

# “What matters to us”: The portrait values questionnaire to measure couple values

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## Abstract

No previous studies have analyzed values as qualities of relational microsystems, such as the romantic couple. Based on Schwartz's Theory of Human Values, this study examines the psychometric properties of the Portrait Couple Values Questionnaire (PCVQ). It measures four couple value dimensions: conservation, openness to change, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence. Five hundred and forty-six Italian respondents (54.1% women), aged 41.52 years ( $SD = 7.19$ ; range 23–63) and having a couple relationship, have filled in an anonymous online questionnaire. The results show the good psychometric properties of the PCVQ. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis Magnifying Glass Strategy shows good indexes of fit for each value dimension, except for the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) for openness to change, thus confirming that

**Statement of Relevance:** This study introduces the construct of “couple values” and proposes a self-report instrument to assess such values. The study examines, therefore, the psychometric properties of the Portrait Couple Values Questionnaire (PCVQ). The study makes a significant contribution to the literature because values have rarely been analyzed as qualities of relational microsystems, such as the family or the romantic couple. To the best of our knowledge, no previous research has investigated values as a couple quality.

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the PCVQ measures the four values with satisfactory internal consistency. The Multidimensional Scaling results, by showing a Stress-1 index of 0.07, confirm the circular structure of values because the four value dimensions are in the position predicted by Schwartz's model. Participants' personal and couple values are highly but not perfectly correlated, suggesting that couple values are a related but distinct construct compared to personal values. This study's contribution lies in introducing an innovative construct into the literature on values and couples, proposing a scale to assess it.

#### KEY WORDS

couple relationship, couple values, personal values, portrait couple values questionnaire

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

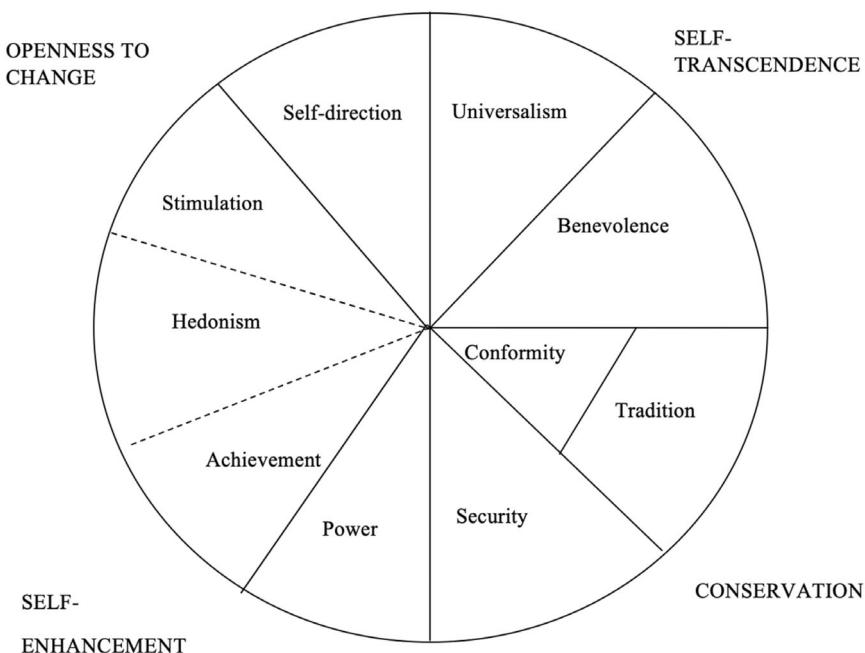
Personal values are of great interest in several areas of psychology, such as social, clinical, and developmental psychology. However, the psychosocial literature has mainly investigated individual, organizational, or cultural values, whereas no previous studies have analyzed values as qualities of relational microsystems, such as the romantic couple. The aim of the current study is therefore to introduce, theoretically and empirically, the concept of couple values, namely what is relevant for the couple as a whole. Nevertheless, it is important to first all define the fascinating, albeit challenging, concept of value.

Values significantly contribute to defining the individual's personal and social identity (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004) and guide attitudes and behaviors (Bilsky et al., 2015; Danioni & Barni, 2019). According to Schwartz's Theory and Circular Model of Human Values (Schwartz, 1992), which is widely adopted in psychosocial research on values and has spawned hundreds of studies since its publication (for a review, see Brosch & Sander, 2015; Roccas & Sagiv, 2017), values are desirable trans-situational goals that function as guiding principles in an individual's life to select modes, means, and actions. Schwartz (1992) identifies 10 basic value types with variable importance but are universally recognized and distinguishes them based on their motivational needs. These values are power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security (see Table 1).

We represent the relations among the 10 values using a circular structure where the values placed contiguously in the structure (i.e., benevolence and universalism) share similar motivational goals. In contrast, values opposite in the structure (i.e., power and universalism) have antagonistic motivational goals (Figure 1). Basic values may also be organized along two orthogonal dimensions, creating four higher-order value dimensions (Schwartz, 1992, 2012). The first dimension opposes openness to change values (hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction), which emphasize the independence of thought, action, and feelings and readiness for change, to conservation values (security, conformity, and tradition), which stress the role of order, self-restriction, preservation of the past and the status quo, and resistance to change. The

**TABLE 1** The 10 values and the motivational goals underlying them (Schwartz, 1992)

Value	Definition
Tradition	Respect, commitment and acceptance of the customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provide to the self.
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.
Security	Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.
Hedonism	Pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself.
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.
Self-direction	Independence thought and action; choosing, creating, exploring.
Power	Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.
Benevolence	Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact.

**FIGURE 1** Schwartz's model of values (Schwartz, 1992, 2003)

second dimension captures the contraposition between self-enhancement values (power and achievement), which emphasize the pursuit of one's interests and relative success and dominance over others, and self-transcendence values (universalism and benevolence), which refer to the concern for the welfare and interests of others.

Personal values were originally assessed by a ranking system, where respondents were asked to provide their value hierarchy based on the importance each value assumed as a guiding principle in their lives, from the most to the least important (Rokeach, 1973). In contrast, Schwartz has adopted a rating procedure to provide respondents with a less cognitively challenging task and avoid forcing them to assign different importance to values when this requirement does not reflect their value priorities (Maio et al., 1996; Ovadia, 2004). Schwartz has first proposed the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS; Schwartz, 1992), where respondents are presented with a list of 57 single-value items to represent 10 motivationally distinct values. Item examples are: "EQUALITY, equal opportunity for all" or "HONEST, genuine, sincere." Respondents are asked to rate for each value the extent to which they consider it a guiding principle in their lives on a 9-point scale. Schwartz et al. (2001) have proposed the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) to overcome some of the major shortcomings of the SVS. The PVQ includes 40 short verbal portraits—or 21, in the short version (Schwartz, 2003)—which describe a person's goals, aspirations, or wishes that point to the importance of a value. An item example is "Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to him/her. He/She likes to do things in his/her original way," which measures openness to change values. Respondents are asked to answer the question "How much like you is this person?" on a 6-point Likert scale. Compared to the SVS (Schwartz, 1992), the PVQ is less subject to social desirability bias because it indirectly measures personal values (Danioni & Barni, 2021) and is more concrete, context-bound, and cognitively simpler (Schwartz et al., 2001). It is also a shorter instrument and is usable with populations for which the SVS was not suitable (e.g., with little or no education, younger population; Schwartz, 2003).

## 1.1 | Not only personal values

The literature focusing on values has predominantly conceptualized them as individual constructs, sometimes treating them as personality traits (e.g., Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004; Rohan, 2000; Turska et al., 2016). Various studies demonstrate the direct association between personal values and individual behaviors; for instance, values are related to prosocial (Daniel et al., 2015; Schwartz, 2010), cooperative (Sagiv et al., 2011; Schwartz, 1996) or transgressive behavior (Rosnati et al., 2014; Russo et al., 2019), but also to voting (Schwartz et al., 2010) or environmental behavior (Poortinga et al., 2004; Scopelliti et al., 2022). Hitlin (2003) has emphasized how "values are the primary phenomenon in the experience of personal identity" (p. 122), considering the construct as a fundamental part of one's identity. Assigning importance to specific personal values in different life domains allows one to hold a unified, trans-situational, self-concept. Values are usually perceived as goals, as people tend to describe themselves in terms of their value priorities (Hitlin, 2011).

Various studies have investigated values at the organizational level (see, e.g., De Clercq et al., 2008). The literature distinguishes between work values, namely the cognitive expressions of needs and/or goals addressed throughout the working activity, and organizational values, endorsed within the organization a person works in (e.g., Gardner et al., 2018; Lyons et al., 2010). Organizational values relate to the actions and end-states of the organization rather than the single worker, building its identity and orienting its goals and behaviors (e.g., Mueller & Straatmann, 2014; Wetzelhütter et al., 2020). An organization's identity mainly depends on its primary motivations and values (Langer & Feeney, 2022). Research on organizational fit has recently shown that workers' perception of congruence between work values and

values endorsed within the organization to which they belong helps attain desirable outcomes, increasing performance and satisfaction (Cable & DeRue, 2002; Oh et al., 2014).

Research has frequently investigated values by referring to an individual's macrosystem, analyzing its variability as a function of the cultural context (see, e.g., Sagiv & Roccas, 2017). From this perspective, the appropriate unit of analysis for considering value dimensions is the society or cultural group rather than the individual (Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1994). Cultural values represent abstract ideas, implicitly or explicitly shared, about what is good, right, and desirable in society (Schwartz, 1999). This is why they are likely to affect an individual's values, which may depend on what is considered "worthy" based on cultural expectations (Danioni & Barni, 2021).

## 1.2 | Couple values: A new, different construct

Values have been rarely analyzed as qualities of relational microsystems, where daily reciprocal exchanges are frequent and possible, for example, the family (e.g., Barni et al., 2017) or the romantic couple (Lönnqvist et al., 2018). The couple represents the encounter between two different "stories" (individual, intergenerational, and cultural values, among others) and the point of origin of the family system (Scabini & Iafrate, 2019). The couple may be conceptualized as a unique entity, different from the individuals who compose it. Couples hold characteristics that at least partially differ from the characteristics of the two couple members (Wang et al., 2020). The scientific literature on this topic has investigated the concept of couple identity, or how the members of a couple represent and define themselves according to a couple's sense of belonging (Parise, 2013). Holding a couple identity leads an individual to include the partner and the relationship with them in the personal self-concept (Emery et al., 2021). Hence, couple members perceive a feeling of connection and "we-ness" (Pagani et al., 2020), through which they define themselves in relationship to the other (Reid et al., 2006).

Several constructs originally conceived for the individual have been rediscovered and measured as specific qualities of the couple, considering the dynamic interplay between the two partners. This rediscovery has allowed the shift from an individual-centered to a couple-based perspective, theoretically and methodologically. Among these constructs, previous studies have addressed concepts such as couple identity clarity (e.g., Emery et al., 2021)—the extent to which an individual, as a member of a romantic couple, feels like the two of them know who they are as a couple—or dyadic coping (e.g., Donato, 2014)—partners' coping responses to each other's stress.

Regarding the study of values within the couple relationship, to the best of our knowledge, no previous research has investigated values as a couple quality. Indeed, no previous research has made the above-mentioned theoretical and methodological shift from an individual-centered to a couple-based perspective when considering values. Nevertheless, to do this shift allows researchers and professionals working with couples to better comprehend some aspects of couple priorities and consequent relational dynamics. The literature has mainly addressed the degree of congruence between the personal values of the two members of the couple. A moderate level of congruence, stable over time, has generally emerged from the research (Caspi et al., 1992; Roest, 2009). Congruence between partners' values is positively correlated with the quality of the couple's relationship (e.g., Gaunt, 2006) and the perception of parental self-efficacy (Robitschek et al., 2018). A longitudinal study that followed a sample of partners facing the transition into parenthood from the first weeks of pregnancy to 3 months after childbirth

(Lönnqvist et al., 2018) has shown that this critical life event is likely to cause women's shift toward conservation values. The change in mothers' value priorities is also perceived by fathers, who do not show any change in their value priorities after becoming parents.

Only very recently, Czyżkowska and Cieciuch (2020) have developed a comprehensive model and measurement of marital goals according to Schwartz's model of values. They have adapted the PVQ to measure the goals partners hold in the marriage (e.g., self-direction: "It is important that partners are independent in what they are doing" and tradition: "It is important to observe customs in a relationship"). They conceptualize values as goals each partner feels compelled to achieve within/through the marital relationship. In contrast, we investigate the partners' perceptions of being part of a "couple system," characterized by specific value priorities. These might be different from the ones that individual couple members may hold (Wang et al., 2020). This perspective allows investigating values by adopting a dyadic approach and addressing a specific part of the couple's identity. Adopting an adequate instrument for measuring this highly specific, new, and different construct is essential. To this end, we propose the Portrait Couple Values Questionnaire (PCVQ) (see Table S1), adapted from the 21-item PVQ (PVQ-21; Schwartz, 2003). As mentioned above, the PVQ-21 was originally developed to measure personal values. In the original version, its items consist of 21 verbal portraits of a person and his/her objectives or aspirations, which implicitly reflect the importance of a value. The instrument has recently been successfully adapted to measure values other than personal ones, such as organizational values (Wetzelhütter et al., 2020). When completing the proposed PCVQ, participants are asked to report the extent to which they perceive each couple as similar to their couple. We minimally modify the PVQ-21 to allow measuring personal and couple values similarly and carry out meaningful comparisons.

### 1.3 | The current study

Based on all the above considerations, this study analyzes the psychometric properties of the PCVQ. First, we explore the factor structure of the PCVQ and the fit of the 21 items to the theorized circular structure of Schwartz's model of values (see Figure 1). Second, we examine whether couple values can be empirically distinguished from personal values.

## 2 | METHOD

### 2.1 | Participants and procedure

Five hundred and forty-six Italian participants (54.1% women;  $M_{age} = 41.52$  years,  $SD = 7.19$ , range 23–63) in a couple relationship and cohabitating (76.4% married) took part in the research. Their couple relationships lasted, on average, 14.94 years ( $SD = 7.43$ , range 1–43). Almost all participants (96.1%) were born in Italy, and all lived in Italy at the time of the survey. Regarding education level, 6.8% of participants completed middle school or below, 47.4% completed high school, 33.7% earned a 3- or 5-year degree, and 12.1% held a PhD or a master's degree. Most participants were full- or part-time workers (79%), 0.9% were students, 4.8% were unemployed, and 13.6% were housewives/househusbands. A small percentage (1.7%) rated "other occupation" as a response.

Participants were presented with the main objectives of the research and, after providing their informed consent, were asked to fill in an anonymous online self-reported questionnaire using a Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) approach in February 2022. This approach implies that web surveys are carried out through the provision of an invitation link to the survey via email. The completion of the questionnaire required about 30 minutes. Data were collected with the collaboration of Demetra Opinion.net, which is an Italian agency specialized in data collection. The agency launched the questionnaire online to a wide panel of Italian respondents. The presentation of the scales measuring individual and couple values was counterbalanced across the sample, and we controlled for careless responding bias (Ward & Meade, 2018), namely the potential low accuracy in responding to a questionnaire (Bowling et al., 2016; Meade & Craig, 2012). Based on the available literature on this topic, the following procedures were adopted: First, we reported the effort and time needed to develop the questionnaire. Second, we asked participants to fill out three statements related to their commitment to the survey (e.g., "I acknowledge that this study asks me to complete a questionnaire of 30 minutes"). Third, at the end of the survey, we asked participants to state if their answers were accurate and truthful (dichotomous response: yes/no). Last, we only considered answers with a positive response to this question.<sup>1</sup>

The research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Psychology of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan, Italy (protocol number: 64-21) and followed the Italian Association of Psychology (AIP) and American Psychological Association (APA) standard ethical guidelines for research. The principal investigator of this study had previously completed the National Institute for Health training course "Protecting Human Research Participants" (Certification Number: 2107256).

### 3 | MEASURES

#### 3.1 | Sociodemographic information

We asked participants to provide the following personal information: sex, age, place of birth and residence, education, occupation, family structure, and duration of the couple relationship.

#### 3.2 | Couple values

To measure respondents' perceptions of the importance assigned to values as a couple, we used the Portrait Couple Values Questionnaire 21-item (PCVQ-21) adapted from the PVQ (Schwartz, 2003; Italian version by Capanna et al., 2005). As mentioned above, the scale comprises 21 items and measures the four value dimensions (6 items for conservation, 6 items for openness to change, 4 items for self-enhancement, and 5 items for self-transcendence) theorized by Schwartz (1992, 2003). We inferred respondents' couple values from their self-reported similarity, rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = not like us at all; 6 = very much like us) to the verbal portraits describing couples in terms of values. Item examples are: "Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important for this couple. They like to do things in their own original way" and "They strongly believe that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to this couple" which describes a couple that highly values openness to change and

self-transcendence. The higher the similarity score to the couple described, the higher the importance assigned to that specific value as a couple.

### 3.3 | Personal values

To measure respondents' personal values, we used the 21-item PVQ (Schwartz, 2003), which assesses the importance given to the four higher-order value domains (conservation, openness to change, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence) by the respondent. The scale consists of 21 verbal portraits of a person and his/her objectives or aspirations, which implicitly reflect the importance of a value. Example items are: "Thinking up new ideas and being creative is important to him/her. He/She likes to do things in his/her own original way" and "He/She strongly believes that people should care for nature. Looking after the environment is important to him/her" which assesses personal openness to change and self-transcendence values. Respondents self-reported their similarity to each portrait using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = not like me at all; 6 = very much like me). The higher the similarity score to the person described, the higher the importance assigned to that specific value. All dimensions show good internal consistency (conservation:  $\alpha = 0.71$ ; openness to change:  $\alpha = 0.76$ ; self-enhancement:  $\alpha = 0.82$ ; self-transcendence:  $\alpha = 0.77$ ); this is in line with the original version of the instrument, where Cronbach's alpha ranged between 0.74 for self-transcendence and 0.81 for self-enhancement.

### 3.4 | Data analysis

First, we adopt the CFA Magnifying Glass Strategy to analyze the adequacy of the four value dimensions for assessing the couple values. This approach reduces the risk of cross-loading items due to the circular nature of Schwartz's model of values (see, e.g., Davidov et al., 2008). Given the circular structure of values, items are likely to show positive or negative secondary saturations (Cieciuch & Schwartz, 2012). The proposed approach only examines parts of the model simultaneously, testing separate models for each value dimension (see, e.g., Beramendi & Zubieta, 2017; Cieciuch & Schwartz, 2012; Vecchione & Alessandri, 2017). Because the proposed items are normally distributed, we evaluate the models using maximum likelihood (ML) estimation performed with Mplus – 8.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 2009). To assess the overall goodness of fit of the models, we report for each model tested the  $\chi^2$  and the degrees of freedom, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; values  $\leq 0.05$  are optimal, and values ranging between 0.05 and 0.08 are acceptable; Brown & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999), the Composite Fit Index (CFI; values of 0.90 or higher are satisfactory; Bentler, 1990), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR; values  $< 0.08$  are considered adequate, Hu & Bentler, 1999). Second, by adopting the structural factor of values that emerge from the CFA Magnifying Glass Strategy, we describe the couple values in terms of mean, standard deviation, range, skewness, and kurtosis (the normal distribution of data requires that values lie between -2 and +2, Griffin & Steinbrecher, 2013), Cronbach's alphas (satisfactory values are above 0.70, Nunnally, 1978), and correlations. Third, we use multi-dimensional scaling (MDS, weak confirmatory approach; Borg & Groenen, 2005) to visually depict relations between items, starting from a regional hypothesis, by presenting them as a configuration of points in a Euclidean space. This approach is widely adopted for analyzing value structures and confirming Schwartz's model of values (e.g., Bilsky et al., 2011; Cieciuch

et al., 2013); We perform the analyses using Proxscal in SPSS - 22.0 (IBM Corp, 2013). Fourth, to verify that couple values are a connected but different construct compared to personal values, we refer to Pearson correlations to analyze linear associations (e.g., between personal conservation and couple conservation). To this end, we adopt Evans' (1996) cut-offs, which suggest evaluating the relationships among variables by considering the absolute value of  $r$  as follows: 0.00–0.19 = very weak, 0.20–0.39 = weak, 0.40–0.59 = moderate, 0.60–0.79 = strong, 0.80–1.0 = very strong.

## 4 | RESULTS

The CFA Magnifying Glass Strategy shows that the theoretically expected solution is confirmed for all four value dimensions based on the standards for fit presented in the Data Analysis subsection. Table 2 reports the indexes of fit for each value dimension, which appear adequate, except for the RMSEA for openness to change. The factor loadings of each PVCQ-21 item for the four value dimensions (Table 3) are adequate, ranging from 0.384 for item 10 to 0.876 for item 12. The only factor loading lower than 0.40 is item 10 “It is important to this couple to make their own decisions about what they do. They like to be free to plan and to choose their activities for themselves” which measures the openness to change dimension.

Based on the adequacy of the four value dimensions confirmed using the CFA, Table 4 presents the mean, standard deviation, range, skewness, kurtosis, and Cronbach's alpha for the couple values and their intercorrelations. Kurtosis and skewness show a normal distribution because they lie within the  $-1/+1$  range.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Cronbach's alphas demonstrate a satisfactory internal consistency for all couple value dimensions, with all values above the cut-off of 0.60.

Finally, Figure 2 represents the two-dimensional projection of the MDS space with the theory-based starting configuration suggested by Schwartz (1992). The PVCQ-21 Stress-1 index of 0.07 (below the 0.27 cut-off) indicates that the solution has a significantly better fit than expected in a random solution (Spence & Ogilvie, 1973; Sturrock & Rocha, 2000). Overall, values assumed to belong to the same value dimension are in the same region. Their regional separation supports the contraposition between conservation vs. openness to change and self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence. Only item 14: “This couple likes to take risks. They are always looking for adventures” which refers to their openness to change dimension, and lies in a spatial position different from the expected. This item lies close to self-enhancement items. In addition, two items (item 10: “It is important to this couple to make their own decisions about what they do. They like to be free to plan and to choose their activities for themselves” and item

TABLE 2 Indexes of fit of the four value dimensions using the CFA magnifying glass strategy

Dimension	$\chi^2 (df)$	p	RMSEA	CFI	SRMR
Couple conservation	31.99 (7)	<.001	0.08	0.96	0.03
Couple openness to change	42.42 (8)	<.001	0.09	0.97	0.03
Couple self-enhancement	1.27 (2)	.529	0.00	1.00	0.01
Couple self-transcendence	19.11(5)	<.01	0.07	0.98	0.02

Note: CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual.

**TABLE 3** Factor loadings of each item of the PVCQ-21

	<b><math>\beta</math></b>
Couple conservation	
Item 5	0.706
Item 7	0.459
Item 13	0.753
Item 15	0.480
Item 19	0.476
Item 21	0.462
Couple openness to change	
Item 1	0.755
Item 6	0.735
Item 9	0.800
Item 10	0.384
Item 14	0.630
Item 20	0.652
Couple self-enhancement	
Item 2	0.735
Item 4	0.712
Item 12	0.876
Item 16	0.704
Couple self-transcendence	
Item 3	0.681
Item 8	0.597
Item 11	0.711
Item 17	0.744
Item 18	0.656

20: “Enjoying life’s pleasures is important to this couple. They like to ‘spoil’ themselves”), which measure openness to change values, are close to the self-transcendence dimension.

The Pearson correlation coefficients between the couple and personal values range between  $r = 0.69$ ,  $p < .001$  for the association between the couple and personal openness to change, and  $r = 0.78$ ,  $p < .001$  for conservation and self-enhancement values (Table 5). The association between the couple and personal self-transcendence is characterized by  $r = 0.70$ ,  $p < .001$ . Overall, the correlations between the couple and personal values are strong, but far from perfect.

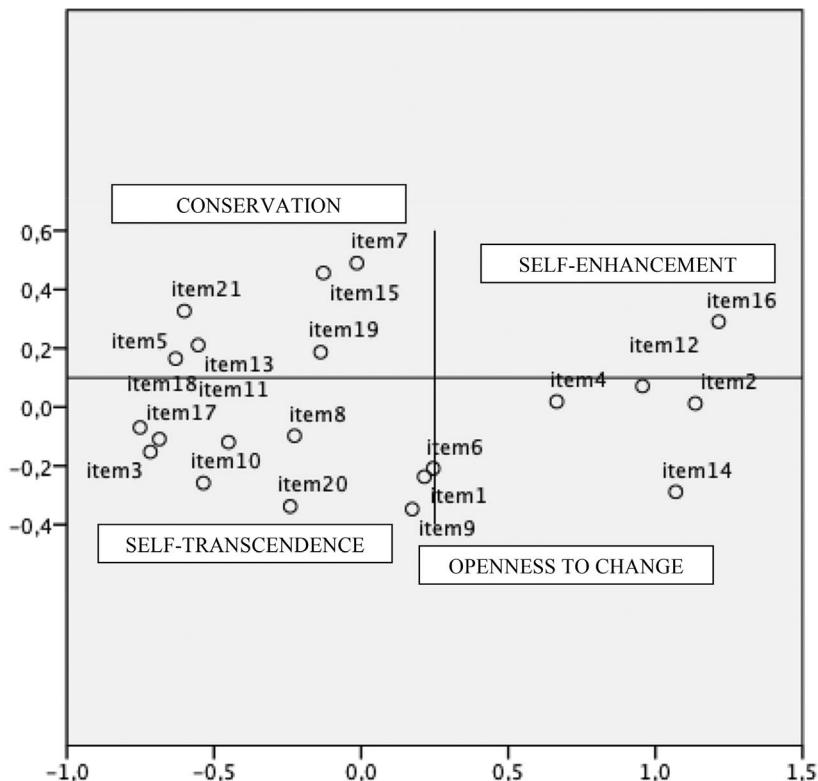
## 5 | DISCUSSION

This study introduces the construct of couple values and proposes a self-report instrument to assess such values. The couple has been conceptualized as an entity “other, different” compared

TABLE 4 Descriptive statistics and correlations between couple values

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	Mean	SD	Range	Skewness (SE)	Kurtosis (SE)	$\alpha$
1. Couple conservation	1				4.18	0.84	1.83-6	-0.18 (0.10)	-0.44 (0.21)	0.75
2. Couple openness to change	0.28**	1			3.81	0.92	1-6	0.11 (0.10)	-0.24 (0.21)	0.81
3. Couple self-enhancement	0.25**	0.53**	1		2.90	1.14	1-6	0.48 (0.10)	-0.41 (0.21)	0.84
4. Couple self-transcendence	0.52**	0.44**	0.11**	1	4.53	0.89	1.40-6	-0.34 (0.10)	-0.48 (0.21)	0.81

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ . SE, Standard Error. Range represents the actual range of responses.



*Note.* Openness to Change: Item 1, 6, 9, 10, 14, 20. Self-enhancement: Item 2, 4, 12, 16. Self-transcendence: Item 3, 8, 11, 17, 18. Conservation: Item 5, 7, 13, 15, 19, 21.

FIGURE 2 Multidimensional scaling of the Portrait Couple Values Questionnaire. Openness to change: Item 1, 6, 9, 10, 14, 20. Self-enhancement: Item 2, 4, 12, 16. Self-transcendence: Item 3, 8, 11, 17, 18. Conservation: Item 5, 7, 13, 15, 19, 21

TABLE 5 Correlations between couple and personal values

	1. Personal conservation	2. Personal openness to change	3. Personal self-enhancement	4. Personal Self-transcendence
1. Couple conservation	0.78**	0.28**	0.24**	0.40**
2. Couple openness to change	0.28**	0.69**	0.43**	0.30**
3. Couple self-enhancement	0.26**	0.50**	0.78**	0.37
4. Couple self-transcendence	0.40**	0.37**	0.10*	0.70**

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

to the individuals who compose it (Parise, 2013; Wang et al., 2020). Hence, couple members may not only be similar in terms of personal values priorities, as suggested by previous literature (e.g., Caspi et al., 1992; Robitschek et al., 2018; Roest, 2009), and may hold specific goals concerning their marital domain (Czyżkowska & Cieciuch, 2020), but they may also develop values priorities as a couple system, creating a couple identity. Couple values are related but different from what each member considers relevant at the individual level. While personal values refer to what a person deems relevant and worthy and guide their selection of modes, means, and actions, couple values may be defined as what is considered essential by this microsystem. This study adapts the PVQ (Schwartz, 2003), originally developed to measure individuals' value priorities according to Schwartz's Theory and Circular Model of Human Values (Schwartz, 1992), to assess couple values, analyzing the psychometric properties of the PCVQ.

Overall, the study's results support the goodness of fit of the proposed instrument for measuring couple values and their empirical distinction from personal values. The CFA Magnifying Glass Strategy confirms the existence of the four value dimensions (i.e., conservation, openness to change, self-transcendence, and self-enhancement) when measuring couple values through the PCVQ. All fit indexes are satisfactory, except for the RMSEA index, when considering openness to change (Bentler, 1990; Brown & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999). As is known, RMSEA refers to how well the model fits the population's covariance matrix (Byrne, 1998). Its unsatisfactory value may be due to the low factor loading of item 10 ("It is important to this couple to make their own decisions about what they do. They like to be free to plan and to choose their activities for themselves"), measuring self-direction, indicated by MDS as spatially close to the self-transcendence dimension. Similarly, previous studies on personal values have found that RMSEA may be problematic regarding the openness to change dimension (e.g., Beramendi & Zubietia, 2017).

MDS results confirm the circular structure of values when assessing couple values. According to the theoretical model proposed by Schwartz (1992, 2003), the four value dimensions are in the expected position. Schwartz's Circular Model of Human Values states the contraposition between conservation versus openness to change values on the one hand and self-enhancement versus self-transcendence on the other. This result is confirmed by the MDS results considering couple values, where the contrast between different dimensions emerges. The few items that appear slightly misplaced (Items 10, 14, and 20) belong to the openness to change values. Item 14 "This couple likes to take risks. They are always looking for adventures" occupies an "independent position" close to self-enhancement values. Previous research on value assessment has shown that risk-taking may not always fit a value dimension that emphasizes change and independence (Danioni & Barni, 2018). Although being creative and embracing new challenges in life may be considered activities worth enhancing within the couple, risk-taking involving loved ones (such as a partner) may be viewed as a danger or threat against which people believe they must protect themselves and their couple (Douglas, 1992). In addition, the closeness of two items (Item 10 and Item 20) to the self-transcendence dimension suggests that, at the couple level, openness to change and self-transcendence share the promotion of growth and couple expansion. This is also indicated by previous research focusing on individual values (Schwartz et al., 2012). Moreover, both items ("It is important to this couple to make own decisions about what they do. They like to be free to plan and to choose their activities for themselves" and "Enjoying life's pleasures is important to this couple. They like to 'spoil' themselves") refer to the concept of "caring for the couple." This may explain their closeness to self-transcendence, reflecting the concern for the welfare and interests of others.

Finally, this study shows that couple values are empirically related but distinguishable from personal values. This result confirms previous research suggesting that couple members hold characteristics that are at least partially different from the features of the two couple members (Wang et al., 2020). Correlation analyses show a strong positive association between the same value domain measured at the individual or couple level, with all correlation coefficients deemed strong (Evans, 1996). However, this relation appears far from perfect, with all coefficients below the cut-off implying a “very strong” relationship. Therefore, this result confirms the relevance of investigating the couple values concept and the “value” of holding an adequate instrument to capture its uniqueness.

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations. First, the RMSEA index for the couple openness to change value dimension is not entirely satisfactory regarding the standards for fit. Caution is needed when interpreting the results concerning this value dimension. Future studies should investigate this dimension to comprehend its specificity and uniqueness when considering the couple values. In addition, because this is only a preliminary study aimed at theoretically and empirically introducing the concept of couple values, future studies should also go more in depth when considering the psychometric properties of the instrument proposed, by testing, for example, age, sex, or cultural measurement invariance. Second, we rely on one informant for reporting couple values and the sampling procedure adopted may limit the generalizability of the findings. To fully capture the complexity of this construct and investigate differences and similarities in the members' perceptions of the couple values, future research should involve both partners by asking them to report their couple values. This approach is widely adopted when measuring specific qualities of the couple (e.g., Pagani et al., 2020). Doing so would help test the invariance of the instrument across partners' sex.

## 6 | CONCLUSIONS

The study has the solid merit of introducing a neglected topic in the literature on values by focusing on the microsystem a person belongs to, such as the couple relationship. It introduces the innovative construct of couple values based on the widely adopted theoretical framework of Schwartz's, 1992 theory. The CAWI allows for reaching a sex-balanced sample of Italian respondents living all over Italy. The promising results of this study pave the way for the study of values within other micro-relational contexts, such as the family, the class or workgroup, and the sports team, among others. Moreover, the alignment between partners' personal values and couple values may have highly relevant implications because the person-couple fit may help feel more engaged and satisfied in the relationship.

In conclusion, this study introduces an innovative construct in the literature on values and couples research and practice, providing a psychometrically satisfactory instrument to assess it. The proposed measure may be used by researchers interested in the functioning of couple relationships and those addressing couple dynamics and their value priorities. Besides the theoretical importance of the construct of couple values, the measurement of these values can have practical applications that extend across several intervention domains. For example, in clinical work, values serve as a guide for evaluating intervention outcomes (i.e., the “success” of the intervention can be assessed, at least in part, by the increase of values-congruent behavior to a desirable and socially meaningful criterion; e.g., Paliliunas, 2022), and considering couple values can be extremely useful for interventions focused on couple relationships. Working on couple values can also be a relevant focus to be addressed within prevention programs, such as

the “Family Enrichment Paths” (Bertoni et al., 2017; Iafrate & Rosnati, 2007). Such interventions target couples and parents facing normative and non-normative transitions and aim at promoting family relationship quality, starting from a conception of the family as an organization of relationships where the couple and the parental bonds are highly interconnected. In this scenario, the possibility to have an easy tool that allows to detect and analyze couple values as whole appears therefore very promising.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Thirteen participants were excluded from the analyses because of their negative response to the yes/no honesty question.

<sup>2</sup> Each of the 21 item included in the analysis showed kurtosis and skewness levels below the cut-off of |1|. No outliers were evident and needed therefore to be eliminated from data analysis.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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