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# Partner Responsiveness Mediates the Relationship Between Virtues and Partner Movement Toward Ideal Self

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Partner Responsiveness Mediates the Relationship Between  
Virtues and Partner Movement Toward Ideal Self

Amber Rachel Cazzell

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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## ABSTRACT

### Partner Responsiveness Mediates the Relationship Between Virtues and Partner Movement Toward Ideal Self

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Doctor of Philosophy

Extant literature suggests not only that social relationships are one context in which individuals may pursue personal strivings (Rusbult, Finkel & Kumashiro, 2009a), but also that individuals may assess their marital satisfaction based on their goal-striving successes (Li & Fung, 2011). Indeed, the degree to which partners appear to be responsive to one another's goals and ideals, termed partner responsiveness, has been linked with personal and relational well-being (Reis, Clark & Holmes, 2004; Rusbult et al., 2009a). Virtues such as commitment, trust, and compassion have been theoretically and empirically associated with upward cycles of partner responsiveness and personal and relational well-being (Canavello & Crocker, 2010; Reis & Gable, 2015). Partner responsiveness has also been consistently linked with goal attainment and well-being in the context of social relationships (Drigotas, 2002). The present study sought to bridge these two literatures by examining the potential mediating role of partner responsiveness between virtues and goal attainment. Data for the present study came from a cross-sectional survey of 840 heterosexual married couples living across the United States. Hypotheses were analyzed using an actor-partner interdependence model (Kenny, Kashy & Cook, 2006). Results suggested that partner responsiveness partially mediated actor effects of virtue on goal attainment, but fully mediated the partner effects of virtue on goal attainment. Gender effects emerged such that the direct effects of virtues on goal attainment were stronger for husbands than for wives. These results indicate that within-dyads (Kenny et al., 2006) gender difference variables (e.g. percent of family income earned) are likely to account for these differences. Study limitations and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Key words: virtues, partner responsiveness, personal strivings

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## **Partner Responsiveness Mediates the Relationship Between Virtues and Partner Movement Toward Ideal Self**

Since the advent of humanistic psychology, a large emphasis has been placed on individual self-growth, personal meaning, and achievement (Bishop, 2007). Even relationship research focuses largely on how relationships help individuals maximize their potentials and find purpose. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that personal goals are the lens through which partners determine whether or not they are satisfied with their relationships (Fincham & Beach, 1999). The recent expansion in positive psychology has ignited interest in character strengths and virtues as avenues to personal flourishing. To date, research has found 1) links between virtues and partner responsiveness (Simpson & Campbell, 2013) and 2) links between partner responsiveness and ideal self-attainment (Rusbult, Finkel & Kumashiro, 2009). The present study adds to the extant literature by examining partner responsiveness as a mediator between virtues and ideal self-attainment in a large sample of married couples drawn from the United States.

### **Expressive Individualism**

Much psychological research today is conducted from an abstractionist ontology which assumes that things are best understood outside of specific contexts. This is in contrast to a relational ontological paradigm which assumes that context constitutes the person or object (i.e. a hammer may be best understood as a paperweight under certain

circumstances [Slife, 2004; Slife & Richardson, 2008]). Abstractionism underpins the use of an individual as the standard unit of analysis, as well as concern with personal emotional satisfaction in psychological research. In particular, abstractionist ontologies have led many positive psychologists to frame research from an expressive individualist paradigm (see Slife & Richardson, 2008).

Expressive individualism is a humanistic moral framework which values individuality and assumes that “core, inbuilt feelings...guide one’s development [and] should be respected and nurtured” (Bishop, 2007, p. 108). The term was first used in the book *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1985) to describe the common moral framework which emerged in reaction to Freudian psychoanalysis and behaviorism (Bishop, 2007; Kohut, 2009). Partly fueling the trend toward expressive individualism was Abraham Maslow’s popularization of the concept of self-actualization (Maslow, Frager & Cox, 1970).

The expressive individualist notion of self-actualization is reflected in work with the theory of possible selves. Such research has described the ideal self as an imagined and hoped for version of the self that reflects who one ideally wants to be and the characteristics they wish to have (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The ideal self is distinct from the actual self—the identity and characteristics one feels they actually comprise. There are several disadvantages associated with large gaps between the ideal and actual

self; in addition to the unpleasant dissonance that such gaps create, distance between an individual's ideal and actual self has been linked to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, low self-acceptance, juvenile delinquency, and pathologies ranging from eating disorders to borderline personality disorder (Heidrich, 1999; Higgins, Klein, & Strauman, 1985; Oyserman & Markus, 1990; Parker, Boldero, & Bell, 2006). The corollary has also been empirically supported: individuals whose ideal selves and actual selves are closer have greater personal well-being, higher self-esteem, greater relational well-being, and experience more positive affect (Drigotas, 2002; Hardy, Walker, Olsen, Woodbury, & Hickman, 2013; Owens & Patterson, 2013). Moreover, community-nominated moral exemplars rate their ideal and actual selves as having higher overlap relative to ordinary individuals (Hart & Fegley, 1995). Striving toward ideal self-attainment, or self-actualization, then, has been empirically linked with a number of favorable outcomes.

**Expressive individualism and relationships.** Scholars have noted that Americans tend to, and may even believe it is best to, strategically choose relational networks which support innermost desires and goals. In a lecture entitled *The Golden Rule in the Light of New Insight*, Erik Erikson praised relationships based on the principle of mutuality, that is, "relationship[s] in which partners depend on each other for the development of their respective strengths" (1964, p. 231). Bellah and colleagues have noted the tendency for Americans to retreat into relational "enclaves" of like-minded

individuals, while engaging only in obligatory interactions with those whose identities are dissimilar (1985). More recently, scholars have even suggested that spiritual maturity emerges when “one person acts to facilitate the good of another and where that good is understood as the other’s unrealized potential” (Leffel, 2011, p. 40).

Expressive individualism remains the predominant framework from which relational research is conducted today (Fowers, 2000). Such work emphasizes personal feelings of love over commitment and obligation and views marriage as effective only when support is offered or personal needs are satisfied (Bellah et al., 1985; Bishop, 2007; Hawkins et al., 2007; Ripley, Worthington, Bromley & Kemper, 2005). As testament to this fact, nearly half of the items of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale assess the degree to which partners agree on several topics (though dated, the scale remains one of the most widely used inventories of relational well-being; Spanier, 1976). Indeed, the very use of relational satisfaction as an indicator of relational quality is a hallmark of expressive individualism.

### **Personal Goals and Expressive Individualism**

**Goal content: Not all goals are created equal.** From an expressive individualist perspective, some goals are more worthwhile than others. Namely, the more true to oneself (autonomously-chosen) the goal is, the more worthwhile this goal is assumed to be. Interest in the distinction between more worthwhile, autonomously-chosen and less worthwhile, externally-controlled goals takes root largely from Self-Determination

theory (SDT). This body of work uses SDT to conceptualize individual eudaimonic well-being as involving the pursuit of intrinsic goals (those which are inherently rewarding to the individual; e.g. friendship) as opposed to extrinsic goals (those which individuals pursue out of controlled motivations--such as external rewards or social approval; e.g. becoming wealthy; see Ryan, Huta & Deci, 2006). Extrinsic goals have been related to lower self-esteem, vitality and self-actualization and higher physical symptoms, television consumption, drug abuse, and narcissism; intrinsic goals are related to higher well-being and positive affect, and less distress (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Kasser & Ryan, 2001). Moreover, intrinsic goal attainment is related to improved well-being when controlling for extrinsic goal attainment, while the inverse is not widely empirically supported (Schmuck, Kasser & Ryan, 2000).

**Personal goals in the context of relationships.** Personal goals provide one framework for understanding relational quality and satisfaction. The idea that marital conflict occurs because of incompatible underlying goals is not a new one (e.g. Fincham & Beach, 1999; Hocker & Wilmot, 1985). Researchers have proposed a dynamic goal theory of marital satisfaction which states that the degree of success in attaining personal growth goals, companionship goals, or instrumental goals dictates one's relational happiness (Li & Fung, 2011). Not only is goal attainment a factor, but the collective nature of goals, perceived goal-striving efficacy, and perceived partner support in goal attainment have each been empirically linked with goal achievement,

personal well-being, and relational well-being (Avivi, Laurenceau & Carver, 2009; Brunstein, Dangelmayer & Schultheiss, 1996; Fitzsimons, Finkel & vanDellen, 2015; Kaplan & Maddux, 2002; Molden, Lucas, Finkel, Kumashiro & Rusbult, 2009).

**Partner responsiveness.** These ideas have been echoed in several theoretical and research niches concerned with relationally-situated strengths-development (see Table 1; each of these concepts are from here on referred to as “responsiveness”). Reis has suggested that such pockets of theory and research can be synthesized into one coherent construct which he terms partner responsiveness. Partner responsiveness refers to the idea that “when partners are felt to be responding supportively to important needs, goals, values, or preferences in the self-concept, emotional well-being is enhanced” (Reis, 2014, p. 257). Two pressing questions arise when considering partner responsiveness: 1. What enhances partner responsiveness? and 2. Does goal attainment mediate the relationship between partner responsiveness and well-being? With respect to the first question, scholars have done more theorizing than empirical work. Reis (2014) suggests that perceived responsiveness is likely a function of whether a partner feels adequately understood, validated, and cared for. Commitment and trust appear to play a significant role in upward cycles of responsiveness and well-being (Simpson & Campbell, 2013; Tran & Simpson, 2009; Wiselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999). Similarly, Finkel and Rusbult (2008) explain how virtues like forgiveness are key indicators of responsiveness, and Canevello and Crocker (2010) have shown

how compassion builds responsiveness and improved relational quality. Scholars have also noted how virtues such as other-centeredness, generosity, admiration, teamwork, shared vision, and loyalty will aid in responsiveness and goal pursuit in the context of marriage (Fowers, 2000; Fowers & Owenz, 2010; Hawkins, Fowers, Carrol, & Yang, 2007). In an attempt to be more systematic, Leffel, Fritz, and Stephens (2008) developed an ecology of virtues based on a literature review of empirical research linking responsiveness with moral emotions. They developed a list of 10 virtues which are good candidates for promoting responsiveness. These 10 virtues are rooted in four motivational foundations of care: attachment (trust, love, elevation), altruism (empathy, compassion/sympathy), reparation (guilt, forgiveness, humility), and reciprocity (gratitude, positive pride).

While Leffel and colleagues have noted that their ecology of responsiveness virtues has yet to be put to the test empirically, they do a good job of providing a rough draft framework. Their framework draws together Jonothan Haidt's social intuitionist model and theory of moral emotions (Haidt, 2001a; Haidt, 2001b) with what other scholars have referred to as "other-regarding virtues" (Post, 2003; Taylor & Wolfram, 1968), "warmth-based virtues" (Worthington, Berry, & Parrott, 2001), "marital virtues" (Hawkins et al., 2007), and "relational virtues" (Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; VanWensveen, 1997). Leffel and colleagues (2008) argue that their ecology of responsiveness virtues reflect moral capacities which have been evolutionarily

prepared, but must be cultivated through life experience and practice. It is through the practice of these virtues that an individual becomes responsive to the needs and strengths of others, and eventually reaches moral maturity.

With respect to the second question, surprisingly little research has looked at the link between partner responsiveness and goal attainment or self-actualization. Much of the literature on goal responsiveness has focused on whether actual versus perceived responsiveness is responsible for well-being, and whether actual responsiveness is reliably linked with perceived responsiveness (see Reis, 2014). One small niche of research has examined and reliably demonstrated the mediating role of goal attainment between partner responsiveness and well-being, dubbing it the Michelangelo phenomenon.

**The Michelangelo phenomenon.** The Michelangelo phenomenon describes the process by which partner responsiveness may elicit a target's ideal self (Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009). Involved in the Michelangelo phenomenon are three theoretical processes (see Rusbult et al., 2005). The first involves expectancy confirmation processes, whereby a partner's expectations about the self become reality as the partner elicits behaviors from the self that confirm those expectations (Darley & Fazio, 1980). The second process involves the cybernetic feedback loop theory described by Carver and Scheier (1982), in which individuals are inherently motivated to eliminate discrepancies between the self and the self's ideals. The third process involves

relational interdependence, in which one gradually adapts contents of the self to adjust to a relational partner (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). There are two partner responsiveness mechanisms by which this occurs in the Michelangelo phenomenon.

The first, *Partner Perceptual Affirmation*, describes whether a partner perceives the target in a manner that is consistent with the target's ideal self. For instance, a partner may consciously or unconsciously express confidence in the ability of the target to achieve goals (Rusbult, Finkel & Kumashiro, 2009). *Partner Perceptual Affirmation* involves belief in the target's competence to resemble the target's ideals (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009). The second mechanism involved in the Michelangelo Phenomenon, *Partner Behavioral Affirmation*, moves beyond perception and involves the actions of a partner toward the target. *Partner Behavioral Affirmation* describes the extent to which a partner elicits the target to perform ideal-congruent behavior (Rusbult, Finkel & Kumashiro, 2009). This may occur directly (by assisting the target in obtaining goals), or indirectly (by reacting positively when the target moves in an ideal-congruent direction). It is through these two types of partner responsiveness that a person may act as a sculptor to their partner, helping to mold them into their ideal self--or into something else. If a partner is perceptually and behaviorally affirming of the target, the target is more likely to rise to the occasion and act in a manner consistent with her/his ideal self.

There have been a handful of studies on the Michelangelo phenomenon which have produced modest, but important findings. Similar to the notion of enclaves suggested by Bellah and colleagues (1985), one study found that when a partner embodies the ideals of the target's ideal self, the target is more likely to experience movement toward their ideals (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka & Finkel, 2009b). That is, the more similar the ideals of each partner, the more likely both partners are to actually resemble those ideals. Additionally, it has been found that partners are more effective sculptors (and more malleable targets) when they have an orientation toward goal pursuit which emphasizes setting realistic goals, and focusing on quick action; they are less effective sculptors (and less malleable targets) when they have an orientation toward goal pursuit which emphasizes reflection on and evaluation of goals (Kumashiro, Rusbult, Finkenauer, & Stocker, 2007). Similarly, it was found that promotion-oriented regulatory focus (being intrinsically motivated to attain goals; "I want to") was more strongly linked with movement toward ideal selves than was prevention-oriented regulatory focus (having controlled motivations to embody norms; "I ought to"; Righetti, Rusbult, Finkenauer & Stocker, 2010). In light of Ryan and colleagues' (2006) theory, this suggests that partner responsiveness aids more in attaining worthwhile, intrinsic goals than attaining less worthwhile, extrinsic goals.

### **The Importance of Virtues in Relationships**

From an expressive individualist perspective of human flourishing, positive psychologists have documented links between exercising virtues and ensuing personal psychological and physical well-being. Although virtues are thought to be traits which benefit the self, it is also acknowledged that virtues are nonzero in nature (Petersen & Seligman, 2004) and build others up as well. Moreover, couples who report exercising virtues also score highly on indicators of marital satisfaction and quality (Hawkins et al., 2007).

**Defining virtue.** From a liberal individualistic paradigm, virtues have been conceptualized as abstract, trait-like, strengths of character which bring about personal feelings of satisfaction and fulfillment. Petersen and Seligman (2004) identified 10 criteria which together distinguish virtues and character strengths from other tendencies. Among other things, character strengths in their view are traitlike, are fulfilling to an individual, are morally valuable in their own right, do not diminish others, do not have opposite characteristics which are desirable, and are distinct from one another. Virtues have been described as multi-faceted, involving perceptual sensitivity to opportunities for prosociality, motivational intensity in the form of moral emotions, and procedural action skills to follow through on prosocial behaviors (see Leffel, 2011).

Recently, positive psychologists have begun to borrow from traditional virtue ethics by recognizing the importance of virtues working in concert with one another.

For instance, some scholars have declared that there is a “dark side” of forgiveness, which causes some couples high in forgiveness to have poorer relational outcomes. This happens when couples are not adequately striking a balance between forgiveness and self-respect (see McNulty, 2011). Young, Kashdan, and Macatee similarly found that individuals who were balanced in their character strengths (i.e. jack of all strengths) tended to have better personal well-being outcomes than individuals who scored very highly on a single virtue (2015). Thus, scholars are beginning to emphasize virtue as a form of character, rather than a single trait per se.

### **Virtue and Goal-striving**

It is fairly undisputed that virtues such as prudence, patience, and perseverance increase the chances of success in goal pursuit (see Emmons, 2002). However, broader virtues promote goal-striving particularly when the goal is a worthwhile one. Recall that from an expressive individualist perspective, a goal is worthwhile when it is autonomously chosen and is intrinsically valuable. Becoming wealthy is considered to be an external, less worthwhile goal from an SDT perspective (Ryan et al., 2006), because money is useful only for the sake of other things. Moreover, means taken to pursue the end goal of wealth are instrumental in nature. While wealth may be attained through perseverance in business dealings, it may also be attained by ignoble behaviors (e.g. stealing). Intrinsic goals, on the other hand, are generally pursued constitutively and the means and ends are inseparable. The worthwhile goal of having a

loving marriage, for instance, can only be pursued constitutively by behaving lovingly in one's marriage (see Fowers, Mollica, Procacci, 2010 for a full discussion of the distinction between instrumental and constitutive goals).

Virtues particularly enable worthwhile, constitutive goals pursuits. Consider the goal of scholarship. Scholarship is made possible through the exercise of virtues such as curiosity, honesty, openness, and discipline. One would not be considered a true scholar if their publications were based on dishonest reporting, or if they were not open to findings contrary to their expectations. The interdependent relationship between virtues and constitutive goals is, in part, due to the inherently worthwhile nature of virtues. Recall that inherent moral value--being considered worthwhile even if tangible personal benefits are not immediately identifiable-- is one of Petersen and Seligman's (2004) criteria for a virtue. Thus, individuals who express worthwhile goals but lack virtue are likely to struggle in their pursuits. Discussed below are some of the mechanisms theorized to underlie this process.

**Virtues promote goal striving through relational persistence.** To some degree, it is intuitive that relationships which promote ideal self-actualization will exhibit a great deal of virtues, partly because virtues enable the relationship to persist in the first place. If a relationship dissolves one's partner cannot be a consistent source of responsiveness. Many positive relationship outcomes appear to be by-products of virtue in the relationship. For instance, good communication requires empathy and

compassion, intimacy often involves trust between partners, and forgiveness enables relationships to continue amidst transgressions. Building off these ideas, scholars have developed a measure of marital virtues (Hawkins et al., 2007) and observed stronger correlations between this measure and indicators of marital quality, satisfaction, and instability than commonly used communication measures. Likewise, a plethora of studies have linked virtue with positive relationship functioning.

Studies yield large correlations between partner empathy and use of positive dyadic coping strategies and moderate-to-large correlations with positive conflict management (Levesque et al., 2014; Perrone-McGovern et al., 2014). Other studies find a forgiving disposition predictive of decreased rumination and revenge-seeking behaviors and increased empathy, perspective-taking, relational closeness, commitment, and satisfaction (Seybold, Hill, Neumann & Chi, 2001; McCullough, 1998). Similarly, gratitude predicts strengthened social bonds (Algoe, Fredrickson, & Gable, 2013) while humility predicts marital satisfaction (Estephan, 2007). Such studies show links between virtues and relationship outcomes, but have not assessed partner responsiveness/affirmation or goal attainment as a mediator between the two.

**Virtues promote goal striving by broadening and building.** Virtues are likely to be accompanied by positive emotions (such as relational satisfaction and warmth) as opposed to negative emotions (such as fight or flight responses) throughout the ups and downs of marriage. Indeed, sometimes there is no clear delineation between a virtue

and a positive emotion, as is the case for gratitude (Leffel et al., 2008). Broaden-and-build theory explains that the experience of positive emotions opens individuals up to exploration and trying new techniques to build problem-solving skills, allowing them to build social resources which promote an upward cycle of human flourishing (Fredrickson, 2001). That is, positive affect may expand perceptions of goal-striving affordances (Jayawickreme, Meindl, Helzer, Furr & Fleeson, 2014). Research on the broaden-and-build framework has linked loving-kindness meditations and the ensuing positive emotions to increased social support given and received (Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, & Finkel, 2008). Similarly, longitudinal studies have suggested that perceiving of one's partner as virtuous predicts turning to that partner for assistance, and increased relationship problem-solving efficacy (Veldorale-Brogan, Lambert, Fincham, & DeWall, 2013). Thus, the experience of positive emotions (virtues) may open individuals up to building the skills necessary to move toward their ideal selves, as well as making them more perceptive of partner responsiveness and more likely to be responsive themselves.

**Virtues promote goal striving by creating secure bases.** Partner enactments of responsiveness virtues (Leffel et al., 2008) create warm relational environments over time. Such relationships offer secure attachments from which partners feel safe exploring their capabilities with the confidence that care will be available if needed (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2003). This enables partners to safely operate on their working

self-concept, or actual self, until ideal discrepancies are minimized (Carver & Sheier, 1982). Over time, responsive partners may become perpetual primes of self-concepts marked by ability or inability.

**Virtues promote goal striving through mutual cyclical growth.** This cyclical relationship of virtues and responsiveness has been noted by several scholars. Reis has particularly highlighted the cyclical nature of commitment and trust. When one partner shows care and concern about the needs and desires of the other, the other is led to feel more trust and, in turn becomes more committed (Reis, 2014). This notion has been supported by a number of empirical studies (Lemay & Venaglia, 2016; Murray & Holmes, 2009; Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2001; Tran & Simpson, 2009; Wieselquist, J., Rusbult, C. E., Foster, C. A., & Agnew, 1999). Likewise, a longitudinal study found that compassionate goals toward roommates incited cycles of responsiveness and boosted relationship quality (Canevello & Crocker, 2010). As discussed previously, a number of virtues have been linked with partner responsiveness, and have been referred to as amplifiers for caring action (Leffel et al., 2008). Additionally, scholars have noted that virtues may act as both motivators and outcomes of responsiveness, and that responsiveness operates in upward cycles of growth (Canavello & Crocker, 2010; Murray & Holmes, 2009; Reis, 2014; Weiselquist et al., 1999).

### **The Present Study**

In the extant empirical literature, virtue has been related to partner responsiveness and personal and relational well-being (see Reis, 2014), and partner responsiveness has been linked with ideal self attainment and well-being (see Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka & Finkel, 2009). Although it has been theorized that virtues enable the pursuit of worthwhile goals (Snow, 2016) in the context of relationships (e.g. Fowers & Owenz, 2010), little or no work has examined this empirically. The present study explores the possibility that partner responsiveness mediates the relationship between virtues and movement toward one's ideal self in a large sample of married couples drawn from the United States.

Though the list of relevant virtues is lengthy and indefinite (see Fowers, 2015, or Petersen & Seligman, 2004, for a discussion of why there cannot be complete list of virtues), empathy, gratitude, forgiveness, humility, and trust were chosen to represent virtues in the present study. These virtues were selected not only because they are common in studies of partner responsiveness (e.g. Algoe & Zhaoyang, 2016; Collins et al., 2014; Pansera & La Guardia, 2012) and theories about relationship-promoting virtues (Hawkins et al., 2007; Lambert & Dollahite, 2006; Worthington et al., 2002), but also because they cover each of the foundations of care found by Leffel and colleagues (2008) in their literature review of virtues which promote responsiveness. Because virtue is best understood holistically (see Young et al., 2015) as character, the primary model in the present study combines all of the virtues together. However, the degree to

which current measures of virtue are equipped to adequately assess virtue as character is questionable (see Fowers, 2014), and so a series of five models which examine each virtue separately are assessed, but not fully discussed.

Likewise, partner responsiveness spans a large breadth of studies, and has been measured numerous ways. Because work on the Michelangelo phenomenon is the only research niche which has systematically studied the relationship between partner responsiveness and goal attainment (for one exception, see Canevello & Crocker, 2010), the present study borrowed the conceptualization of responsiveness and measurement techniques from that line of research. Recall that the Michelangelo phenomenon distinguishes between two forms of responsiveness, *Partner Perceptual Affirmation*, which is related to whether partners view one another ideally, and *Partner Behavioral Affirmation*, which is related to whether partners help elicit ideal -congruent behaviors. In the present study, these two forms of responsiveness are combined into one variable.

## **Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1.** Based on extant literature, it was anticipated that virtue would predict partner responsiveness (e.g. Canevillo & Crocker, 2010), movement toward ideal self (Fowers et al., 2010; Rusbult, 2005), and personal and relational well-being (see Petersen & Seligman, 2004).

**Hypothesis 2.** Perceived partner responsiveness was expected to partially mediate the relationship between virtues and movement toward the ideal self (HR

virtue → WR husband's responsiveness → WR movement toward ideal self<sup>1</sup>, and vice-versa). This hypothesis was based on research on the Michelangelo phenomenon which consistently found links between perceived partner responsiveness and movement toward one's ideal self (see Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka & Finkel, 2009). However, it was not anticipated that responsiveness behaviors would directly predict movement toward ideal self (e.g. HR wife's responsiveness → WR movement toward ideal self). This is for two reasons. First, past research on the Michelangelo phenomenon has not reported this link. Second, while research on partner responsiveness suggests that it creates an upward cycle of mutual growth, these models have relied on virtues as the predictors and outcomes fueling the cycle (see Reis, 2014). Thus any influence a partner's report of responsiveness had on one's movement toward ideal self was expected to be accounted for in the direct partner effect of virtue on movement toward ideal self.

**Hypothesis 3.** It was anticipated that movement toward the ideal self partially mediates the effects of virtue and partner responsiveness on each of the outcomes (personal well-being, relational well-being, and generativity). These links were anticipated because past research with the Michelangelo phenomenon has indicated that movement toward the ideal self mediates the relationship between responsiveness

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<sup>1</sup> For interpretive clarity, in the remainder of the paper WR will abbreviate "wife reported" and HR will abbreviate "husband reported."

and personal and relational well-being (Rusbult et al., 2009b). As noted previously, it has also been theorized that virtues promote goal striving (Fowers et al., 2010), and that autonomous goal striving promotes well-being (Kasser & Ryan, 2001).

**Hypothesis 4.** Virtues (Hawkins et al., 2007), partner responsiveness (Reis, 2014), and movement toward the ideal self (Rusbult, 2005) were expected to predict personal and relational well-being.

## Methods

### Participants

Eight-hundred forty heterosexual<sup>2</sup> married couples were recruited from across the U.S. using the online survey panel Survey Sampling International. The husbands were 81% White, 6% Hispanic, 6% Black 4% Asian, and 3% other. Approximately 86% were married only once, 12% were divorced and remarried, 1% were married but separated, and 1% were widowed and remarried. The wives were 81% White, 6% Hispanic, 4% Black, 6% Asian, and 3% other. Approximately 87% were married only once, 10% were divorced and remarried, 2% were married but separated<sup>3</sup>, and 1% were widowed and remarried. The median length of marriage for participating spouses was

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<sup>2</sup> This study focused solely on heterosexual couples because they are theoretically distinguishable for the purposes of dyadic data analysis. Past research has found gender differences in virtues and the Michelangelo phenomenon, and so retaining the distinguishability of the dyads allowed for the possibility of boosted statistical power.

<sup>3</sup> This marital status is reported separately, because husbands and wives did not always answer this question consistently.

11 years, with a standard deviation of 12.86 years<sup>4</sup>.

## **Procedure**

After being invited to participate in the present study via email, participants were directed to an online survey hosted on Qualtrics. After one spouse had completed their survey, an email trigger was sent to their spouse to take their portion of the survey.

## **Measures**

**Virtues.** Items aimed at assessing trust, empathy, humility, forgiveness, and gratitude were drawn from pre-existing measures and adapted to be relationship-specific. All items which could be adapted to be relationally-specific yet maintain the same face validity were retained. For example, one empathy item drawn from the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg et al., 2006) was altered from “feel others’ emotions” to “I feel my partner’s emotions.” If multiple items were very similar, items that seemed easiest to understand were retained. Before responding to the item pool, participants were instructed: “Please use the rating scale below to describe how accurately each statement describes *you*. Describe yourself as you generally are, not as you wish to be in the future.” Participants rated items from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 5 (*very accurate*).

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<sup>4</sup> Husband and wife reports of length of time married did not always match. Statistics reported here reflect the average of husband and wife responses.

After participants completed the survey, a panel of fourteen leading researchers in the area of virtues and morality received the same items, but rated them as either “this item clearly measures [the intended virtue]” or “it’s unclear whether this item measures [the intended virtue].” Only items with content validity ratio (CVR) ratings above .5 (more than half of the experts thought the item clearly measured the virtue) were retained.

***Trust.*** Twenty-one items (15 items were retained) were adapted from the trust, distrust, mistrust, and relationship security subscales of the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) developed by Goldberg and colleagues (2006; sample item: “I believe that, sooner or later, my partner will let me down”).

***Empathy.*** Twenty-two empathy items (11 items were retained) were adapted from the empathy, empathic concern, attending to emotions, social intelligence, and sympathy subscales of the IPIP (Goldberg et al., 2006; sample item: “I feel my partner’s emotions”).

***Humility.*** Twenty-five items (9 items were retained) which assess humility were adapted from the humility, modesty, dominance, domineering, flexibility, adaptability, social boldness, and grandiosity subscales of the IPIP (Goldberg et al., 2006; sample item: “I can’t stand being contradicted by my partner”).

***Forgiveness.*** Thirteen items were adapted from the forgiveness, mercy, and belligerence subscales of the IPIP (Goldberg et al., 2006) and eight items were adapted

from the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIMI; McCullough et al., 1998). “After my partner upsets me, I avoid him/her” is an example of a forgiveness item. Of these, 17 items were retained.

*Gratitude.* Seven gratitude items were adapted from the gratitude subscale of the IPIP (Goldberg et al., 2006), 10 items were adapted from the Gratitude, Appreciation, and Resentment Test (GRAT; Watkins, Woodward, Stone & Kolts, 2003), and five items were adapted from the Gratitude Questionnaire-Six Item Form (GQ-6; McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002). An example of a gratitude item includes: “I find so much in my relationship to be grateful for.” Of these, 15 items were retained.

*Subscale creation.* A series of confirmatory factor analyses were estimated until initial item pools for each subscale were systematically reduced to three items per virtue. The reduction process involved two steps. First, items with the lowest standardized loadings were reduced one at a time until all standardized factor loadings were greater than or equal to .55 (which is roughly 30% of the variance). Second, items were removed one at a time, beginning with the highest modification indices, until three items remained for each virtue. When modification indexes suggested the error terms of two items be covaried, the item with the lower standardized factor loading was removed. Because the initial item pool was based on previously-validated measures, and was further refined by the expert panel, it was anticipated that the resulting item combinations represented the corresponding virtue factors well.

Each virtue subscale was modeled by two covaried latent variables (one for husbands, one for wives), and corresponding items for husbands and wives were also covaried to account for the non-independent nature of the data (e.g., the error variance of the first empathy item for husbands was allowed to covary with the error variance of the first empathy item for wives). Fit statistics for each of these subscales are strong (see Table 2). Because virtue best conceptualized as holistic balance (Young et al., 2015), fit for a second-order factor SEM was estimated as well (fit indices were moderate; see Table 2). Virtue is best thought of as a character type, as opposed to a series of loosely-related personality traits (Fowers, 2005). However, whether current measures—including the present one—are equipped to measure a unified virtuous character construct is dubious (Fowers, 2014). Thus, the current study estimates a series of six SEMs which analyze virtue together and separately (five models with each specific virtue individually, and one model which combines the virtues).

### **The Michelangelo phenomenon.**

*Partner responsiveness.* In the present study, partner responsiveness (how supportive one is of their partner's ideal self) is represented as an observed variable which aggregates *Partner Perceptual Affirmation* and *Partner Behavioral Affirmation*. These two forms of affirmation are what Reis (2014) points out are akin to partner responsiveness in other disparate programs of research. These variables are distinct from the others in that wives are reporting on how responsive they view their husband

to be, and vice versa.

*Partner perceptual affirmation.* Partner perceptual affirmation (that is, perceiving the target in a manner consistent with the target's ideal self) was measured having participants rate three items (sample item: "My partner sees me as the person I ideally would like to be") on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*; replicated from Drigotas, 2002; see Appendix B).

*Partner behavioral affirmation.* Partner behavioral affirmation (that is, eliciting the target to behave in a manner consistent with the target's ideal self) was measured in the same fashion, drawing on three items (sample item: "My partner often creates situations in which my ideal self can shine") rated on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*); replicated from Drigotas, 2002; see Appendix C).

*Movement toward the ideal self.* Movement toward the ideal self was assessed by having the participant list the four most important characteristics of their ideal self. Participants were then instructed: "Think about your relationship with your partner. To what degree have you changed with respect to Characteristic #1 as a result of being involved with your partner?" Response options ranged from 0 (*I have become less like this characteristic*) to 8 (*I have become more like this characteristic*; replicated from Drigotas, 2002; see Appendix D).

**Personal well-being.** Personal well-being was measured using the 6-item short version of the Psychological General Well-Being Index (PGWB-S) where participants

rate statements such as “I was emotionally stable and sure of myself during the past month” using a scale from 1 (*None of the time*) to 6 (*All of the time*; Grossi et al., 2006; see Appendix E).

**Relational well-being.** Relational well-being was assessed using the Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983). The QMI similarly asks participants to rate their agreement with five statements such as “Our marriage is strong.” on scale from 1 (*very strong disagreement*) to 7 (*very strong agreement*; see Appendix F).

**Generativity.** Generativity was assessed by 6 items taken from the MIDUS National Survey’s (Brim, Ryff & Kessler, 2004) generative qualities scale (An & Cooney, 2006). Participants rated statements such as, “I have had a good influence on the lives of many people” on scale from 1 (*a lot*) to 4 (*not at all*).

## Results

Preliminary analyses and analyses addressing study hypotheses involved testing a series of structural equation models (SEMs) in Mplus version 7.2. Full information maximum likelihood (FIML) was employed to include cases with missing data. Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA: values below .05 indicate good fit, below .08 indicate moderate fit, and below 10 indicate mediocre fit), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI; values above .95 indicate good fit, and values above .90 indicate moderate fit), and Sample-size Adjusted Bayesian Information Criterion (SABIC; a

comparative fit index in which values any degree lower indicate better fit [Tofighi & Enders, 2007]) were used as indicators of how well the overall models fit the data.

### **Preliminary Analyses**

**Confirmatory factor analyses.** Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were estimated separately for each measure using structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus version 7.2. These models involved two covaried latent variables (one for husbands, one for wives). Fit indices and reliability coefficients are provided for each of these measures in Table 3. The measure of partner responsiveness combined items of *Partner Perceptual Affirmation* and *Partner Behavioral Affirmation* together. This CFA had mediocre fit  $\chi^2(53) = 445.51, p < .001$ ; CFI = .93; RMSEA = .09, but reliability coefficients remained acceptable ( $\alpha = .84$  for husbands,  $\alpha = .86$  for wives). One item, “my partner often gets me into things that make it hard for me to be like my ideal self” had a low loading ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$  for husbands;  $\beta = .41, p < .001$  for wives). This question was the only reverse-scored item in the measure, which may have driven the low factor loading. Because the reliability coefficients remained acceptable for both husbands and wives, this item was retained throughout the remainder of the analyses. Although fit indices for personal and relational well-being were poor or borderline, reliability coefficients and all item factor loadings were strong (see Table 3), and so all original items were retained. Correlations and descriptive statistics for each of these measures are provided in Table 4.

**Control variables.** It is possible that length of marriage itself may explain participants' attribution of movement toward their ideal self to their marriage. Partners in a longer relationship have theoretically been afforded a longer period of time in which to encourage growth in their spouse. Because of this, correlations between length of marriage and movement toward ideal self were examined. These relationships were small and failed to reach significance in each case. For the sake of parsimony, length of marriage was not included in the model as a control variable.

Although participants were prompted to describe their intrinsic goals by being asked about features of their ideal self (as opposed to their ought self), Fowers and colleagues (2010) have noted that intrinsic goals are not fundamentally the same thing as worthwhile, constitutive goals. An individual may be intrinsically motivated, for instance, to seek revenge or to become rich. While it is outside the scope of this study to code goal contents for their constitutive or instrumental nature, generativity (giving of our gifts to others and to society) was included as a control variable. If ideal self contents are worthwhile and constitutive in nature, movement toward those goals should theoretically be accompanied by increases in generativity. Thus, actor effects of movement toward the ideal self on generativity were included in the model in order to check that ideal self contents were generally synonymous with human goods.

**Test of distinguishability.** Although husband and wife dyads are theoretically distinguishable, this assumption does not always hold up empirically (Kenny, Kashy &

Cook, 2006). In order to test for gender invariance a series of SEMs were compared in Mplus (version 7.2). First, a model was tested in which all parameters were freely estimated for husbands and wives. This had mediocre fit  $\chi^2(12) = 157.31, p < .001$ ; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .12; SABIC = 22902.78. Next, effect indistinguishability was estimated by constraining corresponding regression coefficients to be equal across husbands and wives (while variances and intercepts remained unconstrained). This model fit the data poorly  $\chi^2(26) = 290.03, p < .001$ ; CFI = .92; RMSEA = .11; SABIC = 22985.66. While the chi-square difference test indicated that the constrained model had significantly poorer fit  $\chi^2(14) = 132.72, p < .001$ , statisticians have suggested that the SABIC is a more appropriate indicator of model fit if the sample size is large (above 400; see Kenny, 2015). According to the SABIC, the constrained model fit the data worse (had a higher SABIC) than the freely estimated model. This corroborates the results of the chi-square difference test, and suggests that the dyads are distinguishable. Therefore, the dyads were treated as such throughout the remainder of the study.

### **SEM Analyses**

In order to examine hypothesized links, an actor-partner interdependence model was estimated according to the methods outlined by Kenny and colleagues (2006). The actor-partner interdependence model simultaneously assesses how one person's independent variable affects both their own outcomes as well as their dyadic partner's outcomes (Kenny et al., 2006). The model is best used when the interdependence of a

relationship between two individuals would violate the statistical assumption of independence.

**Combined virtues.** Six SEMs were estimated (one which combines each of the five specific virtues as one observed variable, and five models which examine the role of each individual observed virtue variables). The combined virtue model had mediocre fit and was identical to the unconstrained model described above;  $\chi^2(12) = 157.31, p < .001$ ; CFI = .96; RMSEA = .12; SABIC = 22902.78. Modification indices suggested adding actor and partner paths from partner responsiveness to generativity. Given that generativity and partner responsiveness are highly related constructs (see discussion above), it makes sense that the two constructs would be associated (see also, Table 4, which shows moderate correlations between the constructs). This modification was accepted and included in subsequent models with individual virtues. After implementing this modification, the model fit the data well  $\chi^2(8) = 33.38, p < .001$ ; CFI = .99; RMSEA = .06; SABIC = 22793.09.

Partner effects of virtue on movement toward ideal self (e.g. WR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR movement toward ideal self) were small and failed to reach significance, suggesting that the relationship between virtue and partner movement toward ideal self may be fully mediated by perceived partner responsiveness. In order to test this, fit was compared with an alternative model which eliminated (set at zero) partner effects of virtue on movement toward ideal self (WR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR movement toward ideal self,

and vice versa). This model fit also fit the data well  $\chi^2(10) = 35.06$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .06, SABIC = 22787.65 and was not significantly different from the partial-mediation model  $\chi^2(2) = 1.68$ ,  $p = .43$ . For the sake of parsimony, partner responsiveness is subsequently treated as a full mediator of partner effects between virtue on movement toward ideal self. Figure 1 depicts the parameter estimates of the primary predictors (virtue), mediators (partner responsiveness) and outcomes (movement toward ideal self) of interest, but excludes parameter estimates for control variables and secondary outcomes. All parameter estimates are available in Table 5.

Standardized actor effects of virtue on partner responsiveness were significant for husbands (HR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR wife responsiveness;  $\beta = .41$ ) and for wives (WR virtue  $\rightarrow$  WR husband responsiveness;  $\beta = .40$ ), while partner effects were smaller for WR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR wife responsiveness ( $\beta = .23$ ) and for HR virtue  $\rightarrow$  WR husband responsiveness ( $\beta = .25$ ). Direct actor effects of virtue on movement toward ideal self were also significant for husbands (HR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR movement toward ideal self;  $\beta = .28$ ) and for wives (WR virtue  $\rightarrow$  WR movement toward ideal self;  $\beta = .10$ ; see Table 4).

Indirect actor effects of virtue on movement toward ideal self via partner responsiveness were  $\beta = .11$ , 95% CI [.07, .16] for husbands (HR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR wife responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  HR movement toward ideal self) and  $\beta = .22$ , 95% CI [.17, .27] for wives (WR virtue  $\rightarrow$  WR husband responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  WR movement toward ideal self). Indirect partner effects of virtue on movement toward ideal self via partner

responsiveness were significant, but smaller ( $\beta = .11$ , 95% CI [.07, .15] for HR virtue  $\rightarrow$  WR husband responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  WR movement toward ideal self;  $\beta = .06$ , 95% CI [.04, .10] for WR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR wife responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  HR movement toward ideal self; see Table 5).

Direct actor effects between virtue and secondary outcomes (personal well-being, relational well-being) ranged from  $\beta = .13$  to  $\beta = .30$ , while direct partner effects between virtue and personal well-being were relatively smaller ( $\beta = .08$  to  $\beta = .13$ ). Table 5 reports each of these standardized beta-weights.

Actor effects of partner responsiveness on movement toward ideal self were significant for both husbands ( $\beta = .27$  for HR wife responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  HR movement toward ideal self) and wives ( $\beta = .45$  for WR husband responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  WR movement toward ideal self). Recall that partner effects of partner responsiveness on movement toward ideal self were not explored. Actor effects of partner responsiveness on personal well-being, relational well-being, and generativity (e.g. HR wife responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  HR personal well-being) ranged from  $\beta = .12$  to  $\beta = .25$ , while partner effects (e.g. WR husband responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  HR personal well-being) were ranged from  $\beta = .13$  for husbands to  $\beta = .13$  for wives (see Table 5).

The actor and partner effects of movement toward ideal self on outcomes were relatively small ( $\beta = .03$  to  $\beta = .20$ ).

*Gender differences.* Given the distinguishability of the dyads and the differences

between beta weights of husband and wife parameters, gender differences in the primary variables of interest (virtue, partner responsiveness, movement toward ideal self) were examined. This involved estimating a series of four follow-up models using the Model Test command in Mplus. This provides a Wald test of differences between specified parameters. Although partner effects of virtue on perceived partner responsiveness (e.g. HR virtue → WR husband responsiveness) failed to reach significance (suggesting partner virtue was not differentially linked with perceived partner responsiveness in husbands and wives), all three actor effects were significant at a  $p < .01$  level (see Table 6). Specifically, actor effects of virtue on perceived partner responsiveness (WR virtue → WR husband responsiveness) and actor effects of perceived partner responsiveness on movement toward ideal self (WR husband responsiveness → WR movement toward ideal self) were larger for wives than husbands. However, actor effects of virtue on movement toward ideal self (HR virtue → HR movement toward ideal self) were larger for husbands than wives.

**Individual virtues.** The ability for current measures of virtue to capture a theoretically-rich construct of virtuous character is questionable (see earlier discussion). Therefore, in addition to a model which combines the virtues into one construct five SEMs were estimated for each virtue (empathy, forgiveness, gratitude, humility, trust) independently. Fit indices and parameters for each of these models are reported in Table 7). SABIC values were larger (indicating poorer fit) for each virtue-specific model

(empathy  $\Delta$ SABIC = +650.93, 3%; forgiveness  $\Delta$ SABIC = +1954.70, 9%; gratitude  $\Delta$ SABIC = +555.50, 2%; humility  $\Delta$ SABIC = +2094.91, 9%; trust  $\Delta$ SABIC = +1080.06, 4%). Actor effects of individual virtues on partner responsiveness (HR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR wife responsiveness, and vice versa) were significant across the individual models ( $\beta = .19$  to  $\beta = .56$ ). With the exception of the trust model, partner effects (HR virtue  $\rightarrow$  WR husband responsiveness) were also sizable ( $\beta = .20$  to  $\beta = .36$ ). Interestingly, husbands' actor effects of virtue on movement toward ideal self (HR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR movement toward ideal self) were larger ( $\beta = .15$  to  $\beta = .26$ ) than wives' actor effects (WR virtue  $\rightarrow$  WR movement toward ideal self;  $\beta = .03$  to  $\beta = .09$ ) in each model. Direct actor effects of partner responsiveness on movement toward ideal self were also significant for husbands and wives ( $\beta = .22$  to  $\beta = .49$ ). Indirect actor effects of the individual virtues on movement toward ideal self via partner responsiveness (e.g. HR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR wife responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  HR movement toward ideal self, and vice versa) were moderate-to-large for husbands and wives ( $\beta = .09$  to  $\beta = .27$ ). Indirect partner effects of virtue on movement toward ideal self via partner responsiveness tended to be larger for HR virtue  $\rightarrow$  WR husband responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  WR movement toward ideal self ( $\beta = .11$  to  $\beta = .18$ , with the exception of trust) and smaller for WR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR wife responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  HR movement toward ideal self ( $\beta = .06$  to  $\beta = .08$ ). Model fit indices and each standardized beta are reported in Table 7.

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the extent of the role that virtues play in interpersonal goal attainment processes in general, and to examine the potential mediating role of partner responsiveness between virtues and personal strivings in particular. It was found that people high in virtue tended to rate their spouses higher on responsiveness and also tended to be evaluated as more responsive by their spouses. Virtue also appeared to be linked with goal striving directly, such that highly virtuous people were more likely to report movement toward their ideal selves. Interestingly, however, this association was stronger in husbands than it was in wives. Hypotheses regarding the mediating role of partner responsiveness between virtue and movement toward ideal self were also supported. Partner effects of virtue on movement toward ideal self were fully mediated, such that a wife's virtue was linked with increased evaluations of her responsiveness, which in turn was associated with her husband's movement toward his ideal self (and vice versa). However, a wife's virtue was not directly associated with her husband's movement toward his ideal self. Interestingly, actor effects were only partially mediated, such that a husband's virtue was linked both directly to his movement toward his ideal self, and indirectly through his perceptions of his wife's responsiveness behaviors.

### **Virtue and Partner Responsiveness**

This study confirmed and extended prior understanding of the link between virtues and partner responsiveness. The strong actor effects of virtue on perceived

partner responsiveness (HR virtue→HR wife responsiveness) may suggest that virtues give spouses rose-colored spectacles when considering their partner's responsiveness behaviors. Reis (2014) has suggested that perceived partner responsiveness may be a function of the perceiver, and not necessarily an accurate picture of responsiveness behaviors that take place. Perhaps virtues make partners more attentive to responsiveness behaviors that would otherwise go unnoticed. However, the link between virtue and spouse evaluations of responsiveness was strong even when controlling for the possible rose-colored spectacles effects. Moreover, this effect was strong despite the fact that virtue scores were based on self-reports. Alternatively, virtues may be one mechanism by which spouses increase their partners' insights about their ideal self contents, boost their partners' ideal self responsiveness skills toward them, and/or foster their partners' desire to aid in their ideal self growth (Rusbult et al., 2005).

Taken together, these results suggest that virtues may play an active role in partner responsiveness. This is in keeping with prior research which suggests that trust (Simpson & Campbell, 2013; Wiselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999), forgiveness (Finkel & Rusbult, 2008), and empathy (Canevello & Crocker, 2010) are indicators of relationship responsiveness, and extends these findings to include two more virtues from Leffel and colleague's (2008) list of Moral Affective Capacities--gratitude and

humility. Results indicate that virtues may 1) equip partners to be responsive toward targets, and 2) equip partners to enhance the target's partner responsiveness behaviors.

### **Virtue and Movement toward Ideal Self**

The present study also found evidence that individuals who score high on virtues tend to experience greater movement toward their ideal selves. Interestingly, this link was stronger for husbands than it was for wives. This may be a byproduct of gender differences in the specific ideal self-contents provided. Recall that virtues enable the pursuit of goals which are specifically worthwhile. While partner responsiveness occurs whenever a spouse treats their partner in an ideal-congruent manner (that is, no matter what the ideal contents are), the relationship between virtues and goal attainment should be moderated by ideal contents (such that the relationship between virtues and goal attainment are stronger when the contents are constitutive; Fowers & Owenz, 2010). For instance, increased income and a more attractive physical feature were two common but instrumental ideal contents listed by participants. Virtues such as empathy may equip a partner to be responsive toward the pursuit of financial gain, which in turn promotes attainment of such goals. On the other hand, in addition to indirectly promoting goal pursuit via responsiveness, empathy would also share a more direct link in attaining constitutive goals, such as kindness. It seems unlikely, however, that the constitutive nature of goals should be different across husbands and wives. Moreover, post-hoc analyses revealed that perceived partner responsiveness had a

stronger indirect link with generativity than did virtues in both husbands and wives, which would be modest evidence against this theory. An alternative explanation may be that there is a third explanatory variable which accounts for the gender differences in the association between an individual's virtues and goal attainment. This possibility is discussed further below.

### **The Mediating Role of Partner Responsiveness**

While extant literature has linked a handful of virtues with partner responsiveness (see Reis, 2014) and has linked partner responsiveness with movement toward the ideal self (see Rusbult, 2005), this study extended prior work by examining partner responsiveness as a mediator between virtue and movement toward the ideal self. Evidence suggested that a spouse's level of virtue influenced their own ideal self attainment both directly, and indirectly (via their perception of their partner's responsiveness; i.e. partial mediation of actor effects). In contrast, the link between a wife's level of virtue and her husband's movement toward his ideal self appeared to be entirely explained by the husband's perception of wife responsiveness (i.e. full mediation of partner effects). This discrepancy in mediation styles is further evidence to suggest that any third variables accounting for gender differences in the virtue and ideal-attainment link (i.e. WR virtue → WR movement toward ideal self versus HR virtue → HR movement toward ideal self) are likely to be mixed variables (vary between partner and between couple; e.g. locus of control) or within-dyads variables

(vary between partner, but do not vary between couple; e.g. percent of income earned, domestic roles) as opposed to between-dyads variables (do not vary between partner, but vary between couple; e.g. length of marriage; see Kenny et al., 2006). That is, because there is a lack evidence to support significant direct partner effects (i.e. WR virtue → HR movement toward ideal self, and vice versa) when controlling for the influence of person-level variables (partner responsiveness), it is unlikely that a couple-level variable is at play.

Extant literature may point to several mixed-variables that are good candidates for exploring this hypothesis. For instance, previous research has found that wives tend to more adequately adjust their responsive behaviors to meet the changing needs of their husbands. While husbands display equal amounts of supportive behaviors as wives, they also tend to be more negative when their wives are experiencing greater levels of stress (Neff & Karney, 2005). In the present study, wives' perceived partner responsiveness variable had a lower mean, a higher standard deviation, and a more negative skew than husbands' perceived partner responsiveness, possibly making it a more robust predictor of outcomes. Another possibility is that women draw a greater benefit from partner responsiveness as it counteracts gender inequalities (e.g. stereotype threat, workplace power inequalities, etc.). For instance, researchers have found that affirmation of values has narrowed achievement gaps in STEM coursework (Miyake et al., 2010). Other mixed-variable candidates for exploration can be drawn from goal-

striving and Michelangelo phenomenon literature, including grit (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007), positive affect (Algoe et al., 2013), goal orientation styles (Kumashiro et al., 2007), locus of control (Phillips & Gully, 1997), self-efficacy (Bandura & Locke, 2003), and self-control (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). However, any gender differences in these mixed-variables are less obvious.

In some ways, within-dyads variables may be more likely to account for gender differences in the mediating role of partner responsiveness. This partially stems from the fact that the link between the husbands' responsiveness and wives' movement toward ideal self was much larger than the inverse (HR wife responsiveness  $\rightarrow$  HR movement toward ideal self), and the direct link between virtue and movement toward ideal self was larger for husbands (HR virtue  $\rightarrow$  HR movement toward ideal self) than for wives (WR virtue  $\rightarrow$  WR movement toward ideal self). Moreover, the correlation between perceived partner responsiveness and movement toward ideal self was larger for wives than for husbands in the first place. These findings are unique to this study. The bulk of past work has employed multilevel modelling and initially included sex in the model, but failed to find a consistent pattern of significant sex effects (Drigotas, 2002; Kumashiro et al., 2007; Righetti et al., 2010; Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka & Finkel, 2009; an exception is Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist and Whitton [1999], who found main effects and interaction effects for sex, but did not report directly on these). Because the present study excluded participants in same-sex marriages, this difference

in findings may point to common gender differences in marriage (e.g. percentage of household income earned, division of domestic labor, and so on), rather than sex differences per-se. For instance, perhaps responsiveness in financial ways allows for the primary breadwinner's responsiveness to make a deeper impact on their partner's ideal self pursuits. Still, it is not strikingly apparent why other such within-dyads, gender-difference variables would moderate the relationship between partner responsiveness and ideal self attainment. Future research may consider including such variables during statistical analysis, particularly when working with indistinguishable dyads.

### **Links with Well-being**

In keeping with extant literature, individuals reporting higher levels of virtue also reported greater personal and relational well-being (Drigotas, 1999). Likewise, individuals reporting high responsiveness in their spouses also enjoyed greater personal and relational well-being (Reis et al., 2004). Unlike prior work on the Michelangelo phenomenon (Rusult, 2005), husbands who reported movement toward ideal self did not report significantly higher relational well-being in the aggregated virtue model. However, this was the first study to examine this link when controlling for the effects of virtues on well-being. Moreover, four of the five individual virtue models found this link to be significant, albeit small. Given that these results were mixed, that virtue and relationship quality are highly correlated (Hawkins et al., 2007), and that this study deviates from past work by retaining distinguishable dyads, this

inconsistency should be explored in other samples. The effects of wives' virtues and partner responsiveness on husband personal well-being (and vice versa) were also inconsistent from model to model. This is likely partially due to this study's reliance on self-reports of socially desirable constructs when linking outcomes across spouses. Still, the general trend linking movement toward ideal self and virtue with personal and relational well-being remained.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

**Methods.** Because this study was cross-sectional in design, causal inferences cannot be drawn. It is possible that the Michelangelo phenomenon elicits the growth of virtues, and not the other way around. Indeed, given the cyclical nature of virtues and partner responsiveness reported by Reis and colleagues (2004), it is anticipated that the model is more accurately nonrecursive. Longitudinal studies in the Michelangelo phenomenon in the past have documented that partner responsiveness at one time point predicts reports of ideal self growth at later time points (Kumashiro et al., 2007), and other studies have shown that responsiveness elicits commitment and trust (Weiselquist et al., 1999).

Additionally, this study relied on self reports and did not include social desirability controls. It is impressive that the study still found strong and significant links between partner-reported virtues and perceived partner responsiveness. On the other hand, this may simply be indicative of obtaining a sample biased toward happily

married couples. The mean relationship quality score, obtained as a shared variable, was 6.08 on a 7 point scale, and had a moderate negative skew (-1.59). Future research should be conducted with unhappily married couples. It is unclear what potential virtues and the Michelangelo phenomenon hold for couples on the brink of separation. Applied intervention studies would be more useful in this regard.

Another consideration for future researchers concerns the static techniques for measuring virtue and partner responsiveness. Personality researchers have begun to suggest that traitlike characteristics vary more within-persons than between-persons (Fleeson, 2001). This is particularly true of moral character traits, such as virtues (Jayawickreme et al., 2014). Researchers have also documented that individuals fluctuate in their levels of responsiveness as stressful circumstances emerge from day to day, and that responsive behaviors during these particular windows are crucial for communicating responsiveness (Neff & Karney, 2005). A fruitful line of future research will employ intensive longitudinal techniques in order to analyze how within-person fluctuations in virtue and partner responsiveness impact ideal self attainment and relationship quality.

**Theory.** This study was conducted from a liberal individualistic perspective which conceives of virtues and relationships as a means to personal satisfaction and fulfillment. Perhaps one of the starkest examples of this is reliance upon formal definitions of human goods (participants listed their characteristics of their ideal self,

and this is assumed to be worth pursuing regardless of content). From an expressive individualist paradigm, it is conceivable to construe relational quality as the extent to which a partner was instrumental to the target partner's goal of committing a violent crime. While those who list such goals are likely rare, precluding these edge cases would require conducting research rooted in relational virtue ethics. From a relational ontology, the unit of analysis ceases to be an individual, and instead becomes the couple situated in a particular society espousing particular values. Rather than heralding movement toward any ideal self contents, the scope would be narrowed to goals which are constitutive and shared (see Bishop, 2007; Fowers & Owenz, 2010; Slife, 2004). While directly addressing such theoretical concerns was outside the scope of this study, this work does serve as a strong first step in assessing the relationships between virtue, partner responsiveness, and goal attainment. Future research should focus efforts toward substantive understandings of human goods by prompting participants to think about constitutive, shared goal pursuits in their specific relationships.

## **Conclusion**

Extant literature has begun to establish links between virtues and partner responsiveness (Canavello & Crocker, 2010; Reis & Gable, 2015) and between partner responsiveness and goal attainment (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka & Finkel, 2009). The present study examined the possible mediating role of partner responsiveness between virtues and goal attainment. In addition to the direct relationship between an

individual's level of virtues and the attainment of their goals (see Fowers & Owenz, 2010 for a theoretical discussion of this link), evidence supported the hypothesized mediating role of partner responsiveness. This mediation happens both within-spouse (virtuous spouses perceive greater responsiveness in their partner and report goal attainment) and between-spouse (virtuous spouses are also perceived as more responsive and their partners report goal attainment). Consistent with prior work (e.g. Drigotas, 1999, Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka & Finkel, 2009), responsive couples who attain goals reported improved personal and relational well-being. Thus, future clinicians and researchers should consider the potentially important role that virtues play in interpersonal goal attainment processes.

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Table 1

*Responsiveness Concepts*

| Responsiveness<br>Concept     | Description   | Source                        |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| Autonomy support              | [promoting another's] "sense of a fuller, more integrated functioning...[promoting another's behavior that is] endorsed by the whole self and is experienced as action for which one is responsible"  | Deci & Ryan, 1987, p. 1025    |
| Mutuality                     | "partners depend upon one another for the development of their respective strengths...to do to another what will strengthen you even as it will strengthen him--that is, what will develop his best potentials, even as it develops your own" | Erikson, 1964, p. 233         |
| Prorelationship<br>motivation | "behavioral preferences that are driven by the desire to benefit one's relationship or partner despite the fact that enacting such behavior conflicts with one's immediate, gut-level behavioral impulses"                                    | Finkel & Rusbult, 2008 p. 547 |
| Flourishing<br>marriages      | "...one in which spouses collaborate regularly in pursuing meaningful goals and have a significant measure of success in reaching those goals."   | Fowers & Owenz, 2010, p. 349  |
| Relational                    | "the motive and capacity to participate in and 'take care   | Leffel, 2008, p.              |

|                                |  |  |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| generativity                   | of' the strengths-development of cared-for others"   | 174  |
| Communal                       | "partner's concern for one's welfare and supportive  | Lemay &  |
| Responsiveness                 | responses to one's needs in past interactions, as well as<br>expectations for the partner's concern and communal<br>motivation toward the self in the future"  | Clark, 2008 p.<br>647                                    |
| Secure attachment<br>provision | "...be responsive to the individual's proximity-seeking<br>attempts in times of need...provide a physical and<br>emotional safe haven...provide a secure base from<br>which the individual can explore and learn about the<br>world and develop his or her own capabilities and<br>personality while feeling confident that care and support<br>will be available if needed" | Mikulincer &<br>Shaver, 2003,<br>p. 59                   |
| Partner affirmation            | "the degree to which the partner elicits key elements of<br>the target's ideal self"   | Rusbult,<br>Kumashiro,<br>Kubacka, &<br>Finkel, 2009, p. |

Table 2

*Virtue Measure Fit Indices and Reliabilities*

| Model               | $\chi^2$  | df  | CFI  | RMSEA | Husbands $\alpha$ | Wives $\alpha$ |
|---------------------|-----------|-----|------|-------|-------------------|----------------|
| Empathy             | 7.97      | 7   | 1.00 | .01   | .84               | .80            |
| Forgiveness         | 12.94     | 7   | 1.00 | .03   | .74               | .72            |
| Gratitude           | 8.48      | 7   | 1.00 | .02   | .85               | .89            |
| Humility            | 8.52      | 7   | 1.00 | .02   | .73               | .67            |
| Trust               | 23.93**   | 7   | .99  | .05   | .82               | .83            |
| Virtue <sup>a</sup> | 836.44*** | 380 | .93  | .05   | .89               | .88            |

*Note:* \*\*  $p < .01$ ;  $p < .001$ . Fit indices were estimated by covarying husband and wife latent variables in Mplus. Reliabilities were estimated separately for husband and wife in SPSS. <sup>a</sup> fit indices based on a second order factor model;  $\alpha$  based on all items combined into a single, first order factor.

Table 3

*Measure Fit Indices and Reliabilities*

| Model                      | $\chi^2$  | df | CFI | RMSEA | Husbands $\alpha$ | Wives $\alpha$ |
|----------------------------|-----------|----|-----|-------|-------------------|----------------|
| Partner Responsiveness     | 445.51**  | 53 | .93 | .09   | .84               | .86            |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self | 107.09*** | 19 | .98 | .07   | .91               | .91            |
| Personal Well-being        | 753.46*** | 53 | .84 | .13   | .83               | .85            |
| Relational Well-being      | 249.11*** | 34 | .98 | .09   | .97               | .98            |
| Generativity               | 220.17*** | 53 | .96 | .06   | .86               | .88            |

*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Fit indices were estimated by covarying husband and wife latent variables in Mplus. Reliabilities were estimated separately for husband and wife in SPSS.

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for Variables in the Combined Virtue Model*

|                              | 1    | 2    | 3    | 4    | 5    | 6    | 7    | 8    | 9    | 10   | 11   | M (SD)        | Skew  |
|------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------------|-------|
| 1. H Virtue                  | -    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 4.09 (.67)    | -.82  |
| 2. W Virtue                  | .66* | -    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 4.10 (.63)    | -.78  |
| 3. H Partner Responsiveness  | .57* | .51* | -    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.93 (1.51)   | -.67  |
| 4. W Partner Responsiveness  | .57* | .65* | .51* | -    |      |      |      |      |      |      |      | 6.66 (1.71)   | -.72  |
| 5. H Movement to. Ideal Self | .43* | .31* | .44* | .39* | -    |      |      |      |      |      |      | 5.23 (1.43)   | -.76  |
| 6. W Movement to. Ideal Self | .29* | .38* | .29* | .53* | .45* | -    |      |      |      |      |      | 5.04 (1.55)   | -.69  |
| 7. H Personal Well-being     | .41* | .36* | .37* | .33* | .36* | .30* | -    |      |      |      |      | 4.50 (.96)    | -.58  |
| 8. W Personal Well-being     | .38* | .42* | .27* | .47* | .28* | .40* | .46* | -    |      |      |      | 4.28 (1.01)   | -.39  |
| 9. Relationship Quality      | .67* | .71* | .57* | .69* | .43* | .46* | .43* | .46* | -    |      |      | 6.08 (1.17)   | -1.59 |
| 10. H Generativity           | .20* | .24* | .36* | .29* | .26* | .20* | .27* | .18* | .29* | -    |      | 3.08 (.66)    | -.57  |
| 11. W Generativity           | .17* | .26* | .28* | .36* | .20* | .28* | .16* | .25* | .23* | .37* | -    | 3.00 (.68)    | -.46  |
| 12. Length of Marriage       | .07  | .08  | -.06 | .01  | -.04 | .05  | .04  | .02  | .001 | -.03 | .001 | 15.21 (12.47) | 0.89  |

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*Note:* \* $p < .001$ . H = husband; W = wife. Correlations, means, and standard deviations were estimated in Mplus. Skewness was obtained in SPSS.

Table 5

*Standardized Parameter Estimates for the Combined Virtue Model*

|   | Actor Effects |        | Partner Effects |        |
|---|---------------|--------|-----------------|--------|
|   | H→H           | W→W    | H→W             | W→H    |
| <i>Combined Virtues</i>                             |               |        |                 |        |
| Direct Effects                                      |               |        |                 |        |
| Virtue → Partner Responsiveness                     | .41***        | .49*** | .25***          | .23*** |
| Virtue → Movement toward Ideal Self                 | .28***        | .10*   | -               | -      |
| Virtue → Personal Well-being                        | .20***        | .13**  | .13**           | .08    |
| Virtue → Relational Well-being                      | .22***        | .30*** | -               | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self | .27***        | .45*** | -               | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Personal Well-being        | .12**         | .22*** | -.06            | -.02   |
| Partner Responsiveness → Relational Well-being      | .12***        | .23*** | -               | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Generativity               | .25***        | .23*** | .13**           | .13**  |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Personal Well-being    | .15***        | .20*** | .03             | .11**  |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Relational Well-being  | .06           | .10*** | -               | -      |

|  |        |        |        |        |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Generativity                    | .10*   | .12**  | -      | -      |
| Indirect Effects   | H→H→H  | W→W→W  | H→W→W  | W→H→H  |
| Virtue → Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self | .11*** | .22*** | .11*** | .06*** |

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*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . <sup>a</sup> Relational well-being was a shared variable and therefore only actor effects exist. Coefficients reported here are standardized.

Table 6

*Summary of Wald test of gender differences in the Combined Virtue Model*

| Parameters  | Estimate | df | p-value | Interpretation  |
|---|----------|----|---------|---|
| Actor effects of virtue on perceived partner responsiveness                     | 8.476    | 1  | .0036   | Wives' virtue → wives' perceived partner responsiveness > husbands' virtue → husbands' perceived partner responsiveness   |
| Partner effect of virtue on perceived partner responsiveness                    | .420     | 1  | .5171   | Husbands' virtue → wives' perceived partner responsiveness = wives' virtue → husbands' perceived partner responsiveness   |
| Actor effects of virtue on movement toward ideal self                           | 11.028   | 1  | .0009   | Husbands' virtue → husbands' movement toward ideal self > wives' virtue → wives' movement toward ideal self   |
| Actor effects of perceived partner responsiveness on movement toward ideal self | 9.633    | 1  | .0019   | Wives' perceived partner responsiveness → wives' movement toward ideal self > husbands' perceived partner responsiveness → husbands' movement toward ideal self |

*Note:* Gender differences were obtained by estimating a series of four additional models. The Wald test evaluates the null hypothesis of equality of husband and wife parameters.

Table 7

*Standardized Parameter Estimates for the Individual Virtue Models*

|   | Actor Effects |        | Partner Effects |        |
|---|---------------|--------|-----------------|--------|
|   | H→H           | W→W    | H→W             | W→H    |
| <i>Empathy</i>                                      |               |        |                 |        |
| Direct Effects                                      |               |        |                 |        |
| Empathy → Partner Responsiveness                    | .39***        | .40*** | .36***          | .30*** |
| Empathy → Movement toward Ideal Self                | .26***        | .09*   | -               | -      |
| Empathy → Personal Well-being                       | .01           | -.04   | .02             | -.05   |
| Empathy → Relational Well-being                     | .22***        | .19*** | -               | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self | .28***        | .45*** | -               | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Personal Well-being        | .21***        | .35*** | .02             | .12*   |
| Partner Responsiveness → Relational Well-being      | .15***        | .31*** | -               | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Generativity               | .25***        | .23*** | .13**           | .13**  |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Personal Well-being    | .19***        | .20*** | .05             | .10**  |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Relational Well-being  | .05           | .09**  | -               | -      |

| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Generativity                     | .10*          | .12**  | -               | -      |
|---|---------------|--------|-----------------|--------|
| Indirect Effects  | H→H→H         | W→W→W  | H→W→W           | W→H→H  |
| Empathy → Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self | .11***        | .18*** | .16***          | .08*** |
|   | Actor Effects |        | Partner Effects |        |
| <i>Forgiveness</i>  |               |        |                 |        |
| Direct Effects  | H→H           | W→W    | H→W             | W→H    |
| Forgiveness → Partner Responsiveness                          | .33***        | .34*** | .26***          | .20*** |
| Forgiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self                      | .22***        | .07    | -               | -      |
| Forgiveness → Personal Well-being                             | .16***        | .12**  | .13**           | .09*   |
| Forgiveness → Relational Well-being                           | .13***        | .15*** | -               | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self           | .22***        | .47*** | -               | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Personal Well-being                  | .16***        | .12**  | .13**           | .09*   |
| Partner Responsiveness → Relational Well-being                | .07*          | .10**  | -               | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Generativity                         | .25***        | .23*** | .13**           | .13**  |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Personal Well-being              | .16***        | .20*** | .03             | .11**  |

|   |        |        |        |        |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Relational Well-being                | .07*   | .10**  | -      | -      |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Generativity                         | .10*   | .12**  | -      | -      |
| Indirect Effects  | H→H→H  | W→W→W  | H→W→W  | W→H→H  |
| Forgiveness → Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self | .11*** | .16*** | .12*** | .07*** |
| <hr/>   |        |        |        |        |
| <i>Gratitude</i>  |        |        |        |        |
| Direct Effects  | H→H    | W→W    | H→W    | W→H    |
| Gratitude → Partner Responsiveness                                | .40*** | .50*** | .23*** | .27*** |
| Gratitude → Movement toward Ideal Self                            | .18*** | .07*   | -      | -      |
| Gratitude → Personal Well-being                                   | .06    | .04    | .05    | .06    |
| Gratitude → Relational Well-being                                 | .23*** | .31*** | -      | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self               | .33*** | .46*** | -      | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Personal Well-being                      | .17*** | .31*** | -.01   | .06    |
| Partner Responsiveness → Relational Well-being                    | .12*** | .26*** | -      | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Generativity                             | .25*** | .23*** | .13**  | .13**  |

|   |        |        |        |        |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Personal Well-being                | .18*** | .20*** | .04    | .10*   |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Relational Well-being              | .06*   | .10*** | -      | -      |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Generativity                       | .10*   | .12**  | -      | -      |
| Indirect Effects  | H→H→H  | W→W→W  | H→W→W  | W→H→H  |
| Gratitude → Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self | .12*** | .23*** | .11*** | .08*** |
| <i>Humility</i>   |        |        |        |        |
| Direct Effects  | H→H    | W→W    | H→W    | W→H    |
| Humility → Partner Responsiveness                               | .28*** | .19*** | .36*** | .20*** |
| Humility → Movement toward Ideal Self                           | .18*** | .03    | -      | -      |
| Humility → Personal Well-being                                  | .12**  | .08*   | .12**  | .09*   |
| Humility → Relational Well-being                                | .08*   | .10**  | -      | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self             | .36*** | .49*** | -      | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Personal Well-being                    | .17*** | .28*** | -.02   | .04    |
| Partner Responsiveness → Relational Well-being                  | .23*** | .42*** | -      | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Generativity                           | .25*** | .23*** | .13**  | .13**  |

|  |        |        |        |        |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Personal Well-being               | .18*** | .20*** | .04    | .11**  |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Relational Well-being             | .08*   | .10**  | -      | -      |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Generativity                      | .10*   | .12**  | -      | -      |
| Indirect Effects   | H→H→H  | W→W→W  | H→W→W  | W→H→H  |
| Humility → Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self | .10*** | .09*** | .18*** | .07*** |
| <hr/>  |        |        |        |        |
| <i>Trust</i>   |        |        |        |        |
| Direct Effects   | H→H    | W→W    | H→W    | W→H    |
| Trust → Partner Responsiveness                                 | .35*** | .56*** | .10**  | .18*** |
| Trust → Movement toward Ideal Self                             | .15*** | .05    | -      | -      |
| Trust → Personal Well-being                                    | .26*** | .19*** | .06    | .03    |
| Trust → Relational Well-being                                  | .15*** | .36*** | -      | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self            | .36*** | .47*** | -      | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Personal Well-being                   | .12**  | .22*** | -.02   | .01    |
| Partner Responsiveness → Relational Well-being                 | .18*** | .22*** | -      | -      |
| Partner Responsiveness → Generativity                          | .25*** | .23*** | .13**  | .13**  |

|   |        |        |       |        |
|---|--------|--------|-------|--------|
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Personal Well-being            | .16*** | .20*** | .05   | .12**  |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Relational Well-being          | .08**  | .10*** | -     | -      |
| Movement Toward Ideal Self → Generativity                   | .10*   | .12**  | -     | -      |
| Indirect Effects  | H→H→H  | W→W→W  | H→W→W | W→H→H  |
| Trust → Partner Responsiveness → Movement toward Ideal Self | .13*** | .27*** | .05*  | .06*** |

*Note:* \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . <sup>a</sup> Relational well-being was a shared variable and therefore only actor effects exist. Coefficients reported here are standardized. Fit indices for each of the virtue models are as follows: Empathy:  $\chi^2(10) = 52.94$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .07, SABIC = 23438.58; Forgiveness:  $\chi^2(10) = 35.56$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .06, SABIC = 24742.35; Gratitude:  $\chi^2(10) = 37.40$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .06, SABIC = 23343.15; Humility:  $\chi^2(10) = 65.19$ , CFI = .98, RMSEA = .08, SABIC = 24882.56; Trust:  $\chi^2(10) = 57.44$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .08, SABIC = 23867.71.

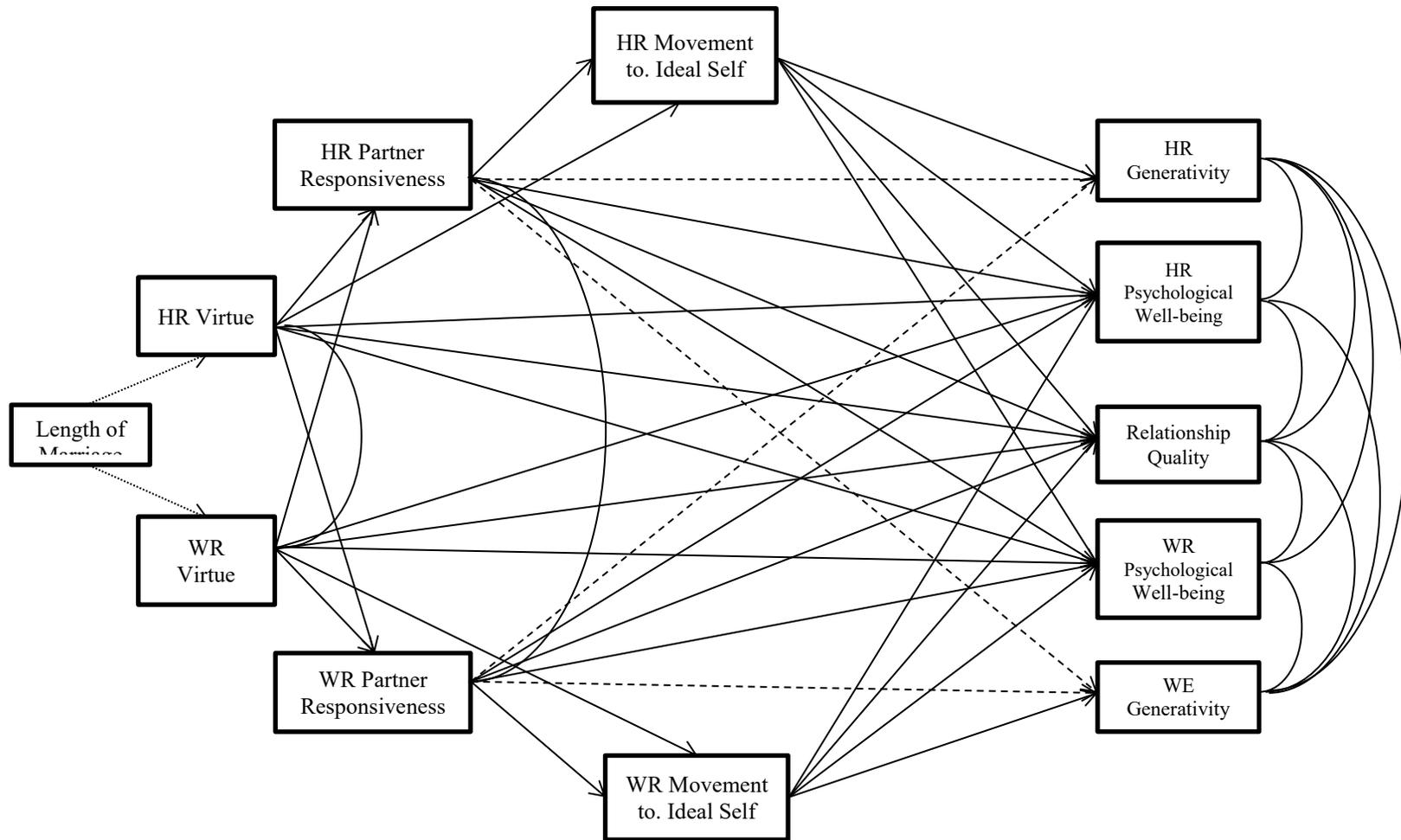


Figure 1. This figure represents the hypothesized SEM. Dashed lines represents relationships added to the model based on modification indices. Dotted lines represent relationships with anticipated control variables that were not included in the estimation due to low correlations during preliminary analyses. HR = husband reported, WR = wife reported.

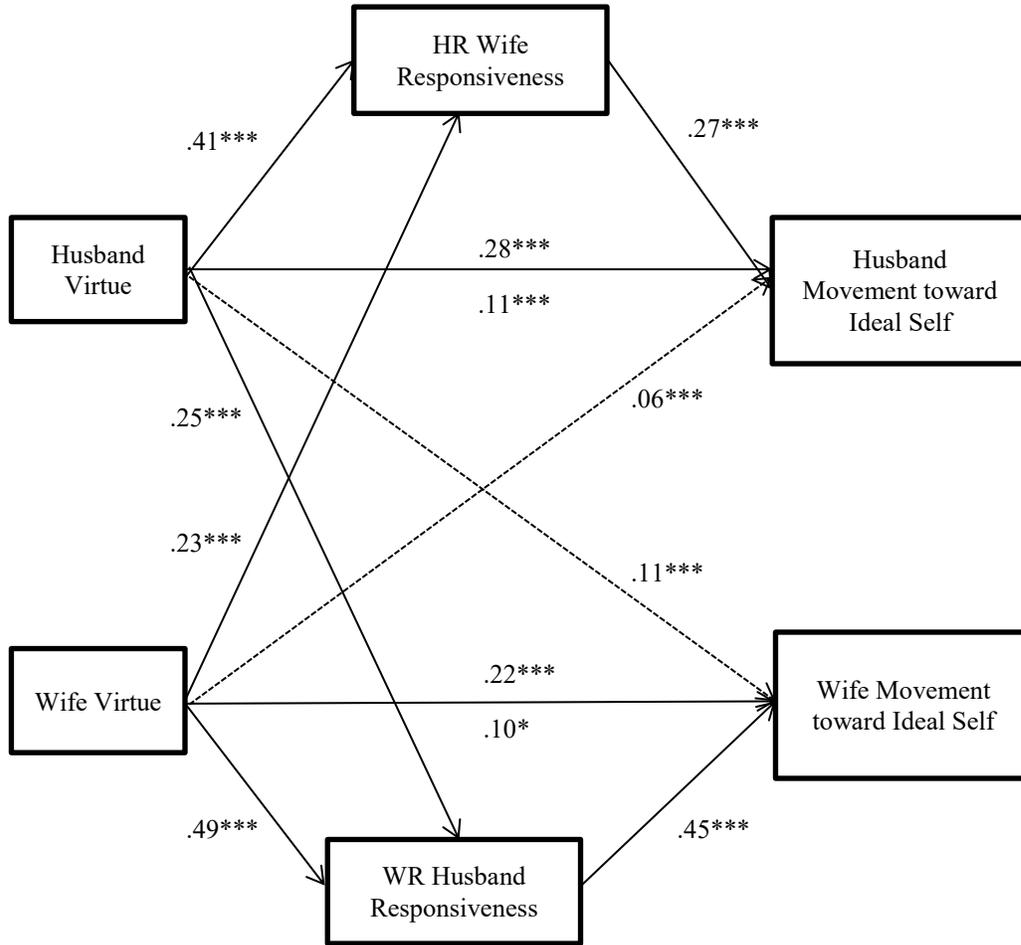


Figure 2 Primary predictors, mediators, and outcomes in the combined virtue model.

Appendix  
**Virtue in Relationships Scale**

Please use the rating scale below to describe how accurately each statement describes *you*. Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future.

| Very<br>Inaccurate | Moderately<br>Inaccurate | Neither<br>Inaccurate nor<br>Accurate | Moderately<br>Accurate | Very Accurate |
|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| 1                  | 2                        | 3                                     | 4                      | 5             |

- 
- \_\_\_1. I feel my partners' emotions. (E)  
 \_\_\_2. I sense my partner's wishes. (E)  
 \_\_\_3. I am good at sensing how my partner is feeling. (E)  
 \_\_\_4. After an argument, I make my partner pay. (F)\*  
 \_\_\_5. I get back at my partner when he/she insults me. (F)\*  
 \_\_\_6. After an argument, I keep as much distance between me and my partner as possible. (F)\*  
 \_\_\_7. I find so much in my relationship to be grateful for. (G)  
 \_\_\_8. My partner is a blessing in my life. (G)  
 \_\_\_9. I don't see a need to acknowledge my partner when he/she is good to me. (G)\*  
 \_\_\_10. I react strongly to my partner's criticisms. (H)\*  
 \_\_\_11. I know my strengths in my relationship with my partner. (H)\*  
 \_\_\_12. I should have special privileges in my relationship with my partner. (H)\*  
 \_\_\_13. I feel short-changed in my relationship with my partner. (T)\*  
 \_\_\_14. I suspect that my partner has hidden motives. (T)\*  
 \_\_\_15. I distrust my partner. (T)\*

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Note: Items on the Empathy, Forgiveness, Gratitude, Humility and Trust subscales are denoted with (E), (F), (G), (H) and (T), respectively.

\*Indicates that the item is reverse-scored