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Core Self-Evaluation Moderates Distinctive Similarity Preference in Ideal Partner's

Personality

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Abstract

This research investigated the moderation effects of core self-evaluation (CSE) on singles' ideal partner preference, concerning distinctive similarity in personality. The data were collected from singles from three countries (i.e., China, Denmark, and US), and modelled in a multilevel profile analysis. The results show that CSE moderated distinctive profile similarity preference in that people high in CSE preferred higher distinctive profile similarity with their ideal partner. In addition, CSE moderated distinctive trait similarity preference in Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness in that people high in CSE preferred their ideal partner to share higher distinctive similarity on these four traits. Implications and limitations of the research and findings are also discussed.

Key words: self-evaluation, ideal partner preference, personality profile, distinctive similarity

Core Self-Evaluation Moderates Distinctive Similarity Preference in Ideal Partner's Personality

It is well-established that people prefer their partner to share similarities in many life domains, including demographics, physiological characteristics, abilities, mental well-being, habitual behaviors, attitudes, values, and personality (see a review by Luo, 2017). Indeed, the similarity preference in a partner is already evident before relationship initiation when people consider their ideal partner's features, especially in personality (Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997; Dijkstra & Barelds, 2008; Figueredo, Sefcek, & Jones, 2006; Liu, Ludeke, Haubrich, Gondan-Rochon, & Zettler, 2018; Watson, Beer, & McDade-Montez, 2014). Despite the ubiquitous similarity preferences in personality, the actual similarity in personality between couples and intimate dyads sometimes are rather mixed, with some studies reporting high and positive correlations while others report low and negative associations (McCrae et al., 2008; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000; Watson et al., 2004). The difference between the ubiquitous similarity preference in ideal partner's personality and the mixed similarity in actual partner's personality, suggests that people might adjust their similarity preference in their ideal partner's personality. Such adjustment is likely to be based on people's evaluation of their ability to fetch a very similar partner, which is captured by core self-evaluation (CSE). The aim of this study was to examine whether CSE moderated individuals' similarity preference in their ideal partner's personality. Importantly, we focus on distinctive similarity preference in personality given that overall similarity is often exaggerated by normative desirability confound (Furr, 2008; Wood & Furr, 2016).

Similarity Preference in Partners

Many theories and empirical studies have provided strong support for the idea that having a similar partner is of great importance. From an evolutionary perspective, having a similar partner can promote the passage of one's genes, because when two parents share similarity, each parent can contribute more than 50% of their genetic material to their offspring (Thiessen, Young, & Delgado,

1997). Niche construction theory indicates that having a similar partner can help people to form congenial and smooth relationships, and to construct a desirable environment that fits their needs and facilitates their goals (Laland, Odling-Smee, & Feldman, 2001). From a psychological perspective, pairing with a similar partner is rewarding, because similarity can validate the legitimacy of individuals' beliefs, values, and knowledge of the world, thus satisfying their demands for self-affirmation (Byrne & Clore, 1967), and because similarity can foster mutual liking between partners, thereby enhancing their mutual attraction (Condon & Crano, 1988).

Besides the theoretical support, the importance of similarity between partners is also supported by some empirical studies. For example, partners sharing similar personalities and/or similar emotions tend to have happier and more stable relationships (Anderson, Keltner, & John, 2003; Gonzaga, Campos, & Bradbury, 2007; Luo & Klohnen, 2005)

Similarity Preference in Ideal Partner's Personality

Given the importance of having a similar partner, people do indeed depict their ideal partner based on their own characteristics before relationship initiation. This trend is especially true when considering their ideal partner's personality. Most studies examining similarity preference in ideal partner's personality have used a variable-centered approach that focuses on an individual personality trait, which we refer to as "trait similarity preference". Trait similarity preference describes the phenomenon whereby people prefer their ideal partner to share similarity on individual personality traits. For example, if Sally has higher levels of Extraversion than other people, she would like her ideal partner to have higher levels of Extraversion than other people. Trait similarity preference in ideal partner's personality has been supported by many studies, both with the Big Five (Botwin et al., 1997; Dijkstra & Barelds, 2008; Figueredo et al., 2006; Watson et al., 2014), and with the HEXACO model (Liu et al., 2018), and the strength of correlations generally ranged from moderate to strong.

Besides trait similarity preference, similarity preference in personality has also been studied using a person-centered approach, referred to here as “profile similarity preference”, which is typically defined as “the similarity in the pattern of peaks and valleys common to the two profiles” (Furr, 2008, p. 1268). Accordingly, profile similarity preference indicates that people prefer a similar personality profile curve (combining all the studied personality traits) with their partner. For example, if Sally scores higher on Neuroticism and Conscientiousness relative to Agreeableness, Extraversion and Openness, she prefers her ideal partner to have a similar pattern of scores on these five traits. To the best of our knowledge, no study so far has examined profile similarity preference in ideal partner. But some insights can be drawn from studies investigating profile similarity in personality in married couples with the Big Five, reporting profile correlations ranging from .21 to .44 (e.g., Gonzaga et al., 2007; Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Considering ideal partner preference is predictive of one’s actual partner choice (Campbell, Chin, & Stanton, 2016; Gerlach, Arslan, Schultze, Reinhard, & Penke, 2017), profile similarity in personality among married couples suggests the existence of this preference in one’s ideal partner.

The above described trait and profile similarity preferences that correspond to variable- and person-centered approaches respectively, have been considered to complement each other while studying personality similarity (Rogers, Wood, & Furr, 2018). The variable-centered approach is used for trait-specific similarity regarding each trait separately, whereas the person-centered approach is used to inform to what degree two profiles, each consisting of multiple personality traits, are associated. Though these two approaches sound conceptually different, they are similar in two ways. Firstly, the variable-centered approach and person-centered approach, when applied to the same dataset, produce the same results, if proper standardization is made (Allik, Borkenau, Hřebíčková, Kuppens, & Realo, 2015). Nevertheless, we still decided to examine personality similarity using both approaches, in order to provide information not only for researchers studying similarity on individual personality traits, but also for those interested in personality profile

similarity (e.g., Krzyzaniak, Colman, Letzring, McDonald, & Biesanz, 2019). Secondly, the two similarities are both indexed by personality items, which capture more variances of personality (Möttus, Kandler, Bleidorn, Riemann, & McCrae, 2017). Specifically, trait similarity is indexed by the correlation between two sets of scores on the same items within a certain scale (e.g., correlations between items assessing Extraversion from self-report and ideal partner report), and profile similarity is indexed by the correspondence between two sets of scores on all the items of the entire personality inventory (e.g., correlations between all the personality items from self-report and ideal partner report).

Distinctive Similarity Preference in Personality

While using items as the unit of analysis helps to capture more nuances when indexing personality similarity, it also raises a problem—profiles of two randomly paired persons tend to be positive (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). This is because people tend to endorse certain items more highly than others. For example, most people would depict themselves as “trustworthy” and “intelligent”, rather than “deceitful” and “conventional” (Wood & Furr, 2016). Indeed, the normative profile—the average profile across individuals—reflects the characteristics possessed by most people. The correlation between a person’s profile and the normative profile is called normativity, reflecting the extent to which a person is like the average person (Furr, 2008). Normativity is not only prevalent, almost characterizing each person’s profile to some degree, but also highly associated with social desirability (Furr, 2008; Wood & Furr, 2016). Accordingly, similarity between individuals and their ideal partner’s personality might be because both individuals’ and their ideal partners’ personality profile are like the average person’s profile, or because individuals indeed prefer a desirable ideal partner rather than a similar one.

To rule out these confounds, this study used distinctive similarity as the similarity index, which reflects the match between one’s self-rating and ideal partner rating after controlling for normativity, thus clarifying how similar people are on their most distinguishable characteristics

(Furr, 2008). To control for normativity and examine distinctive similarity preference simultaneously, we adopted a multilevel profile approach (Biesanz, 2010; Rogers et al., 2018). This approach can also provide high statistical power in terms of integrating person-centered and variable-centered approaches, by examining distinctive profile similarity and distinctive trait similarity, within one model (Borkenau & Zaltauskas, 2009). Additionally, this approach allows for a straightforward estimation of the distinctive similarity preference as a function of CSE.

CSE as a Moderator

Core self-evaluation (CSE) is defined as “fundamental premises that individuals hold about themselves and their functioning in the world” (Judge, Erez, & Bono, 1998, p.168). More specifically, CSE describes how people appraise their self-worth, competence, and capabilities (Judge & Bono, 2001; Judge, Locke, & Durham, 1997). People high in CSE tend to think of themselves as capable, worthy and desirable, whereas people low in CSE tend to think of themselves as incapable, unworthy and undesirable. Indeed, people high in CSE tend to do better in many important life domains compared to their counterparts who are low in CSE. For example, people high in CSE tend to have better job performance (Grant & Wrzesniewski, 2010), be more popular (Scott & Judge, 2009), have better psychological and physical well-being (Tsaousis, Nikolaou, Serdaris, & Judge, 2007), have higher incomes (Judge, Hurst, & Simon, 2009), and tend to pursue more challenging and rewarding goals (Erez & Judge, 2001). Relating to the current topic, since similarity in a partner is very important, it is likely that people high in CSE prefer an ideal partner with higher similarity compared to these low in CSE.

Though no study has directly tested this hypothesis, some indirect evidence can be drawn from the mixed results of similarity in established couples, especially concerning trait similarity preference. Actually, some studies reporting positive and significant correlations between wives' and husbands' personality traits, while others reporting non-significant or even negative associations for this (McCrae et al., 2008; Watson et al., 2000; Watson et al., 2004). Taking

Extraversion as an example, McCrae et al. (2008) reported a positive correlation while Watson et al. (2004) reported a negative correlation for Extraversion in couples. These results suggest that although similarity is essentially preferred and is of great significance as detailed above, not everyone is capable of attracting a highly similar partner in reality. Given that people high in CSE tend to succeed in various aspects of life, they are likely to transfer their positive experience to intimate relationships, and thus forecast that they are more likely to get a highly similar partner in the future. Since ideal partner preference is predictive of one's real life partner choice (Campbell et al., 2016; Gerlach et al., 2017), people high in CSE are likely to depict a highly similar ideal partner before relationship initiation. Thus, this study proposed that people high in CSE are likely to prefer their ideal partner to share higher similarity in personality compared to these low in CSE.

The Current Research

Overall, this research aimed to examine the moderating role of CSE on individuals' distinctive similarity preference in their ideal partner's personality, after controlling for normativity, by utilizing a multilevel profile approach. Specifically, we proposed that people high in CSE had higher distinctive trait similarity preference and profile similarity preference compared to their counterparts low in CSE. We tested this hypothesis in three samples across three countries (China, Denmark, and US), and only focused on singles (i.e., people not involved in intimate relationships) to avoid any potential effects of current relationships and/or current partners on ideal preferences (Fletcher & Simpson, 2000; Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999).

Method

Samples

The present research used three datasets (Denmark, China and US)¹ from Liu et al. (2018), in which CSE was assessed, but had not been previously investigated. For all samples, we only

¹ The German data that was included in Liu et al. (2018) was not included in this manuscript because CSE was not measured in this dataset.

included participants with no missing data on the main variables. These samples are briefly described below, and more information can be found in Liu et al. (2018).

Sample 1. 69 Danish participants, who were single, heterosexually oriented, and responded correctly to two attention-checking items that were inserted into the online survey, were included. They (76% female) were between 19 and 53 years of age ($M = 28.7$, $SD = 9.6$).

Sample 2. 132 Chinese students, who were single and heterosexually oriented, were included. Participants (47% female) were between 17 and 23 years of age ($M = 18.5$, $SD = 0.9$), and completed the study in a lab.

Sample 3. 217 US participants, who were single and heterosexually oriented, from Mturk completed the current survey online. They (60% female) were between 18 to 71 years of age ($M = 38.8$, $SD = 13.7$).

Statement Regarding Statistical Power

As mentioned before, the multilevel profile approach was used to examine whether distinctive profile and trait similarity preference are moderated by CSE. The moderation effect of CSE on distinctive profile similarity preference, can be generalized to an examination of cross-level interactions in multilevel models, where personality measures (level-1 variables) are nested within individuals, and CSE (level-2 variable) is measured at the individual level. The statistical power to detect cross-level interactions in similar two-level situations, is known to depend primarily on the number of individuals, the number of observations per individual, the variation of the slopes between individuals, and the magnitude of the cross-level associations, while the intra-class correlations of the variables and the main effects are negligible (Mathieu, Aguinis, Culpepper, & Chen, 2012). With an analysis script provided by Mathieu et al. (2012), a Monte Carlo simulation with 1000 replications was conducted to examine the sensitivity in detecting cross-level interactions with the obtained sample sizes (418 subjects, 60 items for each subject). As there are no previous studies on the moderators of distinctive profile similarity preference using multilevel profile

analysis, the power to detect significant associations (Type I error was set at .01 in this research) between CSE and distinctive profile similarity preference, were tested for very small ($r = .05$), small ($r = .10$), and medium ($r = .20$) effects, using recently suggested new benchmarks for effect size estimates (Funder & Ozer, 2019). In all simulations, a fixed effect of $q = .40$ for distinctive profile similarity preference was used (note that the influence of this main effect on statistical power is negligible; Mathieu et al., 2012), while the between-subject variation for this slope was sampled with a standard deviation of .15 (95% of the population would have distinctive profile similarity preference between $q = .11$ and $q = .69$). ICCs for self-reports and ideal partner reports were set at .05. The power to detect very small moderation effect of CSE on distinctive profile similarity preference was .995 and larger effects were significant in every replication.

Even though the simulation was not extended to examine the moderation effects of CSE on distinctive trait similarity preference, presumably the power to detect at least small differences between traits in how CSE moderated distinctive trait similarity preference remains at relatively high levels. This was further supported by otherwise identical simulation to the one described above, but with only 20 items for each subject (i.e. if there would only be two ten-item scales for the profiles, referring to a smaller subset of the entire profile), in which the power to detect very small effect was .917.

Measures

Personality traits. Self-reported personality was assessed by the HEXACO-60 (Ashton & Lee, 2009), measuring each personality trait with 10-item. The ideal partner's personality was assessed via an adapted version of the self-report HEXACO-60 by replacing the first-person pronoun with "my ideal partner" for each item in the original version and making grammatical changes only when necessary. For example, the original item from the self-report scale is "Having a lot of money is not essentially important to me" (Honesty-Humility), and was adapted into "Having a lot of money is not essentially important to my ideal partner" in the ideal partner version.

Participants were instructed to rate to what extent each item describes themselves or their ideal partner from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliabilities of these personality scales ranged from .62 to .86 across the three samples for self-report and ideal partner report.

Core self-evaluation. CSE was assessed using the 10-item Core Self-Evaluation Scale (CSES, Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). Sample items include: “I am confident I get the success I deserve in life”, and “I do not feel in control of my success in my career” (reverse-scored). Participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The reliability of CSES ranged from .81 to .92 across the three samples. An overview of all administered assessments, the raw datasets, and the analysis scripts of this research can be found at <https://osf.io/dmuva/>.

Statistical Approach

The multilevel profile analysis model was constructed so that the dependent variable was the ideal partner’s profile, as reported by each participant (consisting of 60 items for each of the 418 subjects, amounting to total of 25,080 ratings in the dataset). The model starts with an examination of distinctive profile similarity preference. To control for normativity, the mean self-report profile of the sample (calculated separately for all three samples from sample grand-mean centred self-reports), was included in the model. Distinctive profile similarity was estimated by entering the self-report profile for each subject, whereby each item was centered around the mean of the same item in the sample (again, separately for each sample), as suggested by Biesanz (2010). In addition, the distinctive and normative profile effects were allowed to vary across subjects to capture how much each subject preferred distinctively similar or normative partners concerning personality profile (Biesanz, 2010; Rogers et al., 2018). The model then tested the moderation effects of CSE on distinctive profile similarity preference. This was done by entering a cross-level interaction between the self-report profile and CSE in the model, while also controlling for the main effect of CSE and its interaction with normativity.

To assess distinctive similarity preference for each HEXACO trait, the multilevel profile analysis was further extended to include information about to which HEXACO trait scale each item belongs. For example, for each of the ten items in the Honesty-Humility scale, a categorical variable was coded to have values that referred to Honesty-Humility, and for each of the ten items in the Emotionality scale, this same variable was coded to have values that referred to Emotionality, and so on. In practice, this resulted in five dummy coded variables (one for each HEXACO trait) that had value “1” if the item belonged to a certain scale, and “0” if not (Agreeableness served as the reference scale and its items were always coded “0”). By including interactions between these dummy-coded variables and distinctive self-ratings, marginal effects were calculated for each trait to inform about distinctive trait similarity preference. This approach is directly informative about distinctive trait similarity, because the average across the similarity association for items equals to the similarity correlation between aggregate trait scores (see Allik et al., 2015). In the final step, trait specific interactions with CSE were included in the model to examine whether CSE is differently associated with distinctive similarity preference across the HEXACO traits, while controlling for whether CSE moderated normativity differently across the HEXACO traits².

The modelling described above, was done in a stepwise manner, by which the statistical significance of the additional part of the model was tested against a model without these additions. At each step, alongside controlling for normativity, gender differences and sample differences were also controlled for. This was done by adding interactions for gender (coded men = -0.5, women = 0.5) for each additional fixed parameter in the model, followed by adding dummy-coded interactions for Danish and Chinese samples, for each parameter. All interactions were retained in

² To test if trait similarity preference and CSE moderated trait similarity preference were bundled into traits, and that trait-specific results were not driven by single items that belong to these trait scales, an additional set of models were conducted and results were presented in our supplementary materials for interested readers (see Part II).

the model as a correct adjustment for distinctive similarity parameter estimates and related interactions with CSE in the later stages of the modelling procedure.

All analyses were run with *lme4*-package version 1.1-21 (Bates, Mächler, Bolker, & Walker, 2015) in R 3.5.3. Likelihood ratio testing was used to examine whether the model was improved by the additional parameters if there were multiple added parameters (e.g. the HEXACO traits or interactions with country) or if the added parameter was a random effect. The statistical significance of the single fixed parameters was examined from p values that were calculated based on Satterthwaite approximations, and degrees of freedom by *lmerTest*-package version 3.1-0 (Kuznetsova, Brockhoff, & Christensen, 2017). In the case that likelihood ratio test indicated heterogeneity between countries or traits, marginal effects and contrasts were extracted with *emmeans* package version 1.4 (Lenth, 2019). To obtain estimates with a meaningful interpretation, the self-reports and ideal partner reports were scaled with their respective standard deviations, across the entire dataset. Means for each item were scaled with the standard deviation across the means of the 60 items. CSE was standardized with its mean and standard deviation in the between-subject dataset.

Results³

The association between CSE and the HEXACO traits is presented in Table 1⁴. Specifically, with data from all three countries (China, Denmark, and US) combined, the correlation between CSE and the self-report HEXACO traits ranged from $-.38$ (Emotionality) to $.67$ (Extraversion), and the correlation between CSE and the ideal partner report HEXACO traits ranged from $-.18$ (Emotionality) to $.25$ (Extraversion). Indeed, CSE was not consistently correlated with more

³ Note that we only presented results concerning distinctive similarity preference in this manuscript, since this is our focus, and all results concerning normativity can be found in our online supplementary materials (see Part III).

⁴ Since the correlations of the HEXACO traits can be found in Liu et al. (2018), they were not presented here.

favourable ideal partner ratings (e.g., the correlation between CSE and Agreeableness was .09) may suggest that it is not the feature of, but the match on, the personality trait, that is important to people. We examined this below.

Distinctive Profile Similarity Preference in Ideal Partner

Parameter estimates from the multilevel profile analysis, controlling for normativity, gender, and sample, are presented in Table 2. Self-rating profiles were associated with ideal partner profiles after adjusting for normativity (Model 1 in Table 2), $\beta = .27$, 99% *CI* [.25, .31], $t(423.39) = 26.43$, $p < .001$, indicating that participants preferred their ideal partner to share a distinctive personality profile. Distinctive profile similarity preference did not vary by gender (Model 1 in Table 2), $\beta = .04$, $t(423.40) = 1.94$, $p = .053$, or by sample (coefficients for China and Denmark as compared to US can be found in Model 2 of Table 2), $\chi^2(2) = 3.57$, $p = .167$.

The Effects of CSE on Distinctive Profile Similarity Preference

Parameter estimates for the effects of CSE on distinctive profile similarity preference can be found in Model 3 of Table 2. Interaction between CSE and distinctive profile similarity preference was positive and significant, $\beta = .10$, $t(351.37) = 11.97$, $p < .001$, indicating that people high in CSE had a stronger preference for distinctively similar partners. This effect is illustrated in Figure 1, and marginal effects for distinctive profile similarity preference were estimated at .18, 99% *CI* [.15, .22], .28, 99% *CI* [.26, .31], and .38, 99% *CI* [.35, .41], for low (Mean – 1SD), average (Mean), and high (Mean + 1SD) levels of CSE, respectively. This interaction did not vary by gender (Model 3 in Table 2), $\beta = .03$, $t(349.26) = 1.53$, $p = .127$, or sample (Model 4 in Table 2), $\chi^2(2) = 2.53$, $p = .283$.

The robustness of the interaction between distinctive profile similarity preference and CSE was further tested by controlling for individual personality trait scale scores and their respective interactions with distinctive self-report profiles. For example, we run a new model, similar to Model

3 in Table 2, but adding Honesty-Humility and its interaction with the centered self-report profile. This procedure was repeated for each HEXACO trait, and the results show that the initial interaction ($\beta = .10, p < .001$) still retained its significance ($p < .001$) and magnitude (ranging from $\beta = .07$ to $\beta = .10$). This strongly supports that CSE has a unique moderating role on distinctive profile similarity preference in the ideal partner's personality.

Distinctive Trait Similarity Preference in Ideal Partner

Adding the interactions between the HEXACO traits and distinctive self-ratings, showed that distinctive similarity preference was different across the HEXACO traits, $\chi^2(5) = 285.65, p < .001$. Marginal effects (all $p < .001$) showed that distinctive preference was strong in Honesty-Humility (.38) and Openness to Experience (.39), average in Agreeableness (.26) and Conscientiousness (.27), and weak in Emotionality (.19) and Extraversion (.19)⁵. Distinctive similarity preference in specific HEXACO traits was independent of gender (Model 5 in Table S4), $\chi^2(5) = 15.05, p = .010$. There were, however, differences between samples in trait specific similarity preference (Model 6 in Table S4), $\chi^2(10) = 29.00, p < .001$. Distinctive similarity preference was stronger in the US sample than in the Chinese or Danish sample (all pairwise comparisons, $p < .01$) for Honesty-Humility (.44, .33, and .32, for the US, Chinese and Danish samples, respectively), Conscientiousness (.33, .24, .16), and Openness (.45, .32, .31), and stronger than in the Chinese sample for Emotionality ($p < .001$) (.24, .13, .16).

The Effects of CSE on Distinctive Trait Similarity Preference

The final modelling step, presented in Table S4 (Model 7 and 8) and summarized in Table 3, was to examine whether the moderating association of CSE on distinctive preference, was present for all or only some of the HEXACO traits. After including the main effect of CSE and interactions

⁵ Results of pairwise comparisons of distinctive preference for the HEXACO traits were presented in supplementary materials (see Part I).

between CSE and the HEXACO traits (also interactions with gender and sample), the results show that the moderating effect of CSE on distinctive similarity was different across the HEXACO traits, $\chi^2(5) = 259.29, p < .001$. Marginal interaction coefficients calculated separately for each trait showed that the interaction between CSE and distinctive similarity preference was significant for Emotionality ($\beta = 0.12, p < .001$), Extraversion ($\beta = 0.19, p < .001$), Agreeableness ($\beta = 0.06, p < .001$), and Conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.08, p < .001$), and non-significant for Honesty-Humility ($\beta = 0.03, p = .054$) and Openness to Experience ($\beta = 0.02, p = .132$). These effects are depicted in Figure 2, and point estimates of similarity preference for each HEXACO trait at low (Mean - 1SD), average (Mean), and high (Mean + 1SD) levels of CSE are presented in Table 3. The general pattern shows that people high in CSE had higher distinctive similarity preference on Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness compared to those low in CSE. There was also a significant interaction between gender and whether CSE moderated the distinctive similarity preference differently for the HEXACO traits, $\chi^2(5) = 21.90, p < .001$. However, contrasting the trait-specific marginal interactions for women and men against each other, revealed that none of the contrasts were significant (for all comparisons, $p > .01$).

CSE moderated distinctive trait similarity preference varied across samples, $\chi^2(10) = 57.54, p < .001$. Pairwise contrasts between countries showed that distinctive preference for Extraversion, although also moderated by CSE in the Chinese ($\beta = 0.14, p < .001$) and Danish ($\beta = 0.09, p = .009$) samples, was even more strongly moderated by CSE in the US sample ($\beta = 0.25, p < .001$; both comparisons $p < .002$). This effect is depicted in Figure 3, and point estimates of Extraversion at low (Mean - 1SD), average (Mean), and high (Mean + 1SD) levels of CSE for each country are presented in Table 3. For all other HEXACO traits, the moderating effect of CSE did not show any significant difference between samples, all $p > .025$.

Discussion

This research investigated the moderation effect of CSE on singles' distinctive similarity preference in their ideal partner's personality across three countries (i.e., China, Denmark, and US). Using a multilevel profile approach to control for normativity and examine the moderation effects of CSE simultaneously, the results largely supported our hypotheses. Overall, CSE moderated distinctive profile similarity preference, with people high in CSE preferring higher distinctive profile similarity in their ideal partner's personality relative to those low in CSE. This effect held across gender and country, and after controlling for personality trait levels. Extending from distinctive similarity preference across the entire personality profile, to specific personality traits, revealed that CSE moderated distinctive similarity preference in Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. The moderation effects show that people high in CSE preferred higher distinctive similarity in these personality traits.

CSE Moderates Distinctive Profile Similarity Preference

As the first study to examine distinctive profile similarity preference in ideal partner's personality, we confirmed that people generally preferred their ideal partner to share a distinctive personality profile. This strongly suggests the importance of profile similarity by showing that people, cultivated in different cultures and immersed in different social norms, uniformly want their ideal partner to be similar to them in their most distinguishable characteristics. This cross-cultural consensual preference not only nicely echoes theories suggesting the evolutionary benefits of similarity (Laland et al., 2001; Thiessen et al., 1997), but also indicates that similarity preference possibly originates from active selection, rather than social homogamy or convergence (Watson et al., 2014). By removing the influence of normativity, which is generally socially desirable (Borkenau & Zaltauskas, 2009; Wood et al., 2007), this research demonstrates that it is really a similar partner, rather than a desirable partner, that is preferred by individuals. Thus, a partner who shares one's idiosyncratic personality features may not be a typically desirable partner for others, but is nevertheless a desirable partner for this specific person. Actually, this might potentially

explain why people tend to match on some undesirable personality features, such as dark traits (Smith et al., 2014) and personality disorders (Decuyper, Gistelinck, Vergauwe, Pancorbo, & De Fruyt, 2018).

Examining the moderation role of CSE on ideal partner preference, extends previous research on CSE, which mainly focuses on organizational settings, to the area of intimate relationships. Our result show that people high in CSE preferred their ideal partner to share their idiosyncratic personality features to a greater degree than those low in CSE. This might be because people high in CSE transfer their positive experience in other life domains to their relationship arena and believe that they can also have partners that meet their preferences, just like they can get their goals achieved in their career. Or, this might be because people high in CSE have more positive relationship-specific experiences, such as having more successful relationship attempts in the past, making them more confident in pursuing partners they admire. Conversely, people low in CSE may transfer their failures in other life aspects or unsuccessful past relationship attempts onto their ideal partner preference, making them infer that they are less likely to attract a highly similar partner. Accordingly, people low in CSE had lower distinctive profile similarity in their ideal partner's personality. Future studies could explore these explanations.

Given that ideal partner preference is predictive of one's real life partner choice, people high in CSE are more likely to form relationships with partners sharing their most distinguishable features in reality. This implies that people high in CSE are also more likely to have better relationships in the future, since some studies have reported the importance of similarity to relationship quality (Gonzaga et al., 2007; Luo & Klohn, 2005). By contrast, people low in CSE are less likely to get a highly similar partner in a real-life scenario, which concurs with their ideal partner preference. This creates a paradox between what they want (i.e., a uniquely similar partner) and what they can actually have (i.e., a less similar or even dissimilar partner). To solve this paradox, people low in CSE might exploit cognitive bias to justify the reality (i.e., having a less

similar or even dissimilar partner) to fit their expectations (i.e., having a highly similar partner; Lemay & Clark, 2015). In other words, they could, consciously or unconsciously, “see” their partners to share their distinctive characteristics, even though their partners do not possess these characteristics in reality, and this cognitive strategy is likely to help people to be happier in their relationships (Böhm, Schütz, Rentzsch, Körner, & Funke, 2010). Future studies could explore how people with different levels of CSE form and maintain their relationships in reality.

Besides moderating preference for distinctive similarity in personality, the current study also indicates that CSE may affect people’s ideal partner preference in other aspects, such as physical attractiveness and social status (Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002). For example, people high in CSE may prefer their ideal partner to be more physically attractive, or to possess more social resources. Future studies could explore these possibilities.

CSE Moderates Distinctive Trait Similarity Preference

While profile similarity captures the consensual similarity preference that people have toward their ideal partner’s general personality pattern, trait similarity reflects the distinguished preference pattern for individual personality traits. This research examined trait similarity preference using a multilevel profile approach, which allows us to separate distinctive trait similarity preference from normativity. The results indicate that distinctive trait similarity preference was high for Honesty-Humility and Openness to Experience, moderate for Agreeableness and Conscientiousness, and weak for Emotionality and Extraversion, which perfectly mirror that of Liu et al. (2018) where overall similarity was reported for the HEXACO traits. The results also provide strong support for the idea that people like a partner who shares unique similarity on these personality traits, rather than a partner with desirable personality traits.

The moderation effects of CSE on the HEXACO traits are different. CSE moderated distinctive trait similarity preference on Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness and

Conscientiousness, but not on Honesty-Humility or Openness to Experience. The differentiated associations between CSE and the HEXACO traits might be explained by the characteristics of those traits, i.e., their relations with personal values. Actually, Liu et al. (2018) reported that people had higher similarity preference in traits closely related to personal values. Accordingly, people should have similar levels of similarity preference in Honesty-Humility and Openness to Experience, regardless of their CSE level, due to the close association between these two traits and personal values, whereas people's preference for Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness is adaptable, since these traits are less correlated to personal values. Thus, matching on Honesty-Humility and Openness to Experience is more important to partners than matching on the other four HEXAO traits. Indeed, this idea is further supported by a recent study reporting that people tended to perceive their partner as sharing higher similarity on Honesty-Humility and Openness to Experience relative to the other traits (Liu, Ludeke, & Zettler, 2018). The uniform similarity preference people have on Honesty-Humility and Openness to Experience may suggest that similarity on these two traits are more important to intimate relationships, and people are less likely to compromise on them when considering their ideal partner's personality traits. Future studies could explore this.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are some limitations in this study. Firstly, although we found that CSE moderates distinctive similarity preference in personality trait and profile, the underlying mechanism remains unknown. It might be because distinctive similarity in personality profile and traits is important to intimate relationships. For example, distinctive similarity in personality profile and traits might help to facilitate relationship formation and improve relationship quality. It might also be because people with different levels of CSE are different in self-perceived mate value. Possibly, people high in CSE might think themselves as high in mate value, and thus could get partners that match their idiosyncratic personality features, whereas people low in CSE is likely to deem themselves as low

in mate value, and thus are unlikely to attract a uniquely similar partner. Accordingly, the importance of distinctive similarity in personality on intimate relationships and the mate value of the people with different levels of CSE might be potential factors that explain our findings. Future research could explore these explanations. Secondly, CSE was treated as a single construct in this research since it was measured with the 12-item CSES (Judge et al., 2003). However, CSE is also sometimes measured by its four components: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, emotional stability, and locus of control, and by using the scales of each component and aggregating them as a composite score (e.g., Bono & Colbert, 2005). In this way, one can look at the effect of each component as well as the overall effect of CSE. We encourage future research to examine the current topic with the four components of CSE, and to see whether they have different associations with distinctive similarity preference in ideal partner's personality. Lastly, the generalization of our conclusions is limited. For example, the criterion of only including heterosexual singles prevents us from generalizing our conclusions to other groups of the population, such as homosexual individuals or married individuals. Exclusively assessing personality with the HEXACO model prevents us from generalizing our conclusions in situations where other personality measures are used, such as the Big Five (Costa & McCrae, 1992) or the Five Factor Aspects (DeYoung, Quilty, & Peterson, 2007). Future research could improve this study by taking these limitations into consideration.

Conclusion

Overall, this research investigated the moderation effects of CSE on singles' ideal partner preference concerning distinctive similarity in personality, with a multilevel profile approach to control for normativity. The results show that CSE moderated distinctive profile similarity preference in that people high in CSE preferred higher distinctive profile similarity with their ideal partner, and that CSE moderated distinctive trait similarity preference in Emotionality,

Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness in that people high in CSE preferred their ideal partner to share higher similarity in these four traits.

Declaration

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

This study was not pre-registered.

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Figure 1. CSE moderates distinctive similarity preference in ideal partner's personality profile.

Note. CSE = Core self-evaluation.

Figure 2. CSE moderates distinctive similarity preference in ideal partner's personality trait.

Note. CSE = Core self-evaluation.

Figure 3. The moderation effect of CSE on distinctive similarity preference in Extraversion separately for each sample.

Note. CSE = Core self-evaluation.

Table 1

Correlation between Core Self-Evaluation and the HEXACO Traits

	China		Denmark		US		All	
	SP	IP	SP	IP	SP	IP	SP	IP
Honesty-Humility	.16	.12	.09	-.12	.25*	.13	.22*	.11
Emotionality	-.14	-.10	-.48*	-.09	-.49*	-.31*	-.38*	-.18*
Extraversion	.53*	.17	.54*	.11	.72*	.31*	.67*	.25*
Agreeableness	.11	.17	.12	-.11	.41*	.16	.32*	.09
Conscientiousness	.21	.17	.00	-.08	.32*	.07	.20*	.03
Openness to Experience	.16	.14	.01	.05	.00	-.07	.01	-.03
CSE: <i>M (SD)</i>	3.48 (0.55)		3.55 (0.65)		3.21 (0.80)		3.36 (0.72)	

Note: $n = 418$. SP = Self-reports, IP = Ideal partner reports, CSE = Core self-evaluation.* $p < .01$

CORE SELF-EVALUATION MODERATES DISTINCTIVE SIMILARITY PREFERENCE

Table 2

Parameter Estimates from Multilevel Profile Analysis Models for Distinctive Profile Similarity Preference

Effect	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3			Model 4		
	Est	SE	<i>p</i>	Est	SE	<i>p</i>	Est	SE	<i>p</i>	Est	SE	<i>p</i>
Fixed effects												
Intercept	0.00	0.01	.583	0.01	0.01	.350	0.01	0.01	.330	0.01	0.01	.325
Gender	−0.08	0.01	<.001	−0.08	0.01	<.001	−0.08	0.01	<.001	−0.08	0.01	<.001
DK	0.02	0.02	.298	0.01	0.02	.441	0.02	0.02	.323	0.02	0.02	.343
CH	0.00	0.01	.863	−0.01	0.01	.689	−0.00	0.01	.816	−0.00	0.01	.846
Dist	0.27	0.01	<.001	0.29	0.01	<.001	0.32	0.01	<.001	0.32	0.01	<.001
Dist × Gender	0.04	0.02	.053	0.04	0.02	.058	0.00	0.01	.992	0.00	0.01	.897
Dist × DK				−0.05	0.03	.123	0.05	0.02	.007	0.04	0.02	.013
Dist × CH				−0.03	0.02	.138	−0.10	0.03	<.001	−0.10	0.03	<.001
CSE							0.10	0.02	<.001	0.09	0.02	<.001
CSE × Gender							0.01	0.01	.634	0.01	0.01	.672
CSE × DK							−0.02	0.02	.348	−0.02	0.02	.374
CSE × CH							−0.02	0.02	.246	−0.02	0.02	.152
Dist × CSE							0.10	0.01	<.001	0.11	0.01	<.001
Dist × CSE × Gender							0.03	0.02	.127	0.02	0.02	.181
Dist × CSE × DK										−0.01	0.03	.724
Dist × CSE × CH										−0.01	0.03	.810
Random effects by subject (<i>SD</i>)												
Intercept	0.08			0.08			0.08			0.08		
Dist	0.18			0.18			0.14			0.14		
ρ Intercept, Dist	−0.10			−0.11			−0.08			−0.09		
Residual	0.77			0.77			0.77			0.77		

CORE SELF-EVALUATION MODERATES DISTINCTIVE SIMILARITY PREFERENCE

Note: Dist = Distinctive self-rating profile. Norm = Normative self-rating profile. CSE = Core self-evaluation. DK = Danish sample. CH = Chinese sample. US sample served as a reference group. ρ = random effect correlation.

Table 3

Distinctive Trait Similarity Preference Moderated by Core Self-Evaluation

		Core Self-Evaluation		
Trait		Mean –1SD	Mean	Mean +1SD
Emotionality		.06 [.01, .12]	.18 [.15, .22]	.30 [.25, .35]
Extraversion	All	.03 [–.02, .08]	.22 [.18, .25]	.40 [.35, .45]
	Danish	.07 [–.08, .21]	.16 [.07, .26]	.25 [.13, .38]
	Chinese	.06 [–.06, .17]	.19 [.12, .26]	.33 [.24, .42]
	US	–.00 [–.06, .05]	.25 [.20, .30]	.50 [.43, .56]
		.21 [.15, .26]	.27 [.23, .30]	.32 [.27, .37]
		.17 [.12, .23]	.25 [.21, .29]	.34 [.28, .39]
Agreeableness				
Conscientiousness				

Note. 99% confidence intervals were presented in the brackets.

Highlights

- Multilevel profile approach was used to separate distinctiveness from normativity.
- Singles preferred their ideal partner to share distinctive similarity in personality profile and personality traits.
- CSE moderated distinctive similarity preference in personality at profile level and trait level.
- The moderation effect of CSE held across China, Denmark and US.