couple approach (Banov et al., 2023; Etzel et al., 2018), while others further decomposed raw profile correlations into normative and distinctive components (Rogers et al., 2018; Furr, 2008). Etzel et al. (2018) in particular, employed the structural summary method to isolate variance attributable to measurement error and to account for the circumplex structure of vocational interests. Although these additional analytical strategies were not formally incorporated into the current meta-analysis, their results consistently demonstrated that romantic partners share a distinctive and statistically significant similarity in their interest profiles, one that surpasses what would be expected by chance alone.

In sum, the results of the meta-analysis provide limited evidence of significant positive assortment for vocational interests when the CCA is applied. In the samples analysed in this dissertation, Study 4 (Banov et al., 2025a) further confirmed that profile similarity reflects both a shared distinctive component between romantic partners and broader normative patterns.

Consistent with findings from Study 1 (Banov et al., 2023) and prior research on vocational interests (Etzel et al., 2019) and personality traits (Rogers et al., 2018), a substantial portion of the observed similarity appears to be attributable to stereotype accuracy. Pseudo-couples also display positive similarity, although at lower levels than actual couples.

Another important consideration is why do VCA and CCA approaches yield only partially converging conclusions? As noted by Luo and Klohnen (2005) and Luo (2017), these methods capture distinct aspects of similarity. VCA estimates overall gender-linked similarity patterns across couples, indicating which interest types are more commonly shared among men and women in relationships. In contrast, CCA focuses on within-dyad congruence, offering a couple-specific perspective. Since VCA does not account for variation at the dyadic level, discrepancies between VCA and CCA outcomes are expected.

Vocational interest congruence has long posed methodological challenges (Cronbach & Glaser, 1953; Etzel et al., 2019). Various methods, such as Euclidean distance, angular agreement, and profile correlations, have been employed to quantify similarity. These metrics align with theoretical models such as Prediger's People-Things and Data-Ideas dimensions (Ertl & Hartmann, 2019; Tracey, 2002). A review by Xu and Li (2020) identified the profile correlation as the most valid approach to capturing congruence within Holland's framework, as it assesses similarity based on the shape of response patterns across all items, rather than on scale scores alone. Unlike metrics that reflect interest elevation or rank-order, profile correlations are uniquely suited to evaluate pattern similarity within each RIASEC dimension (Tracey et al., 2012). However, it remains unclear which operationalization of vocational congruence best reflects meaningful partner similarity. Congruence may reflect interest rank-ordering, preferred versus disliked interests, or more general occupational competence, rather than the intrinsic enjoyment of vocational activities - integral to the measurement of interests in both the SDS (Holland, 1994; Šverko & Babarović, 2006) and PGI-Short (Šverko, 2008; Šverko & Babarović, 2016; Tracey, 2002b). To capture this complexity, this dissertation applied a multi-method approach, incorporating different measurement instruments, theoretical models, and congruence metrics.

2.1.1. Testing the Mechanisms of Assortment for Vocational Interests

Convergence

Hypothesis 1.2 proposed that relationship length would not be associated with assortative mating in vocational interests. This hypothesis was previously tested in the first sample of couples (Banov et al., 2023), with results indicating no evidence that partner convergence contributes to similarity in vocational interests, whether assessed through VCA or CCA analyses. For completeness, I now present the corresponding analysis for the second sample of 271 couples (Banov et al., 2024, 2025), with the summary of results in Table 3.

Table 3

Variable-Centered Approach Correlations Between Vocational Interests of Women and Men and Respective Partial Correlations Testing the Mechanisms of Assortment

	r	r_{c1}	r_{c2}	r_{c3}
Realistic	.05	.05	.05	.08
Investigative	.20***	.19***	.20***	.13*
Artistic	.08	.08	.08	.07
Social	.13*	.12*	.13*	.14*
Enterprising	.19**	.19**	.19**	.18**
Conventional	.01	.05	.03	.03

Note. r_{c1} – partial correlation controlling for relationship length; r_{c2} - partial correlation controlling for log-transformed relationship length; r_{c3} - partial correlation controlling for women and men's respective age and educational level and their two interaction terms

After controlling for relationship length and its log-transformed values, VCA partial correlations remained consistent. Significant associations persisted only for Investigative, Social, and Enterprising interests. Additionally, neither raw nor distinctive overall partner similarity in vocational interests correlated with relationship length, reinforcing the conclusion that observed couple similarity is unlikely to result from convergence. These findings support Hypothesis 1.2.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this cross-sectional approach in evaluating convergence. While vocational interests tend to be stable, they also exhibit malleability (Hoff et al., 2018; Xu & Tracey, 2016). Convergence represents a form of social plasticity, where individuals adjust their traits in response to their partner. This social influence

may be mutual (both partners influencing each other) or unidirectional (one partner shaping the other's traits). It may also be reversible (allowing individuals to adapt to successive partners) or permanent (with the effects of previous relationships persisting in future pairings; Class & Dingemanse, 2022). A robust investigation of convergence as a mechanism of assortative mating would require partitioning the observed phenotype into individual-specific and plastic components, something only achievable through longitudinal data with repeated measures. One 20-year longitudinal study by Schultz et al. (2017), conducted with a cohort of couples engaged in the 1930s and followed up in the 1950s, found evidence for significant partner convergence specifically in Artistic (r = .15) and Conventional (r = .10) interests. This demonstrates that while interests are generally stable, they can change in tandem within a relationship over a long period. The generalizability of these convergence effects beyond the specific sociohistorical context of their sample remains an open question.

Social homogamy

Testing the potential indices of social homogamy mechanism, here I report findings for the second sample of 271 couples (Banov et al., 2024, 2025). As expected, significant assortment was observed for age (r = .93, p < .001) and education level (r = .43, p < .001). I re-computed partial VCA correlations between partners' vocational interests, this time while controlling for participants' age, education, and their interaction. The VCA correlations remained stable and significant. The only notable reduction was observed for Investigative interests, where the cross-partner correlation decreased from r = .25 (p < .001) to r_c = .18 (p < .01), though it remained significant. This finding mirrors results from the first study (Banov et al., 2023) and is further discussed in the next section.

Following Luo and Klohnen's (2005) analytical approach, multiple regression analyses predicting intra-pair similarity (measured via profile correlations across PGI-Short items) found no significant effects of age, education, or their interactions. Together, findings from both samples suggest that assortative mating for vocational interests is unlikely to be driven primarily by convergence or social homogamy based on age or educational attainment, supporting Hypothesis 1.3. Nonetheless, this conclusion must be interpreted with caution. While the current findings do not support strong effects of social homogamy, they do not rule out its contribution entirely. Patterns of educational sorting differ across societies, and research based on all marriages contracted in Italy, Sweden, and the Czech Republic between 2000 and 2020 shows that both structural opportunity and assortative preferences shape homogamy (Leesch et al., 2024). Geographic and institutional structures influence whom individuals are

likely to meet, and this may indirectly affect partner similarity in vocational interests. This is particularly relevant when considering gender differences in vocational interests (Du et al., 2025; Su et al., 2009) and social role theory (Cunningham & Russell, 2004). Such social and geographic factors can shape both assortative mating patterns and the availability of potential partners within different vocational sectors.

In Croatia, gendered vocational trajectories are evident from adolescence. Research shows that gender stereotypes regarding occupations and differential self-competence beliefs are present among both youth and their parents, with girls favouring people-oriented roles and boys feeling more competent in STEM fields (Babarović et al., 2023; Blažev et al., 2024). According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2023), girls are more likely to graduate from grammar (64%) and art schools (70%), while boys dominate industrial craft schools (69%). At the tertiary level, men are overrepresented in engineering (71%), while women dominate in humanities (73%), biomedicine and health (75%), and social sciences (66%). Although gender differences become less pronounced at the doctoral level in some fields, such as natural sciences (51% women) and social sciences (53%), they remain substantial in engineering (76% men) and biomedicine/biotechnical sciences (69% women). Among employed citizens, gender segregation persists across many sectors of the workforce. Men are overrepresented in agriculture, mining, construction, transportation, and utility services (65–90%), while women are more prevalent in education, healthcare, social work, and service sectors (66–80%). Given the high levels of assortative mating for age and education observed in our data, it is plausible that structural opportunities such as meeting a partner within the same field of study or professional environment, contribute to partner's vocational interest similarity.

However, for those individuals working in professions predominantly composed of their own gender, opportunities to meet a partner with similar vocational interests may be inherently limited. Evolutionary, economic and social psychological research consistently suggests that patterns of romantic and sexual behaviour can vary depending on the gender composition of social environments (Adkins et al., 2015; Pestel, 2021; Uecker & Regnerus, 2010). Although the current findings do not provide robust evidence for convergence or broad social homogamy mechanisms, they highlight the complexity of vocational assortative mating. The observed patterns likely reflect a multifaceted interplay of structural opportunities, cultural norms, and individual preferences. These results underscore the importance of future research that systematically examines how these factors contribute to the vocational interest similarity of romantic partnerships.

The Role of Similarity in Big Five Traits

Hypothesis 1.4 posits that similarity in Big Five personality traits would show small or no associations with assortative mating in vocational interests. This was assessed in Study 1 (Banov et al., 2023). It can be seen as a special case of the social homogamy hypothesis, where psychological individual differences are used as the basis for matching in another dispositional and motivational characteristic, rather than the classical approach that focuses on demographic characteristics.

Prior research shows modest assortative mating for personality traits (Kardum et al., 2019; Luo, 2017). It is yet unclear whether the positive assortment for personality overlaps with partner's vocational interest similarity or the processes originating this similarity are separate. Theoretical arguments suggest some alignment, as certain traits correlate with specific interest types (Ackerman & Heggestad, 1997; Armstrong & Anthoney, 2009). Recent meta-analyses confirm moderate links, especially between Enterprising and Extraversion, and Artistic and Openness (Hurtado Rúa et al., 2019), patterns that also appear in the present data (Study 1, Supplemental Table 1). Nevertheless, vocational interests and personality are distinct constructs (Hogan & Sherman, 2019; McCrae et al., 2021). Studies suggest a shared genetic basis for at least some traits and interests (Kandler et al., 2011; Wille & De Fruyt, 2014). Heritability estimates for various occupational interests range from 37% (for interests in elementary education and supervision) to 61% (for interests in social sciences; Schermer & Vernon, 2008; van der Linden et al., 2022). Environmental factors such as social class, educational experiences, and occupational environments may also shape both personality and interests over time (Hoff et al., 2018). These influences may contribute to correlated plasticity in dispositional characteristics (Wille & De Fruyt, 2014). If individuals cluster into social groups based on personality traits, this could create a passive form of assortment for interests, reflecting social homogamy.

In our study, partner similarity in personality traits did not predict interest similarity. Profile correlations for individual traits were not significant predictors of vocational interests' similarity, for each RIASEC type and the profile similarity measured with profile correlations or Euclidean distances. Testing the correct partner choice prediction model in logistic regression models, only interest profile congruence significantly distinguished real from pseudo-couples while personality similarity was excluded in stepwise selection. Before ruling out a connection between assortative mating for personality and vocational interests, it's important to consider methodological limitations in our study. While previous research has

found partner similarity in Big Five traits (Leikas et al., 2018; Liu & Zhang, 2023), our younger, non-cohabiting sample showed low and inconsistent similarity. Significant CCA differences between real and pseudo-couples were modest—only for overall personality profiles (d = .20, p < .01) and Neuroticism (d = .27, p < .05). A meta-analysis (Mehić, 2021) also found that real couples show higher similarity, especially for Openness (r = .17), though differences in demographics and sample sizes may explain the variability.

Importantly, this study used the short-form Big Five Inventory (Benet-Martínez & John, 1998), with only 8 to 10 items per trait. Profile correlations are sensitive to instrument length, and longer scales generally yield more reliable results. This suggests our null findings for personality-interest similarity are best interpreted through overall profile similarity and aligns with meta-analytic evidence recommending longer measures when evaluating trait–interest links (Hurtado Rúa et al., 2019). Further, reducing complex profiles to single scores, may also obscure meaningful patterns of variation (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Nye et al., 2017), as discussed above regarding the selection of congruence indices. The results obtained indicate that, if stereotype accuracy affects both personality and interest assessments, these effects seem to operate independently.

An alternative conceptualization worth exploring is the General Factor of Personality, which reflects socially desirable traits and has been linked to people-oriented interests like Social and Enterprising (van der Linden et al., 2022). Other traits—such as cognitive abilities or emotional intelligence—may also influence partner interest similarity and warrant further investigation (Pässler et al., 2015; Schermer & Vernon, 2008). Replications with more nuanced measurements of personality traits and a multivariate approach to operationalizing congruence are needed to capture the full complexity of partner congruence in interests and personality traits.

2.1.2. The Case of Social Homogamy Assortment for Investigative Interests

A slight reduction in cross-partner partial correlation for Investigative interests was observed in both samples (Banov et al., 2023; Banov et al., 2025a) after controlling for men's and women's age, educational level, and their interaction effects. An additional analysis controlling only for the educational level interaction yielded a marginally significant coefficient (r_c = .12, p = .05), suggesting that partner similarity in Investigative interests may be partially explained by educational assortment. However, as the study is correlational, these interpretations should be made cautiously. Investigative interests are established predictors of

educational attainment (Hoff et al., 2020), and careers in Investigative and Enterprising domains often require higher formal education (Stoll et al., 2017). The direction and pattern of mixed assortment for Investigative interests and educational level warrants further exploration.

The role of educational homogamy in social stratification has been widely debated among sociologists and geneticists (Schwartz et al., 2021). Hugh-Jones et al. (2016) demonstrated a genetic component to assortative mating for education and warned that if social inequality is partly driven by genetic inequality, inequalities in society may be more resistant to change. Assortment on talents not only has genetic implications but may also affect mating dynamics and relationship success. At the same time, hypogamy, where women increasingly marry men with lower educational levels, has become more common (Blossfeld, Scherer, et al., 2024) This trend may contribute to greater competition for highly educated male partners, potentially affecting relationship stability. Although social acceptance of hypogamy is growing, homogamous unions (in terms of education) remain more stable overall. Structural gender disparities in certain academic and career fields, particularly STEM (Leesch et al., 2024), may further limit opportunities for both vocational and educational homogamy. The consequences of these patterns also extend to the next generation: highly educated homogamous couples tend to delay childbirth but are more likely to have second and third children (Nitsche et al., 2018), and their children are more likely to attain tertiary education themselves (Blossfeld, Katrňák, et al., 2024).

A key question is whether active assortment, preferential mating based on Investigative interests, leads to educational homogamy. That is, do individuals who prefer partners with similar Investigative interests, and thus a shared enjoyment of exploring complex ideas, have a greater chance of meeting in educational settings of the same level? Alternatively, passive assortment may be at play, where individuals are influenced by familial and social group expectations or those with lower educational levels experience stronger constraints in their social and marriage markets. Possibly, both mechanisms may be contemporarily at play, as confirmed for the mixed assortment for education and fluid ability (Reynolds et al., 2000).

Education serves as an indicator of tastes, values, and attitudes, as well as a marker of labour market prospects, earning potential, and socioeconomic status (Blossfeld et al., 2024a), just as vocational interests do, particularly Investigative interests which offer above-average salaries, and are often perceived as prestigious (Stoll et al., 2017). Therefore, analysing self-ideal similarity and ideal partner agreement for Investigative interests while controlling for educational homogamy could help clarify whether assortment for Investigative interests is

influenced by partner preferences for similar educational attainment. To explore this, an additional analysis of VCA correlations was done. Table 4 shows the partial correlation values for these measures, after controlling for both partners' education levels and their interaction.

Table 4

Correlations and Partial Correlations Between Investigative Interests in a Sample of 271 Dual-Earning Couples

	VCA r	VCA r_c
Actual couple congruence	.20***	.12
Ideals agreement	.30***	.24***
Men's Self-ideal similarity	.41***	.36***
Women's Self-ideal similarity	.54***	.49***

Note. r_c - partial correlation controlling for men's and women's respective age, educational level, and two interaction terms.

While self-ideal preferences and partners' ideals agreement are slightly reduced compared to raw Pearson correlations, they remain significant. Notably, individuals continue to show a strong preference for a partner with similar Investigative interests, and moderate similarity in shared ideals persists even after controlling for educational homogamy. In other words, even when accounting for educational homogamy, people still tend to prefer partners who share similar Investigative interests, and these preferences align moderately with their partners' ideals. This suggests that active preference-based assortment (not just structural factors like education) contributes to vocational interest similarity in couples for the Investigative dimension.

Another possibility is that a third factor, such as shared cognitive ability, underlies both patterns of assortment. This is supported by meta-analytic findings showing a moderate association between Investigative interests and general intelligence (ρ = .28, 95% *CI*: 0.24–0.33; Pässler et al., 2015). Evidence suggests that assortative mating for intelligence is primarily driven by active partner selection based on cognitive similarity, with this model being only slightly favoured over social homogamy (Vinkhuyzen et al., 2012). However, other studies, such as Reynolds et al. (2000), using extended twin designs, found mixed support for both active assortment and social homogamy in explaining partner similarities in intelligence and educational level. Their findings suggested that similarity in education, which is moderately heritable, may help explain similarity in fluid intelligence, which shows high heritability. They

also highlighted the importance of analysing related traits within a multivariate framework to better disentangle these overlapping mechanisms. Genetic research further suggests that a large portion, up to two-thirds of the stable variance in vocational interests is genetically influenced, although estimates tend to be lower in family-based studies (Grotevant et al., 1977; Lykken et al., 1993; Schermer & Vernon, 2008). Future studies applying more complex, multivariate assortment models across traits can offer clearer insights into the genetic and environmental factors that shape spousal similarity.

2.2. Ideal-Partner Preferences and Assortment for Vocational Interests

The findings presented above provide some evidence for active assortment in vocational interests. To further explore this mechanism within the constraints of a cross-sectional methodology, Study 4 examined the role of vocational interest similarity preferences, focusing on how individuals evaluate potential romantic partners in the abstract.

The assortment mechanism of initial, active choice of a similar partner due to personal preference implies individuals hold representations of their ideal partner even before the initiation of a relationship. Ideal-partner preferences refer to the attributes people report as desirable in a romantic partner, and the construct is integrated in theories and models explaining how individuals pursue and maintain romantic relationships (Buss, 1989; Finkel & Eastwick, 2015). These personal ideal standards encompass characteristics such as personality, physical and social traits, and earning prospects (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015; Fletcher et al., 2000; Gerlach et al., 2019). The Ideal Standards Model (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000a) asserts that people use ideal-partner representations to evaluate potential and current romantic partners and guide their mate selection and relationship maintenance. Research affirms ideal-partner representations as determinants of mate selection (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Campbell & Fletcher, 2015; Driebe et al., 2024).

2.2.1. Do People's own Vocational Interests Align with their Ideal Partner's Interests?

Study 4 focused on the degree of self-ideal vocational similarity, analysing two independent samples: singles and coupled individuals. Since committed partners may adjust their perception of their current partner to align with their ideals (Driebe et al., 2024), research designs relying on both partner-reports and ideal-partner reports may produce falsely positive preference-matching effects, leading to inconsistent findings (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). To

address this, our study included self-reports from both partners and their ideal-partner reports. Additionally, individuals may adjust their ideals to match their current partner (Gerlach et al., 2019), making studies on singles crucial for researching ideal partner preferences (Eastwick et al., 2025). Research on singles has shown congruence between self-ratings and ideal partner descriptions for personality traits, physical attractiveness, and social resources (Liu et al., 2018; Liu & Zhang, 2023). Study 4 incorporated this approach to assess self-ideal similarity in vocational interests. A direct comparison of effect sizes is cautiously interpreted since the samples partially differ in age structure (averagely, single men were younger than partnered, and single women were older than partnered in Study 4 samples), and although using the same items of the PGI-Short (Tracey, 2016), only the sample of partnered participant responded on the competence-subscale, while both samples filled the subscale measuring the liking of occupational activities and settings. The procedures also differed across relationship contexts since single participants responded on online questionnaires and couples responded in front of psychology students in a paper-pencil method.

Trait Wise Approach

This study examined trait-wise self-ideal similarity in vocational interests, revealing positive correlations across all RIASEC domains for both men and women, whether single or in relationships. The strength of self-ideal similarity varied by interest type: weak to moderate for Realistic and Conventional interests, moderate for Social, moderate to strong for Investigative and Enterprising, and modest to strong for Artistic interests. Self-ideal correlations for Ideas-Data and Prestige ranged from modest to high between women and men in the two samples. Partial support was provided to Hypothesis 4.1 stating that for both single and coupled heterosexual participants, trait-wise self-ideal similarity would be stronger for the Ideas-Data and Prestige dimensions compared to the People-Things dimension. The results indicate that while coupled individuals showed no self-ideal similarity in the People-Things dimension, single women and men displayed modest to moderate similarity self-ideal similarity in this, generally gender-typed interest dimension (Pozzebon et al., 2015; Su et al., 2009).

When comparing mean level self-reported interests to ideal partner preferences, men generally envisioned their ideal partner as more interested in Investigative, Artistic, Enterprising, and largely favouring Social interests, people-oriented and prestigious occupations, but described their ideal partner as largely less interested in Realistic occupations. Similarly, single men preferred a partner with high interest across all domains except Realistic, showing an aspirational preference for people-oriented and prestigious occupations.

Women, on the other hand, described their ideal partner as largely more interested in Realistic and things-oriented occupations, modestly more interested in Investigative and Conventional interests, but less interested in Social and Enterprising domains (the latter only for women in relationships). Notably, women's own self-reported interest in prestigious occupations exceeded their ideal-partner reports.

The results highlight a general pattern of aspirational assortative preferences, where individuals describe an ideal partner as highly interested across various vocational fields, except in domains non-normative for own gender (e.g., men preferring partners with lower Realistic interests and women preferring partners with lower Social interests; see (Du et al., 2025). Previous profile-level analyses indicate that girls are more likely to adhere to a female-stereotypical interest profile, while boys are more likely to follow a male-stereotypical interest profile, with no gender differences found in the likelihood of adopting a generally high- or low-expressed interest profile (Ehrtmann et al., 2019).

Findings of elevated ideal-partner's profile align with previous research on aspirational mate preferences in traits such as physical attractiveness, intelligence, and emotional stability (Liu et al., 2018; Liu & Zhang, 2023). Additionally, the strong preference for Investigative interests may reflect intellectual homogamy, aligning with studies on cognitive similarity in mate selection (Dijkstra et al., 2012).

Profile Level Analysis

Rather than focusing solely on trait-level similarity, this study examined vocational profile similarity, acknowledging that interest-related characteristics extend beyond individual traits. A profile-level approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of how vocational interests align between individuals and their ideal partners (Brauer et al., 2022; Furr, 2008; Rogers et al., 2018).

The findings suggest that individuals' ideal partner preferences are significantly aligned with their own vocational interest profile, supporting again Hypothesis 1.1. Distinctive self-ideal similarity in vocational interests was greater than zero, indicating that people seek partners with vocational interests similar to their own. While both singles and couples displayed modest yet significant distinctive self-ideal similarity, an important distinction emerged: singles exhibited this similarity without showing normative vocational similarity preferences. This suggests that vocational interest alignment might be an individual preference before relationship formation rather than a product of social homogamy or later partner convergence,

providing additional support for the active choice mechanism of assortment. Homogamy preferences, or the attraction to partners with similar characteristics before initiating a relationship, have also been recorded for some, but not all, personality traits among online dating app users (De La Mare & Lee, 2023), as well as for some attitudes and values (Leikas et al., 2018). Similar homogamy preferences have been observed in online dating, where individuals tend to express preferences for partners within the same occupational field (Hitsch et al., 2010) and for attributes such as personality, physical attractiveness, and status (Fales et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2018). These findings can be interpreted through the self-expansion model of relationships (Aron et al., 2013), which suggests that individuals may seek partners with strong vocational interests as a way to expand their own experiences, identities, and perspectives. Partners with pronounced vocational interests may provide more opportunities for intellectual stimulation and personal growth, which aligns with research highlighting the benefits of work-related support in relationships (Halbesleben et al., 2012; Sarpong, 2018).

Two main theoretical perspectives may help explain why vocational similarity fosters attraction. According to the Reinforcement Model (Byrne et al., 1973), individuals are drawn to those with similar interests because shared preferences affirm their own values and contribute to a sense of personal stability. Alternatively, the Information Processing Model (Ajzen, 1974) proposes that similarity serves as a cue for making broader positive inferences about a potential partner: when individuals discover shared vocational interests, they may assume other positive qualities about a potential partner, thereby enhancing attraction. Despite this theoretical support, empirical evidence suggest that personality similarity plays only a negligible role in explaining couples' relationship satisfaction (Weidmann et al., 2023). Meta-analytical results indicate that similarity between oneself and a potential romantic partner, appears as a positive, moderate predictor of attraction, and those attributes with higher information salience tend to show stronger effects (Montoya & Horton, 2012). The salience of vocational interests candidates them for characteristics which should demonstrate similarity-attraction effects. This research provided pivotal evidence for profile level similarities in the description of own interests and ideal partner interests, both in partnered and single participants.

Finally, while self-ideal homogamy preferences exhibit some gender differences (discussed later), the distinctive similarity remains significant even after controlling for normative profile effects. This underscores the role of vocational interests in shaping romantic preferences beyond societal expectations or default patterns of partner selection.

2.2.2. Do Ideal Partner Preferences Align with Actual Partner Interests and Partners' Preferences?

When analysing couples, we examined whether individuals' ideal partner preferences matched their actual partner's vocational interests. Results indicated that ideal partner preferences aligned more closely with their partner's vocational interests than with their own self-reported interests or their partner's self-reported ideal preferences, supporting Hypothesis 4.2. Distinctive partner-ideal congruence was observed, with nonzero profile correlations between individuals' self-assessed vocational interests and their evaluations of an ideal partner's interests. No significant gender differences emerged in distinctive partner-ideal congruence ($t_{270} = 0.16$; $p > .05$; $d = 0.87$). Interestingly, distinctive partner-ideal congruence was modestly higher than self-ideal similarity for both women ($t_{270} = 2.79$; $p < .01$, $d = 0.17$) and men ($t_{270} = 5.14$; $p < .001$, $d = 0.31$). Furthermore, it was substantially higher than actual partner congruence for both women ($t_{270} = 13.13$; $p < .001$, $d = 0.80$) and men ($t_{270} = 15.04$; $p < .001$, $d = 0.91$), and significantly exceeded distinctive ideals agreement for both women ($t_{270} = 11.40$; $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$) and men ($t_{270} = 13.00$; $p < .001$, $d = 0.79$). Large effect sizes were found when testing the significance of both raw and distinctive partner-ideal congruences for both genders (Study 4, Table 2).

These findings suggest that individuals' current partners tend to match their ideal partner preferences for vocational interests. The significant distinctive component of partner-ideal congruence may reflect initial matching, implying that partner choices partially align with ideal partner standards (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015). However, we cannot rule out adaptation effects, where coupled participants may modify their preferences to align with their actual partners, a motivated process found to enhance relationship satisfaction (Conroy-Beam & Buss, 2016; Fletcher et al., 2000).

Modest raw ideal-partner agreement was observed at the profile level, and distinctive profile ideals-agreement remained significant after controlling for normative effects. A trait-level analysis revealed that men and women generally shared preferences for Investigative, Artistic, and Enterprising interests, as well as the Ideas-Data dimension, in their ideal partners. However, no agreement was found for Realistic or Social interests, nor for the People-Things dimension—areas where gender differences were most pronounced. Additionally, no agreement was found for Conventional interests or Prestige (Study 4, Table 1). Even after controlling for normative preferences, couples exhibited modest but significant levels of distinctive preferences for vocational interests in their ideal partners. This aligns with prior

research on ideal standards within families (Guvensoy & Erdem, 2023) and across cultures (Lam et al., 2016; Locke et al., 2020). Normative preferences may stem from educational similarity (Hitsch et al., 2010) or stereotypes about professions' competence, warmth, or prestige (Strinić et al., 2022).

2.2.3. Gender Differences in Ideal Partner Preferences for Vocational Interests

Beyond individual vocational preferences, ideal partner profiles also exhibit gender-typed patterns. At the trait level, significant gender differences emerged in preferences for Realistic (d = -1.01 in couples, -0.91 in singles) and Social (d = 0.76 in couples, 0.81 in singles) interests, as well as in the overarching People-Things dimension (d = 1.36 in couples, 1.26 in singles).

When examining profile similarities in couples, results indicate that individuals' ideal partner preferences align more closely with their actual partner's vocational interests than with their own interests or the ideals reported by their partner. Interestingly, partnered individuals showed no self-ideal similarity in the People-Things dimension, what might suggest their greater alignment with gender-typed vocational interests when selecting a partner. Conversely, single men and women displayed modest to moderate self-ideal similarity in the People-Things dimension.

The gendered nature of vocational interests may limit opportunities for self-similar partner matching in heterosexual relationships, potentially reducing mating success when preferences are not aligned with traditional vocational roles of the other sex. These differences in ideal-partner normative profile of women and men, namely the gender-shift hypothesis, are in line with the social role theory (Cunningham & Russell, 2004; Eagly & Wood, 2016), which posits that traditional gender ideology influences mate selection by reinforcing a conventional homemaker-provider division of labour. Evidence of universal, normative ideal partner preferences are found across cultures (Guvensoy & Erdem, 2023; Locke et al., 2020). Societal norms shape career aspirations from an early age, reinforcing gender-typed occupational choices (Blažev et al., 2024; Ehrtmann et al., 2019). Men remain underrepresented in female-dominated occupations compared to women in male-dominated occupations (Croft et al., 2015), largely due to the lower perceived status of communal and caregiving roles (Heilman & Wallen, 2010; He et al., 2019).

Historically, sex differences in mate preferences correspond to complementary reproductive roles, with men prioritizing physical attractiveness (a proxy for fertility) and

women emphasizing resource acquisition and social status (Croft et al., 2020). A recent large-scale study (Eastwick et al., 2025) found that, when asked to explicitly state their preferences for different attributes, men tend to underestimate the importance of partner attractiveness, whereas women overestimate the importance of a partner's earning potential. Gender differences in ideal partner preferences also shape selective mating, mitigating the effects of consensual preferences and leading to the exclusion of individuals with less-desired characteristics (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Conroy-Beam & Buss, 2016). Research further indicates that men in female-dominated occupations face a "romantic penalty," with lower marriage rates (McClintock, 2020), and that individuals in gender-atypical jobs experience higher breakup rates, possibly due to occupational stereotypes (Yu & Kuo, 2021). Even children have greater difficulty processing information about men in counter-stereotypical occupations compared to women in equivalent atypical roles (Wilbourn & Kee, 2010).

To further explore gender differences in vocational interests, this study examined whether preference patterns were more pronounced in the gender-typed People-Things dimension compared to the Ideas-Data or Prestige dimensions. The Hypothesis 4.1. suggested that individuals would prefer vocational traits that were less gender-typed, leading to higher self-ideal similarity in the Ideas-Data and Prestige dimensions. Results partially supported this prediction: partnered and single women consistently showed greater self-ideal similarity in Ideas-Data compared to People-Things. Additionally, women (both single and partnered) and only coupled men showed stronger self-ideal alignment in Prestige compared to People-Things. Single men demonstrated moderate self-ideal similarity for the People-Things dimension, indicating greater acceptance of gender-atypical interests in partners. This may reflect the loosening of gender role constraints for both sexes albeit to a lesser extent for single men (Blažev et al., 2024; Croft et al., 2020).

Interestingly, while self-ideal similarity in Prestige was confirmed for both single and partnered participants, mean-level self-report data revealed that men had aspirational preferences for occupational prestige in their partners, whereas women reported lower ideal partner preferences for prestigious occupations than for their own career ambitions. This finding contrasts with prior research suggesting that women prioritize financial stability in partner selection (Gerlach et al., 2019; Lam et al., 2016). One possible explanation is the increasing accessibility of higher education and prestigious, traditionally male-typed occupations for women, at least in Western societies, which may be shifting mate preference patterns. A recent study (Croft et al., 2020) suggests that women's expectations of becoming primary

breadwinners predict a greater emphasis on complementary mate preferences, such as prioritizing parenting qualities and a family-oriented partner, while financial resources become a less important criterion. Conversely, women expecting to be primary caregivers exhibited a stronger similarity effect in mate selection, particularly in valuing parenting qualities in a partner. Croft's and colleagues (2020) findings underscore the interplay between career aspirations and partner preferences.

Elevated ideal-partner profiles, preferences for elevated Investigative interests and men's preferences for occupational Prestige may also suggest that people aspire to partners who embody resourcefulness. In ancestral environments, individuals skilled in acquiring resources had a reproductive advantage, and partners who prioritized such traits ensured better prospects for their offspring. Over generations, this preference may have shaped the modern emphasis on resource-acquisition abilities in mate selection. However, since these qualities are not always directly observable, individuals likely rely on proxies, such as level of education (Jonason & Thomas, 2022) or vocational interests, to assess a partner's capabilities. As a contrary to an elevated interest profile, being apathetic or unmotivated appears as a repelling factor in the evaluation of a potential partner (Csajbók et al., 2022).

In sum, the findings support the concept of a fixed ideal-partner profile, characterized by elevated interests and partially shaped by gender norms, with women showing distinct patterns compared to men. A limitation of this study is the lack of control for traditional gender-role beliefs, which have been shown to influence mate preferences (Eastwick et al., 2006). Traditional gender-role attitudes reinforce a division of labor where men are breadwinners and women are caregivers (Cunningham & Russell, 2004), whereas egalitarian beliefs support equal occupational opportunities and a rejection of gendered labor divisions. Ultimately, the findings on gender differences in vocational-interest-based partner preferences highlight the importance of considering mate selection as a dynamic, dyadic process. Partner choices are shaped not only by individual preferences but also by broader social influences, including early socialization, which plays a crucial role in shaping vocational interests (Silvia, 2006). Moreover, persistent societal norms and gendered divisions of labor continue to influence mate preferences. While distinctive individual preferences are found to be significant, they operate within the larger framework of enduring social roles and normative expectations that shape the evaluations of potential partners. Besides norms, other psychosocial individual differences may shape the preferences for partner's vocational interests. Anderson (2017) also found that individuals' personality traits relate to their ideal partner preferences. For example, a preference for artistic

partners was associated with higher Openness, Introversion, and Neuroticism, traits that are also positively related to Artistic interests. Similarly, preferences for sociable partners were stronger in extraverted and emotionally stable individuals, traits commonly associated with Enterprising interests (Amstad et al., 2011; Krapić et al., 2008). Future research could benefit from including personality measures to further examine how preferences for vocational interest types in partners are shaped by individuals' own personality profiles.

In summary, this thesis successfully addressed one of its key aims: extending the application of vocational interest measures to the assessment of ideal partner preferences. A significant and novel contribution to the literature is the demonstration that ideal partner preferences can be meaningfully differentiated using the PGI-Short scale (Šverko, 2008; Šverko & Babarović, 2016; Tracey, 2002b). Descriptions of ideal partners obtained through this validated and widely used measure partially align with domains previously identified in research on partner ideals. Also, since the dispositionally guided selection of self-similar (social and) romantic partners appears to arise from enduring social environments (Laland et al., 2001), the results of this study are relevant for understanding the mechanisms that maintain the stability of vocational interests. Indeed, a crucial consequence of assortative mating is the stability of the individual differences for which people assort (Thiessen & Gregg, 1980). Longitudinal studies indicate that partners who share interests and other traits are more likely to maintain consistency in the organization of these attributes throughout adulthood (Caspi & Herbener, 1990); therefore, homogamy may contribute to the long-term stability of interests.

2.3. Predicting Relationship Satisfaction with Vocational Interests

Building on the premise that partners' characteristics and situation structure have implications for both intrapersonal and interpersonal processes (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978), Study 2 employs a dyadic approach to examine the relationship between vocational interests and two indicators of romantic relationship satisfaction: perceived relationship quality (Fletcher et al., 2000) and satisfaction with partner attributes (Simpson, 1987). Most vocational research to date has adopted a within-person perspective, analysing educational and workplace behaviour and wellbeing by reference to individual-level interests. In that literature, interests have proven their utility for the prediction of performance, as well as subjective and objective career success (Hoff et al., 2021; Wille & De Fruyt, 2014; Nye et al., 2017; Van Iddekinge et al., 2011), particularly when considering interest congruence rather than mere interest level (Hoff et al., 2020). Longitudinal studies indicate that vocational interests also predict within-person family

life outcomes, including the likelihood of marriage and parenthood (Stoll et al., 2017). However, research on dyadic samples remains limited. One notable exception is the study by Mayrand et al. (2023), who found that couple similarity in Artistic and Enterprising interests predicted relationship adjustment in young couples.

Based on Holland's typology, it was hypothesized that Investigative, Artistic, Social, and Enterprising interests (Hypothesis 2.2), as well as interest profile characteristics such as differentiation and elevation (Hypothesis 2.3), would predict higher actor and partner relationship satisfaction. People-oriented interests, Social, Enterprising, and Artistic, are associated with affiliative and interpersonally warm traits (Tracey, 2002; Sodano, 2004) and were expected to positively predict relationship satisfaction for both partners. These interests also correspond with personality traits relevant to relational dynamics: altruism, warmth and communion with Social interests, assertiveness with Enterprising, and adherence to structure with Conventional (Armstrong et al., 2008; Pozzebon et al 2015). Additionally, traits that support long-term relationship investment, such as reliability, cooperation, agreeableness, and emotional stability (Manson, 2015), have been linked to stronger Social and Enterprising interests (Banov et al., 2025b; Nye & Rounds, 2019; van der Linden et al., 2022). Artistic interests, characteristic of self-expression, are discussed as holding potential attractiveness advantages shaped by sexual selection (Miller, 2001; Banov et al., 2025b).

Besides people-oriented traits, Investigative interests were also expected to contribute positively to relationship satisfaction (Hypothesis 2.2). These are associated with high-prestige careers and are the strongest predictors of financial success (Huang & Pearce, 2013), characteristics desirable in long-term partners, especially by women (Locke et al., 2020). Their association with delayed family formation (Stoll et al., 2017) may reflect greater psychological maturity, which could further support relationship stability (van der Linden et al., 2022). Overall, vocational interests demonstrated modest effects on relationship satisfaction (as presented in Study 2, Table 2). As anticipated (Hypothesis 2.1), Realistic and Conventional interests were largely unrelated to relationship satisfaction. One exception was women with higher Realistic interests, who reported greater satisfaction with their partner's attributes though this effect was small and future replication is needed to confirm this finding.

Men's Investigative interests were associated with significant positive actor and partner effects on both perceived relationship quality and satisfaction with partner characteristics. Conversely, women's Investigative interests had only negative partner effects on men's perceived relationship quality. Because Investigative interests are often associated with higher

educational attainment, analyses were repeated controlling for education levels of both partners. After this adjustment, men's Investigative interests remained significant predictors of their own (β = .14, p < .05) and their partner's satisfaction (β = .19, p < .01). Women's Investigative interests, however, did not significantly predict their own (β = -.05, p > .05) or their partner's satisfaction (β = -.12, p > .05). A similar pattern emerged for satisfaction with partner characteristics: men's Investigative interests were significant predictors (actor: β = .16, p < .05; partner: β = .20, p < .01), while women's were not (actor: β = .04, p > .05; partner: β = -.07, p > .05). These findings suggest that men's Investigative interests positively predict women's relationship satisfaction. These results indicating gender differences also align with previous findings that educational attainment and income, traits associated with Investigative interests, increase the desirability of men in online dating contexts (Jonason & Thomas, 2022), and correspond with elevated ideal partner preferences for Investigative interests (Study 4).

Men's Artistic interests showed a small but significant actor effect on their own satisfaction with their partner's characteristics. Regarding partner effects, gender differences were again evident: women's Artistic interests were unrelated to relationship satisfaction, whereas men's Artistic interests modestly predicted their partner's perceived relationship quality and satisfaction with partner characteristics. These results suggest men's Artistic interests may enhance relationship satisfaction, particularly in their partners. Artistic and Investigative interests are also linked to openness, absorption, and crystallized intelligence (Ackerman & Heggestad, 1997; Pässler et al., 2015), traits previously theorized as indicators of emotional expressiveness, or promoting attractiveness (Miller, 2001; Sodano, 2004). Higher self-actualizing values and somewhat lower utilitarian values are also predictive of Artistic interests in adolescence (Šverko, 2022). Along with Social, Artistic interests are also positively related to higher social support to friends (Banov et al., 2025b). The nonsignificant findings for women's Artistic interests diverge from results in Study 4, where men showed a strong preference for ideal partners high in Artistic interests, exceeding their own, their actual partner's, and even the average woman's scores. Such discrepancies between expressed preferences and predictive traits for relationship satisfaction are consistent with large-scale international findings (Eastwick et al., 2025), which show that people often misjudge the characteristics that will contribute to their happiness. Although men's Artistic interests exhibited meaningful actor and partner effects here, the broader evidence remains mixed. For example, longitudinal studies indicate that Artistic interests are linked with higher unemployment and lower income and do not predict objective relationship outcomes like marriage or parenthood (Stoll et al., 2017). More research is needed to understand the

mechanisms linking artistic expression and interest to interpersonal functioning, with possible moderators such as cultural, gender, and age-related norms.

Contrary to expectations, Social interests generally did not predict relationship satisfaction. The only notable finding was a modest partner effect of men's Social interests on women's satisfaction with partner characteristics. Tests of gender differences in partner effects found no significant difference (p = .81, 95% *CI* [-0.16, 0.2]), but the overall partner effect was statistically significant (β = 0.13, p < .01). These findings suggest that higher Social interests may enhance a partner's satisfaction, consistent with their role in facilitating social investment. Social interests are positively associated with femininity (Lippa, 2010; Pozzebon et al., 2015), which has been consistently linked to higher relationship satisfaction (Ta, 2017). Men who exhibit Social vocational interests by selecting a career fit to their interests, challenge traditional gender roles (Etzel et al., 2018; McClintock, 2020), making their nurturing behaviors more visible. Since Social interests are linked to prosocial tendencies, and a partner's prosocial behaviour is especially influential for women's well-being (Righetti et al., 2020), these findings are in line with Study 4, where both genders idealized partners with higher Social interests than either themselves or their actual partners.

Across both relationship satisfaction indicators, Enterprising interests had consistent actor effects for women, predicting their own satisfaction. Actor effects for men were marginal. Tests for gender differences revealed no statistically significant disparities for either satisfaction with partner characteristics (p = .45, 95% *CI* [-.09, .21]; overall actor effect: β = .10, p < .01) or perceived relationship quality (p = .38, 95% *CI* [-.05, .12]; overall actor effect: β = .06, p < .01). Thus, Enterprising interests appear to be robust predictors of individual relationship satisfaction. These interests are associated with romantic experience (Stoll et al., 2017), high income and prestige (Hoff et al., 2021), leadership tendencies, and a dominant-friendly interpersonal style (Sodano, 2011). They are also linked to extraversion, risk-taking, and status ambition (Holland, 1997). While not inherently communal, Enterprising interests may contribute to relationship satisfaction by fostering adaptability, assertiveness, and goal-directed interpersonal dynamics.

The current methodology did not explicitly test for similarity effects on Study 1 data. Similarity in vocational interests between romantic partners might promote mutual reinforcement through shared conversations and activities, as theoretically expected (Byrne et al., 1973). Holland's theory, which links congruence indices to job satisfaction, could be extended to posit that fit between partners may similarly promote relationship satisfaction. In

Study 4, using a subsample of partnered participants ($N_{couples}$ = 271), exploratory regression analyses were conducted to test the Hypothesis 4.3. that distinctive partner-ideal congruence would positively predict relationship satisfaction for both women and men, controlling for relationship duration. For men, relationship satisfaction was not significantly predicted by distinctive actual partner congruence or self–ideal similarity. However, supporting Hypothesis 4.3., men's distinctive partner–ideal similarity (β = 6.91, t = 2.92, p < .01) accounted for an additional 3% of the variance in satisfaction, indicating a small effect size. A similar pattern was observed for women: neither actual partner congruence nor self–ideal similarity significantly predicted satisfaction, but women's distinctive partner–ideal similarity (β = 0.13, t = 2.09, p < .05) explained an additional 2% of the variance. These findings suggest that perceived alignment between one's ideal partner and their actual partner may modestly contribute to satisfaction. These effects should be interpreted with caution, as the possibility of reverse causality is theoretically plausible.

Study 2 and Study 4 offered modest yet significant support for the notion that vocational interests hold interpersonal relevance in romantic partnerships. While such interests may contribute to relationship satisfaction, they are not necessarily essential for its attainment. Furthermore, the role of interest similarity between partners warrants further investigation using more sophisticated statistical techniques, such as dyadic polynomial regression. Rather than focusing solely on relationship satisfaction—a broad indicator of interpersonal functioning—future research may benefit from examining outcomes more closely tied to the day-to-day dynamics of dual-earner couples. This issue was addressed in Study 3 and the final section of this elaboration.

2.4. Predicting Work-Family Interface with Vocational Interests

Situational factors such as increased job demands, including requests for extended work availability, and challenges related to employee retention and hybrid work arrangements have been cited as significant precursors of work-family conflict (Dettmers, 2017). Recent data from Eurofound (2024) shows that 30% of European respondents in 2024, matching levels from the COVID-19 peak in 2020, reported frequently or always worrying about work outside of working hours. Similarly, 30% claimed that work regularly hinders time spent with family, an increase compared to pandemic-era figures. Individual differences remain a key predictor of how employees cope with various work-family strains (Bakker et al., 2023). Even when individuals strive to "have it all" they face real limitations in time and energy, resources that,

once allocated to one domain, are no longer available to the other. Dispositional influences, such as personality traits (particularly neuroticism, with $\rho = 0.31$ for WFC and $\rho = 0.27$ for FWC; Miller et al., 2022), have been associated with work-family dynamics. Given that industries vary in their flexibility, demands, and support systems, it is crucial to examine how vocational interests, central to individuals' occupational choices, may contribute to the susceptibility to WFC and potential for WFE.

Building on existing literature (Han & Sears, 2020), Study 3 of this dissertation applied Holland's vocational interest theory to explore how these career-related preferences shape individuals' experiences of WFE and both directions of role conflict: WFC and FWC. For the first time, the analysis incorporates both partner effects and the influence of interest similarity within couples. Investigative, Artistic, Social, and Enterprising interests were expected to positively affect individuals' own WFE and negatively affect both WFC and FWC (Hypothesis 3.1). A partner's Social interests were expected to be positively associated with WFE and negatively related to both WFC and FWC (Hypothesis 3.2). Greater differentiation and elevation in vocational interests were expected to be linked to higher levels of WFE (Hypothesis 3.3), and couples with higher similarity in vocational interests to report greater WFE (Hypothesis 3.4).

To summarise the findings, the effects of RIASEC interests on WFE were generally moderate but more prominent than their effect on conflict outcomes, WFC or FWC. Partial confirmation of Hypothesis 3.1 was found: Enterprising and Social interests showed positive actor effects on WFE. Gender differences became apparent in these associations. For women, Social interests had a curvilinear effect, indicating that very high or very low Social interest levels in both partners resulted in higher WFE, while moderate levels were associated with lower enrichment (Figure 1). In men, having a partner with high Social interests linearly predicted greater WFE. Both partners benefited from higher own Enterprising interests in terms of WFE.

Surprisingly, Conventional interests also demonstrated a small but positive actor effect on WFE. This finding aligns with prior research suggesting that such interests contribute to perceptions of meaningful work (Cardador, 2019), preference for order and structure (Armstrong et al., 2008), and tendencies toward long-term romantic commitment and traditional family formation (Banov et al., 2025b; Stoll et al., 2017). These characteristics may foster an interpersonal environment conducive to WFE. Beyond holding interests in people-oriented and conventional vocations, vocational clarity and a broader range of interests can

promote role enrichment (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). Indeed, interest differentiation and elevation were both positively related to WFE, supporting Hypothesis 3.3 and corroboring findings from Study 2 on the beneficial effects of these vocational profile characteristics on couple functioning. The *Family-Relatedness of Work Decisions framework* (Greenhaus & Powell, 2012) suggest that partners may impact each other's career decisions, such as those related to career downsizing in order to foster positive outcomes for the family role and mitigate work-family conflicts. However, Pluut et al. (2018) introduce the concept of spousal career aspirations, where one partner expects the other to be more engaged in work and achieve career success. Within this context, the modest positive actor effects of interest elevation on WFE, along with elevated ideal-partner vocational profiles, can be interpreted as vocational interests promoting and facilitating positive outcomes in the family domain, particularly for highly engaged employees.

In contrast to other vocational dimensions, Investigative and Artistic interests did not significantly predict work-to-family enrichment. The anticipated benefits associated with a preference for intellectually demanding or creatively engaging activities did not translate into higher levels of enrichment across life domains. This result may appear at odds with previous findings that link Investigative and Artistic profiles to relationship satisfaction, couple adjustment, and communal orientation (Banov et al., 2022; Mayrand et al., 2023; Pozzebon et al., 2015). However, it is likely that the value placed on intellectual inquiry and creative self-expression contributes more to personal identity development than to directly enriching family roles. Future research should explore, for these and other RIASEC types, how the fit between vocational interests and actual job characteristics may shape work-family enrichment outcomes. Despite actual partner congruence reported on this sample for interest elevation, Investigative, Social and Enterprising interests, the similarity in vocational interests does not appear to be linked to either WFC or WFE, contrary to Hypothesis 3.4. The full DRSA model was only superior in examining the effects of Social interests on WFE compared to APIM models. Although the similarity of Social interests did not contribute to WFE, the data suggest that different combinations of partners' interests are associated with varying degrees of enrichment.

Vocational interests generally showed negative effects on role conflicts. Partially supporting Hypothesis 3.1 Investigative, Social, and Enterprising interests, excluding Artistic, predicted lower levels of conflict. Specifically, Investigative interests were associated with reduced time-based FWC, though not strain-based FWC or either dimension of WFC. Social interests further contributed by offering some protective actor and marginal partner effects

against strain-based WFC in both women and men. Since Social individuals are attracted to careers that involve higher emotional labor, it is possible that the social contact and an intrinsic sense of fulfilment derived from working in Social occupations offset potential rewarding effects of these job demands. These results evidence protective actor effects of interest types that did not emerge in one previous study (Han & Sears, 2020), which instead found modest but positive effects of Investigative interests on strain-based WFC and null effects of Social interests. Our findings may be regarded in the context of previous research showing that Social and Enterprising interests are positively associated with relationship satisfaction and family establishment (Stoll et al., 2017; Banov et al., 2022; Mayrand et al., 2023). The negative effects on role conflicts may reflect the collaborative and relational nature of Investigative and people-oriented interests, suggesting that individuals who thrive in interpersonal or leadership roles may extend these benefits to their family dynamics.

A notable crossover effect was found: higher levels of Enterprising interests in women were associated with reduced time-based FWC for both themselves and their partners. This may reflect a greater sense of time autonomy often linked to enterprising career paths. The emergence of this effect solely among women suggests possible gender-specific dynamics in how vocational interests relate to work-family experiences. Despite increasing engagement in entrepreneurial activities, women continue to leave entrepreneurial roles due to family obligations at disproportionately higher rates than men—approximately 36% more often on a global scale (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor [GEM], 2024). While gender disparities in early-stage entrepreneurship have narrowed (e.g., a modest 4% gap in Croatia), established business ownership remains predominantly male-dominated. Nevertheless, women's recognition of new business opportunities has grown markedly, from 29.2% in 2001–2005 to 51.9% in 2021–2023 (GEM, 2024).

Artistic interests did not emerge as significant predictors of conflict outcomes in this study. This finding is consistent with prior mixed evidence regarding similar constructs. For instance, a meta-analysis by Allen et al. (2012) found no consistent association between the Big Five trait of openness to experience, closely aligned with Artistic interests, and WFC. Similarly, Han and Sears (2020) reported no significant relationship between Artistic interests and overall FWC, although they did observe a modest negative association with time-based FWC. The extent to which individuals with high Artistic interests are able to pursue careers that align with their preferences likely varies significantly across national and occupational contexts. Incorporating a person–job congruence index in future studies may offer a more nuanced

understanding of how vocational interests relate to work-family outcomes, particularly in cross-cultural and longitudinal comparisons.

The discrepancies between the findings of the two studies may be attributed to several factors, including differences in sample characteristics and contextual conditions. Han and Sears's (2020) research drew on a U.S.-based sample of professionals, regardless of relationship status, while the present study focused on dual-earning couples in Croatia. The previous study was conducted in 2009, a period with distinct labor market and societal norms compared to the post-pandemic context, where work-family dynamics have undergone considerable transformation. These variations reflect broader cultural, generational, and socioeconomic differences, as well as evolving expectations and structural changes in the nature of work and family life. Additionally, the relational status of participants may be a relevant factor. Han and Sears included single individuals, while the present study focused on couples, many of whom are parents, who may experience more pronounced and complex role conflicts. Further, important family characteristics not accounted for in this study, such as the number and age of children (Amstad et al., 2011; Ford et al., 2007; Michel et al., 2011), could meaningfully influence the experience of both WFC and WFE, potentially limiting the explanatory power of the current model.

2.5. Practical Implications

The findings of this dissertation have several potential applications across diverse domains. One primary area includes support for users of partner selection services, particularly online dating platforms and widely used social networking sites, which have increasingly become the dominant spaces for romantic partner introduction (Rosenfeld & Thomas, 2012). Choosing a suitable partner is complex, as it involves many factors such as physical attraction, personality compatibility, and social, cultural, and demographic considerations (Anderson, n.d.; Conroy-Beam & Buss, 2016; Locke et al., 2020). This dissertation's findings suggest that normative preferences exist for the expression of vocational interests in a partner. These preferences appear to be influenced both by perceived prestige associated with particular vocational domains and by traditional gender related social roles (Eagly & Wood, 2016). For online dating apps users, self-presentation strategies that highlight vocational interests could be differentially effective depending on how well they align with socially normative or gender-typical preferences. Additionally, expressing passion for one's own or even contrasting vocational fields may be particularly attractive, as Study 4 revealed that an elevated vocational

interest profile was commonly endorsed as ideal in a romantic partner. However, the results also underscore individual differences in preferences, especially in relation to partner similarity. Some individuals demonstrate a stronger preference for vocational congruence with their partner than others, suggesting the value of guided self-exploration in psychotherapeutic or counselling contexts for single individuals seeking romantic relationships. Identifying whether an individual prefers a partner with similar vocational interests or has specific preferences for certain types of interests, can be instrumental in guiding them toward environments where such partners may be found. More broadly, examining the role of vocational interests in the internal representation of a potential or current partner may enhance the individual's understanding of the trade-offs he or she is willing to make during partner selection and inform better decision-making. Altogether, we may conclude that short-form vocational interest inventories, well-established in vocational psychology may be repurposed for use within partner selection services. This aligns with previous findings demonstrating assortative mating patterns based on shared leisure interests (Gonzaga et al., 2010).

The concept of self-similarity preferences in vocational interests can be extended to various interpersonal relationships, particularly within organizations. The findings suggest that understanding the alignment of team members' vocational interests could be crucial for enhancing team dynamics, as individual dispositions are strong predictors of team effectiveness (LePine et al., 2011). Beyond just effectiveness, revisiting Holland's congruence hypothesis in the context of fostering positive interpersonal relationships among team members could play a significant role in promoting positive relationships and meaningful work (Cardador, 2019).

Studies 2 and 3 also show that vocational preferences are linked to well-being, particularly in relationship satisfaction and balancing work and family roles. Preferences for certain vocational profiles, especially those marked by higher interest elevation or differentiation, may contribute to improved dyadic adaptation. Thus, helping clients understand the implications of their vocational preferences can facilitate greater harmony between work and family domains. Employment counsellors, in particular, should integrate these insights when advising individuals about vocational choices. Understanding a client's current or anticipated family role, ideal partner's profession, and work centrality can open productive discussions around how to manage competing personal and professional goals (Croft et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2017). This can empower clients to make career choices aligned with their preferred lifestyle, or at the very least, make informed decisions about the potential work–family balance challenges associated with various vocational paths. Furthermore, these findings underscore the importance of conducting combined assessments of clients' RIASEC profiles

with the explorations of their personal competencies for balancing work and life demands, as evidenced by Han and Sears (2020). Such assessments can inform the development of interventions aimed at building skills that support more effective boundary and time management. Employment counsellors equipped with the insights from Studies 2 and 3 may thus guide clients in crafting strategies to mitigate work–family conflict and promote enrichment, not only improving individual adaptability but potentially enhancing the well-being of their partners and families as well (Ferguson et al., 2016; Halbesleben et al., 2012).

Finally, systemic, family-based interventions like career genograms, and constructivist approaches (Savickas, 2005) can be especially helpful for individuals choosing or changing their career path. These tools can help clients connect their emerging career aspirations with family identity and social roles shaped by previous generations (Brown, 2004; Lustig et al., 2017). The role of the shared family values, but also shared vocational interests, appears important particularly for some career paths such as entrepreneurial family businesses (Telling & Goulding, 2020) or for selecting public services professions (Christensen et al., 2022). For single clients, deeper insights into their own ideals and role models may be achieved with interventions aimed at exploring vocational compatibility in other meaningful couples (such as parents) in their environment, thereby supporting more integrated and reflective partner and career choices. The results of this dissertation particularly stress the importance of examining normative, gender-role-based vocational stereotypes, since these may limit flexibility in relationships. For instance, individuals who expect partners to conform to traditional roles (e.g., expecting men to be skilled with tools or women to take on caregiving roles) may struggle if they partner with someone whose interests do not follow these gender norms.

3. CONCLUSION

This dissertation provides a thorough examination of the role of vocational interests in partner selection and relationship functioning, systematically applying Holland's model to interpersonal contexts and addressing their underexplored relevance in romantic domains (Back & Vazire, 2015; Stoll et al., 2017). It offers a novel perspective on the question of partner complementarity in vocational interests, focusing for the first time on the idealization of a partner. Methodologically, the research draws on cross-sectional data from multiple samples and employs several analytic approaches, including variable-centered and couple-centered methods, as well as profile similarity analyses with different corrections for stereotype accuracy (pseudo-couple analysis and profile similarity decomposition).

These analyses provided evidence for modest to moderate assortative mating based on RIASEC interests, comparable to effects typically seen for stable personality traits. Another contribution of this dissertation includes the meta-analytic re-examination of partner-vocational interests' similarity, confirming significant positive RIASEC trait-level assortative correlations, comparable to those observed for many stable personality traits. When analysing RIASEC profiles as a whole, profile similarity between partners was positive and significant in individual studies, but appeared negligible in the meta-analytic re-examination. These findings are subject to certain limitations. The cross-sectional design precludes causal conclusions, and the narrow range of background variables limits the examination of different mechanisms of assortment, particularly social homogamy. Future research should consider experimental designs, include longitudinal data, contextual information on partner meeting contexts, and implicit measures of occupational stereotypes to better understand the consequences of interest-based ideals and possible vocational similarity preferences delineated in this dissertation. The findings suggest that while similarity in vocational interests is not the sole criterion for partner selection, it contributes meaningfully, particularly through moderate similarity in Investigative interests and overall profile alignment. Both single and partnered individuals showed modest, consistent preferences for vocational interest similarity in ideal partners. Trait-level self–ideal similarity was modest but consistent across all RIASEC types and certain Personal Globe dimensions (e.g., Ideas–Data, Prestige), but not People–Things. Among partnered individuals, ideal–

partner congruence was moderate, likely reflecting a combination of matching, shifting ideals, and normative expectations, including gendered vocational stereotypes.

This study demonstrates that vocational interests may be neglected yet meaningful predictors in dyadic analyses. Positive effects of specific interest types were found on overall relationship satisfaction as well as satisfaction with actual partner characteristics. Actor–partner interdependence modelling results indicated that Realistic and Enterprising interests in women, and Investigative interests in men, positively predicted their own relationship satisfaction. Modest partner effects were also observed: women reported higher satisfaction when their partners had higher Investigative and Artistic interests, greater interest elevation, and lower differentiation in their interest profiles. Vocational interests also appear to function as protective factors against role conflicts. Negative actor effects of Investigative, Social, and Enterprising interests were found on various types of work–family conflict. Simultaneously, positive actor effects of Social, Enterprising, and Conventional interests, as well as profile elevation and differentiation, emerged for work–family enrichment, suggesting that these characteristics enable individuals to transfer positive resources from the work domain to the family domain. Partner effects further highlight the interpersonal relevance of people-oriented interest types: partners' higher Social interests predicted greater enrichment and lower strain-based work–family conflicts, whereas higher Enterprising interests in men predicted lower time-based family–work conflicts. These effects were similar for both women and men, and the evidence consistently did not support (dis)similarity effects of interests on work–family conflict or enrichment.

The results of the presented studies support extending interest-based theories beyond career outcomes into relational and family contexts. Several theoretical implications arise. First, vocational interests may capture broader psychological constellations, intersecting with traits, abilities, values, and life goals which may explain the observed associations. Yet Study 1 suggests that their role in assortment is not reducible to personality similarity. Second, vocational interests may reflect how individuals organize priorities across life domains such as work and family, shaping partner preferences accordingly. This view aligns with interdependence theory, which conceptualizes partner selection as a function of perceived rewards offered by a current or potential partner, relative to alternatives (Johnson & Johnson, 2005; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978; Van Lange & Balliet, 2015). Vocational interests may signal partners' characteristics supporting or complementing own personal and professional goals. For example, a woman with high Enterprising or Investigative interests may aspire to career success

and leadership roles, yet also value family life. She may therefore seek a partner with Social interests, who may be more inclined toward caregiving roles, or one with a high-prestige vocational path, offering financial stability and enabling external caregiving support. The results obtained in this dissertation do not prescribe for a "perfect match". Instead, this dissertation underscores that vocational interests, and possibly other career-relevant variables, should be evaluated in the relational context.

Overall, this work contributes to the integration of vocational and relational frameworks. Interests appear as enduring individual differences that not only guide occupational choices but also function as cues in partner evaluation, influencing expectations regarding lifestyle, parenting roles, and household contributions (Ehrtmann et al., 2019). Future research should consider longitudinal and experimental designs, include richer contextual variables (e.g., partner meeting contexts), and address the role of implicit stereotypes in shaping interest-based preferences.

Taken together, this dissertation highlights the relevance of vocational interests as enduring individual differences that shape not only occupational paths but also the formation and evaluation of romantic partnerships. Extending interest-based theories to relational contexts allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how individual differences shape partner selection and relationship experiences. This dissertation provides a missing evidence that individuals initially select partners based on complementarity of their actual interests, self-similarity preferences, and gender-normative ideal-partner preferences. It further supports and explains previous longitudinal evidence suggesting interests remain highly stable over 20 years of adulthood and can converge between partners (Schultz et al., 2017), where initial interest-based assortment may promote this long-term stability. Theoretically, this work contributes to extending interest-based theories into relational contexts. Future work should continue to integrate vocational frameworks with relational and developmental models to better understand the dynamic role of interests in personal and interpersonal functioning. This is conceptually important for identifying interests as global characteristics driving career behaviour. While extensions into process models have been provided through social cognitive career theory (Brown & Lent, 2023), the processes by which interests interact with partner selection and relationship outcomes remain to be elaborated in future empirical and theoretical work. A successful integration of the vocational literature across life domains sets the stage for linking perspectives on interest structure and stability with life span developmental frameworks that model the dynamic processes by which people adapt to age-related changes.

4. APPENDIX

Appendix section consists of five appendices. Study 1, 2, and 3 represent one of the three published papers, respectively, while Study 4 is submitted for review. Studies 1, 3 and 4 are followed by the Supplementary materials which contain additional results accompanying the papers. Study 3 also contains supplemental materials in the form of Open Science Framework links that generate R code to reproduce all results reported in the paper.

Banov, K., Krapic, N., & Kardum, I. (2023). Do vocational interests matter for the selection of romantic partners? Evidence from variable- and couple-centered approaches. *Applied Psychology, 72*(2), 697–717. https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12396

Banov, K., Krapic, N., & Kardum, I. (2022). Vocational interests and relationship satisfaction: An actor-partner interdependence model. *Personality and Individual Differences, 187*, 111440. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2021.111440

Banov, K., Krapic, N., & Kardum, I. (2024). Actor, Partner and (Dis)Similarity Effects of Vocational Interests on Work-Family Interface. Journal of Career Assessment, 33(1), 53-72. https://doi.org/10.1177/10690727241247184

Banov, K., Krapic, N., & Kardum, I. (2025a, February 2). Would you like your partner to share your interests? Vocational ideal-partner standards of singles and couples. https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/3qbhg_v1

4.1. Study 1: Do vocational interests matter for the selection of romantic partners? Evidence from variable and couple-centered approaches

Banov, K., Krapic, N., & Kardum, I. (2023). Do vocational interests matter for the selection of romantic partners? Evidence from variable- and couple-centered approaches. *Applied Psychology, 72*(2), 697–717. https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12396

Abstract

The present study links the person-environment fit theory of vocational interests (VI) with the research on the selection of romantic partners. Empirically, we explore the assortment for VI in 215 heterosexual romantic partners. Using both the variable-centered (VCA) and couple-centered (CCA) approaches, we test the hypotheses on positive versus negative assortment, initial assortment versus convergence, and active assortment versus social homogamy. A modest to moderate positive assortment was found for Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, and Social interests but not Conventional interests, whereas evidence of couple similarity in Enterprising interests was less consistent. A moderate level of positive assortment was identified in couples when full interest profiles were evaluated. The results indicate an initial and active assortment rather than convergence or social homogamy effects. The analysis also shows that the assortment for interests represents an independent preference that cannot be easily considered as a by-product of the assortment in the five-factor personality traits. These findings highlight the importance of VI in the active selection of romantic partners. We discuss implications for future research and practice.

Keywords: vocational interests, assortative mating, profile similarity, Big-five, person-environment fit

Introduction

In vocational psychology interests present trait-like preferences which direct individuals toward (work) environments (Armstrong et al., 2011; Su et al., 2019). Vocational interests (VI) demonstrate a predictive efficiency in career and academic outcomes (Hoff et al., 2019; Schelfhout et al., 2021; Tracey et al., 2012). Holland's (1997) *Theory of vocational personalities and work environments* proposes the classification of six distinct interest types referred to as the RIASEC model: Realistic (R) interests favour mechanical, manual or outdoors activities, Investigative (I) involve a preference for research, Artistic (A) for the expression and an appreciation of arts, Social (S) for collaboration and helping others, Enterprising (E) for leadership, negotiation, and self-management, while Conventional (C) interests involve accurate problem-solving by adhering to rules. Holland's theory currently represents the dominant model for the assessment and description of vocational personality types and work environments. Its' core proposition is that work-related outcomes depend on the degree of interest fit – the matching of individual's interests and the characteristics of his working or educational environment.

Regarding the idea of work-life balance, recent integrative approaches propose repercussions of the theory on different life domains, even outside the educational or occupational spheres (Armstrong et al. 2011; Stoll et al., 2017). In this study we consider the application of Holland's model in the research of mate selection. We build upon the person-environment fit assumption and draw upon Holland's theory which states that individuals seek out and construct permanent social environments congruent with their characteristics (e.g., VI; Hoff et al., 2021; Schelfhout et al., 2021). Additionally, we follow the evolutionary perspective (Buss, 1984; Laland et al., 2001; Thiessen & Gregg, 1980), which states that having a similar partner is beneficial for the adaptation of the present and future generations. Specifically, we investigate assortative mating, a non-random selection of romantic partners which appears in the first stages of a relationship and is based on the resemblance of their phenotypic characteristics (Buss, 1984). The selection of a romantic partner occurs in the form of positive assortment, when partners tend to be more similar than would be expected by chance, or as negative assortment, when the coupling is based on disparate characteristics. The degree of assortment varies for different characteristics: demographic indices such as age, race or education show high positive assortment correlations, moderate assortment has been reported for values, abilities, and intelligence, while low to modest assortment was found for physical characteristics (Kardum et al., 2019; Watson et al., 2004). The main aim of this study was to

examine the assortment for each of the VI types of Holland's RIASEC themes and the overall vocational profile in heterosexual romantic couples.

This article is organized as follows. In the first section, we review previous studies assessing couple similarity in VI and outline some implications of assortment in VI. We then evaluate the possible mechanisms of assortment: the similarity of couples could be due to convergence rather than initial assortment, and to social homogamy effects (like the similarity in age, education, or personality traits). The empirical section tests each of the postulated hypotheses applying two statistical approaches: the *variable centered* (VCA) and the *couple centered* (CCA). Additionally, we regress the similarity in the Big five personality traits on couple-similarities in VI to investigate the possible contribution of broad personality constructs in the assortment for VI. Finally, we summarize findings, discuss methodological issues and practical implications of this work.

Assortment in Interests – Why it Matters and What is There Yet to Know?

Partners tend to assort positively on age, political attitudes, values, education, intelligence, and numerous personality traits (Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Watson et al., 2004). Unlike other individual differences, assortment in interests as stable individual differences has rarely been explored. One exception concerns the investigation of interests in entertaining activities, where there is evidence of positive assortment and an eventual increase in similarity over the years in a committed relation (Gonzaga et al., 2010). Some studies exploring parent-child similarity in VI also included hypotheses on the assortment of parents. An example is a study by Grotevant et al. (1977) that found modest positive associations only for Enterprising, Artistic and Realistic interests in American couples who had been married for more than 20 years. Conversely, a study by Etzel et al. (2018) addressed the intra-family similarity of VI profiles in Germany and found evidence of moderate positive assortment on all RIASEC scale scores, and a modest profile similarity. Although indicating different levels of similarity, both studies investigated couples of parents of adolescents to highlight the importance of parent similarity in VI for their intergenerational transmission or heritability. Considering the possible effects of parental identification, the selection of a mating partner could have long-term implications for the vocational choices of progeny (Etzel et al., 2018). Additional knowledge on assortment in VI should assist future research of their genetic sources: if positive assortment is neglected, the heritability variance tends to be falsely attributed to the shared environment (Thiessen & Gregg, 1980).

We add to previous studies by analysing data gathered in a cultural context that has not yet been considered in the literature, namely Croatia. Additionally, we address several questions that previous studies (Grotevant et al., 1977; Etzel et al., 2018) left unanswered: we investigate whether the similarity between partners appears as a product of long acquaintance, similarity in the social background, or even in the similarity of personality traits (that are linked to VI). Assortment in individual differences displays several social and psychological consequences, affecting the family climate. Couple similarities in personality predict relationship outcomes - marital satisfaction and a smaller chance of relationship dissolution (Gonzaga et al., 2010; Luo & Klohnen, 2005). In an applied context, marriage and vocational counsellors could benefit from valid proofs of the assortment in VI. Indeed, research has shown that individual differences predict the work-family interface, particularly for those individuals who prefer a lower segmentation of work and family roles (Michel & Clark, 2012). The predictive value of RIASEC interests was found for work-family conflict (Han & Sears, 2020), being married, or having children (Stoll et al., 2017), and romantic relationship satisfaction (Banov et al., 2022). Results may assist counsellors in developing new dating services and strategies promoting work-family facilitation based on the utilization of shared interests with a romantic partner (Hall, 2018). Applying VI in the selection of a partner might promote meaningful conversations between partners, their greater relationship satisfaction, and a positive family-work interface.

To test assortative mating, it is necessary to consistently prove whether couples tend to assort positively (higher similarity) or negatively (higher complementarity) in VI. Based on theoretical assumptions (Thiessen & Gregg, 1980) and empirical findings for other stable individual differences (Kardum et al., 2019; Luo & Klohnen, 2005), we hypothesized couple interest fit will be low to moderate, indicating positive assortment, a tendency of couples to be more similar, rather than dissimilar.

Hypothesis 1: Positive assortment will be confirmed for each interest type as well as the overall interest profile which considers all six interests simultaneously.

To address the question of *how* assortment in interests occurs, we explicitly test the possible mechanisms of assortment in VI. Assortment might be due to *initial* selection, a preference for mating with a partner who has similar phenotypic characteristics, or *convergence*, where the similarity between partners grows over time. More stable personality domains usually show a similarity in the first stages of the relationship, while malleable characteristics such as attitudes converge over time, through the development of familiarity (Kardum et al., 2019). Because previous research found a weak convergence for characteristics that show continuity over time, such as personality traits (Gonzaga et al., 2010; Luo & Klohnen,

2005), and longitudinal studies found substantial stability for VI (Armstrong et al., 2011; Hoff et al., 2021), we expect to confirm initial assortment rather than convergence. As couple similarity can show up later in the relationship due to partner interactions, controlling for the length of the relationship can help to differentiate this process from initial partner selection (Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Therefore, we selected a more heterogeneous sample of couples with respect to the lengths of their relationships.

Hypothesis 2: Relationship length will not be related to evidence of assortment in VI.

Similarity could also be the product of *active* preferential selection or a more passive mechanism, *social homogamy*. The tendency of mating in one's immediate social surroundings leads to finding a partner who shares a similar social background (like socioeconomic status or education), and therefore shares other similar characteristics. Indeed, potential partners meet in shared environments such as educational institutions or workplaces, which could explain their similarities. However, for most of the examined characteristics, the evidence more strongly supports active assortment based on differential mating preferences rather than social homogamy (Kardum et al., 2019; Watson et al. 2004). When considering the possible mechanisms of assortment for VI, it is important to note that social norms, especially gender roles, constrain the expression of individual interests (Lippa, 2010; Su et al., 2019). Large effect sizes in gender differences for preferences in Realistic and Social, but also the development of Conventional interests (Hoff et al., 2019) are found. Therefore, the under-representation of one gender in certain occupational areas could lower the chance of assortment by social homogamy.

Previous research found little evidence for social homogamy effects of age or education on couple similarity in psychological individual differences (Watson et al., 2004). Similarly, we expect active assortment for VI will be confirmed over passive social homogamy in age and educational level.

Hypothesis 3: Demographic characteristics indicating social homogamy (level of education, age, and their interaction) will show small or no relations with assortment in VI.

Another related issue is whether eventual systematic matching of partners in VI could be explained as a by-product of the assortment in other stable individual differences, specifically personality traits. Although there have been calls to explore the interpersonal consequences of individual differences besides personality traits (Back & Vazire, 2015), there still are conflicting theories on the relationship between personality and interest domains. Commonalities have been well documented (most consistently Openness relates to Artistic, Conscientiousness to Enterprising, and Extraversion to people-oriented interests; Armstrong &

Anthoney, 2009; Krapic et al., 2008), and modest to moderate share of genetic and environmental variance is common for these constructs (Kandler et al., 2011). The discussion of whether interests are mere expressions of basic personality traits (McCrae et al., 2021) or systematically related but distinct dispositions of human behaviour (Hogan & Sherman, 2019) is above the scope of this research, however, we consider important to explore the possible (in)dependence of assortment in VI from the assortment in broad personality traits, similarly to previous studies of the interpersonal relevance of VI (Han & Sears, 2020; Stoll et al., 2017). Selecting a partner based on personality preferences contributes to the selection of certain social environments (Buss, 1984). Assortment correlations for five-factor personality traits tend to be positive, although rarely exceed .30 and have most consistently been reported for Openness and Agreeableness (Kardum et al., 2019; Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Accordingly, the similarity in interests might be explained as a spurious effect of the assortment in personality traits. Previous investigations did not provide a dyadic examination of both domains of individual differences within a single analysis. We explore whether similarity of VI appears beyond the similarity of personality, and therefore whether VI represent independent psychological basis for partner selection. Following models which distinguish between personality traits and motivations, specifically the socioanalytic theory (Hogan & Sherman, 2019) we expect that:

Hypothesis 4: Vocational interests will be significant predictors of the forming of romantic couples over and above the similarity in the Big Five personality traits.

Traditionally, assortment is expressed through a sizeable correlation in partners' scores on the studied characteristic and across all couples in a sample, the *variable-centered approach* (VCA). However, this method provides information about the similarity in the studied characteristic for the entire sample without quantifying the similarity or complementarity of a specific couple. Without an index of similarity between partners, we cannot relate this variable to its' predictors or outcomes (Luo & Klohnen, 2005), or investigate the mechanisms of assortment. To address this problem, we follow the methodologies applied in assortment studies of the intra-couple similarity in personality traits, values, or emotional experiences (Gonzaga et al., 2010; see Kardum et al., 2019) through the *couple-centered approach* (CCA). This approach takes the couple as a unit of analysis and computes a profile correlation between responses on any given scale completed by both partners. Quantifying person-environment congruence has been a central methodological and practical problem in vocational psychology and its various operationalizations are also applicable for the assessment of assortment in VI. The stability (Wille et al., 2014), and predictive strength of the profile correlation appears slightly higher compared to other congruence operationalizations (Xu & Li, 2020). Another

useful measure not yet applied in the study of VI assortment is the Euclidean distance: one of the advantages of this fit measures is that it can consider the theoretically circular structure of the RIASEC model when evaluating full profile congruence (Wille et al., 2014; Tracey et al., 2012). However, as they are applied at a scale rather than item level, Euclidian distances don't capture agreement in specific responses. Additionally, profile correlations are easier to interpret as they express the similarity through positive scores and the complementarity through negative scores, while the Euclidean distances range only from zero. Focusing on assortment and its mechanisms, in this study we use three conceptualizations of interest fit: first, we apply the VCA to observe the degree of assortment which can be captured at a group level. Second, we apply the CCA, specifically, the profile correlation and the Euclidean distance, to measure the similarity at the couple level and explore the mechanisms of assortment. Given the described differences in the three conceptualizations of interest fit, we expect the results based on the overall (full) RIASEC pattern to be the most informative on assortment in VI.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The convenience sample comprised 215 Croatian heterosexual romantic couples who had been in a relationship for at least 1 year, 15.7 years on average (SD = 11.82 years). The age of participants ranged from 19 to 65 years. Most couples were married (62%), 22 per cent cohabitating, and 16 per cent did not live together, while 60.5 per cent of couples had children. Most of the men (79.5%) and women (72.6%) were employed, 2.8 per cent of men and 9.3 per cent of women were unemployed, 9.5 per cent of men and 14.4 per cent of women were university students, while 6.2 per cent of men and 1.4 per cent of women were retired. Women (M = 13.35, SD = 11.67) had a shorter experience of working service than men (M = 17.08, SD = 12.16; t = 8.34, $p < .001$, d = 0.57).

Participants had different levels of education: 1.9 per cent of both women and men were educated beyond a master's degree, 31.2 per cent of men and 44.2 per cent of women had a university degree, 10.7 per cent of men and 9.8 per cent of women had a college education, 52.1 per cent of men and 43.3 per cent of women had high school education, and 4.2 per cent of men and 0.9 per cent of women had elementary education. Participants provided informed consent and then completed questionnaires by paper and pencil method. Two psychology students ensured independent responding since the partners responded simultaneously, where they were either sitting separated at the faculty premises or in their homes.

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire

The participants completed a demographic questionnaire that included questions about their gender, age, education level, relationship status (married or dating) and employment status (student, unemployed, employed, retired), the number of children, the length of their romantic relationship in months, and years of working service.

Big Five Inventory

To allow for a quick and efficient assessment of the Big Five personality dimensions we applied the Big Five Inventory (BFI; Benet-Martinez & John, 1998), which consists of 44 brief phrases with self-report ratings for each item made on a 5-point rating scale (1 - *strongly disagree* to 5 - *strongly agree*). Internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach alpha) in this study ranged from .74 for Agreeableness to .82 for Openness. Correlations between the dimensions are low to moderate and range from -.44 (p <.001; Agreeableness and Neuroticism) to .41 (p <.001; Extraversion and Conscientiousness).

Self-Directed Search Inventory

To measure romantic partners' VI, we used the Croatian adaptation (Šverko & Babarović, 2006) of Self-Directed Search inventory (SDS; Holland, 1994). Self-reports were collected on a 228-item questionnaire grouped in four sections: on a dichotomic scale (e.g. *I like–I do not like*) participants indicated their preference for work activities (66 items), estimated their work-related competencies (66 items), and their interest in occupations (84 items). Additionally, personal abilities and skills are estimated as comparisons with peers on twelve 7-point scaled items. RIASEC scores are calculated aggregating six composite scales across these four measurement domains. The inventory showed strong validity across different samples (Krapic et al., 2008; Šverko & Babarović, 2006). In our sample, all interest scales exhibited high Cronbach alpha internal consistencies having values between .87 and .93.

We tested the assumed circular structure of the RIASEC dimensions using a confirmatory factor analysis (LISREL 8.30; Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1999). The analysis indicated a relatively poor adjustment of our data to the structure of the circulant for the sample of men (*SRMR* = 0.19, *RMR* = 0.24, *NFI* = 0.69, *CFI* = 0.71, *GFI* = 0.86) and a somewhat better fit for women (*SRMR* = 0.09, *RMR* = 0.10, *NFI* = 0.80, *CFI* = 0.84, *GFI* = 0.93). Darcy and Tracey (2007) reported that the CFA does not always provide a good fit of the data to the circulant model, with some variations being more often noted in the male samples. The authors suggest that the replication of the circular structure applying the randomization test of hypothesized order relations (RTOR) may be preferable. The RTOR analysis applied using the RANDALL package (Tracey, 1997) revealed a correspondence index of *CI* = 0.51, p = .02 for men, and a

somewhat better fit for women CI = 0.67, p = .02. Both indices are above the cut-off for internationally replicated instruments (CI = 0.48; Rounds & Tracey, 1996); therefore, the hypothesis of a random order can be rejected in favours of an alternative circular order for both subsamples. This also confirms the appropriateness of applying Euclidean distance as a measure of profile congruence.

Congruence Measures

In the present study, we applied two different similarity indices to measure congruence between the RIASEC profile of both partners. Both indexes for each couple can later be related to other variables, moderators, or outcomes (Luo & Klohnen, 2005), and can be used to assess the mechanisms of assortment through subsequent analysis.

Profile correlation: For each couple we computed a Pearson correlation on all assessed items between two individuals. The 12 items from the SDS inventory (2 across each RIASEC type) that present Self-Estimates of skills and abilities (from 1 as low and 7 as high) were dichotomized based on their median for each gender. This allowed their inclusion in the calculation of profile similarity along with other 36 dichotomic items per interest scale. Another set of intra-pair similarity calculation included all items from the SDS, to assess partner interest similarity based on the full profile of all SDS items. This coefficient captures the broad similarity in the interest profile of two individuals based on the organization of responses on a measure of interest. Finally, apart from these seven indices calculated on the items, another profile correlation was computed on the six average RIASEC scores of all dimensions. Previous studies applied the profile correlation as a measure of congruence between the individual's interests and RIASEC based ratings of the environment (Allen & Robbins, 2010; Tracey et al., 2012).

Euclidean distance: Secondly, the one-dimensional Euclidean formula (the square root of squared deviations) was calculated for each pair of scores on the interest type (e.g. for Realistic interests it was SQRT (men's score on Realistic interests – women's score on Realistic interests)^2). To capture the similarity in profile, we applied the two-dimensional Euclidean formula based on the circular structure and two underlying dimensions of People/Things and Data/Ideas (Prediger & Vansickle, 1992; see also Tracey et al., 2012; Wille et al., 2014). Unlike the profile correlation, high Euclidean distances represent poor congruence while low values represent higher congruence. Euclidean distances of the six interest types small to moderate correlations (from r = -.17, p < .01 for Investigative to r = -.38, p < .001 for Conventional). The profile Euclidean distance correlated moderately with the full-item profile correlation (r = -.65,

$p < .001$) and the summed-interest-scales profile correlation ($r = -.61$, $p < .001$), indicating these measures of profile similarity are related.

Applying the Pseudo-Couple Approach

An important issue concerning CCA is a need for a careful evaluation of the actual degree of similarity because individuals tend to appear more similar than dissimilar to each other due to common cultural values, social desirability, and various response biases (Luo & Klohnen, 2005). We addressed this problem by using the pseudo-couple approach. To test if VI indeed assist in matchmaking (Hypothesis 1), and to investigate the sources of correlation within couples (Hypothesis 2 or 3 - relationship length or social homogamy) we applied the pseudo-couple approach (Kenny et al., 2006). Applying the random uniform distribution, from our sample we generated a control group of 430 randomly paired couples in which no real-life couples were present, by pairing each woman twice with the other two men. This sample size was selected because previous research suggests that correlations reach a high degree of stability with a sample size of 250 participants (Schönbrodt & Perugini, 2013). However, when expecting smaller effect sizes, greater samples are recommended. We evaluate the actual degree of couples' similarity by comparing the fit of real and randomly paired couples**,** similarly to previous authors (Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Additionally, as another indication of the magnitude of the effect, each real-life couples' fit measure was compared to a control group of 214 pseudo-couple fit scores and the effect sizes of these comparisons were averaged.

Results

Gender Differences, Descriptive Statistics, and Correlations Between Variables

Mean-level differences between women and men in the sample were found: men scored higher on Realistic ($t = 16.82$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.15$) and marginally higher on Enterprising interests ($t = 1.97$, $p = .05$, $d = 0.13$), while women had greater Artistic ($t = 8.08$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.55$), Social ($t = 11.26$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.77$) and Conventional ($t = 5.20$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.35$) interests. No gender differences were found for Investigative interests ($t = 0.97$, $p = .33$, $d = 0.07$).

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and correlations between vocational interests and demographic variables

	Women						**Men**					
Variables	R	I	A	S	E	C	R	I	A	S	E	C
Women												
Realistic												
Investigative	.36***											
Artistic	.34***	.33***										
Social	.10	.38***	.41***									
Enterprising	.15*	.22**	.22**	.46***								
Conventional	.19***	.07	.03	.10	.50***							
Men												
Realistic	.17**	-.07	-.02	-.02	.06	.08						
Investigative	.13	.25***	.14*	.12	-.03	.02	.17***					
Artistic	.07	.14*	.16*	.12	.02	.04	.13	.46***				
Social	-.01	.10	.07	.16*	.02	.05	-.18**	.42***	.49***			
Enterprising	-.07	.08	-.02	.11	.10	.14*	-.07	.30***	.24***	.53***		
Conventional	-.01	.18***	.01	.08	.09	.15*	-.14*	.42***	.13*	.35***	.59***	
Age	.07	-.10	-.13	-.12	-.22**	-.09	.07	-.13	-.13	.01	-.09	-.09
Educational level	.04	.36	.09	.19	.06	.10	-.22**	.29**	.06	.21**	.21**	.30**
Relationship duration	.01	-.15*	-.17*	-.14*	-.26**	-.14*	.08	-.16*	-.17*	.01	-.04	-.07
M	18.95	22.91	26.4	34.71	25.59	26.29	32.8	22.02	18.5	25.21	27.62	21.27
SD	8.33	10.56	11.02	9.05	10.89	11.06	10.23	11.21	11.12	9.99	11.66	10.64

Note. Values of educational level were coded as follows: 1, less than elementary school; 2, elementary school; 3, high school education; 4, college education; 5, university degree; 6, beyond a master's degree.

* $p < .05$, ** $p <. 01$, *** $p <. 001$.

Separate correlational analyses were computed for men and women (Table 1). Only women's age negatively correlated with their Enterprising interests, while the educational status of men correlated with all interest types except for Artistic. Modest, but consistently negative correlations were found concerning the length of the couple's relationship and men's and women's Investigative and Artistic interests, as well as women's Social, Enterprising and Conventional interests.

Are Partners Similar in Vocational Interests? Evidence from the VCA

Hypothesis 1 was first assessed using the VCA. As can be observed in Table 1, significant positive correlations for several VI were found, the highest and moderate for Investigative, low for Realistic, Artistic, Social, and Conventional, while no correlation between partner's Enterprising interests was found. Several significant positive non-diagonal correlations indicate that couples did not only match with regards to a similarity in the same interest type. The Investigative interests in both women and men correlate positively with partners' Artistic interests, while women's Conventional interests are related to men's Enterprising interests. Apart from these theoretically similar interests, a low positive correlation was also found between two theoretically complementary interests: women's Investigative and men's Conventional interests.

Additionally, we checked the values of intrapair correlations between the same interest types in a sample of 430 pseudo-couples (Kenny et al., 2006). They ranged between -.07 and .04 and none was found to be significant. Positive assortment found on real couples could not be replicated across randomly paired women and men as would be expected if these correlations were solely the product of common cultural bias.

Assessing Assortment Using the CCA

Dismissing the assumption of the VCA that all couples are homogeneous in the VI assortment, we applied the CCA, which informs on the similarity of every single couple. For that purpose, two sets of fit indices between the profiles of each couple were computed: a set of profile correlations and another of Euclidean distances. Besides the fit indices computed for each interest type, we also derived congruence measures from the full profile (one profile correlation on all items, another on the six RIASEC scores, and the Euclidean distances between People/Things and Data/Ideas dimensions).

To evaluate the actual degree of couples' similarity with the control of partners shared response bias or socio-cultural environment, we used the independent samples t-test comparing congruence measures (profile correlations and Euclidean distances) obtained on 215 real and 430 pseudo-couples.

As can be observed from Table 2, when profile correlations are examined, a significantly higher mean intra-pair similarity was found in real couples in comparison to randomly paired ones for all interest types except the Conventional. The differences were small (d = 0.20 to 0.47), with the greatest effect sizes found for the profile correlation of all items and the Investigative interests, followed by Enterprising interests, the profile of RIASEC summed scores, Artistic, Social, and Realistic interests. Applying the Euclidean distance as a measure of convergence the results replicated only for the Investigative interests.

To test if the interest fit is indeed above the fit that is to be expected on random couples, we applied another statistical procedure: the fit of each real couple was compared to the control group of 214 pseudo-couple-fit measures, and an effect size of this simple one sample t-test was calculated. The averages of these effect sizes are similar to those obtained in the previous analysis and are provided in Table 3.

Table 2

Similarity Indices Obtained for Real Couples (*N = 215*) *Compared with Similarity Obtained for Pseudo-Couples* (*N = 430*)

	Couples	Mean	*SD*	*t*	*d*	95% CI for Cohen's *d*	
						Lower	Upper
Profile correlation							
Realistic	Real	0.18	0.21	2.38*	0.20	0.04	0.36
	Random	0.14	0.21				
Investigative	Real	0.17	0.48	4.89***	0.41	0.24	0.57
	Random	0.04	0.19				
Artistic	Real	0.12	0.24	2.34*	0.20	0.03	0.36
	Random	0.07	0.20				
Social	Real	0.20	0.23	3.05**	0.25	0.09	0.42
	Random	0.15	0.20				
Enterprising	Real	0.20	0.23	4.09***	0.34	0.18	0.51
	Random	0.13	0.21				
Conventional	Real	0.27	0.27	1.76	0.15	-0.02	0.31
	Random	0.23	0.26				
Overall summed scores profile	Real	0.07	0.59	3.17***	0.27	0.10	0.43
	Random	-0.09	0.56				
Overall item profile	Real	0.15	0.17	5.66***	0.47	0.31	0.64
	Random	0.08	0.13				
Euclidean distance							
Realistic	Real	15.22	10.29	-1.20	-0.10	-0.26	0.06
	Random	16.26	10.46				
Investigative	Real	10.49	8.24	-3.05**	-0.26	-0.42	-0.09
	Random	12.67	8.66				
Artistic	Real	13.45	9.30	-1.48	-0.12	-0.29	0.04
	Random	14.69	10.38				
Social	Real	13.18	8.33	-0.89	-0.07	-0.24	0.09
	Random	13.85	9.46				
Enterprising	Real	12.48	8.75	-1.25	-0.11	-0.27	0.06
	Random	13.42	9.09				
Conventional	Real	12.12	8.84	-0.83	-0.07	-0.23	0.10
	Random	12.76	9.43				
Overall profile	Real	74.57	36.15	-1.22	-0.10	-0.27	0.06
	Random	78.40	38.22				

Note: Statistical analyses were performed on Fisher *r*-to-*z* transformed similarity correlations;

* $p < .05$, ** $p <. 01$, *** $p <. 001$.

Table 3

Comparison Between the Value of Congruence in Each Real Couple with Values Of 214 Pseudo-Couples

	Profile correlation		Euclidean distance	
	Average Cohen's *d*	Proportion of better fit	Average Cohen's *d*	Proportion of better fit
Realistic	0.22	21.65	0.16	22.05
Investigative	0.51	27.84	0.28	44.97
Artistic	0.23	6.53	0.10	18.78
Social	0.27	20.00	0.04	11.34
Enterprising	0.37	19.79	0.09	26.73
Conventional	0.16	11.83	-0.30	-11.58
Overall profile (summed scores)	0.22	15.79	0.28	32.99
Overall (full item) profile	0.50	38.07		

Note: The proportion of better fit was calculated by dividing the number of t-tests indicating real-couples' indices were significantly higher by the number of results where the congruence indices of pseudo-couples was higher and then multiplying by 100.

* $p < .05$, ** $p <. 01$, *** $p <. 001$.

Again, applying both similarity indices, the effect size was the highest for Investigative interests and the full RIASEC profile, and higher similarity was observed when couple congruence was assessed through profile correlations.

Does the Similarity in Vocational Interests Converge Over Time or Does it Result from Initial Assortment?

To test the hypothesis of initial assortment versus convergence with the VCA, the duration of the relationship was partialled out from the correlations of women's and men's scores, as convergence implies that couples who have been together longer should be more similar to each other. Partial correlations corresponded to the zero-order correlations between women and men's VI reported in Table 1. They remained significant and around the same values, the highest for Investigative ($r = .23$, $p < .01$) and lowest for Conventional and Artistic ($r = .14$, $p < .05$). These results were replicated when the convergence hypothesis was additionally tested by partialling out the log-transformed duration of the relationship where higher weight was assigned to shorter relationships (considering that the time in the first stages

of the relationship could matter more than the same amount of time spent in longer relationships).

Testing convergence with the CCA yields results that are consistent with those obtained with VCA: the initial assortment rather than convergence hypothesis was confirmed (H2). Concerning the intrapair similarity coefficients for interest types, significant negative correlations with relationship length (r = -.15, p < .05) and the log-transformed relationship length (r = -.18, p < .01) were only found for Enterprising interests, and only when applying the profile correlations. The overall partner similarity in interests didn't correlate with measures of relationship length, and the patterns again suggest that couple similarity is most likely not a result of convergence. To correct for multiple comparisons, we applied the Bonferroni correction (divided the threshold levels of significance by the number of comparisons and setting p at .006) and neither of the correlations with Enterprising interests was no longer significant.

Testing Active Assortment versus Social Homogamy

The couples in our sample showed assortment on several background variables - age (r = .96, p < .001), years of employment (r = .85, p < .001), and a moderate positive assortment for the degree of education (r = .36, p < .001). To test with VCA whether these potential sources of social homogamy could account for similarity in VI, we computed partial correlations, controlling for six variables: the age of both partners, their educational level, the interaction of women's and men's ages, and the interaction of women's and men's educational levels (see Watson et al., 2004). Cross-partner partial correlations for Conventional interests were no longer significant (r = .12, p > .05), while for other interests the levels of significance remained the same, although correlation coefficients appeared lower (R - r = .14, p < .05; I - r = .18, p < .01; A - r = .14, p < .05; S - r = .16, p < .05; E - r = .10, p > .05). Therefore, the VCA showed poor evidence for social homogamy effects on assortment for VI.

This hypothesis (H3) was again tested using CCA. The profile correlations of the interest types and two overall interest-profile-similarities (item-based and summed-scores based) did not show any consistent pattern of correlations with both partners' age and educational level, and two interaction terms of partners' age and education. Out of 48 correlations, 9 (16%) were significant at p < .05, ranging from -.17 to .19. After the Bonferroni correction was applied to adjust threshold levels of significance, none of the correlations remained significant. One exception was the correlation between couple similarity in Conventional interests and men's education (r =.19, p < .01). None of the demographics was related to the Euclidian measure of the full profile congruence.

When evaluating the associations of Euclidean distances in the specific RIASEC scales we found distances in Realistic interests to be negatively correlated with women's education (r = -.22, p < .01; partners were less dissimilar in Realistic interests if women had a higher level of education). Higher men's education was also related to lower couple dissimilarity in Social interests (r = -.18, p < .01). Additionally, we followed the procedure of Luo and Klohnen (2005), conducting two sets of multiple regressions predicting intra-pair similarity indices for each of the RIASEC interests and the two overall interest similarities. In the first set, the age of both partners and their interaction term were introduced as predictors, while in the second set women's and men's education and their interaction term predicted couple similarity. The significant contribution of interaction terms in the prediction of couple similarity would indicate the effects of social homogamy. From the eight regressions testing the effects of a partners' age and their interaction, none showed significant effects on the intra-pair similarity in overall interests or RIASEC types. Two regressions indicated significant effects of the educational levels and their interaction: higher men's education (β = .16, t = 2.20, p < .05) was a significant predictor of Conventional interest similarity, while lower women's education (β = -.57, t = 2.24, p < .05) and the interaction of educational levels (β = .98, t = 2.25, p < .05) predicted the overall interest similarity (measured on items). Besides these indicators of social homogamy, the vast bulk of our results using both VCA and CCA supported the active assortment hypothesis (H3).

Does the Similarity in Vocational Interests Remain the Same After the Similarities in the Big Five Personality Traits are Controlled for?

To obtain similarity coefficients for real and randomly paired couples we computed profile correlations for each of the Big Five personality traits. As we were interested in exploring the possibility that assortment in interests appeared as a product of assortment in personality traits, these personality-similarity coefficients were applied in the subsequent analysis. The similarities in the Big Five traits in our sample were generally modest, appearing positive for Extraversion (r = .16, p < .05) and Openness (r = .18, p < .01) in VCA, and for Neuroticism in CCA (more significant correlations in real then in random couples; t = 2.40, p < .05, d =.20). The similarity in five-factor personality traits was not the main interest of our study, so we present all the relevant correlations in the supplementary files.

When we partialled out the similarity coefficients for each personality trait in the VCA, the same correlations between women's and men's interests remained significant and same in magnitude (Realistic, r = .21, p < .01; Investigative, r = .31, p < .01; Artistic, r = .15, p < .05; Social, r = .19, p < .01 and Conventional, r = .16, p < .05) while Enterprising interests reached the significance threshold (r = .16, p < .05). Finally, through nine multiple regressions, we

applied the same Big Five similarity coefficients to predict intra-pair similarity indices (both expressed in profile correlations and Euclidean distances) for each of the RIASEC interest types, the two overall interest profile correlations, and the Euclidian distance of the overall profile. This allowed a CCA exploration of the association of assortment in VI and assortment in broad personality traits. These processes seem to be independent as we obtained no significant relations. Interested readers can find additional explorations of the incremental validity of the similarity in VI towards actual prediction of the formation of romantic couples in the supplementary files. These results again indicate that similarity in the full RIASEC profile can improve the prediction on real versus pseudo-couples.

Discussion

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of assortment for VI in heterosexual romantic partners. Applying both variable- and couple-centered approaches, our results mainly confirmed the hypothesis (1) on positive assortment. Specifically, a modest to moderate positive assortment was observed for several interest types. Considering both the variables and the couples as a unit of analysis and applying both profile correlations and Euclidean distances as congruence measures, we found the highest assortment for Investigative interests. Investigative interests have been related to a higher risk of work–family conflict (Han & Sears, 2020), tendencies of marrying later (Stoll et al., 2017), and both romantic partners' relationship satisfaction (Banov et al., 2022). This study contributes to the validation of the interpersonal relevance of this interest type.

For Realistic, Artistic, and Social interests the findings of modest positive assortment are again consistent across the VCA and CCA measured with profile correlations. However, no significant differences in Euclidean distances were found for these interests when comparing real and pseudo couples. Both Realistic and Social interests are related to family-work conflict (Han & Sears, 2020), but the Social appear interpersonally affiliative, predispose for marriage and having children (Stoll et al, 2017), and it could be expected they signal a potential provision of resources (time or care) of a romantic partner. However, both interest types display sizeable gender differences and normativity (Lippa, 2010) which could limit the availability of potentially similar mates, and lower the possibility of assortative mating. Although our sample was heterogeneous in relationship duration, research on mate preferences of single participants would be needed to fully address the problem of gender differences. Assortment in Artistic interests was also modest and consistent across approaches. Similarly, Gonzaga et al. (2010) found evidence for assortment for interests in entertainment activities (live music or theatre, etc.), a form of expression of Artistic interests.

Assortment for Enterprising interests did not reach significance when we evaluated the VCA correlations across couples (Table 1) or the Euclidean distances. However, evidence of modest positive assortment was obtained using the profile correlation in CCA: in this interest type, cross-item profiles of real couples were significantly more similar compared to randomly paired couples (Tables 2 and 3). How to explain these differences? Note that the VCA approach and Euclidean distance for a particular interest are derived from the score in the Enterprising subscale (as well as other interest subscales), while the profile correlation indicates the similarity of shape between two sets of responses on items (38 per interest scale in the SDS). The similarities between partners might not be observed at the scale level, however, among the listed occupations, activities or abilities there might be some that are particularly popular even among those who generally score low on this interest, thus raising the overall level of similarity captured by the profile correlations. Conversely, although a significant correlation for Conventional interests of women and men was found using the VCA, the CCA revealed that a great proportion of significant positive profile correlations could also be found in randomly paired couples (Table 2) confirming the usefulness of the pseudo-couple approach.

Our study finds that couples tend to assort positively in Enterprising but not in Conventional interests, corroborating previous indications that the two interest types might be related to differential mating strategies, and possibly even differential mate selection. Enterprising interests are related to greater experience in romantic relationships but not marriage; Conventional interests predict the relationship status of being single or married differentially for women and men (Stoll et al., 2017).

The crucial aspect of this research, accessible only through the CCA was the evaluation of the overall profile similarity across all interest types. Evidence of moderate positive assortment was identified in real couples across three profile-based congruence indices: two profile correlations (one measured on the whole item pool of the SDS and the other on six summed RIASEC scores) and the Euclidean distance which considers the circular interest structure (Table 3). This finding is of great importance for the understanding of assortment in interests: not only do couples tend to match in the levels of the particular interest types (most consistently Investigative), but they match in the relative level of all six interests considered together. The effect size of the comparison with pseudo-couples appears moderate.

Applying methods corresponding to previous cross-sectional studies (Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Watson et al., 2004) we performed tests of convergence and social homogamy hypotheses. As expected, the results of both VCA and CCA supported the initial assortment rather than convergence for all interest types (Hypothesis 2). That is in line with meta-analytic

evidence of a high longitudinal stability of interests from adolescence to middle adulthood (Hoff et al., 2021; Su et al., 2019).

The results further indicate active selection is more likely involved in the creation of couple similarity than the homogamy in social background (Hypothesis 3). By controlling for age and education levels we ruled out the possibility that these sources of social homogamy are responsible for couple similarity in interests, consistent with previous findings for other individual differences (Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Watson et al., 2004). A degree of positive assortment was traced even among pseudo-couples (Table 2; note they were formed by recombining individual responses from men and women in our sample). This may reflect the cultural similarity within our sample on other variables related to VI (like the social norms of prestige related to occupations), therefore, we do not exclude the possibility of social homogamy on other characteristics.

In exploring the effects of homogamy, this study expands previous findings, indicating interests affect the attraction and selection of possible mates independently from personality traits. Regressing the personality similarity on vocational similarity no meaningful relations appeared. This part of our research was explorative (Hypothesis 4), so how can we relate the findings to theory? Buss (1984) stressed that mate preferences for a given personality trait tend to be consensual: agreeable, conscientious, and emotionally stable partners are generally preferred to others. Conversely, certain characteristics like the values, and we would add – interests, are idiosyncratic as different individuals prefer different types of mates. As an example, people with an interest orientation towards manipulation of tools and machines, rather than serving people, may prefer the company of similar partners. Levels of active assortment in idiosyncratic characteristics are stronger (Watson et al., 2004) and accordingly, positive assortment for interests appeared somewhat more consistently across the VCA and CCA than assortment for personality traits. The independence of assortment for VI from the similarity in broad personality traits is also consistent with the socioanalytic theoretical framework which defines these constructs as distinct domains of individual differences (Hogan & Sherman, 2019). This theory distinguishes personality from interests as the first captures self-presentations of an own reputation while the latter better represent identities. Based on this distinction, recent investigations provided evidence for the predictive validity of VI for life outcomes, life goals, and the work-family interface. For instance, higher Social and Conventional interests positively predict mating success (being married or having children; Stoll et al., 2017), while Social and Enterprising interests predict relationship life goals and the RIASEC model contributes to the explanations of various types of work-family and family-

work conflict, even when the effects of the five-factor personality traits are considered (Han & Sears, 2020; Stoll et al., 2020). The presented results additionally signal that assortment in VI appears independently from the assortment in the Big five traits and can even contribute to the prediction of the forming of romantic couples (see Supplemental).

Overall, the results indicate assortment in interests is positive, modest when specific RIASEC interests are considered, and moderate in the overall interest profile. This is consistent with studies that found a modest positive assortment for the personality, emotionality (Gonzaga et al., 2010), and attachment styles, but moderate for values (Luo & Klohnen, 2005; Watson et al., 2004), and leisure interests (Gonzaga et al., 2010). We found more consistent proof of VI assortment compared to Grotevant et al. (1977) but somewhat lower assortment in interest types compared with findings by Etzel et al. (2018). Both previous studies included relatively homogenous samples of parents of high-school students, different approaches to similarity operationalization, and did not investigate the mechanisms and relations to personality assortment. Differences might also be explained by the fact that our data was gathered in a different cultural context. Besides the previously mentioned methodological strengths (inclusion of direct tests of the mechanisms of assortment on a heterogeneous sample of couples, and the application of several methodologies to test assortment across interest types and profiles), we point out another. The application of the SDS as an extensive measure permitted a comprehensive evaluation of the profile similarity by CCA, a procedure that applies the full item pool, capturing the full breadth of the domain and the advantage of higher psychometric qualities.

The selection of a similar mate would be in line with the evolutionary theory of niche construction (Laland et al., 2001) that predicts an individual's active creation of environments for the sake of adaptation. Indeed, assortment (in VI) increases the genetic similarity of parents and offspring (Thiessen & Gregg, 1980), but the similarity between partners also contributes to the creation of homogenous dating and rearing environments (Kardum et al., 2019). The latter may have important consequences for children's future occupational choices (Etzel et al., 2018; Grotevant et al., 1977) and their career outcomes such as job satisfaction, prestige, or income over a decade later (Hoff et al., 2021).

The study of vocational interests straddles at applied goals primarily in vocational counseling. We advocate a broader perspective and validation and the possible applications of the VI in the domains of interpersonal functioning. Besides the selection of romantic partners, our conclusions might be relevant in the understanding of the formation of other types of relationships like close friendships. Higher similarity between partners communicates

consensual validation and is therefore considered rewarding (Byrne, 1971). The practical implications of assortment research lie in those interventions aimed at promoting greater relationship satisfaction in romantic partners. Individual differences, including VI, contribute to both positive and negative spillover within the work–family interface (Han & Sears, 2020; Michel & Clark, 2013), and further research into the effects that assortment in VI has on well-being is still needed. If VI affects family-related outcomes, assortment in interests could contribute to the relationship stability of a couple and potentially longer lasting relationships (Gonzaga et al., 2010). Indeed, several VI types are related to the relationship satisfaction of both the individual and his or her partner (Banov et al., 2022). Another contribution of this research is the inclusion of different assortment indices, which can help to inform counselling psychologists in the selection of congruence measures for the assessment of similarity in interests among couples. We have found here that the utilization of profile correlations can capture the highest degree of couple similarity in interests. The need and value of cross-specialty collaboration and the inclusion of the conjoint couple format in (career) counselling have been outlined by career practitioners (Hall, 2018).

Measuring couple congruence in VI might be applied in counselling in the co-construction of common life-career intentions of partners, the possible joint activities, and topics of common interest. Finally, our results indicate that assortment in VI is not a product of convergence or social homogamy in age and education, or a by-product of assortment in personality traits. Therefore, individuals probably have their own preferences for VI of their partners even before the initiation of a relationship. This information might be useful for the developers and researchers of the effectiveness of (online) dating services (see Gonzaga et al., 2010; Jonason & Thomas, 2022).

Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should be noted when considering the results. Although we assessed couples with different relationship lengths and educational levels, some cultural specificities of our sample could limit the generalizability of our results. The inclusion of other indicators of social context such as economic status or family-of-origin professional and educational background could lead to different conclusions regarding the social homogamy hypothesis. A parent's vocation might be a plausible indicator of the social milieu involved in the development of interests (Etzel et al., 2018) and therefore important for testing the social homogamy hypothesis. Second, as our design could not test the hypothesis of attrition, future research including partners who ended their romantic relationships could address these issues. The cross-sectional design of this study does not permit definitive conclusions about the mechanisms of

assortment in interests as aspirations for occupational activities and niches. A longitudinal design could enable a more appropriate test of convergence. Finally, when applying the CCA we found considerable variability in interest similarities. Some couples had similar interests, but there were several couples with negative profile correlations. An investigation into the moderators underlying this variability is needed.

Conclusions

This study offers new insight into the implications of individuals' life choices due to interests. It adds to the knowledge of assortment on VI, a tendency to pair with a self-similar partner. We applied an interindividual approach toward understanding the relationship between partner similarity in VI and broad personality traits. Although modest, assortment for interests appears independently from the social background where partners meet or their similarity in personality traits. Applying both the VCA and the CCA, we partially replicated previous findings on spousal similarity in VI (Etzel et al., 2018) adding to their generalizability by using a more detailed operationalization of interests and providing evidence for initial assortment rather than convergence in interests over time. These findings should be considered in future studies of the heritability of interests and spotlight new areas of research in the outcomes of VI.

4.1.1. Online Supplemental Materials (Study 1)

to

Do vocational interests matter for the selection of romantic partners? Evidence from variable and couple-centered approaches

available at: https://iaap-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/apps.12396

Supplemental Table 1

Descriptive statistics and correlations between vocational interests and personality traits

		Women					Men				
		E	A	C	N	O	E	A	C	N	O
Women	A	.22**									
	C	.48***	.32***								
	N	-.33***	-.41***	-.25***							
	O	.42***	.20**	.19**	-.11						
Men	E	.16*	.06	.05	-.02	.03					
	A	-.01	-.02	.05	.04	.01	.17*				
	C	.08	.04	.03	-.06	.01	.36***	.29***			
	N	-.07	.01	.01	.03	-.04	-.39***	-.52***	-.29***		
	O	.15*	.10	.04	-.02	.18**	.37***	.17*	.17*	-.19**	
Women	R	.06	.16*	.11	-.18**	.28***	-.07	.04	.02	-.11	-.10
	I	.02	.05	.09	-.05	.28***	-.12	-.05	-.12	-.02	.03
	A	.18**	.16*	.03	.02	.55***	-.09	-.05	-.06	-.02	.04
	S	.40***	.24***	.26**	-.13	.31***	-.08	-.08	-.08	.07	.06
	E	.38***	.04	.25***	-.14*	.21**	-.05	-.09	-.12	.07	.03
	C	-.03	.09	.08	-.09	-.09	.04	.03	.04	-.01	.10
Men	R	.02	.10	.03	-.01	-.01	.13*	.14*	.20**	-.18**	.13
	I	.02	.21**	-.06	-.03	.13	.12	-.04	-.04	-.09	.34***
	A	.12	.16*	.02	.04	.23**	.22**	.08	.01	-.05	.54***
	S	.10	.12	.12	.06	.14*	.26***	.08	.01	-.09	.34***
	E	.07	.11	.04	.05	.01	.41***	-.09	.20**	-.10	.27***
	C	-.03	.05	-.02	.00	.01	.06	-.10	.06	.08	.07
	M	28.71	33.72	35.20	20.99	36.49	29.13	33.27	34.9	18.66	34.94
	SD	5.01	4.79	4.25	5.0	6.13	4.75	4.83	5.19	5.02	6.03

Note: E – Extraversion; A – Agreeableness; C- Conscientiousness; N -Neuroticism; O – Openness; R – Realistic; I – Investigative; A – Artistic; S – Social; E – Enterprising; C – Conventional.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Assortment for Personality Traits and Its Relation to Assortment in Vocational Interests

In this section, we explicate the results of the investigation of assortment in the Big-five personality traits in our sample, applying both the variable-centered (VCA) and couple-centered approaches (CCA). Significant positive VCA correlations for personality traits in this sample were found for Extraversion ($r = .16$, $p < .05$) and, as in previous studies (McCrae et al., 2008), the largest correlation was for Openness ($r = .18$, $p < .01$). The positive assortment was confirmed only for these two traits, and further analysis indicates these traits were also most strongly correlated to interests of the same respondent (Supplemental Table 1). The correlations between Openness and Artistic interests were particularly high (.54 for women and men), Extraversion with Enterprising (.38 in women, .41 in men) and Social interests in women (.40).

Supplemental Table 2

Similarity Indices Obtained for Real Couples (N = 215) Compared with Similarity Obtained for Randomly Paired Couples (N = 430)

	Couples	Mean	*SD*	*t*	*d*	95% CI for Choen's *d*	
						Lower	Upper
Extraversion	Real	.22	.41	1.71	0.14	-0.02	0.31
	Random	.15	.41				
Agreeableness	Real	.28	.45	1.72	0.14	-0.02	0.31
	Random	.23	.38				
Conscientiousness	Real	.24	.40	0.18	0.01	-0.15	0.18
	Random	.24	.43				
Neuroticism	Real	.35	.41	2.40*	0.20	0.04	0.36
	Random	.28	.39				
Openness	Real	.20	.39	0.81	0.07	-0.10	0.23
	Random	.17	.42				
Overall	Real	.34	.26	3.22**	0.27	0.10	0.43
	Random	.29	.22				

Note. Statistical analyses were performed on Fisher *r*-to-*z* transformed similarity correlations; values in the table have been transformed back to regular correlations.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$

As can be observed in Supplemental Table 2, when applying the CCA and the comparison of profile correlations for real and randomly paired couples, we did not replicate the results of the VCA. Our results correspond to those of Luo et al. (2005) who also applied

the BFI and the methods of CCA in their assortment research, finding no evidence of similarity for Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, or Openness. Conversely, other studies showed consistent evidence of positive assortative mating for openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (McCrae et al., 2008; Watson et al., 2004). The positive VCA correlation for Extraversion was not confirmed through CCA. Concerning this trait, inconsistencies have been reported in previous studies, with evidence varying from low negative to moderate positive assortment (McCrae et al. 2008; Watson et al. 2004). With the CCA method we have replicated previous findings of a modest positive assortment for Neuroticism (Luo et al., 2005; McCrae et al. 2008). Although for the specific traits evidence of assortment was modest, similarly to what we observed for interests, the overall profile correlation was significantly higher for real than pseudo-couples (d = 0.27).

Linking Similarity in Personality Traits and Vocational Interests

One of the goals of our study was to evaluate whether the assortment in interests appears as a by-product of the assortment in five-factor personality traits. We, therefore, evaluate the correlations of women's and men's interests while controlling the similarity in Big five traits and performed a set of multiple regressions including the Big five similarity coefficients as predictors of intra-pair RIASEC similarity. Here we present the correlations between the similarity indices of both domains of individual differences (Supplemental Table 3).

Supplemental Table 3

Correlations Between Profile Similarity Indices Obtained for Vocational Interests and Personality Traits

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Realistic												
2. Investigative	.15*											
3. Artistic	-.02	.01										
4. Social	.06	.15***	.06									
5. Enterprising	.10	-.03	.25***	.28***								
6. Conventional	.12	.09	.21**	-.01	.20**							
7. Overall interest	.37***	.30***	.36***	.43***	.41***	.45***						
8. Extraversion	.01	.04	-.09	.13	-.02	-.11	-.03					
9. Agreeableness	.11	.04	-.14*	.01	-.02	-.05	.01	.33***				
10. Conscientiousness	.11	.17*	.06	.14*	.07	.01	.17*	-.01	-.03			
11. Neuroticism	-.10	.09	-.02	.09	-.02	-.11	.02	.12	.13	.04		
12. Openness	.05	-.03	-.11	-.02	.03	-.02	-.01	.06	.04	.12	.08	
13. Overall BFI	-.04	-.01	-.03	.22**	.15*	.01	.05	.43***	.26***	.22**	.32***	.35***

Note. Statistical analyses were performed on Fisher r-to-z transformed similarity correlations

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Most similarity coefficients of interests and personality traits were not significantly correlated. Partner similarity in Conscientiousness showed modest positive correlations with the Investigative, Social, and overall interest profile similarity. Conversely, partners that are more similar in Agreeableness appeared less similar in Artistic interests. Finally, the overall BFI profile of couples was positively related to the similarity in Social and Enterprising interests. None of these associations appeared significant in our subsequent analysis as outlined in the article, where we evaluated the proportion of variance in interest similarity that could be explained by the similarities in personality traits. Another interesting observation from Supplemental Table 3 that supports these conclusions is the correlation between two overall profile similarity indices. No significant sizable associations between these, most robust measures of couple similarity in the two domains have been observed.

Differentiating Real-Life and Pseudo-Couples With Similarities in Personality Traits and Vocational Interests

Again, to test the incremental validity of similarity in VI towards the actual prediction of the formation of romantic couples, 108 (half of the sample) of real-life couples versus 107 pseudo-couples were predicted as a binary outcome in logistic regression. This subsample of pseudo-couples was generated applying the random uniform distribution from one half of the original sample so that all participants appeared in this analysis only once, one half paired to their real partner, and the other half to another subject. The binary outcome variable of real or random pairing was predicted in logistic regression.

Hypothesis 4 stated that vocational interests would be significant predictors of the forming of romantic couples over and above the similarity in Big Five personality traits. To test this hypothesis, we built two partner choice models: in the first, we added four sociodemographic characteristics - age, education, and their two respective interactions (note that the interactions were computed after the random placement of subjects in the pseudo-couple subsample) followed by profile correlation coefficients - the Big-five profile correlation coefficients and the six profile correlation coefficients for each RIASEC dimension. In the second, after the sociodemographic characteristics, we added the profile correlation obtained across all the five personality traits (i.e., personality profile), and the one obtained across the full profile of RIASEC interest scores (i.e., overall interest profile). The sociodemographic variables and interactions were assigned to the null model, as the focus of these analyses were the effects of similarity coefficients. Given a high number of predictors, to select the best fitting model for

distinguishing real from pseudo-couples we performed logistic regressions with stepwise variable selection based on Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC), which is comparable with previous research in the effects of interest fit (see Schelfhout et al., 2021). This procedure reduced the final set of predictors to seven for the first partner choice model (Negelkerke R^2 = 0.17, Tjur R^2 = 0.24). As indicated in Table 4, partners' age and interactions in age contribute to a true identification of real or pseudo-couples.

Supplemental Table 4

Coefficients at the Two Final Partner Choice Models Estimates from Logistic Regressions

	Estimate	Standard Error	*z* -Statistic
Model 1			
(Intercept)	6.10	1.82	3.35***
Age (men)	-0.19	0.05	-3.98***
Age (women)	-0.20	0.05	-4.08***
Interaction education (women * men)	0.05	0.03	2.04*
Interaction age (women * men)	0.01	0.001	4.22***
Openness – profile correlation	0.61	0.37	1.63
Investigative – profile correlation	2.55	0.73	3.52***
Artistic – profile correlation	1.66	0.73	2.27*
Model 2			
(Intercept)	10.79	3.05	3.54***
Age (men)	-0.20	0.05	-4.20***
Age (women)	-0.22	0.05	-4.33***
Educational level (men)	-0.99	0.65	-1.53
Educational level (women)	-1.02	0.59	-1.73
Interaction age (women * men)	0.01	0.001	4.47***
Interaction education (women * men)	0.30	0.15	1.91
Overall RIASEC interest profile	3.18	1.00	3.20***

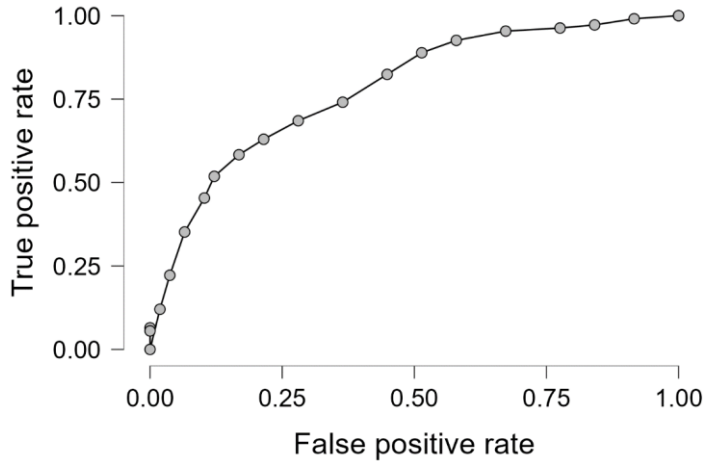
Note. The partner choice was codes as: 0 = pseudo-couples, 1 = real couples;

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

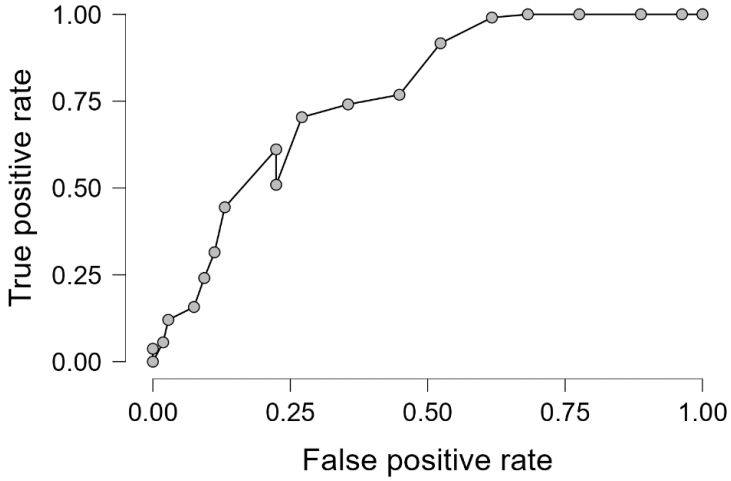
Important when testing our hypothesis is that a significant contribution of profile similarities appears in Investigative and Artistic interest. This partner choice model manages to correctly identify 68.52% of the real couples (sensitivity) and 72% of the non-couples (specificity). We plotted the ROC curve (Fig. 1) to represent the rate of sensitivity and 1-specificity and found an AUC of 0.78 indicating acceptable accuracy.

Supplemental Figure 1

The ROC Curve of Real Versus Pseudo-Couple Membership for Model 1 (a) and Model 2 (b)



(a)



(b)

While other similarity coefficients of personality traits were excluded at the first step of the analysis, Openness remained in the model, although its' contribution did not appear significant. In the second partner choice model AIC stepwise selection procedure excluded the personality profile coefficient from the predictors' list (Negelkerke $R^2 = 0.07$, Tjur $R^2 = 0.20$), while the contribution of the overall RIASEC interest profile was significant. This model correctly identifies 70.4% of the real couples (sensitivity) and 73% of the non-couples (specificity). Figure 2 represents the ROC curve for the second model, with an AUC of 0.76 indicating again acceptable accuracy. These results further confirm Hypothesis 4, indicating the incremental validity of vocational interests in the prediction of romantic matchmaking.

4.2. Study 2: Vocational interests and relationship satisfaction: An actor-partner interdependence model

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Abstract

This study examined the intrapersonal and interpersonal effects of vocational interests (VI) on two indicators of romantic relationship satisfaction (RS), specifically women and men's perceived relationship quality and their satisfaction with partner attributes. We hypothesized Investigative, Artistic, Social, and Enterprising interests would predict higher own or partner's RS. Additionally, we explored the role of interest profile attributes: differentiation and elevation. The study employs actor-partner interdependence modeling on data of 215 heterosexual romantic couples. Results from both RS measures converged on several findings: Realistic and Enterprising interests in women, and Investigative interests in men positively predicted own RS. Women were more satisfied if their partner had higher Investigative interests, Artistic interests, higher interest elevation and a lower differentiation of interest profile. Although the effects were relatively small, the present results contribute to the literature by showing that VI, which has been previously investigated principally for the prediction of career outcomes, are also relevant for romantic relationship outcomes.

Keywords: vocational interests; relationship satisfaction; actor–partner interdependence model

Introduction

Most adults aspire to be in a satisfying romantic relationship, an important resource promoting health, as well as the psychological stability and development compatible with the partner's personality (Gerlach et al., 2018; Karney & Bradbury, 2020). Previous research of the social consequences of personality prominently focused on the effects of broad traits on romantic relationship satisfaction (RS) with metaanalytic and cross-cultural studies concluding that personal dispositions predict RS by intimate partners (Gerlach et al., 2018; Malouff et al., 2010; Weidmann et al., 2016). Back and Vazire (2015) stress that the search for processes that explain the associations between dispositions and social outcomes is still understudied, while we have almost no data on the interpersonal consequences of a wide range of personality variables besides traits.

The present research sought to address these gaps by examining the associations between vocational interests (VI) and two aspects of RS on a dyadic sample. VI as stable individual differences predict performance and satisfaction-related outcomes in educational, professional, and working environments (Van Iddekinge et al., 2011). Holland (1997) developed a model to organize a unified description of six vocational personalities through preferences for occupational activities, and corresponding working environments with dominant demands and opportunities. These domains are: Realistic (operating with things, or in the outdoors), Investigative (exploring, analytics and science), Artistic (creative expression), Social (helping people), Enterprising (leadership), and Conventional (systematic data manipulation), therefore – RIASEC. Some authors argue (Armstrong et al., 2011; Han & Sears, 2020) the applications of Holland's theory can be broader, and even provide testable hypotheses about relational well-being outcomes that have rarely been studied in the vocational field. We select VI as relevant predictors of RS departing from the general theory of personality, the Five-factor theory (McCrae et al., 2021). The theory describes traits as based in biology, relatively independent from environmental influences, and affecting behaviour only trough characteristic adaptations (like interests, values or attitudes) which result from the accommodation to specific life circumstances. The hypothesis that VI should affect the construction of social relationships outside work (Stoll et al., 2017) including RS, is based on their stability, effects on transitions during early adulthood (Hoff et al., 2021; Wille & De Fruyt, 2014), decision making and cognition (attention and memory), including affective experiences (Su et al., 2019).

Vocational Interests in the Interpersonal Context

Few studies have investigated the importance of VI in the interpersonal context. In soldiers, social interests predicted higher, whereas Artistic interests predicted lower interpersonal job knowledge over and above cognitive aptitude or personality (Van Iddekinge et al., 2011). In a ten-year follow-up, alumni with higher social, and lower Investigative or Enterprising interests were more likely to be married and have children (Stoll et al., 2017). Positive associations with work-family conflict appear for Realistic, Social, Enterprising, and Investigative interests, while Artistic interests are associated with higher work-family time balance (Han & Sears, 2020). To explore the interpersonal relevance of VI in children and adults, Sodano (2011) investigated how RIASEC-based VI relate to interpersonal dispositions. Realistic and Investigative interests were perceived as non-affiliative, Social showed affiliative interpersonal meanings, and Enterprising had a cold-dominant meaning for children but friendly-dominant for adults, unlike conventional that children associated with interpersonal warmth. Children's view of Artistic interest as warm and submissive differs from the adults' perception of it as non-conforming and independent.

In addition to direct effects of interests, we propose the investigation of theoretically meaningful parameters of VI profiles: differentiation and elevation. The first can be adopted in the operationalization of vocational identity as it represents a measure of the level of distinctness of interest profiles (Holland, 1997). Interest elevation, measured as the sum of all RIASEC scores, reflects the willingness to consider different vocational options. It relates positively to career exploration and an enthusiastic style in career counseling (Bullock & Reardon, 2005). These attributes may contribute to the prediction of RS and enhance our understanding of the role VI play in dyadic relations.

The Current Study

This study uses a dyadic paradigm, securing data from romantic couples in a simultaneous assessment of the effects of one partner's disposition (in this study VI) on his own RS (actor effects) and the effects on their counterpart's RS (partner effects). To account for the nonindependence of couple data we applied the Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006). As in previous research of romantic RS (Malouff et al., 2010; Weidmann et al., 2016), we investigate each partner's evaluation of the global relationship quality (Fletcher et al., 2000). Additionally, we have examined another relationship outcome: the satisfaction with a partner's characteristics. Previous authors stress the importance of a domain-specific distinction in the evaluation of RS (Fletcher et al., 2000; Mattson et al., 2012). To make the

results more comparable with those attained in other studies we separately evaluate the associations for both measures of RS. No previous research has examined actor or partner effects of VI on RS of romantic partners. Therefore, we formulate exploratory hypotheses mainly from Holland's (1997) conceptualization of the RIASEC types and empirical findings on their prediction of non-work outcomes.

Realistic interests orient toward the manipulation of objects, practical achievements, and are not related to family life outcomes (Stoll et al., 2017). Similarly, Conventional types prefer efficient, ordered data manipulation, with a tendency to be prudish and follow rules (Holland, 1997). Although appreciated in a professional context, these characteristics could hardly be related to affiliation motives (Sodano, 2011). Hypothesis 1. Realistic and Conventional interests will not exert significant actor and partner effects on the satisfaction with partner characteristics and the perceived relationship quality of romantic partners. Investigative interests as preferences for symbolic investigations are most predictive for greater income and occupational prestige (Hoff et al., 2021), valuable characteristics of a long-term partner. They also relate to delays in starting a family (Stoll et al., 2017) which could indicate the greater psychological maturity of involved partners. A person with high Artistic interests tends to self-expression, including emotional expression. Additionally, aesthetic production has been related to attractiveness (Miller, 2001). Social interests, predispose individuals for caregiving and predict a higher probability of being married or having children (Stoll et al., 2017). They are perceived as affiliative (Sodano, 2011), marked with higher social skills and interpersonal knowledge (Van Iddekinge et al., 2011). Enterprising interests are related to greater experience in romantic relationships (Stoll et al., 2017), income and prestige (Hoff et al., 2021), the preference to lead and persuade others, and is characterized by a friendly-dominant interpersonal style (Sodano, 2011). Gender differences in actor and partner effects of personality traits on RS appear but are rarely replicated across samples (Weidmann et al., 2016). Coherent subdomains of masculine and feminine occupational interests are identified (Lippa, 2010), and RS relates positively to femininity (Ta, 2017). However, theories of interests (Holland, 1997; Su et al., 2019) do not expand their predictions for interpersonal outcomes considering gender moderation effects. This study will enable a first exploration of whether VI differentially predict RS for women and men. Accordingly: Hypothesis 2. Higher actor and partner RS will be observed (both the satisfaction with partner characteristics and the perceived relationship quality) in individuals with higher Investigative, Artistic, Social, or Enterprising interests. Finally, we investigate the role of two interest profile attributes, differentiation and elevation. Individuals with higher differentiation are more predictable in their vocational

choices, and higher commitment to career choices has been modestly but positively related to romantic RS (Demirtas & Tezer, 2012). Higher elevation signals a more open and enthusiastic person (Bullock & Reardon, 2005) what might contribute to RS. To summarise: Hypothesis 3. Higher interest differentiation and elevation will contribute to higher RS (both the satisfaction with partner characteristics and the perceived relationship quality) in romantic partners.

Method

Participants and Procedures

A community sample of 215 Caucasian heterosexual urban couples was recruited by opportunity sampling method from one town in Croatia. The exclusion criteria were the age of less than 18 years, and less than one year of relationship length, to grasp couples of partners who knew each other well and who were in a committed relationship. Women were younger (M = 37.90 years, SD = 11.92) than their partners (M = 40.02 years, SD = 12.05; t = 9.16, $p <$ .001, d = 0.62). The duration of their relationships ranged from 1 to 42 years (M = 15.71 years, SD = 11.82), 62% of couples were married or 22% cohabitating, while 16% did not live together. The majority (60.5%) of couples had children. Participants were employed (79.5% of men and 72.6% of women), unemployed (2.8% and 9.3%), university students (9.5% and 14.4%), or retired (6.2% and 1.4%), and 81.9% of participants declared to have an average income. Participants mostly had a secondary level of education (52.1% of men and 43.3% of women), or a higher education degree (41.9% of men and 54% of women), while less often they had finished only elementary school (4.2% of men, 0.9% of women) or reached beyond a master's degree (1.9% of both women and men). Couples were provided an informed consent form. Then, they completed paper-and-pencil questionnaires simultaneously, sitting apart in their homes or at the faculty premises, under the supervision of two psychology students who ensured independent responding.

Materials

Self-Directed Search

Romantic partners' VI were assessed with the Croatian adaptation (Šverko & Babarović, 2006) of the Self-Directed Search inventory (Holland, 1994). Respondents rated their (dis)like of work activities (66 items), occupations (84 items), and their sense of ownership for work-related competencies (66 items). Additionally, the questionnaire contains twelve 7-point scaled items of comparisons with peers for personal abilities and skills. Items are aggregated into six composite RIASEC scores. Strong validity was proven across different

samples (Krapić et al., 2008; Šverko & Babarović, 2006). In our sample, interest scales exhibited high Cronbach alpha internal consistencies having values between 0.87 and 0.93.

For calculating the elevation of interest profiles, we summed up the scores from the six interest scales for each participant. The profile elevation in our sample was higher for women (M = 154.85, SD = 37.66) than for men (M = 147.42, SD = 40.35; t = 2.20, $p < .05$, d = 0.15). We computed two differentiation measures: the difference of the lowest from the dominant interest score, and the Streuungs-Index (dispersion-index), calculated as the standard deviation among the values of the six interest scores. The two measures correlate substantially in our sample (0.95 for both women and men) and therefore we report only the Streuungs-Index in this paper, as it accounts for all six interest scores. Men (M = 10.19, SD = 2.91) and women (M = 9.76, SD = 3.03; t = 1.65, $p > .05$) did not differ significantly on this measure.

Relationship Satisfaction Measures

Two different questionnaires were used to investigate aspects of RS.

The Satisfaction Index (SI; Simpson, 1987) is a composite measure of satisfaction with 11 partner attributes (their financial and social status, physical and sexual attractiveness, emotional support capability, reliability, similarity of attitudes and values, stability, pleasantness of personality) graded on a scale from 1 (*very unsatisfactory*) to 7 (*very satisfactory*).

Perceived Relationship Quality Components (PRQC; Fletcher et al., 2000) is a six-item scale where participants rate different aspects of their relationship (satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion, and love) on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). Cronbach's alphas reliability coefficients for the SI and PRQC were 0.91 and 0.89 respectively.

Results

Correlations of VI types and profile attributes with RS measures within and between samples of women and men are displayed in Table 1.

Assortative correlations between women and men appeared for all interests except for Enterprising, they were modest but significant and ranged from 0.25 for Investigative to 0.15 for Conventional interests, 0.17 for differentiation, and 0.19 for elevation. Women and men's SI (r = 0.52, $p < .001$) and PRQC (r = 0.52, $p < .001$) were highly correlated. Strong correlations between RS measures were found in both women (r = 0.75, $p < .001$) and men (r = 0.83, $p <$

.001). We present our results from separate analyses similarly to some previous authors (Mattson et al., 2012), considering the different aims of measures (partner rather than relationship evaluation), and to capture criterion-relevant information. Men expressed somewhat higher satisfaction with a partner (t = 2.61, p > .01, d = 0.25), but there were no gender differences in the perceived relationship quality (t = 0.94, p < .05, d = 0.09). Overall, all the significant correlations were modest but positive, besides men's differentiation and women's RS. Both women's SI and PRQC showed associations with their own (Realistic, Social, Enterprising) or men's (Investigative, Artistic, social) VI. In men, only the SI correlated with their own (Investigative and Artistic) or women's (social) interests.

Table 1

Correlations Between Interests, Interest-Profile Attributes, and Relationship Satisfaction Measures

Interests	SI (W)	PRQC (W)	SI (M)	PRQC (M)
Women				
Realistic	.16*	.12	.07	.06
Investigative	.06	.00	-.04	-.11
Artistic	.01	-.07	-.02	-.07
Social	.11	.14*	.14*	.01
Enterprising	.16*	.18**	.07	.04
Conventional	.04	-.01	-.07	-.08
Differentiation	-.01	.06	.11	.01
Elevation	.14	.09	.04	-.05
Men				
Realistic	.02	.03	.07	.05
Investigative	.19**	.18**	.14*	.10
Artistic	.27***	.19**	.15*	.06
Social	.16*	.12	.08	.03
Enterprising	.12	.09	.11	.10
Conventional	.07	.06	.03	-.05
Differentiation	-.19**	-.18**	-.08	-.01
Elevation	.22**	.18**	.16*	.08

Note. SI – satisfaction index; PRQC – perceived relationship quality index; W – characteristic is observed in women; M – characteristic is observed in men; zeroorder correlations are shown.

*p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001. Two-tailed.

In the analysis, actor and partner effects were estimated applying the APIM (Kenny et al., 2006) through a free web application APIM_SEM (Stas et al., 2018). This statistical procedure uses the dyad as the unit of analysis controlling for correlations between the independent variables and correlations between residual variables. Given that a correlation of predictor variables between partners is 0.20, and the correlation between errors is 0.50, the power of detecting actor effects of 0.25 would be 0.99, and the power of detecting partner effects of 0.20 would be 0.93 (Ackerman & Kenny, 2016).

The tests of distinguishability based on gender were statistically significant in all cases except for APIM's of Enterprising interests and profile differentiation on PRQC. To make the results more easily comparable we treated dyad members as distinguishable across all subsequent analyses. Previous evidence of gender normativity of VI interests (Etzel et al., 2018) suggests this is theoretically appropriate. We then conducted two sets of APIM analyses to examine whether men and women's interests and profile characteristics predicted satisfaction with partner attributes or the evaluation of relationship quality. We present the results comparatively in Table 2.

Table 2

Standardized Parameter APIM Estimates For Vocational Interests Predicting Satisfaction with Partner Attributes (SI) and Perceived Relationship Quality (PRQC)

Predictor	*Satisfaction with partner attributes*					
	Actor effects (β)		Partner effects (β)		W R^2	M R^2
	W → W	M → M	M → W	W → M		
Realistic	.16*	.06	-.01	.06	.03	.01
Investigative	.01	.16*	.18**	-.08	.04	.03
Artistic	-.04	.15*	.27***	-.05	.07	.02
Social	.08	.06	.14*	.13	.03	.02
Enterprising	.14*	.10	.11	.06	.04	.02
Conventional	.03	.05	.07	-.08	.01	.01
Differentiation	.03	-.10	-.20**	.12	.04	.02
Elevation	.10	.16*	.21**	.01	.06	.02
	Perceived relationship quality					
	Actor effects (β)		Partner effects (β)		W R^2	M R^2
	W → W	M → M	W → Ž	W → M		
Realistic	.11	.04	.01	.05	.01	.01
Investigative	.04	.13*	.18**	-.14*	.03	.03
Artistic	-.10	.07	.20**	-.08	.05	.01
Social	.12	.03	.10	.01	.03	.01
Enterprising	.17**	.10	.03	.07	.04	.01
Conventional	-.02	-.03	.06	-.08	.01	.01
Differentiation	.09	-.01	-.20**	.02	.04	.00
Elevation	.06	.09	.17**	-.07	.04	.01

Note. W – women; M – men; β – standardized beta coefficient; R^2 – coefficient of determination.

*$p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

We found positive actor effects of Realistic interests on women's satisfaction with partner's attributes. Positive actor effects of Investigative interests were observed on both measures of RS, but only in men. The expected positive actor effects of Artistic interests were found for men's SI, but not for men's PRQC or either measure of women's RS. Enterprising interests in women exerted positive actor effects on both RS measures. Finally, we did not find proof for the relational relevance of Conventional interests. No partner effects were found for Realistic or Conventional interests on either measure of RS. Men's Investigative interests positively relate to women's SI and PRQC. Contrary to our prediction, women's Investigative interest exerted significant negative effects on their partner's PRQC, but not on their partner's

SI. Artistic interests in men consistently showed significant positive partner effects on women's PRQC and SI. This was not the case for women's Artistic interests, which showed no relation to either RS outcome of their partners. Men's social interests exerted positive partner effects on women's satisfaction with their partners, although no partner effect was found for the PRQC. Enterprising interests did not show any partner effects.

Women whose partners had a lower interest profile differentiation or higher interest profile elevation scored higher on SI and PRQC. Additionally, higher interest elevation in men relates to higher own SI.

Discussion

Disciplinary boundaries have limited the investigation of potential outcomes of VI on vocational, organizational, and educational psychology. This study presents a unique contribution in the investigation of associations between the RIASEC interests and RS – satisfaction with partner attributes and relationship quality. Taken together, our results provide evidence that VI are modest but consistent predictors for different operationalizations of RS. Regarding the associations of Realistic and Conventional interests with SI and PRQC, as expected (H1), no associations with RS were found for these interests. One exception is the positive actor effect of women's Realistic interests on their own satisfaction with partner's attributes. This interest type, rarely dominant in women (Lippa, 2010; preferred for 1.5% of women in our sample) may represent a form of sharing interests with a partner, or some leisure experiences (McIntyre & Graziano, 2019), promoting RS in women.

The results showed significant actor or partner effects of Investigative, Artistic, social, and Enterprising interests for at least one RS measure (H2). Data suggest there are gender differences for the contribution of interest types to RS. For partner effects of Investigative interests, our results confirm the hypothesis that they relate to higher women's RS, albeit women's Investigative interests exerted deleterious effects on their partner's PRQC. We expected positive partner effects of this interest-type based on its association with higher income and a tendency to marry at a more mature age (Stoll et al., 2017). Investigative, as well as Artistic interests, predicted by intelligence and openness (Krapić et al., 2008), could indicate good genes and higher mating value (Miller, 2001). However, Investigative interests lead to time-intensive careers and are positively linked to work-family conflict (Han & Sears, 2020). These associations could reflect the negative effects on men's RS, considering the social norms of women's higher investment in family roles (Lippa, 2010).

Women's satisfaction was also higher in the case of men's higher Artistic interests. The evolution of artistic capacities is explained by sexual selection through mate choice: aesthetic fitness indicators, like bodily ornaments or courtship dances and songs, are also found in the animal world (Miller, 2001). Apparently, in men Artistic interests have the highest predictive contribution of all VI on the establishment of a satisfactory romantic relation, possibly serving courtship functions. Why men's Social interests translate into positive RS outcomes only for women's satisfaction with their partners? Social interests are often related to femininity (Lippa, 2010) which in turn has been consistently and positively associated with RS (Ta, 2017). Men who select activities related to Social interests contrast traditional gender roles (Etzel et al., 2018), therefore, beneficial effects on women's satisfaction with partner's attributes may be related to the higher visibility of men's Social interests or nurturing behaviours. Social interests present a tendency to serve others, and women's wellbeing is indeed more affected by the prosocial behaviour of their partners (Righetti et al., 2020).

We expected Enterprising interests to be relevant for partner's RS as they are associated with interpersonal affiliation and dominance (Sodano, 2011), leading to well-paying and prestigious environments (Hoff et al., 2021), and predicting relationship status outcomes (Stoll et al., 2017). Data confirm their relevance for women's own RS. This interest-type relates to an agentic and goal-directed interaction style (Holland, 1997) what might ease the behaviour related to intimacy goals. Enterprising work demands reflect on higher levels of work-family conflict (Han & Sears, 2020) but may contribute to a higher appreciation of a partner's support in long-lasting relationships. Further research is needed to comprehend the possible gender differences.

Contrary to our predictions (H3), differentiated men in our sample had partners that expressed lower relationship quality and partner satisfaction. Differentiation indicates lower interest exploration needs (Bullock & Reardon, 2005), and Holland (1997) proposed it should be related to career commitment and decidedness. General self-concept clarity was previously found beneficial for partners' relational wellbeing (Parise et al., 2019). However, differentiation of RIASEC interests represents the clarity of identity in the vocational domain. Perhaps men with higher differentiation are more discriminating in their search for career opportunities, maybe even inflexible or unwilling to prioritise family over work, leading to diminished satisfaction of their partners. Interestingly, and consistent with the above-mentioned results, we found that differentiation in men is also negatively correlated with those RIASEC interests that present positive effects on women's satisfaction, the Investigative, Artistic, and Social interests.

Higher interest elevation in men predicted their higher satisfaction with partner attributes, and it was also consistently related to higher SI and PRQC in their partners, in line with our expectations (H3). This measure, useful in career guidance, has been positively related to an expressive, or enthusiastic style (Bullock & Reardon, 2005), and it might contribute to the ability to search for partner qualities that enrich the self, contributing to RS.

This study found few examples of different effects across women and men (Table 2). Similarly, findings of possible gender effects in the differential associations between personality traits and RS are inconsistent (Weidmann et al., 2016). We discuss these findings with respect to widely acknowledged gender differences in VI related to both biological and environmental factors (Armstrong et al., 2011). The inclusion of homosexual union types could help the better understanding of possible gender-role effects mediating the relations of interests and RS. Our results support recent attempts (Han & Sears, 2020; Stoll et al., 2017; Wille & De Fruyt, 2014) to recognize VI as individual differences that are relevant for social outcomes outside the work environment. One important strength of this research concerns the adoption of a dyadic framework, which simultaneously assesses both partners. The partner effects presented are not artifacts of the common method variance (Kenny et al., 2006), as different assessors estimate VI- and RS- scales. The application of an extensive measure of interests and different operationalizations of RS contribute to the validity of our findings. Nonetheless, several limitations might be addressed in future studies. First, our convenience sample addressed the relationships of heterosexual, Caucasian, well-educated, middle-class couples, limiting the possibility of generalization and testing the effects of gender roles. The cross-sectional nature of the study disables conclusions about directional effects. Considering longitudinal reciprocal relations between interests and career trajectories or outcomes (Hoff et al., 2021; Wille & De Fruyt, 2014), future research should examine the long-term bidirectional associations between VI and relationship outcomes. Finally, we have only focused on the effects of individual interest types, although dyadic (dis) similarity effects might appear in the exploration of the relations between RS and individual differences.

4.3. Study 3: Actor, Partner and (Dis)Similarity Effects of Vocational Interests on Work-Family Interface

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Abstract

The study aimed to explore the predictive role of vocational interests in work-family conflict and work-family enrichment in 271 employed heterosexual couples. We administered questionnaires measuring vocational interests, time-based and strain-based work-family conflicts and work-family enrichment. Going beyond prior studies, we (a) utilized a dyadic paradigm to examine actor and partner effects of interest types, (b) considered two characteristics of the interest profile - differentiation and elevation, and simultaneously (c) tested (dis)similarity effects. Actor-partner interdependence modelling and dyadic response surface analysis were employed. The results revealed modest negative actor effects of Investigative, Social, and Enterprising interests on various types of work-family conflict, along with positive actor effects of Social, Enterprising and Conventional interests, profile elevation and differentiation on work-family enrichment. Partner effects support the interpersonal relevance of people-oriented interest types. The effects were similar for women and men, and evidence generally spoke against the (dis)similarity effects of interests on work-family conflict or enrichment. A higher educational level in women was associated with increased work-family enrichment but also family-work conflict. This study highlights the interdependence of vocational interests in romantic dyads and their contribution to work-family dynamics.

Keywords: vocational interests, work-family conflict, work-family enrichment, dyadic analyses

Introduction

Recent changes in work flexibility, a growing emphasis on family-friendly and gender-equitable workplaces, and the rise of hybrid working models have sparked concerns about the work-family interplay (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014; Sarpong, 2018). Role conflicts, operating as family-to-work conflicts (FWC) and vice versa (work-to-family conflict; WFC), can adversely affect employees' physical and mental health (Amstad et al., 2011; Yucel & Latshaw, 2020). These conflicts arise when demands in one role hinder engagement in the other, manifesting as time-based or strain-based challenges (Carlson et al., 2000). On a positive note, engaging in multiple roles within work and family contexts can enhance functioning in both domains, leading to work-family enrichment (WFE; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

In dual-income families, the repercussions of partners' vocational choices resonate in the interpersonal context. Existing studies have predominantly investigated intra-individual, i.e. actor effects of role conflicts and enrichment on personal, work, and health-related wellbeing domain (Amstad et al., 2011). Research using couple-level data has evidenced the dyadic transmission of experiences to closely related others, the inter-individual, partner effects. For instance, inter-role conflicts relate negatively to job satisfaction, couple relationship quality, wellbeing, physical and mental health of both workers and their partners (Steiner & Krings, 2016; Yucel & Latshaw, 2020). Conversely, WFE can lead to higher job and family satisfaction, as well as improved physical and mental health (McNall et al., 2010). These findings align with interdependence theory (Van Lange & Balliet, 2015), asserting that outcomes of close others are intertwined, and psychological states, such as moods or distress, can be transmitted between partners. Situational demands, work arrangements, and social support at work and home contribute to both WFC and WFE (French et al., 2018). Some employees benefit more from favorable work conditions, while others are more sensitive to organizational and family characteristics contributing to role conflicts; therefore, Michel et al. (2011) underscore the role of dispositional variables. A meta-analysis (Allen et al., 2012) indicates that self-efficacy and internal locus of control protect against WFC, while negative affect increases vulnerability to it.

Diverse dispositional antecedents of WFC, FWC, and WFE remain understudied, and vocational interests (VIs) emerge as theoretically relevant and plausible predictors. These stable preferences for vocational activities guide the selection of long-term working and educational environments (Su et al., 2019), exposing workers to varying working conditions, probabilities of stressful interactions, and social support (Nye et al., 2017). VIs are enacted within social

contexts that include not only the work and educational environments but also families and culture (Armstrong et al., 2011). This study aims to extend previous research by investigating actor and partner effects of VIs on WFE and both directions of work-family conflicts in romantic couples. Additionally, building on the hypothesis that interest congruence contributes to better adaptation in the working context (Holland, 1959), we explore whether partner similarity or dissimilarity in VIs uniquely contributes to the experience of WFC or WFE. The following sections present the current state of knowledge, leading to research hypotheses, along with the analytic strategy applied to simultaneously test actor, partner, and (dis)similarity effects.

Vocational Interests in the Interpersonal Context

Actor and Partner Effects of VIs

Interests encompass affective reactions and cognitive evaluations of activities or environments, serving motivational functions as stable individual differences (Su et al., 2019). Holland's theory (1959; 1997) categorizes dispositional aspirations for work or education into six interrelated types: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional (RIASEC). The high interest-homogeneity of individuals working in the same occupation makes this typology useful in career counselling. Importantly, the congruence of individual's interests and their working environment enhances the prediction of work performance compared to interest scores alone (Nye et al., 2017). RIASEC types have been shown to predict income and job satisfaction (Hoff et al., 2019). Beyond work, Stoll et al. (2017) found that VIs significantly impact relationship outcomes a decade after graduation: Enterprising and Conventional interests increased the odds of marriage, while Social and Conventional interests were linked to a higher probability of having children. Vocational interests might be interdependent among closely related individuals, as suggested in the theory of interest dynamics (Su et al., 2019), which posits that both direct and vicarious experiences contribute to interest stabilization. Friends and families impact vocational decision-making in adolescence (Kim et al., 2023). Recent studies stress the importance of examining the relational effects of interests in romantic dyads. Specific RIASEC types differentially predict relationship satisfaction; for instance, one's own Realistic, Enterprising and Investigative interests, as well as their partner's Investigative and Artistic interests predict higher satisfaction in romantic relationships (Banov et al., 2022). Couples generally exhibit modest or moderate similarity in interests, a pattern mirrored in greater parent-child interest similarity (Banov et al., 2023; Etzel et al., 2019) and better couple adjustment (Mayrand et al., 2023). Consistently with the

interdependence theory (Van Lange & Balliet, 2015), we propose exploring the effects of VIs in the context of work-family dynamics. Han and Sears (2020) were pioneers in demonstrating the incremental validity of RIASEC interests in predicting WFC beyond the effects of personality. They found that Realistic and Social interests negatively, and Artistic interest positively predicted FWC, while Investigative and Enterprising interests positively relate to WFC. The authors suggest that characteristics of working environments that attract employees of a certain interest type might also lead to specific patterns of experienced role conflicts. Our study aims to extend these findings to the couple level, assessing the potential interpersonal relevance of VIs in the context of work-family dynamics.

Secondary Constructs of Profile Elevation and Differentiation

In addition to exploring potential divergent effects of RIASEC interest types, vocational research emphasizes the importance of considering features of the entire interest profile when predicting individual outcomes (Etzel et al., 2019; Hoff et al., 2019; Tracey et al., 2014). Consequently, our study considers the effects of two components of the overall interest profile. Holland (1997) coined the term interest differentiation to measure variation in the six RIASEC scores. Differentiated profiles, indicating clearer vocational preferences, correlate positively with career certainty, occupational stability, and career satisfaction (Tracey et al., 2014). Conversely, the total interest score, referred to as elevation, signifies interest versatility. Individuals with an elevated interest profile are more likely to fit into different types of workplaces. Hence, elevation implies a general disposition for a variety of interests. These two scores may drive distinct interest-guided behaviors, such as specializing or being flexible across different work contexts. In the interpersonal context, women reported higher relationship satisfaction if their partner had higher levels of interest elevation, but lower differentiation (Banov et al., 2022).

Potential (Dis)Similarity Effects

Evolutionary theories proposing the benefits of assortative mating (Kardum et al., 2021), highlight the importance of exploring how partner similarities, alongside individual traits, impact well-being. Some (dis)similarities in partners' personalities, attitudes, or leisure interests have positive effects on their well-being, attraction, and relationship satisfaction (Gonzaga et al., 2010; Montoya et al., 2008; Schaffhuser et al., 2014). However, at least for the Big-Five traits, the impact of similarity on relationship satisfaction is relatively small (less than 0.05%) after accounting for main effects (Dyrenforth et al., 2010). The rise of women in professional occupations, particularly in high-status professions, has led to increased

occupational assortative mating. This trend may amplify resource concentration in advantaged households, potentially contributing to increased economic inequality (Schwartz et al., 2021). Further investigation is needed to determine whether the VIs' similarity explains variations in work-family dynamics, alongside their main effects, but some evidence suggests so. The rise in similarity for entrepreneurial interests among the employees enhances their work-related commitment (Hubner et al., 2020). Mayrand et al. (2023) found that higher vocational similarity in Artistic and Enterprising interests contributes to greater couple adjustment. Although not directly related to VIs, research on couples sharing the same occupation or industry indicate positive wellbeing outcomes for both partners (Sarpong, 2018). These couples often experience higher spousal support, leading to improved work-family balance, job satisfaction, and family satisfaction (Ferguson et al., 2016). However, challenges may arise due to similar working schedules, blurred boundaries between private and working time, and differences in earnings. A large-scale analysis by Hennecke and Hetschko (2021) reveals that work-linked couples experience greater income and job satisfaction, especially if highly educated. However, they also report lower leisure satisfaction, and these effects apply to both men and women, even after considering Big Five personality traits.

Recent studies employing dyadic response surface analysis (DRSA; Schönbrodt et al., 2018; Shanock et al., 2010) have demonstrated that varying levels of similarity or dissimilarity in certain dispositional characteristics among partners are associated with different outcomes. For instance, Xie et al. (2017) found that when both partners prioritize work over family roles, they experience lower marital satisfaction, demonstrating disruptive effects of similarity. Another study reported that dissimilarity in openness (but not similarity) was linked to lower relationship satisfaction in women (Weidmann et al., 2017). While the use of DRSA to measure dispositional similarity is becoming increasingly common in romantic relationship research (Humberg et al., 2019), it remains relatively novel in vocational psychology. Our research will be the first to test the potential similarity effects of Holland's VIs among romantic partners within the context of work-family dynamics.

The Present Study

The aim of this study was to investigate whether RIASEC types and two interest profile dimensions, elevation and differentiation, can predict WFC, FWC and WFE in romantic couples. This study adopts a dyadic approach securing data from romantic couples to examine work-family conflicts or enrichment as functions of the interdependent, own and partner's RIASEC types and two characteristics of both partners' vocational profiles. To ensure

comparability with previous research predicting role conflicts from individual VIs (Han & Sears, 2020), and to differentiate between different sources of challenges, we separately analyzed time- and strain-based forms of both FWC and WFC. However, we consider the current state of knowledge insufficient to develop specific hypothesis for each source of role conflict. Drawing from prior findings suggesting that certain interest profile characteristics contribute to positive relationship outcomes (Banov et al., 2022; Mayrand et al., 2023), we hypothesized that Investigative, Artistic, Social and Enterprising interests would positively predict own WFE (Hypothesis 1). Considering the caregiving tendencies associated with Social interests (Holland, 1959), we anticipated positive partner effects on WFE (Hypothesis 2). The lack of research on the interpersonal effects of VIs does not allow us to formulate additional evidence-based hypotheses on possible partner effects. Additionally, based on evidence indicating that greater vocational clarity or differentiation is linked to improved work-related outcomes (Tracey et al., 2014), we proposed that higher levels of differentiation would promote WFE (Hypothesis 3). As higher elevation contributes to better adjustment to working contexts, we expect it to enhance one's own sense of WFE (Hypothesis 4). Complementing the above stated, we predict negative actor effects of Investigative, Artistic, Social and Enterprising interests on both WFC and FWC (Hypothesis 5), along with negative partner effects of Social interests on WFC and FWC (Hypothesis 6).

Beyond examining the main effects, we assess the effects of (dis)similarity in interest types, differentiation, and elevation on role conflicts or enrichment. Grounded in Holland's person-environment fit hypothesis and insights from personality and social psychology prior research suggests that partner similarity in vocational profiles may enhance couple adjustment (Mayrand et al., 2023), while marital similarity in leisure interests promotes relationship satisfaction (Gonzaga et al., 2010). Therefore, we hypothesize that partners can benefit from sharing VIs, thereby experiencing positive effects of similarity on WFE (Hypothesis 7). The examination of (dis)similarity effects on WFC and FWC remains exploratory, as does the investigation of potential gender differences due to limited dyadic research on VIs.

Method

Participants and Recruitment

We used a convenience sample of Caucasian heterosexual married (51%), cohabiting (24%) or dating (25%) urban couples. The sample was recruited by psychology undergraduates who received course credit for their collaboration. Each student was asked to approach dual-

earner couples among their acquaintances during spring and summer of 2022. We had to exclude 7 couples due to partially incomplete answers. This left a total sample of 271 couples, thereafter, referred to as the analysis sample. To be eligible for participation, both partners had to be employed at least part-time, be at least 18 and at most 51 years old, and be involved in a heterosexual romantic relationship for at least 6 months at the time of entering the study. The duration of the relationship was between 6 months and 33 years (M = 11.90; SD = 9.44). Women were somewhat younger (M = 33.74 years; SD = 9.82 years) than men (M = 35.59 years; SD = 10.08 years; t = -8.50; $p < .001$; Cohen's d = -0.52). Women had also more years of educational attainment (M = 14.40 years; SD = 2.65 years) than men (M = 13.54 years; SD = 2.72 years; t = 5.02; $p < .001$; Cohen 's d = 0.31). Our sample included fewer participants who completed only elementary education (1.1% and 0.7% of men and women, respectively), three-year vocational high school programs (21.5% and 11.1%), or a postgraduate education (4.8% and 4.1%). Most participants obtained a four-year high school education (38.8% men and 32.1% women), or a college degree (13.7% of men and 19.2% of women obtained a bachelor's degree, while 20% of men and 32.8% of women obtained a master's degree). Approximately half of the couples were parents (N = 132; 48,71%).

After providing informed consent, the couples completed questionnaires by paper-and-pencil method. Research assistants administered the questionnaires to each member of a couple alone, at the same time, but ensured independent responding by requiring the partners to sit apart from each other.

Measures

Participants initially self-reported their gender and completed a demographic questionnaire, providing information on their age, occupation, highest educational degree, duration of the current relationship, and the number of children they had with their current partner.

VIs were assessed with the *Personal Globe Inventory-Short* (PGI-Short; Tracey, 2010). This instrument comprises two sets of ratings. Participants rate their liking for 40 vocational activity preference items on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly dislike*) to 7 (*strongly like*). The same activities are then rated based on the respondent's self-perceived competence (1 = *I am unable to do* to 7 = *I am very competent*). The Croatian translation of the instrument demonstrated its validity in young adult samples (Šverko, 2008).

We applied four subscales of the multidimensional *Work-Family Conflict Scale* (Carlson et al., 2000) to measure both directions of conflict (work-to-family and family-to-

work) and distinguish weather the conflict arises in the allocation of time or energy devoted to each role. Participants had to evaluate three items for each dimension: the time-based WFC (e.g. "I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities"), the time-based FWC (e.g. "I have to miss work activities due to the amount of time I must spend on family responsibilities"), the strain-based WFC (e.g. "I am often so emotionally drained when I get home from work that it prevents me from contributing to my family"), and strain-based FWC (e.g. "Due to stress at home, I am often preoccupied with family matters at work"). The scale was previously translated, validated, and adopted in research on Croatian samples, demonstrating adequate reliability and validity (Maslić Seršić & Kurtović, 2020).

We applied the *Short measure of work-family enrichment* (Kacmar et. al., 2014) containing three items (e.g. "My work helps me to understand different viewpoints and this helps me be a better family member"). For both scales, items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Statistical Approach

All statistical analyses were conducted using R 3.3.2 (R Core Team, 2019), applying the packages *RSA* (Schönbrodt & Humberg, 2021), *lavaan* 0.6-12 (Rosseel, 2012), *dplyr* (Hadley et al., 2021) and *gridExtra* (Auguié, 2017). The code for model computations was based on Schönbrodt et al.'s (2022) work, accompanying their paper (Schönbrodt et al., 2018). Missing data were estimated using full information maximum likelihood. Confidence intervals were bootstrapped with 10000 replications. For gender comparisons of effects, all variables were standardized across partners by centering them to a common mean and pooled standard deviation before analysis.

For each outcome (time- or strain-based WFC or FWC, and WFE) we evaluated whether it is a function of own and partner's level of the predictor variable, introduced in pairs: one woman's and the other men's. This procedure was repeated a total of 40 times, with each of the five outcomes predicted by each of the six RIASEC interest types or the two interest-profile characteristics, elevation, or differentiation. To address potential effects of couples' social homogamy, which means partners having similar education rather than rather than VIs, all analyses were controlled for standardized educational levels. In each comparison, we employed the actor-partner interdependence model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) which simultaneously tests actor and partner effects of two predictors (e.g. each partner's Social interests) on two interdependent outcome variables (e.g. each partner's WFC), considering the interdependence

of predictors. Additionally, we examined whether an APIM with gender constraints could adequately fit the data, retaining the simpler model if applicable.

To explore (dis)similarity effects, we applied dyadic response surface analysis (DRSA). Combining the APIM with the response surface analysis (RSA), DRSA simultaneously estimates two polynomial regression models. In these models, a pair of predictor variables simultaneously predicts two interdependent outcome variables. This allows the researcher to test whether the possible (dis)similarity effects are the same for both partners (i.e. as similarity in Social interests might be beneficial only for women and not for men) and whether the main effects are linear or curvilinear (Schönbrodt et al., 2018). In other words, DRSA provides a graphical and statistical interpretation of the (dis)similarity effects on low, mid- and high level of the predictor (e.g. one experiences WFE only when they and their partner are high but not low on Social interests).

Polynomial regression coefficients are estimated as linear actor (b_{1f} and b_{2m}), curvilinear actor (b_{3f} and b_{5m}), linear partner (b_{2f} and b_{1m}), curvilinear partner (b_{5f} and b_{5m}), and interaction (b_4) effects. These coefficients are crucial for computing additional parameters whose combination allows us to describe the shape and position of the response surface in a three-dimensional space and test the similarity hypothesis. Notably, the operationalization of similarity in DRSA doesn't rely on a single parameter, a departure from Conventional measures such as difference scores and profile correlations. This approach mitigates potential biases toward false positive (dis)similarity effects (Rogers et al., 2018). To select the most parsimonious model, we adhered to the stepwise procedure suggested by Weidmann et al. (2017). If a model featuring linear relations and/or gender equality explained the association between VIs and the outcome comparably well with a dyadic polynomial model, we reported the results of the simpler model. We assessed the comparative model fit using the chi-square difference test. More details on interpretating (dis)similarity in the DRSA, the full dataset, analytical code, and additional analyses can be found in the Supplementary materials at https://osf.io/whju6/?view_only=a13062414f6e46508b7f55e775025eeb.

Power analysis

To estimate the power of detecting actor and partner effects in indistinguishable or distinguishable dyads, we applied the web application APIMPowerR (Ackerman & Kenny, 2016). We computed the power expecting modest correlations of the actor and partner variables (r = .20). On a sample of 271 couples, and a significance level of .05, the power to detect an expected small to medium actor effect (standardized estimate = .20) is .91 while the power to

detect a small partner effect (standardized estimate = .15) is .70. To estimate the power of detecting similarity effects, we adapted the R code by Schönbrodt et al. (2018). Using the significance level of .05, the power to detect a similarity effect that would explain 5% of variance in women or men's relationship satisfaction was .90.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and assortative correlations for all variables, along with cross-gender predictor variability, are fully reported in the Supplementary analyses. Consistent with prior research, this study found notable gender differences in VIs: Social and Artistic interests are more expressed in women, while Realistic interests are dominant in men. Not all assortative mating coefficients reached significance, indicating that the dyadic approach is more suitable for evaluating some interests (Investigative, Social and Enterprising) than others (Realistic, Artistic and Conventional), as well as for the interest profile elevation. Moreover, men reported experiencing more time-based WFC, while higher strain-based FWC and WFE were found in women.

Most interests did not show significant correlations with work-family role conflicts or enrichment. In men, Investigative and Social interests were modestly related to strain-based WFC (both $r = -.16$, $p < .01$), while Enterprising interests were modestly related to WFE ($r = .13$, $p < .05$). In women, Social interests were related to both time- and strain-based WFC, and, along with Enterprising interests, to time-based FWC (r between -.12 and -.18), while Conventional interests were associated to strain-based FWC ($r = -.15$, $p < .05$). Social, Enterprising and Conventional interests in women were modestly positively associated with WFE (r between -.14 and -.18). The reliability measures α and ω-hierarchical indicate sufficient unidimensionality and internal consistencies for all measures. For detailed coefficients and the complete correlation table, interested readers can refer to the Supplementary materials. In Table 1 we present the model comparisons of the simple APIM with DRSA analyses, and the latter compared to the gender constrained APIM model. In cases where the chi-square test was significant, the complex model yielded a significantly better fit. Bolded entries indicate models where combinations of predictors and outcomes revealed significant actor or partner effects.

Most significant models were well represented by the simple APIM with gender equality constrained. There were no significant associations found between Realistic or Artistic interests and time- and strain-based WFC, FWC or WFE. Other VIs (Social, Enterprising, Conventional), along with profile elevation and differentiation, emerged as significant

predictors of WFE (Table 1 and Table 2). For role conflicts, the results indicate a modest contribution of VIs to the prediction of role conflicts (Table 1 and Table 3). Specifically, Investigative, Social and Enterprising interests predicted only time-based FWC, Social interests predicted strain-based WFC, and interest differentiation predicted time based WFC. The DRSA model did not significantly improve the fit over the APIM (at $\alpha = .001$) for any combination of predictors and outcomes except for the case of Social interests predicting WFE (Table 1 and Table 3), suggesting that (dis)similarity effects are not likely for other combinations of predictors and outcomes.

Table 1

Difference in Chi-square between Unconstrained Model and Constrained Model ($\Delta\chi^2$) for the Prediction of Time- and Strain- Based WFC, FWC, and WFE

	Realistic	Investigative	Artistic	Social	Enterprising	Conventional	Differentiation	Elevation
Time WFC								
APIM - DRSA	1.81	3.25	6.22	5.95	10.95†	4.29	**5.45**	0.65
APIM - APIM G.E.	1.35	0.15	1.11	1.49	2.69	3.85	**7.17***	0.71
Strain WFC								
APIM - DRSA	7.06	5.27	8.09	**3.80**	8.09	3.61	1.27	0.99
APIM - APIM G.E.	0.77	3.64	4.86†	**0.70**	0.12	4.62†	1.62	1.31
Time FWC								
APIM - DRSA	6.81	**11.77**†	11.57†	**4.28**	**6.22**	9.69	5.08	2.22
APIM - APIM G.E.	0.94	**1.73**	1.34	**3.20**	**7.80***	4.95†	3.98	4.59†
Strain FWC								
APIM - DRSA	6.34	6.16	10.68†	7.94	5.52	3.61	3.01	7.61
APIM - APIM G.E.	0.99	0.59	0,18	0.79	2.39	4.62	0.83	1.99
WF Enrichment								
APIM - DRSA	2.61	5.02	4.44	**30.74*****	**6.45**	**3.66**	**10.64**†	**9.48**
APIM - APIM G.E.	1.65	0.46	1.29	**19.90*****	**1.55**	**1.30**	**10.08**	**7.34**†

Note. DRSA - Dyadic response surface analysis model; APIM - simple APIM model; APIM G.E. - simple APIM model with coefficients constrained to be equal across genders. Degrees of freedom in the model comparisons were: *df* (DRSA) = 0, *df* (APIM) = 6, and *df* (APIM G.E.) = 8.; †$p \leq .10$; *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$; ***$p \leq .001$. In the bolded models we found significant effects, presented in subsequent analyses.

Predicting Work-Family Enrichment

Supporting Hypothesis 1, simple APIMs with gender constraints revealed modest positive actor effects for Enterprising interests on WFE, but no effects were found for Artistic or Investigative interests. Extending the expected associations, Conventional interests emerged as significant predictors of one's own WFE. Modest positive actor effects of interest elevation and differentiation were in line with Hypotheses 3 and 4 respectively. The final models for these analyses are detailed in Table 2.

Interestingly, only for the association between Social interests and WFE, the constrained models exerted significantly worse fit. Different patterns of associations are observed for Social interests of women and men. For women's WFE, positive non-linear actor effects (b_5) emerged, indicating that the more extreme women's Social interests were in both directions, the incrementally higher their WFE. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, positive linear (b_1) and non-linear (b_3) partner effects suggest that higher levels of women's WFE appeared at more extreme levels of men's Social interests. As a result, a significant coefficient $a_2 = b_3 + b_4 + b_5 = .25$ (CI: .11, .37; $p < .001$) emerged, describing the shape of the response surface on the congruence line, in women's case curvilinear. A significant coefficient $a_1 = b_1 + b_2 = .35$ (CI: .16, .55; $p < .001$) describes the slope of the response surface on the congruence line, meaning that women's WFE is nonconstant for congruent levels of Social interests. The observed relationship can be visualized in Figure 1a, and best described as a bowl-shape: when both partners share moderate levels of Social interests women's WFE appears lowest, while higher enrichment is experienced in women if both partners have a high-high, low-low, low-high or high-low combination. In men, Hypothesis 2 was confirmed: a positive linear partner effect (b_2) suggests that greater levels of WFE were observed if their partners had greater Social interests. This resulted in a significant $a_1 = .35$ (CI: .16, .55; $p < .001$), indicating a slanted response surface above the congruence line, observable in Figure 1b.

Table 2

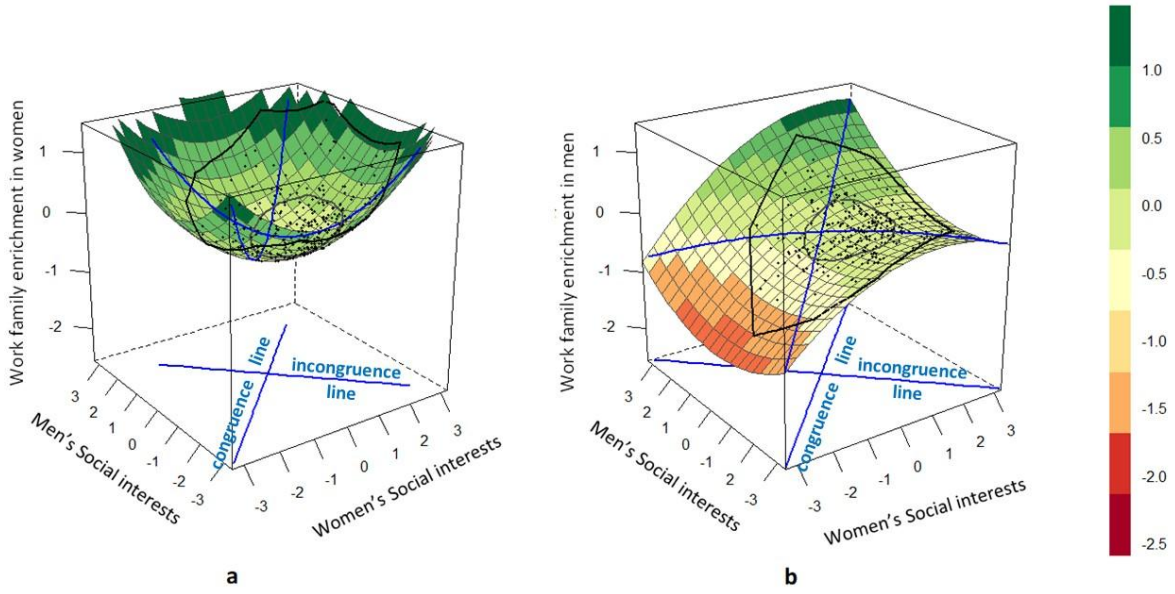
Coefficient Estimates of the Selected APIM or DRSA Models Based on the Model Comparison of the Effects of RIASEC Interests on Work-Family Enrichment

	WFE (W) ~ Social	WFE (M) ~ Social	Enterprising	Conventional	elevation	differentiation
Linear actor (b_1)	.09 (-.07, .24)	.13 (-.03, .30)	.11** (.03, .20)	.11** (.04, .19)	.10* (.02, .18)	.11** (.04, .19)
Curvilinear actor (b_3)	.12** (.05, .20)	.06 (-.03, .14)				
Interaction (b_4)	-.02 (-.14, .09)	.02 (-.09, .13)				
Linear partner (b_2)	.20* (.04, .38)	.22** (.06, .38)	.05 (-.04, .13)	.03 (-.05, .11)	.04 (-.04, .13)	.02 (-.05, .09)
Curvilinear partner (b_5)	.15*** (.07, 24)	-.06 (-.14, .03)				
WFE (M) ~ Educ. (w)		.04 (-.07, .17)	.02 (-.10, .14)	.06 (-.06, .18)	.01 (-.11, .13)	.03 (-.09, .14)
WFE (W) ~ Educ. (w)	.20** (.07, .33)		.16* (.03, .29)	.14* (.01, .27)	.15* (.02, .28)	.17** (.04, .30)
R^2 W, M	.14	.06	.05, .03	.05, .03	.05, .03	.05, .03

Note. Educ. (w) - standardized level of women's education; no significant effects observed for the control of men's education, hence omitted from the table for simplicity; M / W - the prediction of men's / women's outcomes. For Realistic, Investigative and Artistic interests no significant effects emerged. All cells, except those for Social interests, display coefficients of the APIM with gender equality constraints. The cells for Social interests show coefficients estimated with the DRSA model, which better fits the data in this analysis. The conditions for similarity effects of Social interests were not satisfied, based on the procedure suggested by Humberg et al. (2019); *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$; ***$p \leq .001$.

Figure 1

Response Surfaces of the DRSA Model for Work-Family Enrichment of Women (a) and Men (b) when Using Social Interests



In summary, both women and men experienced higher WFE when they had greater Enterprising or Conventional interests, an elevated overall profile, or more differentiated VIs. Furthermore, having a partner with higher Social interests was associated with higher WFE. Across all models, women's level of education was a positive predictor of women's WFE. In other words, women with higher educational levels reported that experiences in their working roles promoted a greater sense of enrichment in their family roles.

Predicting Work-Family Role Conflicts

Generally, the RIASEC model accounted for variance in time- and strain-based WFC and time-based, but not strain-based FWC. All effects were modest in size, represented in Table 3. Most significant relations were actor-only effects.

Partially supporting Hypotheses 5, we observed negative actor effects of Investigative, Social and Enterprising interests on WFC and FWC, while no effects of Artistic interests were noted. Specifically, greater Social interests in both the self and the partner (supporting Hypotheses 6) predicted lower strain-based WFC, with no gender differences. Negative actor effects of Investigative and Social interests on time-based FWC were consistent across genders, indicating that individuals with higher Investigative and Social interests experienced lower time-based FWC, regardless of gender. Enterprising interests showed significant negative actor

effects on time-based FWC, differing across genders: only for women, higher Enterprising interests were associated with lower time-based FWC. For this interest type significant negative partner effects were also observed: men's time-based FWC was lower when their partners had greater Enterprising interests. Across analyses of Investigative, Social and Enterprising interests, women's level of education was positively associated with their own time-based FWC but negatively with partner's strain-based WFC.

For individuals identifying as men, interest differentiation positively predicted time-based work-family conflict, indicating that those with more distinct vocational preferences might be at risk of experiencing greater time demands at work, at the expense of family-time.

Table 3

APIM Coefficients Parameters of Both Partners' RIASEC Interests on Work-Family and Family Work Conflict

Outcome ~ Predictor	R^2 (m)	R^2 (w)	Linear effect	estimate	95% CI LB	95% CI UB
Time WFC ~ differentiation	.03	.02	Actor (w)	-.09	-.20	.02
			Actor (m)	.13*	.02	.23
			Partner (w)	-.04	-.16	.07
			Partner (m)	-.06	-.18	.06
			M ~ Educ. (w)	-.11	-.24	.01
			W ~ Educ. (w)	.04	-.08	.16
Strain WFC ~ Social	.07	.03	Actor	-.13**	-.21	-.04
			Partner	-.09*	-.17	-.001
			M ~ Educ. (w)	-.15*	-.27	-.03
			W ~ Educ. (w)	-.02	-.15	.10
Time FWC ~ Investigative	.04	.02	Actor	-.10*	-.20	.00
			Partner	.07	-.02	.17
			M ~ Educ. (w)	.02	-.10	.14
			W ~ Educ. (w)	.18**	.04	.32
Time FWC ~ Social	.03	.05	Actor	-.13**	-.22	-.04
			Partner	-.04	-.14	.06
			M ~ Educ. (w)	.03	-.09	.15
			W ~ Educ. (w)	.15*	.01	.29
Time FWC ~ Enterprising	.03	.06	Actor (w)	-.16*	-.29	-.03
			Actor (m)	.07	-.05	.18
			Partner (w)	-.02	-.15	.11
			Partner (m)	-.11*	-.22	-.01
			M ~ Educ. (w)	.02	-.10	.14
			W ~ Educ. (w)	.17*	.03	.30*

Note. R^2 - coefficient of determination; m – men; w – women; WFC – work-family conflict; FWC– family-work conflict; Educ. (w) – standardized level of women's education (controlled variable); no significant effects were observed for men's education, hence omitted from the table for simplicity. M / W - the prediction of men's / women's outcomes; LB - lower bound and UB - upper bound of a CI - confidence interval;

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

Investigating (Dis)Similarity Effects

Consistently across all 8 analyses (for each RIASEC type, elevation and differentiation), Hypothesis 7 of similarity-effects on WFE had to be rejected. Specifically, only in the case of Social interests predicting WFE the model comparison indicates that the full DRSA model is superior to the simple APIM (Table 2), and even in that case the conditions for similarity effects are not satisfied, based on the procedure suggested by Humberg et al. (2019). Exploratively, we performed the DRSA models for the predictions of time-and strain-based WFC and FWC, and again no evidence of (dis)similarity effects of any RIASEC type, interest elevation or differentiation was found. To replicate this analysis using a conventional method for testing similarity, we calculated profile correlations based on each couple's item-level responses for each RIASEC type. Since this approach doesn't allow a separate evaluation of similarity effects of elevation or differentiation, we performed an additional profile correlation across all the items of the PGI-Short, examining similarity across all interests at once. The obtained profile correlations, serving as indices of couple similarity, were applied in regression analyses to predict each partner's WFE or the time- and strain-based WFC/FWC. Once again, null findings replicated across men's and women's outcomes. In summary, our data, analysed through different methods, consistently does not support the effects of (dis)similarity in VIs on WFC, FWC, or WFE. The values of profile correlations in our sample and their associations with outcome variables can be found in the Supplementary analysis.

Discussion

To address the need for more understanding of dispositional variables in work-family dynamics (Michel et al., 2011), we explored how RIASEC interests and vocational-profile characteristics impact WFC, FWC, and WFE. Partner and similarity effects were assessed, aligning with the interdependence theory (Van Lange & Balliet, 2015). The results partially supported our hypotheses, revealing negative actor effects of Investigative, Social, and Enterprising interests on employees' WFC and FWC, but null associations for Artistic interests. The study identifies positive actor effects of several VIs, interest elevation, and differentiation on WFE. Modest partner effects of Social and Enterprising interests support the interpersonal relevance of people-oriented interest types. However, the absence of evidence for similarity effects persists across all interest types and profile characteristics.

No significant main effects were found for Realistic or Artistic interests on outcome variables (Table 1) contrary to prior findings (Han & Sears, 2020) associating Realistic interests positively and Artistic interests negatively with time-based FWC. Previous studies found no

associations between Realistic interests and relationship satisfaction (Banov et al., 2022; Mayrand et al., 2023) or interpersonal life goals (Stoll et al., 2020), instead linking this interest type to the occupational value of independence (Rounds & Armstrong, 2014). We find existing theory insufficient for formulating hypothesis about the effects of Realistic interests on work-family dynamics. Realistic interests are more prevalent in men, who tend to disclose work-family management challenges less frequently (Shockley et al., 2017). This might be the reason for suppressed, null effects. Future research could benefit from including partner reports of WFC, especially in the case of traits more expressed in men. The following sections discuss hypothesized effects, linking the results to relevant theoretical and empirical findings for each interest type.

Actor and Partner Effects of VIs and Profile Characteristics on WFE

Hypothesis 1 received partial support, revealing positive actor effects of Enterprising and Social interests on WFE (Table 3). This aligns with evidence that entrepreneurial passion provides both material and psychological resources, enhancing efficiency in familial roles (Xiao & Fu, 2022). Gender differences emerged for Social interests. Women displayed curvilinear actor and partner effects, with an incremental increase in WFE at more extreme own and their partner's interest levels, while for men linear positive partner effects were found (Figure 1). When Social interests, as occupational preferences aligned with traditionally female-associated roles are highly complementary, highly expressed in both or in neither of the partners, women report greater WFE, indicating that various forms of vocational coupling can be beneficial. Hypothesis 2 held for both genders, with DRSA offering detailed insight into Social interests' partner effects. The findings align with the idea that this preference for caregiving and interactional activities has positive effects on the well-being of men and women (Banov, 2022).

Conventional interests exerted positive actor effects on WFE, going beyond our initial expectations. Theoretical proposals suggest that Social, Enterprising and Conventional interests contribute to work meaningfulness (Cardador, 2019). Employees find work meaningful when it contributes to others' wellbeing (Social interests), positively impacts the organization through leadership (Enterprising interests) or aligns with a sense of duty and belonging (Conventional interests). Social contribution emerges as a common mechanism, explaining perceptions of meaningfulness, belonging and enrichment. Evidence of Social interests' positive partner effects on both women and men's WFE contributes to the literature on partners' dispositional interdependence (Dyrenforth et al., 2010, Schaffhuser et al., 2014).

The anticipated associations (Hypothesis 1) between Investigative or Artistic interests and WFE were not confirmed. Previous studies suggest the role of these interests in interpersonal and family relations. For instance, individuals with higher Investigative interests are less likely to be married or have children by the age of 30 (Stoll et al., 2017), while Artistic interest contribute to romantic relationship satisfaction (Banov et al., 2022). While artistic professions offer autonomy and self-actualization through work (Menger, 2006), we found no evidence for the effects of mere Artistic interests, which might be present even in employees working in other professions, on the enrichment in the family domain.

Consistent with the positive impact of vocational clarity on career outcomes and decision-making (Tracey et al., 2014), our study supports Hypotheses 3 and 4, indicating that Holland's (1997) constructs of interest differentiation and elevation enhance personal experiences of WFE. Differentiation, associated with emotional stability and extraversion, is often described as vocational decidedness. Comparably, interest elevation, associated with higher openness, is indicative of greater career exploration and vocational flexibility (Hirschi, 2009). Consistent with the expansionist perspective in work-family literature (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), our data suggest that expressing diverse interests, and therefore having an elevated interest profile, contributes to transmitting positive experiences from work to the family domain. Interest elevation and differentiation serve as psychological resources influencing career behavior. However, the specific mechanisms behind their modest contribution to WFE require examination in future research.

Actor and Partner Effects of VIs and Profile Characteristics on WFC and FWC

VIs generally had negative effects on role conflicts, indicating that a greater expression of Investigative, Social, or Enterprising interests, excluding Artistic, relates to lower levels of role conflicts. Specifically, Investigative interests showed modest negative actor effects on time-based FWC (Table 3), supporting Hypothesis 5. Contrary to Hypotheses 5, Investigative interests didn't show associations with strain-based FWC or any WFC type. Past research noted Investigative interests predicting educational goals but negatively linked to relationship goals (Stoll et al., 2020). Prolonged education delays family role entry (Stoll et al., 2017). Yet, Investigative interests positively affected relationship satisfaction (Banov et al., 2022). High Investigative interests correlated with lower time-based FWC, opposing Han and Sears (2020), who found positive links with strain-based WFC. Our sample, comprising somewhat younger participants, may capture a different career stage compared to the previously investigated sample. Intellectual work may cause strain, but pursuing an investigative career early on might

also correlate with increased family support, leading to lower FWC. Future research could explore age and social support as potential moderators in the relationship between VIs and role conflicts.

Contrary to our expectations, Artistic interests did not predict WFC or FWC. Han and Sears (2020) observed negative associations of Artistic interests with time-based FWC, attributing it to flexible time schedules of artistic professionals. However, the arts also involve challenges like short-term contracts or multiple employments outside the profession (Menger, 2006). We avoid explaining the associations between interests and work-family conflicts based on working conditions, as these environments can vary across professions related to specific interests. Based on our couple-level analysis, we cannot conclude that the Artistic interest type significantly impacts work-family role balance of the employee or that of their partner. Consistent with our null findings, a previous meta-analysis (Allen et al., 2012) did not identify bivariate relationships between WFC and the trait of openness to experience, typically associated with Artistic VIs.

Social and Enterprising interests exerted negative actor effects on time-based FWC, supporting Hypothesis 5. This again contrasts previous findings on the positive associations of interest with role conflicts (Han & Sears, 2020). Additionally, women's Enterprising interests exerted negative partner effects on men's time-based FWC. In line with Hypothesis 5 and 6, for both women and men, higher Social interests had protective actor and partner effects on strain-based WFC (Table 3). The negative actor and partner effects of Social and Enterprising interests can be interpreted in the context of previous findings linking them to relationship life goals (Stoll et al., 2020). Both interests share the tendency, knowledge, and skill to provide service to others, often involving collaborating at work (Holland, 1997), which could be applied in the private context as well. In this line, Enterprising interests in women and Social interests in men had positive effects on own or partners' relationship satisfaction (Banov et al., 2022). Another proof of their interpersonal relevance reflects in the fact that Social and Enterprising interests predict the likelihood of being married and having children (Stoll et al., 2017). The negative association between these interests and time-based FWC or strain-based WFC requires further investigation. While we cannot rule out the strain- or time-based conflicts experienced by workers in social or enterprising environments, the mere interests in people-related careers seem to have some protective effect.

Surprisingly, only a differentiated vocational profile in men had significant positive actor effects on time-based WFC (Table 3). This unexpected result could be explained by the

possibility that, like high work-family centrality findings (Xie et al., 2017), individuals with highly differentiated interests may be heavily invested in their vocation (in education or at work), potentially at the cost of time devoted to their family. Further research is needed to explore this finding and the gender-specific effects of differentiation.

The Absence of Evidence for Similarity Effects

Our data reveal modest assortative correlations in interest elevation, Investigative, Social and Enterprising interests (Table 1). Previous studies on VIs assortment also support assortment for Realistic and Artistic interests (Banov et al., 2023; Etzel et al., 2019). Despite these correlations, similarity in VIs does not appear to be linked to either WFC or WFE, contrary to Hypothesis 7. The full DRSA model was only superior in examining the effects of Social interests on WFE compared to APIM models (Table 1 and Table 2). Although the similarity of Social interests did not contribute to WFE, the data suggest that different combinations of partners' interests are associated with varying degrees of enrichment.

Earlier studies on personality-similarity effects have produced mixed results, depending on the methods used to measure similarity. For example, similarity in personality traits appears unrelated to attraction (Humberg et al., 2023), and when (dis)similarity effects do appear, their impact on relationship satisfaction is often modest (Dyrenforth et al., 2010; Weidmann et al., 2017). Meta-analytic evidence suggests that perceived similarity is a stronger predictor of interpersonal attraction than actual similarity (Montoya et al., 2008). Inconsistent conclusions on partner similarity in work-family centrality also exist. While attitudes favoring work roles over family roles predict both individual and partner's work-family conflict (Hong et al., 2022; Xie et al., 2017), research on similarity effects has yielded different results. One study using discrepancy scores suggested that less discrepant values between partners led to lower WFC and greater life satisfaction (Hong et al., 2022). In contrast, another study using RSA found that couple complementarity, rather than similarity, in prioritizing work over family had beneficial effects on marital satisfaction (Xie et al., 2017). Thus, we applied two different methodologies to assess similarity effects, and both yielded null results.

Lastly, studies on couples linked through work have shown positive well-being outcomes when partners share the same profession or workplace (Hennecke & Hetschko, 2021; Sarpong, 2018). However, these effects might only manifest when partners share more than just interests. Studies applying the RIASEC model and grouping various distinct vocations, may require larger samples and greater statistical power to identify similarity effects conclusively.

Limitations and Future Directions

Certain limitations warrant consideration in future studies. Although a substantial body of literature supports VIs as antecedents of career choices and work outcomes (Hoff et al., 2019; Nye et al., 2017; Stoll et al., 2017), cross-sectional designs limit causal interpretations. Longitudinal research could build on these findings by investigating whether VIs assessed at the beginning of a career, or even before partners initiate their romantic relationship, predict later role conflicts or enrichment. Other variables closely connected with VIs such as occupational values (Rounds & Armstrong, 2014), also play a role in motivating career decisions. As cultural values predict both FWC and WFC (Masuda et al., 2019), future research should concurrently evaluate the unique contributions of occupational values in the emergence of conflicts and enrichment in couples.

While our study did not include couples who had broken up or left their jobs, attrition could be a factor in not capturing (dis)similarity effects. The study focused on individual interests but did not account for vocational environment characteristics or the fit between VIs and work environments. Additionally, the relatively young age of our sample, with no participant older than 51 years and only around half being parents, may limit the variability in experienced WFC and, consequently, the obtained associations. Two meta-analyses (Amstad et al., 2011; Michel et al., 2011) reported that having children or the age of children did not moderate the effects of WFC on work- or family-related outcomes. However, another meta-analysis suggests a nuanced picture for parents. Ford et al. (2008) found a stronger negative effect of work-related stress on family well-being in parents compared to non-parents. The authors suggest that various family characteristics (single or coupled parenthood, age of children, etc.) could potentially explain the emergence of WFC and WFE. It is important to note that our sample lacks information on these family characteristics potentially related to WFC and WFE. Considering parenthood as a potential demand and resource factor, future research could offer a more detailed investigation of mediators explaining the relations between (especially Social) interests and work-family balance.

The generalizability of these findings is limited to heterosexual, white couples within a highly ethnically homogeneous society. Additional research is needed for LGBTQ populations or other minority groups that may encounter unique concerns or stress linked to a lack of social support in their families or workplaces. Research focusing on these social groups should employ sufficiently large samples and consider an additional validation of the measures of WFE, FWC or WFC (Belous & Wampler, 2016). Replications designed for minority groups should consider

the cross-cultural specificity of VIs and avoid the heteronormative assumption that VIs scales are universally applicable for gay or lesbian couples (Ellis et al., 2012). Finally, sex differences in Realistic and Social interests might have supressed the effects of similarities between partners on their WFC/WFE. We offered plausible interpretations of our data based on Holland's theory and empirical findings. However, to clarify the possible mechanisms underlying the actor and partner effects and the effects of (dis)similarity on WFC/FWC and WFE, the role of contextual factors should be explored in future studies.

Implications for Research and Practice

Despite its limitations, this study contributes significantly by reviewing relevant literature and investigating the associations between VIs and role conflicts or enrichment in romantic couples. Nye and colleagues' meta-analysis (2017) supports the predictive validity of interest congruence in job performance. The authors emphasize the need for the application of polynomial regression (integrated into the DRSA model) to measure interest congruence accurately. Recent studies suggest that while generally being work-linked has positive effects on well-being, in certain occupations, an excessively tight link, such as in common agricultural businesses, might not be optimal (Hennecke & Hetschko, 2021). This further supports the importance of exploring nonlinear interest congruence effects. While our study did not find the same predictive validity for partners' congruence in VIs on work-home dynamics, it introduces the DRSA's application in interest-fit research for dual-earner couples. The simplicity of the RIASEC model (Holland, 1997) allows for the categorization of working environments, enabling further analysis of vocational interdependence within families. Hopefully, our methodology informs further research in this domain.

For family counsellors, this study highlights the importance of exploring clients' people-oriented vocational identity in their efforts to balance family and work roles. We offer additional support to the idea that encouraging job crafting aligned with employees' interests can have beneficial effects (Chen et al., 2023), especially if interests are people-oriented. The study enhances our understanding of VIs as motivational and dispositional resources that promote WFE and generally alleviate inter-role conflicts. Our results emphasize the value of integrating the work-home perspective in the research of career self-management and vocational behaviour (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014).

4.3.1. Online Supplemental Materials (Study 3)

to

Actor, Partner and (Dis)Similarity Effects of Vocational Interests on Work-Family Interface

available at:

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/10690727241247184

Complementing the main article's findings, Supplementary Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and assortative correlations for all variables, including cross-gender predictor variability.

Traditional methods applying difference scores or profile similarity correlations have been regarded as biased toward falsely claiming support for the hypothesis of congruence effects (Rogers et al., 2018; Schonbrodt et al., 2018). Therefore, in social and personality psychology the dyadic similarity effect hypotheses are recently more often tested by applying statistical methods based on polynomial regression – the dyadic response surface analysis (DRSA). The disadvantage of this procedure lays in its non-intuitive interpretation of dissimilarity effects. While we've presented the results of the DRSA model in the main text of this article, here we outline the key for the interpretation of (dis)similarity effects. Additionally, to provide a replication of our results with a more comprehensive, profile-correlation based approach, we provide this supplementary analysis.

Supplemental Table 1

Descriptive Statistics, Assortative Correlations and Predictor Variability of Gender Distribution for Studied Variables

	M (SD)		*t*	Cohen's *d*	Assort. cor.	Predictor variability		
	Men	Women				m<w	m=w	m>w
Realistic	7.72 (2.68)	4.54 (2.15)	15.71***	0.95	.05	7%	25%	68%
Investigative	7.21 (2.54)	7.26 (2.75)	-0.24	-0.02	.20***	36%	30%	34%
Artistic	5.04 (2.53)	6.24 (3.14)	-5.08***	-0.31	.08	44%	31%	25%
Social	6.81 (1.95)	9.04 (1.95)	-14.27***	-0.87	.13*	68%	21%	11%
Enterprising	7.59 (1.98)	8.95 (2.04)	-8.73***	-0.53	.19**	52%	31%	17%
Conventional	6.84 (2.37)	5.84 (2.12)	5.20***	0.32	.01	26%	27%	48%
Elevation	41.21 (9.04)	41.86 (8.62)	-1.01	-0.06	.27**	36%	31%	33%
Differentiation	2.06 (0.79)	2.65 (0.75)	-9.27***	-0.56	.07	54%	30%	16%
TWFC	9.07 (3.42)	8.05 (3.33)	3.56***	0.22	.02			
TFWC	5.12 (2.31)	5.48 (2.69)	-1.83	-0.11	.19***			
SWFC	7.83 (3.07)	8.20 (3.18)	-1.53	-0.09	.18**			
SFWC	4.75 (2.18)	5.11 (2.64)	-2.07*	-0.13	.29***			
WFE	10.40 (2.88)	10.91 (3.03)	-2.15*	-0.13	.13*			

Note. M - mean; *SD* - standard deviation; m - men; w - women; TWFC – time-based work-family conflict; TFWC – time-based family-work conflict; SWFC – strain-based work-family conflict; SFWC – strain-based family- work conflict; WFE – work-family enrichment; Assort. cor. - assortative Pearson correlation between variables observed in women and men; Predictor variability - the distribution of interests within couples presented through the percentages of couples with congruent versus discrepant VIs combinations. *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$; ***$p \leq .001$.

Interpreting Similarity Effects

In the DRSA, the three-dimension visualization is defined by an estimated polynomial regression equation, where male (Z_m) and female (Z_f) outcome variables are regressed on two commensurable and theoretically comparable predictors (e.g. women's interest - X and men's interest - Y), their squared terms, and interaction (Equation 1). The non-independence of dyadic data is considered by correlating error terms e_f and e_m.

$$Z_f = b_{0f} + b_{1f}X + b_{2f}Y + b_{3f}X^2 + b_{4f}XY + b_{5f}Y^2 + e_f \quad (1)$$
$$Z_m = b_{0m} + b_{1m}X + b_{2m}Y + b_{3m}X^2 + b_{4m}XY + b_{5m}Y^2 + e_m$$
$$e_f \sim\sim e_m$$

Polynomial regression coefficients are estimated as linear actor (b_{1f} and b_{2m}), curvilinear actor (b_{3f} and b_{5m}), linear partner (b_{2f} and b_{1m}), curvilinear partner (b_{5f} and b_{5m}), and interaction (b_4) effects. These coefficients are crucial for computing four additional parameters, the combination of which allows us to describe the shape and position of the response surface in a three-dimensional space and test the similarity hypothesis (for details we refer to Humberg et al. 2019).

To determine a positive similarity effect, where congruence of partners (e.g. same levels of Social interests) predicts higher levels of an outcome (e.g. work-family enrichment), we need to test whether the shape of the response surface corresponds to the shape of a theoretically prototypical similarity pattern (described in Humberg et al., 2019 and Schonbrodt et al., 2018). Mathematically and graphically, this case is characterized by the following conditions. First, the position of the ridge line of the response surface is aligned with the congruence line. This is the case if (1) p_{10} is non-significant, and (2) p_{11} is approximately 1. The two coefficients are computed from the regression estimates b_1 to b_5 (Edwards, 2007). Second, the outcome is highest when the predictor combinations are identical for both partners, and it is the lowest when the predictor combinations are complementary for both partners. Describing the graphical representation, the surface above the incongruence line should have an inverted U shape. If $a_3 = b_1 - b_2 \approx 0$ and $a_4 = b_3 - b_4 + b_5$ is significantly negative ($a_4 < 0$).

Supplementary Analyses

For interested readers, we present descriptive statistics of profile correlations obtained for each interest type in our data (Supplementary table 2).

Supplemental Table 2

Correlations Between Vocational Interest and Work-Family Interface Outcomes

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
1. Realistic (m)	1																				
2. Investigative (m)	.29***																				
3. Artistic (m)	.17**	.37***																			
4. Social (m)	.19**	.35***	.42***																		
5. Enterprising (m)	.24***	.15**	.18***	.48***																	
6. Conventional (m)	.48***	.30***	.20***	.11	.53***																
7. Realistic (w)	.05	.15**	.13*	.12*	.15**	.16**															
8. Investigative (w)	.07	.20**	.17**	.13*	.13*	.19**	.28***														
9. Artistic (w)	.05	.23***	.08	.12*	.12*	.15**	.27***	.43***													
10. Social (w)	.14*	.06	.03	.13*	.16**	.16**	.17**	.26***	.37***												
11. Enterprising (w)	.06	.01	.04	.08	.19**	.08	.18**	.03	.05	.48***											
12. Conventional (w)	.02	-.01	.04	.10	.14*	.01	.45***	.06	.00	.14*	.50***										
13. TWFC (m)	.04	.00	-.02	-.07	.06	.10	-.01	.01	.07	-.10	-.11	-.04									
14. TFWC (m)	.01	-.07	.03	-.10	.06	.11	-.02	.04	-.02	-.06	-.10	-.08	.29***								
15. SWFC (m)	.00	-.16**	-.06	-.16**	-.02	-.01	-.03	-.01	.00	-.11	-.09	-.03	.49***	.28***							
16. SFWC (m)	.07	-.07	-.01	-.05	.01	-.03	.01	.02	-.03	-.03	.03	-.01	.21***	.39***	.37***						
17. WFE (m)	.09	.04	.02	.10	.13*	.11	.07	.03	.08	.16**	.03	.00	.05	.05	-.18**	-.10					
18. TWFC (w)	-.07	.01	-.01	-.04	-.02	-.03	-.03	.03	.05	-.13*	-.05	-.05	.02	.01	-.02	.04	-.09				
19. TFWC (w)	.02	.15**	.08	-.04	-.03	.05	.01	.00	.03	-.18**	-.15*	-.03	.06	.19***	.01	.14*	.03	.29***			
20. SWFC (w)	-.03	-.03	.03	-.07	-.08	-.06	.01	.01	.05	-.12*	.01	-.02	.06	.04	.18**	.22***	-.10	.58***	.27***		
21. SFWC(w)	.01	-.01	-.06	.04	-.01	-.06	-.04	-.05	-.04	-.08	-.10	-.15*	.05	.15*	.07	.29***	.02	.24***	.39***	.40***	
22. WFE (w)	.00	.01	.01	.09	.14*	.10	.04	.08	-.03	.18**	.14*	.17**	-.07	.05	-.09	-.03	.13*	-.26***	.10	-.25***	-.04
Alpha	.84	.80	.86	.80	.84	.89	.82	.84	.91	.85	.85	.90	.81	.78	.80	.84	.87	.81	.82	.80	.88
Omega	.90	.92	.92	.85	.88	.92	.89	.94	.96	.85	.89	.93	.81	.77	.80	.84	.87	.81	.83	.83	.89

Note. TWFC – time-based work-family conflict; TFWC – time-based family-work conflict; SWFC – strain-based work-family conflict; SFWC – strain-based family- work conflict; WFE – work-family enrichment; *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$; ***$p \leq .001$.

Profile correlations are obtained by correlating responses of two partners within the same couple across all items of a given measure. Thus, we computed six profile correlations for the six RIASEC types, along with an additional overall profile correlation obtained by correlating partner responses across all 80 items of the PGI-Short. Here we present the partial correlations between these similarity indices and outcomes of women and men, controlling for both partner's levels of interest for each RIASEC type (Supplementary table 3).

We note that in the computing a summary score for RIASEC interests, different numbers of items from the PGI-Short (Tracey, 2010) are included: three scales apply eight items, while three scales apply a nonlinear transformation of sixteen items (Tracey, 2019). This affects the estimation of the significance of a profile correlation for each couple; hence, we only evaluate the values of estimated scores. Additionally, in cases where one partner provided constant estimations for each item in a scale (e.g. selected 1 = *I strongly dislike* and 1 = *I am unable to do* for all 8 vocational activities in the Artistic scale), the profile correlation for that couple could not be estimated. This is the reason for a different number of degrees of freedom for partial correlations across the interest types. A comparison with the results obtained on the full sample (271 subjects) is therefore inappropriate, especially for Realistic and Artistic interests. This statistical limitation additionally calls for a cautionary interpretation of profile similarity indices obtained in the application of shortened measures of interests.

As can be noted from Supplementary Table 3, the profile correlations ranged from modest to moderate. The values of similarity obtained for individual couples are spread out indicating that sharing vocational interests may be more important for some couples than others. Additionally, the strength of the profile correlation differs across various types of interests. Most couples had positive profile correlations for Social and Enterprising interests.

Supplemental Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Partial Correlations Between Interest Similarity Indices and Work-Family Interface Outcomes

	r_p R	r_p I	r_p A	r_p S	r_p E	r_p C	r_p overall
Control Variables	Realistic M Realistic W	Investigative M Investigative W	Artistic M Artistic W	Social M Social W	Enterprising M Enterprising W	Conventional M Conventional W	All RIASEC interests (W and M)
Outcomes in women							
TWFC	-.10	-.02	.01	-.04	.08	.02	.06
TFWC	.00	-.04	-.02	.02	.03	.01	.11
SWFC	-.04	-.04	.07	-.11	-.08	-.02	.01
SFWC	.02	.01	.04	-.09	-.11	.01	-.05
WFE	.03	-.05	-.16*	.03	-.04	.13*	-.01
Outcomes in men							
TWFC	-.04	-.02	-.04	.03	-.02	.04	.07
TFWC	.09	.02	-.08	-.09	-.08	-.04	.01
SWFC	-.05	-.05	.07	-.15**	-.12*	-.04	.02
SFWC	.11	.06	.06	-.15**	-.08	-.05	-.09
WFE	.01	-.05	-.21**	.08	-.05	.00	.07
n. items	8	8	8	16	16	16	80
df	220	244	203	266	263	262	246
Mean (r_p)	.09	.05	.14	.21	.30	.15	.12
sd (r_p)	.43	.51	.45	.30	.30	.36	.20
Percentiles (r_p)							
25%	-.23	-.36	-.20	.01	.07	-.11	-.03
50%	.13	.05	.16	.23	.31	.17	.11
75%	.44	.45	.49	.41	.54	.43	.24

Note. r_p – profile correlation; M – interest expressed my men; W – interest expressed by women; TWFC – time-based work-family conflict; TFWC – time-based family-work conflict; SWFC – strain-based work-family conflict; SFWC – strain-based family-work conflict; WFE – work-family enrichment; *n*. items – number of items included in the computation of profile correlations; *df* – degrees of freedom for partial correlations; *$p \leq .05$; **$p \leq .01$; ***$p \leq .001$

Contrarily, for Realistic, Investigative, and Artistic interests, the distribution of positive and negative correlations was more evenly spread, indicating that some couples share the same levels of these interest type, while in others we can observe the complementarity of interests for Realistic or Artistic interests. The overall profile correlation additionally indicates that the couple's similarity in VIs is generally positive, although modest. Comparing with the assortative correlations found applying the variable-centered approach (Supplementary table 2) modest couple similarity is most consistently observed for Social and Enterprising interests, while for other interest types assortative correlations vary across methods, instruments, and samples applied (Banov et al., 2022; Etzel et al., 2018; Grotevant et al., 1977; Mayrand et al., 2023).

The associations between profile similarity indices and WFC or WFE were generally nonsignificant, except for a few modest negative correlations. Specifically, profile similarity in Artistic interests was negatively associated with both women's and men's WFE. In other words, partners who had similar levels of Artistic interests less often identified transfers of positive experiences at work into the domain of family life. Conversely, these positive transfers were more often reported by women in couples with similar levels of Conventional interests. Additionally, similarity in Social interests was negatively related to both directions of men's strain-based conflicts WFC or FWC, while similarity in Enterprising interests was negatively related to men's strain-based WFC.

These correlations did not translate into significant similarity effects when the dyadic response surface analysis was applied. In addition to evaluating polynomial regression coefficients, we also examined VIs (dis)similarity using a more traditional approach. This involved applying the profile correlations of specific RIASEC types and the overall interest profile correlation. These coefficients were then entered as predictors in hierarchical regression analyses, separately for women's and men's outcomes. As an example, we predicted women's WFE from similarity on each RIASEC subscale in the first step, followed by the overall interest profile correlation, entered in the second step. Once again, the null findings replicated across men's and women's WFC, FWC, and WFE.

In summary, our data, analyzed through various methods, consistently do not provide strong and consistent support for the effects of (dis)similarity in VIs on work-family conflict or enrichment.

4.4. Study 4: Would you like your partner to share your interests? Vocational ideal-partner standards of singles and couples

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Abstract

To explore how vocational self-concepts align with ideal partner preferences, we collected data from two Croatian heterosexual samples: 271 couples and 335 single participants. Using the same inventory, participants rated their own vocational interests and those desired in an ideal partner. In both samples, we assessed trait-level and profile-level similarities between self and ideal-partner interests. In the couple sample, we additionally examined actual partner congruence (similarity between one's own interests and those of their actual partner), ideals agreement (the similarity between partners in how they describe their ideal partner), and partner–ideal congruence (the match between an individual's ideal partner preferences and their partner's actual vocational interests). Results revealed both assortative (similar-to-self) and aspirational (higher-than-self) ideal-partner preferences. Gendered preferences aligned with established differences in vocational interests: women idealized partners with male-typed interests, while men preferred partners interested in social interaction or care. Among couples, partner–ideal congruence showed a strong normative component, while its distinctive (couple-specific) component modestly predicted relationship satisfaction. These findings suggest that vocational interests play a meaningful role in partner selection and relationship dynamics.

Keywords: couple similarity, distinctive similarity, ideal-partner standards, occupational assortment, vocational interests

Introduction

Career choices and life-partner selection are among the most consequential life decisions, each carrying long-term implications and shaped by enduring personal preferences and ideals. Just as people pursue careers that align with their interests and values (Nye et al., 2017), they also seek partners who match internalized standards, known as *ideal-partner preferences* (Eastwick & Neff, 2012; Fletcher & Simpson, 2000). These preferences, expressed as the desired traits in a potential partner (e.g., trustworthiness, ambition), shape whom individuals choose and how satisfied they are in those relationships. Ideals, formed prior to relationship initiation, also predict the traits of actual partners (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015). Moreover, research indicates that when a partner closely matches one's ideals, referred to as *partner–ideal congruence,* individuals report greater relationship satisfaction, a higher likelihood of marriage, and increased well-being (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000; Guvensoy & Erdem, 2023; Hsu & Barrett, 2020), supporting what is known as the *ideal-partner preference–matching effect* (Gerlach et al., 2019; Eastwick et al., 2025).

While the research of partner preferences has addressed a broad array of individual differences (e.g. Buss & Barnes, 1986), particularly personality traits (e.g. Liu & Zhang, 2023), comparatively little is known about preferences specifically regarding *vocational interests* (VIs). VIs are stable preferences for specific types of work activities and environments (e.g., working in laboratories), underpinned in part by genetic influences (Xu & Tracey, 2016). As salient indicators of identity, serving motivational functions, VIs guide educational and career choices (Hoff et al., 2020; Nye et al., 2017) and may inform potential partners on one's lifestyle, values, and social context.

Although VIs research has traditionally focused on career outcomes, recent integrative approaches highlight the interplay between career-related decisions (including vocational choices) and family-life decisions (Kossek et al., 2021). Longitudinal studies suggest that VIs predict not only occupational satisfaction (Nye et al., 2017), but also family-related outcomes, including marriage and parenthood (Stoll et al., 2017). Additionally, evaluations of VIs in committed romantic partners suggest modest to moderate *actual partner similarity* (Etzel et al., 2019; Mayrand et al., 2023; Citation blinded 1) operationalized trough correlations between item-level responses of each partner in a couple on a VIs inventory (i.e. profile correlations). However, couples appear to differ in the degree of their vocational alignment: while some display high congruence, others show little. Such alignment is more likely to result from active assortment based on self-similarity preferences rather than convergence over time or mere

social homogamy (e.g., meeting in shared educational premises; Citation blinded 2; see Luo, 2017 for explanations of assortment mechanisms).

This study draws on two influential frameworks for conceptualizing VIs. The first is Holland's (1997) RIASEC model, developed through extensive factor-analytic research, which organizes occupational preferences into six domains arranged in a quasi-circular structure: Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional. This circumplex reflects psychological similarity, with adjacent types (e.g., Realistic and Investigative) sharing greater conceptual overlap, while opposing types (e.g., Artistic and Conventional) represent more divergent orientations. Realistic interests involve hands-on, mechanical, or technical activities and stand opposite to Social interests, which emphasize interpersonal connection and caregiving. Investigative and Artistic interests both center on working with ideas through analytical inquiry and creative expression, respectively. In contrast, Enterprising interests emphasizes leadership and persuasion, while Conventional center on organization and precision (working with data).

Alongside the RIASEC model, this research also applies the Personal Globe (PG) model (Tracey & Rounds, 1996), which builds on a simplified structure of Holland's model. It incorporates two core bipolar dimensions proposed by Prediger (1982): People versus Things (paralleling the Social–Realistic axis) and the orthogonal Data versus Ideas dimension (distinguishing Conventional and Enterprising from Artistic and Investigative interests). Importantly, the PG model adds a third orthogonal dimension, Prestige, which captures the relative social status and educational demands associated with different vocational domains, offering an additional layer of meaning possibly relevant for conceptualizing ideal-partner preferences.

Using these conceptualizations, we expand the literature on assortative mating (selecting genetically or phenotypically similar partners), assessing whether single and coupled heterosexual individuals express their ideal-partner preferences as self-similar (*self-ideal congruence*) in terms of VIs. Among established couples, we also assess *partner–ideal congruence*, the extent to which individuals' current partners match their ideal-partner profiles. This represents a first step toward understanding whether individuals actually select partners who fulfill their vocational ideals, as supported in wide cultural contexts across different psychosocial characteristics (Eastwick et al., 2025), but not specifically for VIs. Building on prior findings that demonstrate couple-level variation in vocational similarity (Etzel et al., 2019; Citation blinded 2), we further examine the degree of agreement between partners' ideal preferences (*ideal agreement*) and the actual similarity of partners' self-reported interests

(*actual partner congruence*). We also test whether these similarity indices predict relationship satisfaction for both men and women.

To examine self–ideal congruence, we used two complementary approaches. First, a trait-level (variable-centered) analysis assessed similarity in the *level* of individual interest domains (RIASEC or PG). Second, a profile-centered approach evaluated overall similarity in the *pattern* of vocational interest expression. Profile correlations, calculated as Pearson correlations between item-level responses, capture the alignment of peaks and valleys across profiles (Furr, 2008). Addressing correspondence across many attributes is suited for multidimensional constructs like VIs, and has been validated in vocational (Xu & Li, 2020) and ideal-partner research (Brauer et al., 2022; Locke et al., 2020).

Social role theory (Eagly & Wood, 2016) proposes that innate physical characteristics contributed to a gendered division of labor and shaped culturally shared gender roles, reflected in both VIs and partner preferences (Cunningham & Russell, 2004). Shared cultural norms, including gender-role expectations, may inflate observed similarity coefficients (Guvensoy & Erdem, 2023; Liu et al., 2018; Locke et al., 2020). Empirical research show consistent gender differences in VIs: women tend to score higher on Social (d = -0.68) and Artistic (d = -0.35) interests, whereas men tend to endorse Realistic (d = 0.84) and Investigative (d = 0.26) interests more (Du et al., 2024; Su et al., 2009). To account for these normative effects, we apply profile similarity metrics that adjust for shared cultural patterns, using methods developed by Furr (2008) and Rogers et al. (2018), along with analytic code from Brauer et al. (2022), to compute *raw*, *normative*, and distinctive similarity scores. This approach helps to isolate meaningful interpersonal similarity from superficial or socially influenced components of congruence.

In specific, *normative actual-partner congruence* refers to the correlation between average VIs profiles of all coupled women and all coupled men in the sample, indicating stereotypical congruence. In contrast, *distinctive actual-partner congruence* reflects the unique alignment between each individual's VIs profile and their partner's, based on deviations from their respective gender-normative averages. This captures couple-specific congruence beyond normative trends. Similarly, in ideal agreement, *normative ideal agreement* represents convergence in average ideal-partner ratings across genders, while *distinctive ideal agreement* measures how uniquely a couple's ideal preferences align, beyond culturally normative expectations.

In the sections that follow, we elaborate the rationale for the relevance of VIs in romantic partner selection, and outline the background and hypotheses regarding self–ideal similarity, partner–ideal congruence, and their prediction of relationship satisfaction.

Theoretical Basis of Exploring Ideal-Partner Standards in Vocational Interests

Holland's (1997) theory and subsequent models of VIs emphasize person-environment fit: the alignment between personal attributes and characteristics of one's vocational context. Meta-analytic evidence demonstrates that congruence between VIs and job characteristics predicts job performance ($\rho = .32$), job choice satisfaction ($\rho = .34$), and overall job satisfaction ($\rho = .19$; Hoff et al., 2020; Nye et al., 2017). This congruence reflects an interactive process, whereby individuals select and shape their work environments, to reinforce and reflect their identities (Xu & Tracey, 2016). Although research on the congruence effects of VIs is grounded in vocational theory, the concept of person–environment fit also resonates with theories of partner selection and relationship functioning.

From an evolutionary biology perspective, partner selection appears as a strategic form of environmental shaping: assortative mating (choosing a partner with similar traits) enhances reproductive success by increasing each parent's genetic contribution to their offspring beyond 50% (Class & Dingemanse, 2022). Niche construction theory further suggests that mate selection enables mutual shaping of genes and environments, as individuals actively modify their surroundings by choosing partners with similar traits, co-creating social niches that align with and support their goals (Bahns et al., 2017).

From a social psychological perspective, interdependence theory suggests that individuals evaluate partners based on perceived benefits (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). The Ideal Standards Model (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000) extends this, proposing that partner choice depends on how well a partner matches internalized ideals—an alignment also linked to relationship satisfaction (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015; Gerlach et al., 2019). Ideal partner traits have been described using personality dimensions (Liu & Zhang, 2023) and motivational factors (Guvensoy & Erdem, 2023), with evidence for self-similarity preferences. We propose that VIs may also indicate a partner's values and motivation to support or complement one's personal and professional aspirations, thereby contributing to the mate-ideals.

Research on occupational assortative mating, the tendency to couple with partners in similar occupations, further indicates that vocational similarity is valued in partner selection (Han & Qian, 2021), with particularly strong effects observed among professionals and service workers compared to those in manual or administrative roles (Schwartz et al., 2021). Gendered occupational preferences emerge consistently, with women favoring partners in law enforcement, military service, and healthcare (Hitsch et al., 2010). However, online dating experiments reveal substantial heterogeneity in occupational preferences and no significant overall effects on partner selection (Witmer et al., 2025).

Beyond similarity, individuals also express aspirational preferences, favoring partners who exceed them in desirable traits such as intelligence, emotional stability, and agreeableness, while avoiding undesirable traits like neuroticism (Liu et al., 2018). Current evidence does not suggest that particular RIASEC domains are universally preferred when controlling for gender (Xu, 2023), nor that specific VIs are prioritized in ideal-partner preferences. However, apathy and lack of motivation, possibly reflected in lowered interest profiles, are typically unattractive (Csajbók & Berkics, 2022). Therefore, a partner with VIs that are more expressed or elevated relative to oneself, may be preferred. In line with this, research showing preferences for higher social status and earning potential (Gerlach et al., 2019; Lam et al., 2016) may correspond to ideal-partner preferences for higher vocational prestige.

This study investigates whether individuals show self-similar or aspirational ideal-partner preferences for VIs. We also examine how ideal-partner preferences vary for strongly gender-typed interests (e.g., Holland's Social and Realistic, and the People–Things dimension) versus less gender-differentiated interests. Analyses are conducted separately for men and women, both single and partnered. However, only in couples can we assess how self–ideal and partner–ideal congruence relate to relationship satisfaction.

Predicting Relationship Satisfaction

As previously noted, existing research demonstrates modest to moderate associations between VIs and long-term relational outcomes, including the likelihood of marriage, couple adjustment (Mayrand et al., 2023; Stoll et al., 2017), and work-family dynamics (Citation blinded 3). Specifically, individuals' own Realistic, Enterprising, and Investigative interests, along with their partners' Investigative and Artistic interests, have been found to predict greater relationship satisfaction. Women in particular report higher satisfaction and work–family enrichment when partnered with individuals who have more diverse VI profiles (Citation blinded 1 and 3). Besides the main effects of specific interests, the effects of actual partner congruence, self-ideal similarity and partner-ideal congruence in VIs profiles on relationship satisfaction are yet to be evaluated.

Preference-matching effects are supported for various psychosocial traits: alignment between ideals and partner characteristics is associated with greater relationship quality and longer relationship duration (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015). Findings from longitudinal (Driebe et al., 2024) and large-scale cross-cultural studies (Eastwick et al., 2025) indicate that raw partner–ideal similarity indices are more consistently linked to relationship quality than similarity indices adjusted for normative desirability. Although tests of the predictive validity

of distinctive components of congruence may be more conservative, these components provide important insights into couple- and individual-specific effects.

Research on work-linked couples indicates that actual partner congruence and self–ideal similarity in VIs may foster mutual support and reduced emotional exhaustion in relationships (Halbesleben et al., 2010). Nonetheless, vocational similarity may also be detrimental when one partner works in a gender-atypical occupation. For example, individuals in such roles report higher rates of union dissolution (Yu & Kuo, 2021), and men in traditionally female-dominated jobs show lower probabilities of marriage (McClintock, 2020), potentially due to gendered occupational stereotypes.

Focusing on dyad-specific compatibility, this study provides the first examination of the distinctive (i.e. individual- or dyad-specific) components of three types of congruence (self–ideal similarity, actual partner congruence, and partner–ideal congruence) in predicting relationship satisfaction. The following section presents our hypotheses regarding ideal-partner vocational profiles, their similarity to individuals' self-reported profiles, and the possible congruence effects.

Current Research and Hypotheses

Research suggests that being in a romantic relationship can influence ideal-partner preferences, as coupled individuals may adjust their standards to better match their current partners, particularly when those partners fall short of initial ideals (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000; Gerlach et al., 2019). Accordingly, we investigate patterns of ideal-partner preferences in two distinct samples: couples (Study 1) and singles (Study 2).

In both studies, we examine whether ideal-partner preferences, conceptualized using the RIASEC and PG models, reflect both self-similarity preferences and aspirational assortative preferences. For methodological rigor, we also consider the role of normative components in the profile-based ideal-partner preferences (Furr, 2008).

First, we expect a specific pattern of trait-wise interest expression emerging at the descriptive level.

Hypothesis 1: Ideal-partner ratings will generally exceed self-ratings, indicating aspirational preferences. Furthermore, based on the expected gender-reversed pattern of VIs expression in ideal-partner ratings, aspirational preferences are predicted to vary by gender and RIASEC interest type. Specifically, women are expected to show elevated preferences for ideal partners' Realistic interests and lower preferences for ideal partners' Social interests relative to their own Realistic and Social interests, respectively. For men, the opposite pattern is

anticipated: higher preferences for ideal partners' Social interests and lower preferences for Realistic interests compared to their own Realistic and Social interests, respectively.

Next, analyzing the assortative preferences at trait-wise and profile level, we expect:

Hypothesis 2a: Significant positive trait-wise correlations between self-reported and ideal-partner's VIs scores will be confirmed across all RIASEC and PG dimensions.

Hypothesis 2b: Significant positive profile correlations will reflect distinctive self–ideal congruence for both men and women.

Given the role of gender-normative expectations in shaping VIs (Du et al., 2024) and drawing on social role theory (Cunningham & Russell, 2004), we also assess the gender-shift pattern in ideal-partner standards. Specifically, we expect that:

Hypothesis 3a: Among both singles and couples, trait-wise self–ideal similarity will be stronger for the Ideas-Data and Prestige dimensions than for the People-Things dimension, reflecting stronger assortative preferences for less gender-typed interests.

In Study 1, which focused on couples, we used a profile-based approach to compare four types of distinctive congruence: self–ideal similarity, actual partner congruence, ideals agreement, and partner–ideal congruence. Of these, only partner–ideal congruence reflects within-gender matching, as it compares each person's ideal-partner profile to the actual VIs profile of a partner of the same gender. The other indices involve cross-gender pairings. Based on this distinction, we formulated the following:

Hypothesis 3b: In couples, distinctive partner–ideal congruence will be significantly greater than distinctive self–ideal similarity, distinctive actual partner congruence, and distinctive ideals agreement.

Finally, we test for the *ideal-partner preference matching effect* among coupled participants, expecting that:

Hypothesis 4: Distinctive partner–ideal congruence and self–ideal similarity will be positive predictors of relationship satisfaction for both women and men, above and beyond the effects of relationship duration and the distinctive components of actual partner congruence.

Study 1

Method

Participants and Procedure

Study 1 involved a community sample of heterosexual couples in Croatia, where both members identified as cisgender. Eligibility criteria included being in a romantic relationship for at least six months, being aged between 18 and 51 years, and working at least part-time. The final analysis included 271 couples (N = 542 individuals). The average relationship length was

11.9 years (SD = 9.44). On average, women (M = 33.74 years; SD = 9.82 years) were younger than their partners (M = 35.59 years; SD = 10.08 years; t = -8.50, p < .001, d = -0.52) but had slightly more years of education (mean difference = 0.87 years, t = 5.02, p < .001, d = 0.31). Nearly half of the participants (48.71%) were parents.

Before starting the survey by paper-and-pencil administration participants were briefed on the procedure and conditions, including duration, incentives, and voluntary participation. Psychology students at the University of Blinded could earn course credit for recruiting participants. Research assistants administered questionnaires to each member of a couple individually, ensuring independent responses by seating partners apart. Completed questionnaires were sealed in envelopes and linked by a unique random code for each couple.

Measures

The study began with demographic questions covering sex, age, relationship duration, sexual orientation, occupation, and highest educational degree.

Each participant provided two types of responses on the same VIs inventory, the *Personal Globe Inventory - Short* (PGI-Short; Tracey, 2010). The PGI-Short is composed of 40 vocational activities (e.g. *Drive a bus*) to which respondents endorse their liking (from 1 = *Strongly Dislike* to 7 = *Strongly Like*) and their perceived competence (1 = *Unable to do* to 7 = *Very competent*). After completing the self-assessment, participants evaluated the same inventory for their ideal partner. We applied the following prompt: *"Assess what your ideal partner would be like in your opinion. Your ideal partner could be someone you know and consider suitable for a romantic relationship, or they could be entirely hypothetical. What activities would interest your ideal partner? In which activities would they excel?"*.

The *Satisfaction Index* (Simpson, 1987) was applied to measure relationship satisfaction. On this composite measure participants rated 11 partner attributes (their financial and social status, physical and sexual attractiveness, emotional support capability, reliability, similarity of attitudes and values, stability, pleasantness of personality) on a scale from 1 (*very unsatisfactory*) to 7 (*very satisfactory*).

Results

Descriptives, reliability coefficients, and evidence supporting the circular structure of VIs are provided in the Supplementary Materials (https://osf.io/6n3hf/?view_only=b31e0a89f924452684e5c5ebf7cd3abb). These results aligned with previous validation of the Croatian-language version of the instrument (Šverko & Babarović, 2016).

Testing Aspirational Preferences

To test Hypothesis 1, we fitted a linear mixed-effects model that accounted for the dyadic structure of the data by including random effects at the couple and participant levels. The outcome variable comprised trait-wise RIASEC interest scores for both self-ratings and ideal-partner ratings (12 per subject, 24 per couple). The model included a three-way interaction between respondent gender (men vs. women), report type (self vs. ideal-partner), and the RIASEC domain defining the interest score (six categories). We specified random intercepts for dyads and participants to account for individual and couple-level differences, along with random slopes for report type nested within dyads to account for variability in how partners evaluated themselves versus their ideals.

This full model demonstrated superior fit compared to simpler nested models (AIC = 28,837; BIC = 29,034, REML = 28,231.2): the additive main effects only ($\Delta\chi^2(18) = 1{,}259.80$, $p < .001$, AIC = 30,061; BIC = 30,135) and the three-way interaction without random slopes ($\Delta\chi^2(2) = 16.52$, $p < .001$, AIC = 28,850; BIC = 29,033). All three-way interaction terms were statistically significant ($p < .001$), indicating that ideal-partner preferences were not uniformly higher than self-reported VIs. Instead, the direction and magnitude of idealized preferences differed by RIASEC dimension and participant gender.

To further explore these differences, paired samples t-tests comparing self-reports and ideal-partner preferences were conducted separately for men and women (see Table 1).

Table 1

Comparisons Between Self-Reports and Ideal-Partner Preferences for Coupled Women and Men

Interest	Role	Pearson's *r*	Self-reports *M* (*SD*)	Ideal-partner reports *M* (*SD*)	*t*	*p*	*d*
Realistic	Men	.26**	7.72 (2.68)	5.22 (2.38)	13.33	< .001	0.81
	Women	.30**	4.54 (2.15)	8.86 (2.75)	-24.20	< .001	-1.47
Investigative	Men	.41**	7.21 (2.54)	8.14 (2.63)	-5.41	< .001	-0.33
	Women	.54**	7.26 (2.75)	8.04 (2.86)	-4.75	< .001	-0.29
Artistic	Men	.27**	5.04 (2.53)	7.57 (2.88)	-12.7	< .001	-0.77
	Women	.38**	6.24 (3.14)	5.95 (3.07)	1.31	0.19	0.08
Social	Men	.36**	6.81 (1.95)	9.61 (1.86)	-21.40	< .001	-1.30
	Women	.31**	9.04 (1.95)	7.53 (2.16)	10.20	< .001	0.62
Enterprising	Men	.37**	7.59 (1.98)	9.18 (1.98)	-11.80	< .001	-0.72
	Women	.53**	8.94 (2.03)	8.46 (2.14)	3.96	< .001	0.24
Conventional	Men	.20**	6.84 (2.37)	6.80 (2.11)	0.21	0.83	0.01
	Women	.28**	5.84 (2.12)	8.55 (2.62)	-15.50	< .001	-0.94

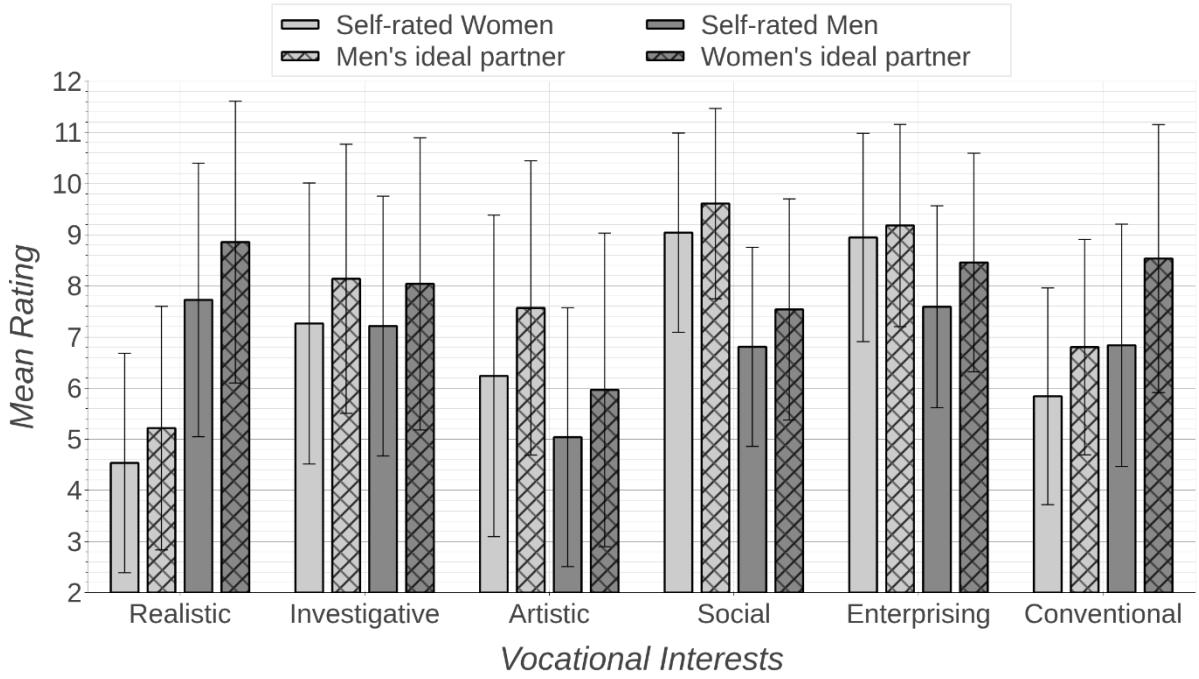
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$; RIASEC scores range from 2 to 14.

Large self-ideal differences were observed across several RIASEC types. Women reported significantly higher ideal-partner preferences than self-reports for Realistic and Conventional interests and significantly lower preferences for Social interests. Men, in contrast, reported significantly lower ideal-partner preferences than self-reports for Realistic interests and significantly higher preferences for Artistic, Social, and Enterprising interests. Smaller, though still significant, differences emerged for Investigative interests in both genders, indicating a pattern of assortative preferences. Notably, women reported slightly higher self-rated Enterprising interests compared to their ideal partner preferences. These results support Hypothesis 1, by demonstrating that heterosexual individuals tend to express aspirational ideal-partner preferences that are gendered and specific to particular interest types. The direction of these preferences aligns with normative gender differences in VIs.

Figure 1 displays mean RIASEC scores by gender and report type for coupled participants. Additional comparisons between men's and women's self-reports, ideal-partner reports, and the actual partner's self-reports are provided in the Supplementary Materials.

Figure 1

Average RIASEC Scores for Coupled Women and Men and Their Ideal-Partner Preferences



Testing Trait-wise Similarities

We computed trait-wise bivariate correlations between self-reported and ideal-partner evaluated VIs presented in Table 1. Results revealed consistent positive correlations for all six RIASEC dimensions, indicating the presence of assortative preferences rather than complementarity. Correlations between own and ideal-partner interest scores ranged from modest for Conventional to large for Investigative. All correlations were statistically significant at $p < .01$. Supporting Hypothesis 2a, these findings confirm the presence of moderate trait-wise assortative preferences across VIs in both genders.

To test Hypothesis 3a, that self–ideal similarity would be stronger for less gender-typed dimensions, we compared correlations using back-transformed average Fisher's Z and computed confidence intervals with the *cocor* package in *R* (Diedenhofen & Jochen, 2015). Given that the correlations were based on the same participants (and thus statistically dependent) but involved non-overlapping variables, appropriate corrections were applied.

Results indicated that, for women, compared to self–ideal similarity in People–Things ($r = .06$, $p > .05$), self–ideal correlations were significantly higher for Ideas–Data ($r = .32$, $p < .001$; $Z = -3.23$, $p < .001$; 95% CI: [-0.41, -0.10]) and Prestige ($r = .24$, $p < .001$; $Z = -2.14$, $p < .05$; 95% CI: [-0.34, -0.01]), suggesting a gender-shift pattern of preferences. For men, however, the differences were not statistically significant—neither for People–Things ($r = .09$,

$p > .05$) versus Ideas–Data ($r = .20$, $p < .001$; $Z = -1.42$, $p = .16$; 95% CI: [-0.28, 0.05]) nor for People–Things versus Prestige ($r = .24$, $p < .001$; $Z = -1.80$, $p = .07$; 95% CI: [-0.31, 0.01]). Partially supporting Hypothesis 2a, trait-wise assortative preferences are confirmed for Ideas-Data and Prestige, but not People-Things dimensions.

Testing Vocational Profile Similarities

To further test assortative preferences and the possible gender-shift pattern at the profile level we examined profile correlations across 80-items of the VIs inventory. We computed normative, raw, and distinctive profile correlations as profile-based measures of self-ideal similarity, ideals agreement, actual partner congruence, and partner–ideal congruence. These results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Normative, Raw, and Distinctive Profile Similarities in VIs for Couples

	Mean difference	*SD*	Std. Error Mean	*t*-value	Cohen's *d*
Self-ideal similarity					
Normative in men	.22* [.02, .40]				
Normative in women	.28** [.07, .48]				
Z Raw in men	.21 [.18, .24]	.28	.02	12.41***	0.75
Z Raw in women	.26 [.22, .29]	.29	.02	14.57***	0.89
Z Distinctive in men	.20 [.16, .23]	.26	.02	12.22***	0.74
Z Distinctive in women	.24 [.21, .27]	.26	.02	15.35***	0.93
Ideals agreement					
Normative	.24* [.04, .44]				
Z Raw	.12 [.09, .15]	.25	.02	7.68***	0.47
Z Distinctive	.08 [.05, .11]	.22	.01	5.98***	0.36
Actual partner congruence					
Normative	.36*** [.17, .52]				
Z Raw	.13 [.11, .16]	.23	.01	9.72***	0.59
Z Distinctive	.07 [.04, .09]	.21	.01	5.33***	0.32
Partner - ideal congruence					
Normative in men	.94*** [.90, .96]				
Normative in women	.87*** [.81, .92]				
Z Raw in men	.53 [.50, .56]	.26	.02	33.11***	2.01
Z Raw in women	.43 [.40, .47]	.28	.02	25.13***	1.53
Z Distinctive in men	.31 [.28, .34]	.25	.02	20.46***	1.24
Z Distinctive in women	.31 [.28, .34]	.28	.02	18.37***	1.11

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$***; $p < .001$

Consistent with Hypothesis 2b and the trait-wise results, distinctive profile-level self–ideal similarity was modest but significantly greater than zero, suggesting alignment between individuals' vocational self-representations and their ideal-partner preferences.

As can be observed from Table 2, positive ideals agreement was observed at the profile level, with significant correlations between partners' ideal-partner evaluations. While raw ideals agreement was modest, distinctive profile ideals agreement remained significant when

controlling for normative effects. Also, modest positive raw profile actual partner congruence was observed, although distinctive profile similarity decreased when controlling for normativity (Table 2). Positive, non-zero distinctive profile correlations were found between the vocational interest profiles of paired men and women.

To test Hypothesis 3b, we examined whether distinctive partner–ideal congruence exceeded both distinctive self–ideal similarity and distinctive actual partner congruence. This was confirmed in both genders. For women, partner–ideal congruence was significantly higher than self–ideal similarity ($t(270) = 2.79$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.17$) and substantially higher than actual partner congruence ($t(270) = 13.13$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.80$). For men, partner–ideal congruence was also significantly higher than self–ideal similarity ($t(270) = 5.14$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.31$) and actual partner congruence ($t(270) = 15.04$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.91$). Moreover, distinctive partner–ideal congruence exceeded ideals agreement for both women ($t(270) = 11.40$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.69$) and men ($t(270) = 13.00$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.79$). These results suggest that individuals' ideal-partner preferences are more closely aligned with their actual partner's vocational interest profiles than with their own interests or their partner's reported ideals.

Predicting Relationship Satisfaction

To test Hypothesis 4, we applied the Actor–Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) using structural equation modeling in *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012), with maximum likelihood estimation. This approach allowed us to account for dyadic interdependence by modeling correlations between men's and women's relationship satisfaction. Two separate models were estimated: one examining actor and partner effects of self–ideal similarity, and the other examining partner–ideal congruence. In both models, we controlled for relationship duration and actual partner congruence, and all profile similarity scores were transformed using Fisher's *Z*. All results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Standardized Actor and Partner Effects of Partner-ideal Congruence and Self-ideal Similarity on Relationship Satisfaction

Predictor	Role	Actor effect (*β*)	Partner effect (*β*)	Relationship duration (*β*)	Actual partner congruence (*β*)
Partner-ideal congruence	Women	0.09	0.09	-0.21**	-0.10
	Men	0.21**	0.11	-0.14*	-0.05
Self-ideal similarity	Women	0.08	-0.003	-0.20**	-0.07
	Men	-0.08	0.02	-0.13*	0.05

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$***; $p < .001$

In the model testing partner–ideal congruence, results revealed a significant actor effect for men, indicating that men reported higher relationship satisfaction when their partner's VIs aligned with their own internalized ideals. This actor effect was not significant for women. Partner effects were non-significant for both genders. Relationship duration was negatively associated with satisfaction for both men and women, while actual partner congruence was not a significant predictor.

In the second model assessing self–ideal similarity, no significant actor or partner effects emerged for either men or women. This suggests that the degree of similarity between individuals' self-perceived interests and their ideals for a partner was not associated with their own or their partner's satisfaction. As in the previous model, relationship duration showed a significant negative association with satisfaction for both men and women, while actual partner congruence remained non-significant.

Together, these findings provide partial support for Hypothesis 4. Distinctive partner–ideal congruence appears to predict relationship satisfaction uniquely for men, over and above other forms of congruence and relationship duration, while self–ideal similarity does not appear to play a significant role for either gender.

Study 2

Method

Participants and Procedure

Study 2 was conducted online using opportunity sampling. Invitations to voluntary participate were distributed via electronic announcements posted to various university departments in Croatia to ensure responses from students with diverse VIs. Additional recruitment was conducted through social network announcements. A snowball sampling procedure was also employed, encouraging participants to share the study invitation with employed friends who were not currently enrolled in academic programs.

Exclusion criteria included: being under the age of 18, currently being in a romantic relationship, and failure on attention check item ("I intend to respond to this questionnaire seriously"). Additionally, responses from participants who identified as homosexual and imagined an ideal partner of the same sex were excluded from analyses due to a low response rate ($N = 12$).

The final sample included 335 individuals (136 men and 199 women) who were not currently in romantic relationships. The men had a mean age of 25.88 years ($SD = 6.00$); 72.8% were employed full-time, 3.7% were unemployed, and 21.3% worked part-time while studying. Women in this sample were significantly older, with a mean age of 32.45 years ($SD = 9.51$), representing a mean difference of 6.57 years, $t(333) = 7.15$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.80$. Among women, 79.4% were employed full-time, 3.0% were unemployed, and 17.1% worked part-time while studying. Additionally, 16.6% of women and 0.7% of men were parents.

Measures

The demographic questionnaire used in Study 2 was identical to that in Study 1.

VIs were assessed using the PGI-Short (Tracey, 2010). Participants rated their preferences for 40 vocational activities using only the liking subscale, ranging from 1 (*strongly dislike*) to 7 (*strongly like*). In Study 2, only the liking (preference) subscale of the PGI-Short was administered. Due to the self-paced, online format of data collection and the need to minimize participant burden and dropout rates, the perceived competence subscale was omitted. Although liking and competence are typically correlated, individuals may perceive discrepancies between what they enjoy and what they feel skilled at (e.g., one may enjoy artistic activities but not feel competent in them). Given the focus on ideal partner preferences in this study, the liking scale was prioritized as the more relevant indicator of vocational interest

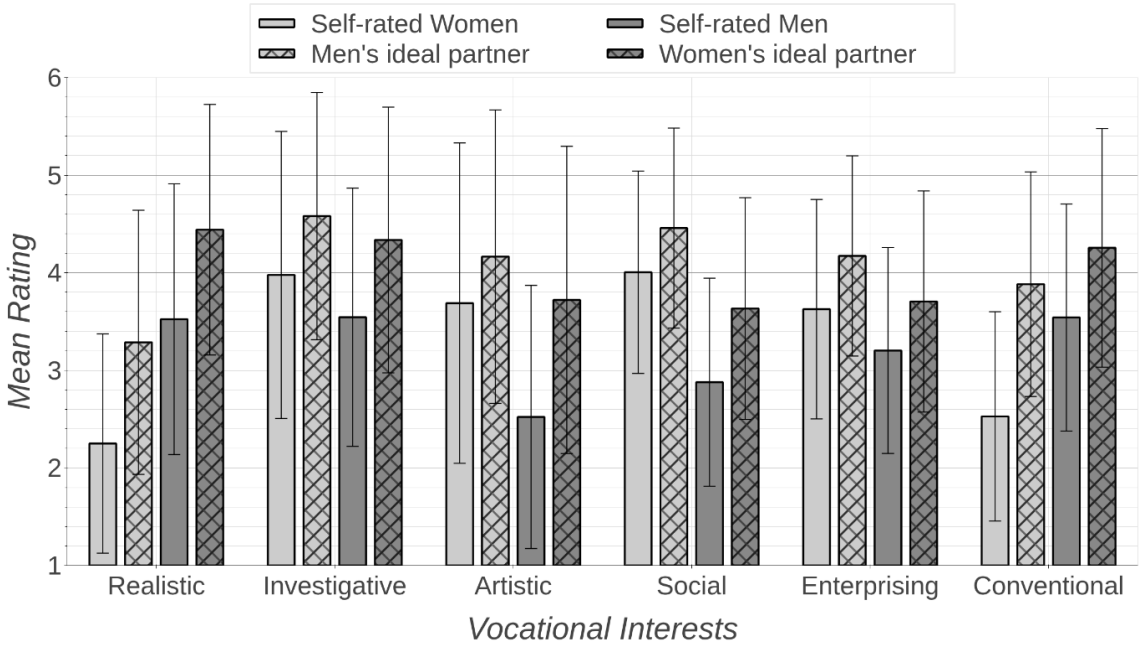
orientation. After completing the self-assessment, participants evaluated the VIs of their ideal partner using the same prompt as described in Study 1.

Results

Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for the sample of single participants are again presented in Supplementary materials. A visual inspection mean RIASEC scores by gender and report type is available in Figure 2 for single participants. As only the 40 items assessing preferences for vocational activities in the PGI-Short were applied, therefore the range of average ratings is narrower.

Figure 2

Average RIASEC Scores for Single Women and Men and Their Evaluated Ideal-Partner Preferences



Paired-sample t-tests comparing self-reports and ideal-partner preferences among single women and men revealed patterns similar to Study 1, partially supporting Hypothesis 1. Single women preferred ideal partners who were much higher in Realistic and Conventional interests, modestly higher in Investigative, and lower in Social interests. No differences were found for Artistic or Enterprising interests. In contrast, single men reported strong aspirational preferences, with significantly higher ideal ratings for Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional interests. No significant difference emerged for Realistic interests. These findings support the aspirational preference pattern and also reflect a gender-

reversed pattern: women preferred more Realistic and less Social traits in an ideal partner, while men preferred more Social traits but did not rate ideal partners lower in Realistic traits than themselves. Table 4 along with Figure 2b presents the values of men's and women's self-reported and ideal-partner reported VIs for single individuals.

Table 4

Comparisons Between Self-Reports And Ideal-Partner Preferences for Single Women and Men

Interest	**Role**	**Pearson's *r***	**Self-reports *M* (*SD*)**	**Ideal-partner reports *M* (*SD*)**	***t***	***p***	***d***
Realistic	Men	.24**	3.52 (1.39)	3.29 (1.35)	1.63	.10	0.14
	Women	.29***	2.25 (1.12)	4.44 (1.28)	-21.50	< .001	-1.52
Investigative	Men	.47***	3.54 (1.32)	4.58 (1.27)	-9.09	< .001	-0.78
	Women	.58***	3.98 (1.47)	4.34 (1.36)	-3.86	< .001	-0.27
Artistic	Men	.49***	2.52 (1.35)	4.17 (1.50)	-13.30	< .001	-1.14
	Women	.55***	3.69 (1.64)	3.72 (1.57)	-0.30	0.76	-0.02
Social	Men	.36***	2.88 (1.07)	4.46 (1.02)	-15.59	< .001	-1.34
	Women	.39***	4.01 (1.04)	3.63 (1.14)	4.36	< .001	0.31
Enterprising	Men	.27***	3.20 (1.05)	4.17 (1.03)	-9.01	< .001	-0.77
	Women	.47***	3.63 (1.12)	3.71 (1.13)	-0.96	0.34	-0.07
Conventional	Men	.23**	3.54 (1.16)	3.88 (1.15)	-2.77	< .01	-0.24
	Women	.37***	2.53 (1.07)	4.26 (1.22)	-18.76	< .001	-1.33

Note. ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Supporting Hypothesis 2a, the results confirm the presence of moderate trait-wise assortative preferences across VIs in both single women and men. Among men, correlations between self- and ideal-partner interest scores ranged from $r = .24$ for Realistic to $r = .49$ for Artistic interests. Among women, the corresponding values ranged from $r = .29$ for Realistic to $r = .58$ for Investigative interests. All correlations were statistically significant at least at $p < .01$.

To test Hypothesis 3a, that assortative preferences would be stronger for less gender-typed vocational domains, the same analytic procedure as in Study 1 was applied, comparing trait-wise self–ideal correlations across the PG dimensions (presented in Table 4).

For men, the differences in self–ideal correlations between the People–Things ($r = .31$, $p < .001$) and Ideas–Data dimensions were not statistically significant ($r = .43$, $p < .001$; Z = -

1.15, $p > .05$; 95% CI: [-0.32, 0.09]), nor were there differences between the People–Things and Prestige dimensions ($r = .38$, $p < .001$; $Z = -0.56$, $p > .05$; 95% CI: [-0.26, 0.15]). For women, these contrasts were more pronounced: compared to self–ideal similarity in People–Things ($r = .18$, $p < .01$), self-ideal similarity was significantly higher for both Ideas–Data ($r = .55$, $p < .001$; $Z = -4.41$, $p < .001$; 95% CI: [-0.53, -0.21]) and Prestige ($r = .44$, $p < .001$; $Z = -2.86$, $p < .01$; 95% CI: [-0.44, -0.08]). These results confirm Hypothesis 2a, and partially support Hypothesis 3a, indicating that single women, but not men, show stronger assortative preferences in less gender-typed vocational domains.

To test Hypothesis 2b, profile-based self–ideal similarity was evaluated among single participants using raw, distinctive, and normative components of Fisher Z-transformed profile correlations, calculated separately for men and women. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Normative, Raw, and Distinctive Self-ideal Similarities in VIs for Singles

	Mean difference	*SD*	Std. Error Mean	*t*-value	Cohen's *d*
Normative in men	.06 [-.29, .36]				
Normative in women	.21 [-.13, .50]				
Z Raw in men	.26 [.21, .31]	.30	.03	9.61***	0.88
Z Raw in women	.32 [.28, .36]	.30	.02	14.63***	1.05
Z Distinctive in men	.26 [.22, .31]	.27	.02	11.42***	0.98
Z Distinctive in women	.31 [.28, .35]	.28	.02	16.05***	1.14

Note. *** $p < .001$.

Raw profile self–ideal similarity was significantly greater than zero for both men and women, indicating a general preference for ideal partners whose VIs profiles resemble their own. Distinctive self-ideal similarity, which controls for normative self-ideal preferences, also remained significant for both genders. This supports the presence of individual-specific aspirational preferences, consistent with findings from Study 1 involving coupled participants. In contrast to Study 1, normative similarity, which reflects typical or culturally shared self–ideal alignment, was low and not statistically significant for either men or women. These results suggest that single individuals do not show a tendency toward normative self–similarity in their ideal-partner preferences, underscoring that in singles self-similarity preferences are more personalized than socially prescribed.

General Discussion

This research provides new insights into how VIs, conceptualized trough RIASEC and PG models, play a role in how individuals conceptualize ideal partners and evaluate relationship quality. Across two studies, we examined ideal-partner preferences in both single and coupled individuals, revealing aspirational, gender-typed, and assortative patterns in ideal-partner evaluations.

Ideal-Partner Preferences Are Aspirational and Gender-Typed

Supporting Hypothesis 1, ideal-partner ratings consistently exceeded self-ratings across most VI domains, suggesting aspirational preferences. However, participants generally did not idealize VIs that are less typical for their gender. For example, both single and coupled men (Tables 1 and 4; Figures 1 and 2) strongly idealized Social interests, along with Artistic, Enterprising, and to a lesser extent, Investigative interests. In contrast, men did not idealize higher Realistic interests in partners, and coupled men even preferred lower levels than their own. For Conventional interests, only single men reported higher ideal-partner than self-ratings.

Among women, the strongest aspirational preference was for Realistic interests, a domain more typical for men. Women in both studies also idealized higher Investigative and Conventional interests, while consistently rating ideal partners lower in Social interests than themselves. Artistic and Enterprising interests showed no significant ideal-self differences among single women, while coupled women rated themselves modestly higher than their ideal partners in these domains.

Across both studies, gendered patterns emerged consistently along the People-Things dimension: men described their ideal partners as more People-oriented than themselves, whereas women preferred partners more interested in Things-oriented vocations. Effect sizes for these self-ideal comparisons were large. These gendered patterns align with meta-analytic (Su et al., 2009) and cross-cultural (Du et al., 2024) evidence on gendered VIs, supporting the idea of gendered partner preferences (Cunningham & Russell, 2004; Buss & Barnes, 1986). Besides genetical basis (Beltz et al., 2011), occupational gender stereotypes (He et al., 2019; Rice & Barth, 2017) may also contribute to shaping gender-typed VIs. Cultural norms likely influenced the gendered occupational preferences observed in our study. In Croatia, traditional gender norms persist despite legal equality. Women remain underrepresented in high-status fields such as STEM and continue to bear most household and childcare responsibilities (Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2023). Longitudinal research further shows that Croatian boys increasingly endorse gendered career stereotypes, whereas girls gradually reduce such stereotypes, particularly regarding masculine activities (Blažev et al., 2024).

Preferences for partners with elevated VIs can be interpreted through the self-expansion model (Aron et al., 2013). Partners with more strongly expressed VIs (elevation), regardless of the specific domain, may foster self-expansion by sharing their passions and introducing their partners to novel experiences, roles, and perspectives. Notably, women with partners who exhibit more elevated VI profiles report higher relationship satisfaction (Citation blinded 1). Our findings extend evidence of aspirational preferences beyond domains such as intelligence or socially desirable traits, like agreeableness and emotional stability (Liu et al., 2018), as well as physical attractiveness and status (Fales et al., 2016).

Aspirational, gender-typed partner preferences among singles, who are not adjusting their preferences to current partners, suggest fixed, internalized ideals. These domain-specific schemas prioritize certain traits over one's own and remain stable across relationship status, consistent with findings on trait consistency across partners (Štěrbová et al., 2019) and the ideal standards model (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000).

Evidence of Self-Similarity Preferences

Assortative (self-similarity) preferences were evident at both the trait level (individual interest domains) and profile level (overall VIs patterns). Supporting Hypothesis 2a, modest to moderate self–ideal correlations were found across all RIASEC domains in both samples (Tables 1 and 5). Correlations were weakest for Realistic and Conventional interests, moderate for Social, and stronger for Investigative and Enterprising interests. Artistic interests showed modest to strong correlations.

Applying the broader PG model, Hypothesis 2a received partial support. Moderate self–ideal similarity was observed in the Ideas–Data and Prestige dimensions across both single and coupled participants. However, People–Things self–ideal similarity was modest and significant only among singles, possibly reflecting structural limitations in finding gender-atypical matches due to occupational segregation, particularly in STEM fields (Leesch et al., 2024).

At the profile level, coupled participants showed significant positive normative and distinctive self–ideal congruence, confirming Hypothesis 2b. Among singles, only distinctive self–ideal similarity was found, implying that assortative matching in VIs reflects individualized preferences, beyond the effects of stereotypical responding, generational, or cultural influences captured by normative similarity. Further support for assortative preferences comes from distinctive actual-partner congruence, suggesting individuals actively seek partners with similar VIs. Prior studies found modest to moderate assortative correlations for RIASEC interests, exceeding those of randomly paired pseudo-couples (Citation blinded 1; Etzel et al., 2019). Similarly, Study 1 identified modest but significant normative and distinctive

components of partner congruence using profile analysis, consistent with broader patterns of assortment by personality, attractiveness, and social resources (Fales et al., 2016; Leikas et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018; De La Mare & Lee, 2023).

An important exception in assortative preferences for VIs emerged in gender-typed domains: women, but not men, consistently showed stronger self–ideal similarity in less gender-typed dimensions than in the People–Things dimension. Thus, Hypothesis 3a was only supported for women but not for men. Single men demonstrated moderate People–Things self–ideal similarity, possibly reflecting more openness to gender-atypical interests in women. In contrast, women's ideal preferences adhered more closely to traditional gender norms. While preferences may be shaped by socialization (Eagly & Wood, 2016), genetic influences on VIs also warrant further exploration. Prior research has documented genetic components to educational assortment (Hugh-Jones et al., 2016), and biological bases for gender-typed patterns in VIs (Beltz et al., 2011).

Supporting Hypothesis 3b, in couples, distinctive partner–ideal congruence exceeded other forms of similarity (e.g., self–ideal or actual partner congruence). For heterosexual couples, we can assume these findings once again reflect gender-typed preferences at the profile level. Also, a significant distinctive component suggests that individuals at least partially align their partner choices with their ideal standards, as theoretically implied in the function of ideal-partner standards (Campbell & Fletcher, 2015).

Given that VIs are strong predictors of occupational success (Nye et al., 2017), particularly when congruence is considered (Hoff et al., 2020), we extended this framework to romantic contexts by examining the predictive validity of VI similarity for relationship satisfaction.

Predicting Relationship Satisfaction

In our data, partner–ideal congruence modestly predicted men's relationship satisfaction, partially supporting Hypothesis 4. Self–ideal similarity was not a significant predictor of satisfaction for either gender.

These findings partially align with the Ideal Standards Model (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000; Campbell & Fletcher, 2015) and prior work linking ideal–partner congruence to relationship quality (Driebe et al., 2024). While VIs may not be core to relationship satisfaction, they still contribute to interpersonal compatibility. However, given the cross-sectional design, reverse causality cannot be ruled out: individuals may adjust their ideals to reflect their current partner's traits (Conroy-Beam & Buss, 2016). Our study still has a key strength: it emphasizes distinctive partner–ideal similarity, offering a more accurate view of couple-specific dynamics.

Contrary to expectations, actual partner–VIs congruence did not meaningfully predict satisfaction with partner characteristics, despite its theorized role in mutual reinforcement through shared goals and values (Luo, 2017). In contrast, Mayrand et al. (2023) found that similarity in Artistic and Enterprising interests predicted better couple adjustment. Similarity effects might appear if analysed at trait level or selecting outcomes more related to everyday functioning, as found in studies predicting actor, partner and similarity effects of work-family conflicts and enrichment (Citation blinded 2).

This study advances understanding of how VIs shape romantic preferences and partner selection. First, by integrating VIs into models of relationship formation and focusing on both singles and dual-career couples, we highlight how partners' interest profiles may signal compatibility with one's personal ideals and goals. This aligns with interdependence theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) and suggests that VIs serve as meaningful, visible cues in partner evaluation. Second, the study extends vocational theory by demonstrating that VIs play a role in shaping social environments beyond the career domain, a connection that has been underexplored (Kossek et al., 2021; Stoll et al., 2017; Xu, 2023). Maintaining a strict divide between work and private life research may overlook valuable resources for identifying suitable occupations or enhancing work–recovery processes (Walter & Haun, 2020). Exploring gendered patterns in interest-based preferences may be especially important for supporting individuals in non-traditional career paths. Finally, by linking vocational and relational domains, this research contributes to a more integrated understanding of how career-related dispositions influence intimate relationships. Future research should further examine the role of vocational self-similarity in assortative partner selection based on occupational or educational traits - factors linked to social stratification and income inequality within households (Schwartz et al., 2021).

Limitations and Conclusions

The cross-sectional design limits causal interpretations of the link between ideal-partner congruence and relationship satisfaction, as preferences may be adapted to align with current partners in order to promote satisfaction. Gerlach et al. (2019) found that while ideals are generally stable, they may shift to accommodate partners who do not meet initial expectations. Longitudinal research is needed to examine track singles through various stages of partnership formation, examining how vocational ideal-partner standards evolve through relationship formation.

Differences between singles and couples may be influenced by sampling and measurement specifics, such as the use of only the liking subscale of the PGI-Short in singles.

Future studies should include diverse samples across age, socioeconomic background, and cultural contexts. Also, our results are not to be generalized for non-cisgender or non-heterosexual individuals. Moreover, in the evaluation of potential partners, VIs may differentially benefit individuals who value self-similarity compared to those who prefer more traditional, gendered roles in relationships. Latent profile analyses may provide insights into patterns of coupling based on interests.

In conclusion, our findings demonstrate the relevance of VIs in defining ideal-partner standards, revealing gender-specific and aspirational preferences for elevated interest profiles. Levels of self–ideal similarity varied across RIASEC and PG domains. Individuals showed distinctive ideal–partner preferences, and their alignment with actual partner interests contributed to relationship satisfaction. While causality cannot yet be established, this study highlights VIs as meaningful factors in romantic compatibility.

4.4.1. Online Supplemental Materials (Study 4)

to

Would you like your partner to share your interests? Vocational ideal-partner standards of singles and couples

with data available at:

https://osf.io/6n3hf/?view_only=b31e0a89f924452684e5c5ebf7cd3abbž

Evaluating the Reliability and Circular Structure in Vocational Interests

Demographic details and additional measures not analysed in this study are published elsewhere (Citation blinded 3).

Before testing the research hypotheses, we evaluated the circular structure of vocational interest data as proposed by Holland's model. We conducted the Randomization Test of Hypothesized Order Relations (RTHOR; Hubert & Arbie, 1987). Applying the *randall* function in *R* (Tracey, 1997) separately for both studies we tested the number of predictions met versus the null correspondence with the circular order of relations in correlation matrixes of each set of estimated vocational profiles. All indices are above the cutoff for internationally replicated instruments, with correspondence indexes above CI = .48 (Rounds & Tracey, 1996) indicating that the null hypothesis of random order in the correlation matrices could be rejected in favor of an alternative circular order for both single and coupled men and women (Supplementary Table 1) for both self-reported interest profiles and profiles of ideal-partners of women and men. All comparisons of difference in the circular order between women's and men's self-reports and ideal-partner reports were non-significant.

Supplementary Table 1

Results of the Randomization Test of Hypothesized Order for Study 1 and Study 2

		Predictions met out of 72	Ties	Correspondence index	*p*
Couples	Men's self-reports	63	0	0.75	.03
	Women's self-reports	69	0	0.91	.02
	Men's ideal-partner reports	67	0	0.86	.02
	Women's ideal-partner reports	61	0	0.69	.02
Singles	Men's self-reports	62	0	0.72	.02
	Women's self-reports	67	0	0.86	.02
	Men's ideal-partner reports	69	0	0.92	.02
	Women's ideal-partner reports	67	0	0.86	.02

These findings support the generalizability of our data to samples commonly used in vocational interest research. Notably, the profile correlation metric used to compute profile-level congruence in this study is independent of the RIASEC model's normative structure, including its three-dimensional arrangement (People–Things, Ideas–Data, Prestige).

Xu and Li (2020) emphasize that the interest structure described by these models is based on sample-level correlations. However, individual RIASEC profiles often deviate from this normative structure. For example, normatively opposite interests, such as Artistic and

Conventional, can be similarly preferred in an individual's profile (Tracey, 2008). These authors highlight the predictive utility of profile correlation over other congruence indices, including Euclidean distance and angular agreement which are based on the normative structures. They argue that inaccuracies in congruence results often stem from applying the normative model inappropriately at the individual level, essentially imposing population-level structural constraints on individual profiles.

The internal reliability of the RIASEC scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α). In Study 1 (couples), reliability was acceptable for self-reports (α = .80–.91) and ideal-partner ratings (α = .81–.92), with the exception of Investigative interests in women (α = .72). In Study 2 (singles), only the liking subscales were administered (excluding competence items), yielding slightly lower internal consistency. Self-report reliabilities ranged from α = .70 (Investigative, women) to .85 (Conventional, women), and ideal-partner reliabilities ranged from α = .71 (Investigative, men) to .82 (Artistic, women). Caution is warranted when interpreting scores for Investigative interests in men (α = .66) and Social interests in women (α = .65).

Pairwise Mean Comparisons of Vocational Interests in Coupled Participants

Extending the results reported in the main article, we provide a detailed overview of pairwise mean comparisons from couples (Study 1) for each Personal Globe (PG; Supplementary Table 1) and RIASEC interest domain (Supplementary table 2).

Supplementary Table 2

Trait-Wise Comparisons of Self- and Ideal-Partner Reports Within Couples for PG Dimensions

Interest	For role	*r*	*M (SD)* (1)	*M (SD)* (2)	*t*	*p*	CI LL	CI UL	*d*
Comparisons of Men's self reports (1) and Women's self reports (2)									
People-Things		-.06	-1.26 (5.54)	7.93 (5.11)	-19.47	< .001	-10.11	-8.26	-1.18
Ideas-Data		.10	2.01 (5.95)	2.90 (7.43)	-1.62	0.11	-1.98	0.19	-0.10
Prestige		.16*	-1.78 (3.29)	1.56 (2.86)	-13.76	< .001	-3.83	-2.87	-0.84
Comparisons of self-reports (1) and ideal-partner reports (2)									
People-Things	M	.10	-1.26 (5.54)	7.14 (4.96)	-19.50	< .001	-9.24	-7.54	-1.19
	W	.06	7.93 (5.11)	-2.88 (5.47)	24.51	< .001	9.94	11.67	1.49
Ideas-Data	M	.21***	2.01 (5.95)	1.92 (6.64)	0.19	0.85	-0.86	1.04	0.01
	W	.32***	2.90 (7.43)	2.98 (6.66)	-0.17	0.87	-1.07	0.90	-0.01
Prestige	M	.24***	-1.78 (3.29)	2.61 (2.84)	-18.99	< .001	-4.84	-3.93	-1.15
	W	.24***	1.56 (2.86)	-0.50 (3.40)	8.77	< .001	1.60	2.53	0.53
Comparisons of own ideal-partner reports (1) and partner's self-reports (2)									
People-Things	M	.43***	7.14 (4.96)	7.93 (5.11)	-2.41	< .05	-1.43	-0.14	-0.15
	W	.49***	-2.88 (5.47)	-1.26 (5.54)	-4.80	< .001	-2.29	-0.96	-0.29
Ideas-Data	M	.59***	1.92 (6.64)	2.90 (7.43)	2.51	< .01	-1.75	-0.21	-0.15
	W	.54***	2.98 (6.66)	2.01 (5.95)	2.65	< .01	0.25	1.70	0.16
Prestige	M	.49***	2.61 (2.84)	1.56 (2.86)	5.94	< .001	0.70	1.39	0.36
	W	.50***	-0.50 (3.40)	-1.78 (3.29)	6.30	< .001	0.88	1.68	0.38

Note. M = men; W = women. PG scores range from –31.37 to 31.37. For PG dimensions positive values indicate higher interest in vocations oriented to People, Ideas, or high-prestige occupations; negative values reflect interest in Things, Data, or low-prestige roles.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Supplementary Table 3

Trait-Wise Comparisons of Self- and Ideal-Partner Reports Within Couples for RIASEC Domains

Interest	For role	*r*	*t*	*p*	CI LL	CI UL	*d*
Comparisons of Men's self-reports (1) and Women's self-reports (2)							
Realistic		.05	15.70	< .001	2.79	3.59	0.95
Investigative		.20***	-0.25	< .001	-0.45	0.35	-0.02
Artistic		.08	-5.08	< .001	-1.66	-0.73	-0.31
Social		.13*	-14.28	< .001	-2.54	-1.92	-0.87
Enterprising		.19**	-8.74	< .001	-1.66	-1.05	-0.53
Conventional		.02	5.21	< .001	0.62	1.38	0.32
Comparisons of self-reports (1) and ideal-partner reports (2)							
Realistic	M	.26***	13.30	< .001	2.14	2.88	0.81
Realistic	W	.30***	-24.2	< .001	-4.68	-3.97	-1.47
Investigative	M	.41***	-5.41	< .001	-1.26	-0.59	-0.33
Investigative	W	.54***	-4.75	< .001	-1.1	-0.45	-0.29
Artistic	M	.27***	-12.7	< .001	-2.92	-2.14	-0.77
Artistic	W	.38***	1.37	< .001	-0.12	0.7	0.08
Social	M	.36***	-21.4	< .001	-3.06	-2.54	-1.3
Social	W	.31***	10.20	< .001	1.22	1.8	0.62
Enterprising	M	.37***	-11.8	< .001	-1.85	-1.33	-0.72
Enterprising	W	.53***	3.96	< .001	0.25	0.73	0.24
Conventional	M	.20**	0.21	< .001	-0.3	0.38	0.01
Conventional	W	.28***	-15.5	< .001	-3.05	-2.36	-0.94
Comparisons of own ideal-partner reports (1) and partner's self-reports (2)							
Realistic	M	.32***	4.22	< .001	0.36	1.0	0.26
Realistic	W	.46***	6.61	< .001	1.48	0.80	0.40
Investigative	M	.45***	5.10	< .001	0.54	1.21	0.31
Investigative	W	.42***	4.66	< .001	1.17	0.48	0.28
Artistic	M	.56***	7.71	< .001	0.99	1.67	0.47
Artistic	W	.46***	5.10	< .001	1.26	0.56	0.31
Social	M	.36***	4.47	< .001	0.32	0.82	0.27
Social	W	.31***	4.93	< .001	1.01	0.43	0.30
Enterprising	M	.40***	1.68	.09	-0.04	0.51	0.10
Enterprising	W	.34***	6.32	< .001	1.13	0.60	0.38
Conventional	M	.43***	6.66	< .001	0.68	1.25	0.40
Conventional	W	.37***	10.5	< .001	2.03	1.39	0.64

For gender differences in self-reported VIs, our data align with the results of meta-analytical (Su et al., 2009) and cross-cultural (Du et al., 2024) studies: compared to their partners, men reported significantly higher interests in Realistic occupations, and interests for

working with things. Women self-reported greater Social and interests for working with people, compared to their partners. These were the greatest gender differences observed, however, single men also reported greater Conventional interests than did average single women (Study 2), and men in both studies reported lower preferences for prestigious occupations. Women self-reported greater Artistic and Enterprising interests, along with greater interest in prestigious vocations compared to their partners. No differences in self-reported Investigative interests or interests for working with Ideas were found in couples.

Comparisons of self- and ideal-partner preferences revealed that coupled men idealized partners with less interest in Realistic domains but greater interest in Investigative, Artistic, Social, and Enterprising fields, as well as a preference for working with people and pursuing prestigious careers. In contrast, women preferred partners with more interest in Realistic, Investigative, and Conventional occupations but less interest in Social fields. Women described their ideal partners as less interested in prestigious careers than themselves. Women's self-rated Enterprising interests were higher than their ideal-partner preferences.

Across heterosexual couples, both men and women rated their own interests as lower than the preferences expressed by their partners, suggesting an aspirational pattern in partner evaluations. Men, in particular, idealized partners with higher interests across nearly all RIASEC domains and prestige, except for Enterprising. In contrast, women reported greater People- and Ideas-oriented interests than those ascribed to them by their partners. They also perceived their actual partners as more interested in lower-prestige occupations than their ideal partner profile.

To draw a similar comparison between their self-reports for single individuals, we employed independent samples t-tests in Study 2 data, as presented in Table 4.

Supplementary Table 4

Average Men's Self-Reports Compared to Average Women's Self-Reports

Interest	*t*	*p*	CI LL	CI UL	*d*
Realistic	-9.25	< .001	-1.55	-1.00	-1.03
Investigative	2.76	< .001	0.12	0.74	0.31
Artistic	6.86	< .001	0.83	1.50	0.76
Social	9.66	< .001	0.90	1.36	1.07
Enterprising	3.47	< .001	0.18	0.66	0.39
Conventional	-8.21	< .001	-1.26	-0.77	-0.91
People-Things	15.29	< .001	4.252	5.51	1.70
Ideas-Data	4.61	< .001	0.975	2.43	0.51
Prestige	8.47	< .001	1.10	1.77	0.94

The results for single participants mirrored the patterns observed in couples and prior studies on gender differences in vocational interests. Compared to average single women, single men reported significantly higher interests in Realistic occupations and a stronger orientation toward working with Things. Conversely, single women reported greater Social interests and a preference for working with People, and these were the largest gender differences observed. Single men also showed greater interest in Conventional occupations than single women and, consistent with Study 1, reported lower preferences for prestigious occupations. In contrast, single women reported significantly higher Investigative, Artistic, and Enterprising interests, and stronger preferences for prestigious vocations, compared to single men. These findings reaffirm established gender patterns in vocational interests (e.g., Su et al., 2009), while also aligning closely with the partner-based data presented in Study 1.

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6. List of Figures

7. List of Tables