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A Dyadic Personality Perspective on the Michelangelo Phenomenon: How Personality Traits  
Relate to People's Ideal Selves and Their Personal Growth in Romantic Relationships

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### Abstract

Personality matters for romantic relationships. In this study, we investigated personal growth in couples (the Michelangelo phenomenon) and targeted questions of personality effects. We explored whether traits intrapersonally predict ideal selves as well as whether traits intra- and interpersonally account for why some people are more likely to benefit from the Michelangelo phenomenon than others. We used data from a 4-year study of 163 couples ( $M_{\text{age}} = 50.72$  years). Logistic regressions indicate complementarity effects for men, in that those high in neuroticism were likely to wish to be emotionally stable. Actor-partner interdependence models revealed positive actor effects of emotional stability, extraversion, and agreeableness, while few partner effects emerged. We discuss dyadic personal growth in view of individual trait differences.

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*Keywords.* Michelangelo phenomenon; personal growth; romantic couples; ideal selves; personality traits

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**Introduction**

Personal growth is one key element of a satisfying life: People desire to expand who they are and are motivated to move their actual self toward their ideal self, a process that is conducive to well-being (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000; Higgins, 1987, 1989). Although personal growth can occur without input from other people, it is often in interaction with close others that it is likely to occur (e.g., Fitzsimons, Finkel, & VanDellen, 2015). Studied as a relevant growth-striving process in the close relationship literature, the Michelangelo phenomenon posits that people (i.e., “targets”) hold an ideal self, which they can achieve through the perceptual and behavioral affirmation of close others (i.e., “sculptors”), particularly romantic partners.

Supportive partners affirm targets' ideal self, for instance, through modeling or social support, and thereby promote movement toward the ideal self; this movement, in turn, yields positive personal and relational outcomes (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009; Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009). Less supportive partners, conversely, neglect or disaffirm targets' movement toward their ideal self; this hindrance or lack of movement, in turn, has negative personal and relational ramifications (Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009).

In the present article, we argue that not all targets are equally likely to benefit from the Michelangelo phenomenon, that not all partners are equally willing and able to affirm the targets' ideal self, and that these differences are partly accounted for by individual differences in personality traits. To address these individual differences, we pursued two research aims. First, from an intrapersonal perspective, we explored the content of people's ideal selves and tested whether personality traits are linked to personality-trait attributes reported in ideal selves. Second, from an intra- and interpersonal perspective, we examined whether personality traits account for why some people are more inclined to benefit from the

Michelangelo phenomenon than others by testing personality traits' predictive power on the Michelangelo phenomenon's key components and outcomes.

### **The Michelangelo Phenomenon**

From perspectives as diverse as the psychoanalytical (Freud, 1923) and humanist (Maslow, 1962; Rogers, 1961), people are thought to have a conception of their ideal self that reflects their hopes, aspirations, and wishes. An ideal self can hence be defined as the constellation of dispositions, values, and behavioral tendencies that people ideally wish to possess (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Because a discrepancy between the actual and ideal self is experienced as unsettling, people aspire to move closer to their ideal self (Higgins, 1987, 1989). A person's personal growth (i.e., movement toward the ideal self) can be facilitated or hindered by that person's romantic partners, because relationship partners are interdependent, such that partners' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors mutually shape each other (Kelley et al., 1983). In the best-case scenario, a romantic relationship can thus be understood as a facilitator of personal growth and movement toward one's own ideal self, a process described as the Michelangelo phenomenon (Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009).

The Michelangelo phenomenon is conceived of as a step-by-step process, consisting of the following key components and outcomes (see Figure 1): First, *partner perceptual affirmation* characterizes the extent to which the target perceives the partner to be perceptually affirming of the target's ideal self (Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009), that is, whether the partner regards the target as the person the target ideally would like to be. Second, partner perceptual affirmation fuels *partner behavioral affirmation*, that is, the extent to which the target perceives the partner as someone who draws out the best in the target and engages in (a subset of possible) behaviors that reinforce the target's ideal-congruent qualities (Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009; Rusbult et al., 2005). Third, the target experiences *movement toward the ideal self*, which reflects behaving in a way that is close to the target's ideal self (Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009;

Rusbult et al., 2005). Finally, moving toward the ideal self is linked to positive personal and relational outcomes, such as higher life and relationship satisfaction (Drigotas, 2002; Rusbult et al., 2005). These steps are summarized in three main associations: Partner perceptual affirmation facilitates partner behavioral affirmation (partner-affirmation hypothesis), partner behavioral affirmation promotes movement toward the ideal self (movement-toward-ideal hypothesis), and movement toward the ideal self facilitates relationship and life satisfaction (well-being hypotheses).

### **An Intrapersonal Perspective: Personality and Ideal-Self Content**

Before elaborating on how personality traits relate to the key components and outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon, we focus on the core conception of the Michelangelo phenomenon—people’s ideal selves. People are thought of as being active agents in their personality development, suggesting that people want to and can change aspects of themselves (e.g., Baranski, Morse, & Dunlop, 2017; Hudson & Fraley, 2015; Hudson & Roberts, 2014; Miller, Baranski, Dunlop, & Ozer, 2019). Research on intentional personality development has assessed people’s change goals with Likert scales (e.g., Hudson & Roberts, 2014) and open-ended formats (e.g., Baranski et al., 2017), examining how people’s change goals reflect and relate to personality traits. Most prior research, however, assessed change goals rather than people’s ideal selves and focused on US American college students in their young adulthood (for exceptions, see Hudson & Fraley, 2016b; Quintus, Egloff, & Wrzus, 2017). As such, far less is known about the concept of ideal selves, how ideal selves relate to personality traits, and the generalizability of findings in age-heterogeneous samples outside the United States.

In this study, we assumed that the dispositions people actually have, such as their habitual patterns of behavior, cognition, and emotion (i.e., personality traits; e.g., John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008), are related to the constellation of dispositions, values, and behavioral tendencies people ideally wish to acquire (i.e., the ideal self). For instance, from a

humanistic perspective, people are thought to be ever-changing and ever-developing toward becoming a fully functioning person (Rogers, 1963). According to this reasoning, people might hold an ideal self that reflects those personality traits in which they are low (e.g., a person who is low in conscientiousness might ideally wish to be more dutiful), a type of association that would map onto *complementarity*. This proposition, however, would only apply to socially desirable personality traits (Dunlop, Telford, & Morrison, 2012; Hudson & Roberts, 2014) and to traits associated with psychological maturity (e.g., Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005), because most people who find themselves agreeable would not strive to become argumentative, and people who find themselves emotionally stable would not like to become irritable and worried. It was hence our first research aim to explore the content of people's ideal selves in light of personality-trait attributes and to test whether their personality traits systematically relate to these attributes.

### **An Intra- and Interpersonal Perspective: Personality and the Michelangelo Phenomenon**

Previous findings have revealed the Michelangelo phenomenon to be a beneficial process across the entire adult life span (e.g., Bühler, Weidmann, Kumashiro, & Grob, 2018; Drigotas, 2002; Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009; Rusbult et al., 2005). Yet, research has focused less on the individual dispositions that may intra- and interpersonally relate to the Michelangelo phenomenon. From an intrapersonal angle, some targets might be open and disposed to perceiving and accepting their partner's perceptual and behavioral affirmation and consequently move closer to their ideal self; others might be less willing or able to perceive and/or receive their partner's affirmation and might be less likely to move closer to their ideal self. From an interpersonal angle, some partners might be willing and able to perceptually and behaviorally affirm a target's ideal self, whereas others might be less supportive. For instance, people with individual characteristics that reflect insecurities or vulnerabilities (i.e., neuroticism, low self-esteem, or insecure attachment styles; Karney &

Bradbury, 1995; McNulty, 2016) might be less likely to be supportive and also less likely to benefit from affirmation (e.g., Denissen & Penke, 2008; Finn, Mitte, & Neyer, 2013; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Sadikaj, Rappaport, et al., 2015).

There is evidence that individual differences shape the Michelangelo phenomenon. One study, for instance, examined how individual differences in self-regulation tendencies (specifically, locomotion orientation and assessment orientation) predict the Michelangelo phenomenon (Kumashiro, Rusbult, Finkenauer, & Stocker, 2007). These individual orientations are defined as relatively stable individual differences in how people select, evaluate, and pursue goals (Higgins, Kruglanski, & Pierro, 2003; Kruglanski et al., 2000). Kumashiro et al. (2007) showed that a person's partner affirmation, movement toward the ideal self, and relationship satisfaction are positively linked to locomotion orientation and negatively linked to assessment orientation. Another study examined the extent to which promotion and prevention orientation (i.e., individual characteristics shaping individuals' goal pursuit) are intra- and interpersonally related to interpersonal goal support of ideal and ought selves within the close-relationship context (Righetti & Kumashiro, 2012; Righetti, Rusbult, & Finkenauer, 2010). Whereas promotion orientation was positively linked to receptivity and to seeking support, prevention orientation was negatively related to receptivity to support and to engagement in supporting the other's goals. Partner effects (i.e., the effect of the partner's predictor on the target's outcome) were observed only for the association between partners' promotion orientation and perceived support of the ideal self, and not for the associations between partners' prevention orientation and perceived support of ideal goals (Righetti & Kumashiro, 2012). Another study investigated the role of self-esteem in the Michelangelo phenomenon and found that it was not related to partner affirmation (Drigotas et al., 1999).

Taken together, previous results suggest that some of the target's and partner's individual characteristics are related to the Michelangelo phenomenon. So far, however, dispositional individual characteristics, such as personality traits, have not been examined in their relation

to the Michelangelo phenomenon. Given that personality traits frame and guide how people think, feel, and behave (e.g., John et al., 2008), and that traits have been proven relevant for romantic relationships (e.g., Dyrenforth, Kashy, Donnellan, & Lucas, 2010; Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Weidmann, Ledermann, & Grob, 2016), we consider it essential to address the intra- and interpersonal effects of personality traits on the Michelangelo phenomenon. Therefore, the second research aim of the present study was to examine how personality traits are linked to the key components and outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon.

### **Personality Traits and the Michelangelo Phenomenon**

Personality traits, defined as relatively stable foundational consistencies in thought, feeling, and behavior (Allport, 1937; John et al., 2008; McAdams & Pals, 2006), are most commonly understood in terms of the five-factor model of personality, known as the Big Five traits (Costa & McCrae, 1994; John & Srivastava, 1999; McCrae & Costa, 1987). These five traits are neuroticism, extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness to experience (*openness*, hereafter). In the following, we describe these traits and illustrate how they might intrapersonally relate to the Michelangelo phenomenon.

**Neuroticism.** People high in neuroticism tend to be anxious, moody, and easily upset, and they perceive the (social) environment negatively (John & Srivastava, 1999). People high in neuroticism tend to harbor negative thoughts and attributions about their relationship and their romantic partner (Karney, Bradbury, Fincham, & Sullivan, 1994; McNulty, 2008), and they tend to interpret ambiguous partners and ambiguous relationship scenarios in a negative light (Finn et al., 2013; McNulty, 2008). Given that people high in neuroticism are thought to be preoccupied with themselves (John & Srivastava, 1999), their preoccupation might shape their receptiveness to their partner's affirmation. Applied to the Michelangelo phenomenon, this means that targets high in neuroticism may be less likely to recognize perceptual or behavioral affirmation from their partner, which would make these targets less likely to move toward their ideal self, and, in turn, less satisfied. Hence, we expected neuroticism to



negatively relate to the target's affirmation, movement, and satisfaction components of the Michelangelo phenomenon.

**Agreeableness.** People high in agreeableness tend to be gentle, good-natured, compliant, and cooperative (John & Srivastava, 1999). These dispositions, in turn, are thought to play out in the social context such that people high in agreeableness are likely to bond with another person, to have concern for close others, and to be empathetic (John & Srivastava, 1999). We expected these social benefits to favorably relate to the target's affirmation, movement, and satisfaction components of the Michelangelo phenomenon.

**Extraversion.** People high in extraversion tend to be talkative, sociable, assertive, and active, are likely to seek out potentially rewarding situations, and are characterized by positive affect (John & Srivastava, 1999). Given these tendencies, individuals high in extraversion might hold a more positive view of their partners, which would favorably relate to the target's affirmation, movement, and satisfaction components of the Michelangelo phenomenon.

**Openness.** People high in openness tend to be intellectual, imaginative, and open-minded and are likely to express an understanding and tolerance for other people (John & Srivastava, 1999). Given these tendencies, they likely benefit from the Michelangelo phenomenon in that openness positively relates to the target's affirmation, movement, and satisfaction components of the Michelangelo phenomenon.

**Conscientiousness.** People high in conscientiousness are thorough, organized, responsible, dutiful, and self-regulated (John & Srivastava, 1999). They usually take things seriously and set clear goals for themselves. This self-regulation tendency might be transferred to the couple context because they actively talk about their goals and how they intend to pursue those goals, or because they engage in activities that are tailored to the pursuit of the goal (Kumashiro et al., 2007). Targets high in conscientiousness would be able to stick to their goal pursuit rather than being distracted by temptations. This would favorably

relate to the target's affirmation, movement, and satisfaction components of the Michelangelo phenomenon.

In sum, in terms of intrapersonal (i.e., actor) effects, we propose that the personality trait neuroticism hinders the Michelangelo phenomenon, that is, that targets high in neuroticism will be less likely to recognize their partners as skilled sculptors, less likely to move toward their ideal self, and less likely to report satisfaction in their relationship and their life. For the personality traits extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness, we propose the opposite, that these traits promote the Michelangelo phenomenon; that is, targets high in these personality dimensions will be more likely to perceive partner (perceptual and behavioral) affirmation, to move toward their ideal self, and to be satisfied in their relationship and their life in general. Possible strategies that are responsible for the expected actor effects might be that the target consciously or unconsciously detects values, behavior, or actions in the partner (e.g., suggesting effective strategies to pursue goals or expressing approval of the target's strivings) that help the target to promote the ideal self.

Given the dyadic nature of romantic relationships, we also tested for interpersonal (i.e., partner) effects, that is, we examined partners' perception of the targets' affirmation, partners' movement toward their ideal self, and partners' satisfaction, as a function of targets' personality traits. So far, only a few studies have examined interpersonal effects in the link between personality and the Michelangelo phenomenon (for exceptions, see findings from locomotion orientation; Righetti & Kumashiro, 2012; Righetti et al., 2010), and we seek to address this research gap. In line with previous research on intra- and interpersonal personality effects in romantic relationships (e.g., Weidmann et al., 2016), we expected partner effects to point in the same direction as actor effects, but to be smaller in size.

### **The Present Research**

In this study, we adopted two complementary research lines: We examined the intrapersonal association between people's personality traits and their ideal self (Research Aim I), and we

tested the intra- and interpersonal associations between personality traits and the Michelangelo phenomenon's key components and outcomes (Research Aim II). We used an individual cross-sectional approach for Research Aim I and a dyadic longitudinal approach for Research Aim II.

Regarding the first aim, participants mentioned up to four ideal selves. We coded their ideal selves for whether aspects related to personality traits (and to nonpersonality aspects) had been mentioned. These coded ideal selves were then linked to people's self-reported personality traits. To account for both potential gender differences and the dyadic structure of the data set, the analyses were performed separately for women and men. Given that no previous research has tested this link before, we adopted an exploratory approach.

Regarding the second aim, we studied intra- and interpersonal effects of personality traits on the key components and outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> In terms of both actor and partner effects, we expected the personality trait neuroticism to be negatively linked to the key components and outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon, while the personality traits extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness would be positively linked to these aspects. In particular, we tested the following exploratory question and hypotheses:

### **Research Aim I: An Intrapersonal Personality Perspective on Ideal Selves**

*Exploratory question 1.* Do people mention personality-trait attributes in their ideal selves? If so, are people's personality traits systematically linked to the personality-trait attributes reported in the ideal selves?

### **Research Aim II: An Intra- and Interpersonal Personality Perspective on the Michelangelo Phenomenon**

*Hypothesis 1a–e:* The target's key components (i.e., partner perceptual affirmation, partner behavioral affirmation, movement toward the ideal self) and the target's outcomes (i.e., life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction) of the Michelangelo

phenomenon are negatively linked to the target's (a) neuroticism and positively linked to the target's (b) extraversion, (c) agreeableness, (d) openness, and (e) conscientiousness.

*Hypothesis 2a–e:* The target's key components (i.e., partner perceptual affirmation, partner behavioral affirmation, movement toward the ideal self) and the target's outcomes (i.e., life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction) of the Michelangelo phenomenon are negatively linked to the partner's (a) neuroticism, and positively linked to the partner's (b) extraversion, (c) agreeableness, (d) openness, and (e) conscientiousness.

## **Method**

### **Procedure and Recruitment**

Data were taken from the longitudinal Co-Development in Personality (CoDiP) Study<sup>2</sup> that was conducted in German-speaking parts of Switzerland. Approval for this study was received from the ethics committee [blinded] (approval number: 175/09). The study included three measurement occasions (referred to as Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3) that were each 2 years apart. Individuals from different age groups were recruited either through university and vocational schools or through lectures given as part of a lifelong learning course aimed at middle-aged and older adults. Thus, the final sample of the study included an age-heterogeneous sample of young, middle-aged, and older adults who participated in the study. For the present research, we used participants' data on personality traits, which were assessed at each measurement occasion, and their data on the Michelangelo phenomenon, which was assessed at Time 3; an overview of all variables assessed in the CoDiP study is provided at a public and open-access repository.<sup>3</sup>

### **Sample**

The initial sample included 973 individuals aged 18 years or older. At Time 2, 638 individuals participated in the study, of whom 574 individuals participated at Time 3. From

these 574 individuals, we focused on those who participated together with their partners, which resulted in a final sample of 163 female–male couples ( $N_{\text{individuals}} = 326$ ). Fifty of these couples did not participate as a couple across the entire 4-year study period, for one of three reasons: (a) Individuals entered the study as singletons, started a relationship during the study period, and invited their partners to participate after Time 1; (b) individuals were partnered at Time 1 but entered the study alone, and their partners entered the study after Time 1; or (c) they changed partners from Time 1 to Time 3, meaning that their partner at Time 1 was not the same as their partner at Time 3. Because we were interested in concurrent actor effects in the analysis for Exploratory Question 1, we used the Time 3 data of the 326 female and male couple members for this analysis.<sup>4</sup> For all other analyses (i.e., Hypotheses 1 and 2), we calculated longitudinal actor and partner effects and, thus, worked with the data of those who provided couple data from Time 1 to Time 3 ( $N = 116$  couples).<sup>5</sup>

Female participants' age ranged from 18 to 88 years ( $M = 49.75$  years;  $SD = 19.77$ ) and male participants' age ranged from 20 to 87 years ( $M = 51.69$  years;  $SD = 19.94$ ). Relationship duration was between 3 months and 64 years ( $M = 23.67$  years;  $SD = 18.35$ )<sup>6</sup>; 60.7% of the couples were married, and 66.9% of the participants had children. Of the female participants, 28.8% had earned a degree from a college or university, 25.2% had undertaken vocational training, 13.5% had finished high school, while 32.5% indicated another highest level of education. Of the male participants, 42.3% had earned a degree from a college or university, 20.9% had undertaken vocational training, 6.7% had finished high school, while 30.1% indicated another highest level of education. The majority of participants were Swiss (89.7%).

## Measures

**Personality traits.** Personality traits were assessed with the German version of the Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999; Lang, Lüdtker, & Asendorpf, 2001). The 45-item self-report scale measures each of the Big Five traits of extraversion (8 items), neuroticism (8

items), conscientiousness (9 items), agreeableness (10 items), and openness (10 items). For each item, the participants rated the extent to which they agreed with statements ascribed to themselves (e.g., “I see myself as someone who is talkative”). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Cronbach’s alphas indicated good internal consistencies across measurement occasions ( $\alpha = .71$  to  $.88$ ).

**Perceived partner perceptual affirmation.** We measured partner perceptual affirmation—the first step of the Michelangelo phenomenon—with five items that were translated from the original scale (Drigotas et al., 1999) into German. Participants rated statements such as “My partner regards me as the sort of person I would most like to become” on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 5 (*agree completely*). A Cronbach’s alpha of  $.79$  indicated satisfactory internal reliability.

**Perceived partner behavioral affirmation.** We assessed the second step of the Michelangelo phenomenon—partner behavioral affirmation—with a German translation of Drigotas et al.’s (1999) five-item questionnaire. Participants rated statements such as “Because of the way my partner acts with me, I am able to be my best self” on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 5 (*agree completely*). The internal reliability was good ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

**Movement toward the ideal self.** To measure the third step of the Michelangelo phenomenon—movement toward the ideal self—we asked participants to reflect on how they would ideally like to be and to name up to four attributes of their ideal self (Drigotas et al., 1999). Participants reported various ideal-self attributes from different life domains (e.g., “calm,” “helpful,” “successful”). We treated each named attribute as a single ideal self, which implies that each participant could have up to four ideal selves. After having described their ideal selves, participants were asked to think about their current romantic relationship and to indicate for each ideal self whether they had moved closer to this ideal self, remained static, or moved further away from this ideal self as a result of being in that relationship. Movement

was rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*moved away*) through 4 (*unchanged*) to 7 (*moved closer*). The mean of each participant's ratings was used to indicate overall movement toward the ideal self. Cronbach's alpha was satisfactory ( $\alpha = .73$ ).

**Life satisfaction.** Life satisfaction was measured with the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) in its German version (Glaesmer, Grande, Braehler, & Roth, 2011). Participants rated five items (e.g., "The conditions of my life are excellent") on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The internal reliability was good ( $\alpha = .84$ ).

**Relationship satisfaction.** Relationship satisfaction was assessed with the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988) in its German version (Sander & Böcker, 1993). Participants rated seven items (e.g., "How well does your partner meet your needs?") on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*low satisfaction*) to 5 (*high satisfaction*). Cronbach's alpha was excellent ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

### **Coding**

To test whether personality traits were related to the content of the ideal selves, we coded participants' ideal selves for personality-trait attributes and for attributes that would not fall into a personality-trait category. Two independent raters (master's students in psychology) who were blind to identifying information of the participants and to the hypotheses of the study were trained by the first author in how to code these ideal selves. The raters started with the first ideal self that participants mentioned (156 ideal selves for female couple members and 149 ideal selves for male couple members). In most instances, ideal selves consisted of one or two words (e.g., "more reliable," "dutiful," "emotionally stable"). The coding categories were developed on the basis of the Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999), and for each ideal self, the coders decided which of the categories best represented the ideal self, using a presence ("1")/absence ("0") coding system. The categories

were exclusive: It was not possible to place the ideal-self description into more than one category.

The categories were as follows: (1) *Emotional stability* was chosen when the participant's ideal self referred to having less anxiety, irritability, depression, self-consciousness, shyness, moody impulsiveness, or vulnerability (e.g., "calm"). (2) *Agreeableness* was selected when the participant's ideal self covered aspects of trust, altruism, compliance, modesty, and tender-mindedness (e.g., "faithful"). (3) *Extraversion* was best suited when the ideal self reflected gregariousness, forceful assertiveness, activity, excitement seeking, and enthusiastic emotions (e.g., "active"). (4) *Openness* was chosen when the participant mentioned imaginative fantasy, curiosity, aesthetics, wide range of actions, excitable feelings, or unconventional values in the ideal self (e.g., "creative"). (5) *Conscientiousness* was chosen when the participant mentioned efficient competence, organized order, careful dutifulness, thorough achievement striving, self-discipline, and deliberation in the ideal self (e.g., "diligent").

Some descriptions of ideal selves did not fall into one of the Big Five categories and were hence categorized into separate categories; these descriptions were mostly attributes that referred to (6) *health* (e.g., "healthy"), (7) *satisfaction* (e.g., "content"), or (8) *intelligence/wisdom* (e.g., "clever"). Descriptions that did not fit into any of the above categories (e.g., "to possess sufficient power to solve issues of gender equality and poverty") were assigned to the category (9) *other*.

Next, to use this coding in subsequent analyses, we needed dichotomous variables that indicated whether the respective trait was included in the described ideal self. To that aim, an outcome variable was created for each of the categories that dichotomously indicated (with 0 = no and 1 = yes) whether the respective personality trait (e.g., conscientiousness) was mentioned in that ideal self. For example, if a participant described her or his ideal self as "diligent," a "5" was given to assign this ideal self to the category conscientiousness. This



resulted in a “1” for the category conscientiousness and a “0” for the eight remaining categories (i.e., emotional stability, agreeableness, extraversion, openness, health, satisfaction, intelligence, and other).

To determine consistency among raters, we applied interrater reliability analyses using Cohen’s kappa ( $\kappa$ ). Interrater reliability for coding the first ideal self was found to be  $\kappa = .98$ , suggesting excellent agreement between raters (Landis & Koch, 1977). Given this high interrater reliability, raters continued to code participants’ second ideal selves ( $N_{\text{women}} = 152$ ;  $N_{\text{men}} = 147$ ), third ideal selves ( $N_{\text{women}} = 148$ ;  $N_{\text{men}} = 143$ ), and fourth ideal selves ( $N_{\text{women}} = 146$ ;  $N_{\text{men}} = 140$ ) by applying the same logic as described above. Interrater reliability was found to be  $\kappa = .85$  for the second ideal self,  $\kappa = .84$  for the third ideal self, and  $\kappa = .79$  for the fourth ideal self, suggesting substantial to excellent agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). Overall, raters coded 602 ideal selves for female couple members and 579 ideal selves for male couple members.

### **Data-Analysis Approach**

To test our research aims, we applied two data-analytic approaches. For Research Aim I, we focused on the coded personality-trait attributes in participants’ ideal selves and tested whether personality traits were systematically related to these ideal-self attributes. We applied logistic regression analyses with the dichotomous ideal-self variable as outcome and the five personality traits as predictors. All models were run separately for each of the ideal-self outcome variables, and we conducted separate analyses for the first, second, third, and fourth ideal self that participants mentioned. For example, in the prediction of the ideal-self variable agreeableness (coded with 0 vs. 1), neuroticism, agreeableness, extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness were entered as predictors. Logistic regressions were conducted with the ISLR package (James, Witten, Hastie, & Tibshirani, 2013) and figures were created with the ggplot package (Wickham, 2016), both in R (R Development Core Team, 2016); predictor and criterion variables stemmed from Time 3.

For Research Aim II, we first tested the general intra- and interpersonal effects within the Michelangelo phenomenon and next tested the specific intra- and interpersonal effects of participants' personality traits on the Michelangelo phenomenon. We used the five personality traits as predictors and the Michelangelo phenomenon's key components (i.e., partner perceptual affirmation, partner behavioral affirmation, movement toward the ideal self) and outcomes (i.e., life satisfaction, relationship satisfaction) as criteria; predictor variables stemmed from Time 1 and criterion variables stemmed from Time 3. Due to the nested nature of our data (i.e., individuals [Level 1] were nested within romantic couples [Level 2]) and to derive intra- and interpersonal effects, we applied actor-partner interdependence models (APIMs; Kenny & Cook, 1999; Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; see Figure 2).

**APIMs.** Results of Level 1—controlling for Level 2—are presented with standardized estimates. To provide a terminology for the effects that were tested in the APIMs, we refer to *actor effects* when the target's personality traits were linked to the target's partner perceptual affirmation, the target's partner behavioral affirmation, the target's own movement toward the ideal self, or the target's own outcomes (life satisfaction and relationship satisfaction, respectively). We refer to *partner effects* when the target's personality traits were related to the partner's partner perceptual affirmation, the partner's partner behavioral affirmation, the partner's movement toward the ideal self, or the partner's outcomes (life satisfaction and relationship satisfaction, respectively). APIM analyses were calculated with the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) in R (R Development Core Team, 2016), and missing values were treated with full information maximum likelihood estimation.

For each set of analyses for Hypotheses 1 and 2, we calculated single-predictor models and multiple-predictor models. While single -predictor models examined the association of a single predictor with a single criterion (e.g., partner perceptual affirmation for relationship satisfaction), multiple-predictor models regressed a criterion simultaneously on two or more predictors, considering multiple predictors (e.g., partner perceptual affirmation and partner

behavioral affirmation for relationship satisfaction). As in previous research (see Drigotas, 2002), when life satisfaction was the outcome of interest, we controlled for relationship satisfaction.

**Fit indices.** To obtain the most parsimonious model, we used the following four-step logic for each set of APIM analyses: We set (1) actor and partner paths equal across couple members, (2) only actor paths equal across couple members, (3) only partner paths equal across couple members, and (4) neither actor nor partner paths equal. Goodness-of-fit indices of the various models were examined with the fit indices of the comparative fit index (CFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). The model was considered to fit the data well if CFI was above .97 and RMSEA was below .05. Acceptable fit was characterized by a CFI above .95 and RMSEA below .08 (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003). If more than one model had acceptable goodness-of-fit indices, we compared these models by applying a  $\chi^2$  test. The superscript numbers in Tables 4 and 5 indicate which model provided the best fit for each set of analyses and which model was hence chosen.

Overall, from a total of 29 APIMs that we calculated, we were able to set (1) actor and partner paths equal across couple members in 14 models, (2) actor paths equal in 2 models, and (3) partner paths equal in 12 models. It was only in one model (i.e., openness as predictor for relationship satisfaction) that neither actor nor partner paths could be set as equal. Hence, except for this result, the findings suggest actor effects, partner effects, or both to be similar for female and male couple members.

**Power analyses.** To test whether the obtained results would be based on sufficiently high statistical power, we conducted a post-hoc power analysis for APIM analyses (Kenny & Ackerman, n.d.). Taking into consideration what could be expected from previous research testing actor and partner personality effects in romantic relationships (e.g., Weidmann et al., 2016), we examined the power for detecting actor effects of  $\beta = .25$  and for detecting partner

effects of  $\beta = .15$  with a sample of  $N = 113$  couples. The power to detect these effects was .98 for actor effects and .66 for partner effects, suggesting sufficient power.

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for the key variables (i.e., personality traits, the Michelangelo phenomenon, and outcomes) of the present investigation, separately for women and men. Regarding the personality traits, women and men had similar values in agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness, but women had significantly higher scores in neuroticism and extraversion than men, indicating small to medium effects. Regarding the Michelangelo phenomenon, women and men reported similar values for all variables, and on outcomes, women and men were equally satisfied with their relationship and their life in general.

Table 2 presents the zero-order correlations between the key variables (i.e., personality traits, the Michelangelo phenomenon, and outcomes), separately for women and men. As evident from this table, women's neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion were significantly related to at least one aspect of the Michelangelo phenomenon; the same emerged for men's neuroticism and extraversion. As found in previous studies, partner perceptual affirmation and partner behavioral affirmation were positively related to each other (see, for instance, Drigotas, 2002, with a correlation of  $r = .58$  between perceptual and behavioral affirmation). In addition, regarding selection and/or socialization effects within the dyad, couple members' scores correlated with each other for all variables except for agreeableness and extraversion. Table 2 also includes associations with relationship duration and age, showing that none of the Michelangelo phenomenon's key variables was related to relationship duration or age for women. Men's partner behavioral affirmation was negatively correlated with age. These results correspond to previous research (Bühler et al., 2018), suggesting that age and/or relationship duration might be related to single components of the

Michelangelo phenomenon (i.e., affirmation components), but the overall framework was found to be fairly age independent.

### **Research Aim I: An Intrapersonal Personality Perspective on Ideal Selves**

A descriptive overview of the attributes that participants mentioned in their ideal selves is shown in Figure 3 for women and Figure 4 for men: Women and men mentioned ideal selves that covered all of the personality-trait categories: Women most often reported ideal-self attributes that referred to agreeableness, followed by emotional stability and extraversion, while men most often reported attributes that referred to agreeableness, followed by conscientiousness and extraversion.<sup>7</sup> Men and women also indicated ideal selves that were not captured by these categories, with references to health, satisfaction, and intelligence, among aspects.

Next, we tested whether women's and men's personality traits intrapersonally predicted the personality-trait attributes that they reported in their ideal selves. For women, we observed significant effects for agreeableness and extraversion as predictors of ideal-self content: Women high in agreeableness were more likely to mention aspects of agreeableness ( $B = 1.06$ , odds ratio OR = 2.88, 95% CI [1.14, 7.81],  $p = .03$ ; as third ideal self) and extraversion ( $B = 1.51$ , OR = 4.54, 95% CI [1.28, 18.36],  $p = .03$ ; as first ideal self). Women high in extraversion were less likely to mention attributes of agreeableness ( $B = -.58$ , OR = .57, 95% CI [0.33, 0.99],  $p = .04$ ; as first ideal self). No effects were observed for women's neuroticism, openness, and conscientiousness as predictors of ideal-self content (all  $ps > .05$ ).

For men, we found significant effects for neuroticism, agreeableness, and conscientiousness as predictors of ideal-self content: Men high in neuroticism were more likely to mention attributes of emotional stability in their first ideal self ( $B = .79$ , OR = 2.20, 95% CI [1.11, 4.42],  $p = .03$ ) and in their third ideal self ( $B = .75$ , OR = 2.21, 95% CI [1.01, 4.47],  $p = .04$ ) and less likely to mention aspects of agreeableness ( $B = -.61$ , OR = 0.54, 95% CI [0.29, 0.95],  $p = .04$ ; as first ideal self). Men high in agreeableness were more likely to

mention attributes of agreeableness ( $B = .93$ ,  $OR = 2.54$ , 95% CI [1.05, 6.81],  $p = .04$ ; as second ideal self) and less likely to mention attributes of emotional stability ( $B = -1.35$ ,  $OR = 0.26$ , 95% CI [0.08, 0.72],  $p = .02$ ; as fourth ideal self). Finally, men high in conscientiousness were less likely mention attributes of extraversion ( $B = -1.13$ ,  $OR = 0.32$ , 95% CI [1.13, 0.77],  $p = .04$ ; as second ideal self). No effects were found for men's extraversion and openness as predictors of ideal-self content (all  $ps > .05$ ).

To summarize, across both genders, we observed agreeableness to be a predictor for women's and men's ideal-self content. While extraversion served as a further predictor among women, neuroticism and conscientiousness served as further predictors among men.

### **Research Aim II: An Intra- and Interpersonal Personality Perspective on the Michelangelo Phenomenon**

For Research Aim II, we first tested the intra-and interpersonal effects in the Michelangelo phenomenon in general and then examined the role of personality traits as predictors of the key components and outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon.

**The Michelangelo phenomenon in the romantic dyad.** Table 3 displays the results of the APIM analyses testing actor and partner effects in the Michelangelo phenomenon without personality-trait effects. For partner perceptual affirmation as predictor, we observed positive actor and partner effects on partner behavioral affirmation for women and men, as well as a positive actor effect on relationship satisfaction for men: Female and male targets who perceived their partners as perceptually affirming also perceived their partners as behaviorally affirming, and female and male targets who perceived their partners as perceptually affirming were also perceived as more behaviorally affirming by their partners. Men who perceived their partners as perceptually affirming were also more satisfied in their relationship.

For partner behavioral affirmation as predictor, we found a positive actor effect on relationship satisfaction for women and a positive actor effect on life satisfaction for women

and men. Put differently, female and male targets who perceived their partners as behaviorally affirming were more satisfied with their life, and female targets who perceived their partners as behaviorally affirming were also more satisfied with their relationship.

Finally, for movement toward the ideal self as predictor, we observed a positive actor effect on relationship satisfaction for women and positive partner effects on relationship satisfaction for women and men. In other words, female targets who experienced more movement toward the ideal self were more satisfied with their relationship, and female and male targets who experienced more movement toward the ideal self had partners who were more satisfied with their relationship.

**Personality traits as intra- and interpersonal predictors of the key components and outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon.** Tables 4 and 5 provide the results of the APIM analyses testing women's and men's personality traits as intra- and interpersonal predictors of the Michelangelo phenomenon's key components (i.e., partner perceptual affirmation, partner behavioral affirmation, movement toward the ideal self; Table 4) and outcomes (i.e., relationship satisfaction, life satisfaction; Table 5).

**Women's personality traits.** The predictive effects of women's personality traits on the Michelangelo phenomenon's key components are shown in the left section of Table 4. We observed several actor effects, but no partner effects (all  $ps > .05$ ). More specifically, we found a negative actor effect of neuroticism on partner perceptual affirmation, partner behavioral affirmation, and movement toward the ideal self. That is, women high in neuroticism perceived their partners to be less perceptually and behaviorally affirming, and they were less likely to move toward their ideal self. Next, we found a positive actor effect of agreeableness on movement toward the ideal self, suggesting that women high in agreeableness were more likely to move toward their ideal self. Finally, we observed a positive actor effect of extraversion on partner perceptual affirmation, partner behavioral affirmation, and movement toward the ideal self. That is, women high in extraversion were

more likely to perceive their partners to be perceptually and behaviorally affirming, and they were more likely to move toward their ideal self. We found no significant effects for women's openness or conscientiousness as predictors of the Michelangelo's key components (all  $ps > .05$ ).

The predictive effects of women's personality traits on the Michelangelo phenomenon's outcomes are shown in the left section of Table 5. We observed significant actor effects and one partner effect. Specifically, we found a negative actor effect of neuroticism on relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction, and a positive actor effect of extraversion on relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction. That is, women high in neuroticism were less satisfied with their romantic relationship and their life in general, while women high in extraversion were more satisfied with their relationship and life. For agreeableness and conscientiousness, we found a positive actor effect on relationship satisfaction, suggesting that women high in agreeableness and women high in conscientiousness were more satisfied with their romantic relationship. For openness, we observed a positive actor effect on women's own life satisfaction, while we found a negative partner effect on men's relationship satisfaction. That is, women high in openness were more satisfied with their life and had partners who were less satisfied with their romantic relationship.

***Men's personality traits.*** The predictive effects of men's personality traits on the Michelangelo phenomenon's key components are shown in the right section of Table 4. We observed actor effects, but no partner effects (all  $ps > .05$ ): We found a negative actor effect of neuroticism on movement toward the ideal self, reflecting that men high in neuroticism were less likely to move toward their ideal. Next, we observed a positive actor effect of agreeableness on movement toward the ideal self, showing that men high in agreeableness were more likely to move toward their ideal self. Finally, we found a positive actor effect of extraversion on partner perceptual affirmation, partner behavioral affirmation, and movement



toward the ideal self. That is, men high in extraversion were more likely to perceive their partners as perceptually and behaviorally affirming, and they were more likely to move toward their ideal self. We found no significant effects for men's openness or conscientiousness as predictors of the Michelangelo's key components (all  $ps > .05$ ).

The predictive effects of men's personality traits on the Michelangelo phenomenon's outcomes are shown in the right section of Table 5. We observed significant actor and partner effects: We found a negative actor effect of neuroticism on relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction as well as a negative partner effect on relationship satisfaction. In other words, men high in neuroticism were less satisfied with their romantic relationship and their life in general, and they had partners who were less satisfied with their romantic relationship. For agreeableness and openness, we observed positive actor and partner effects on relationship satisfaction. That is, men who were high in agreeableness and openness were more satisfied with their romantic relationship and had partners who were more satisfied with this relationship. For extraversion, we observed a positive actor effect on relationship satisfaction, indicating that men high in extraversion were more satisfied with their romantic relationship.

***Interim summary.*** Overall, and largely consistent with Hypothesis 1, we found personality traits to significantly relate to the key components of the Michelangelo phenomenon: For women, the traits neuroticism and extraversion were those that exhibited significant actor effects on the affirmative components (i.e., perceptual and behavioral partner affirmation), while the traits neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion revealed significant actor effects on women's movement toward the ideal self. While the latter of these predictions also held true for men (i.e., the traits neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion revealed significant actor effects on men's movement toward the ideal self), and men's extraversion also exhibited a significant actor effect on their affirmative components (i.e., perceptual and behavioral partner affirmation), we found no significant actor effects of men's neuroticism on the affirmative components. Across both genders, no significant effects were observed for

openness or conscientiousness as predictors. In terms of personality traits predicting outcomes, neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion had actor effects on women's and men's relationship satisfaction, while conscientiousness revealed an actor effect on women's relationship satisfaction, and openness showed an actor effect on men's relationship satisfaction. Neuroticism revealed actor effects on women's and men's life satisfaction, while extraversion and openness had actor effects on women's life satisfaction.

Regarding Hypothesis 2, we found no partner effects in the prediction of the Michelangelo phenomenon's key components (i.e., perceptual partner affirmation, behavioral partner affirmation, and movement toward the ideal self). However, partner effects emerged in the prediction of outcomes (i.e., relationship satisfaction and life satisfaction) and more so for men's personality traits predicting women's satisfaction indices. These partner effects were similar or even larger in size than the actor effects.

### **Discussion**

In the present research, we examined the Michelangelo phenomenon in couples from a personality perspective and pursued two research aims. First, we applied an intrapersonal personality perspective on ideal selves: We explored the attributes that women and men mentioned in their ideal selves and tested how personality traits are linked to personality-trait attributes reported in ideal selves. Second, we applied an intra- and interpersonal personality perspective on the Michelangelo phenomenon: We first tested the general intra- and interpersonal effects in the Michelangelo phenomenon and then examined how couple members' personality traits predicted the key components and outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon. Overall, we found individual differences in personality traits to be related to the ideal selves that people mention and to be predictive for how likely people are to benefit from the Michelangelo phenomenon.

#### **Research Aim I: An Intrapersonal Personality Perspective on Ideal Selves**

When exploring the content of people's ideal selves, we found that women and men described ideal selves that included personality-trait aspects (e.g., being helpful, being even-tempered, being reliable) and nonpersonality-trait aspects (e.g., being healthy, being wise, being happy). These findings align with prior research on change goals (Hudson & Roberts, 2014), suggesting that people's ideal conceptions reflect Big Five personality dimensions. At the same time, our findings also show that people express desires to possess attributes that are not captured by personality traits.

Concerning the personality-trait aspects in people's ideal selves, which were the main focus of the present investigation, both women and men were most likely to mention ideal selves that contained facets of agreeableness. Agreeable people are thought to be gentle and good-natured (John & Srivastava, 1999), which might be a general ideal of how a mature social human being might want to be (e.g., Caspi et al., 2005), because aspects such as "being helpful," "being understanding," or "being loyal" are conducive to one's social and close interactions. However, the present sample included coupled individuals, and although we did not prompt participants to report their ideal selves in the romantic relationship context, it is possible that attributes relevant in the couple context (e.g., support, reciprocal understanding, loyalty) were more salient and hence more likely to be reported than attributes relevant in another context (e.g., being dutiful in the work context; Hennecke, Bleidorn, Denissen, & Wood, 2014). Future studies are needed to examine how different contexts might potentially alter the ideal selves that people report.

Next, we were interested in how people's personality traits are related to the personality-trait attributes that they mentioned in their ideal selves. Among women and men, we found that those high in agreeableness were even more likely to mention aspects of agreeableness in their ideal self. We label this finding an *additive effect*, indicating that people are likely to strengthen an aspect of themselves that they already have. In contrast, aspects of agreeableness were less likely to be reported by women high in extraversion; this finding

speaks to an *antagonistic effect*, meaning that one trait tends to exclude the other trait. Among men, we found an antagonistic effect between agreeableness as predictor and emotional stability in the ideal self as well as between conscientiousness as predictor and extraversion in the ideal self. Finally, we found an *effect of complementarity*, indicating that people hold ideal selves that reflect those personality traits in which they are low. We found this type of association for men's neuroticism, in that men high in neuroticism were more likely to mention aspects of emotional stability in their (first and third) ideal self.

When interpreting these findings, it was for emotional stability that the anticipated concept of complementarity was supported, but only for men: Men who were emotionally unstable were more likely to hold an ideal of themselves as emotionally stable. It stands to reason that emotional stability is relevant, in two respects: First, increases in emotional stability, together with increases in agreeableness and conscientiousness, constitute what has been described as changes toward greater maturity (Bleidorn, Kandler, Riemann, Angleitner, & Spinath, 2009; Caspi et al., 2005; Lucas & Donnellan, 2011; Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006; Specht, Egloff, & Schmukle, 2011). As such, by reporting an emotionally stable ideal self, people may strive to become an emotionally more mature person. Second, given that emotional instability has been found to be a risk factor for romantic relationships (e.g., Karney & Bradbury, 1995; McNulty, 2016), striving for emotional stability might be especially desirable in the context of a romantic relationship and especially important for those who are more emotionally unstable. As such, by reporting an emotionally stable ideal self, male participants might have been wishing for attributes that are conducive to a satisfying romantic relationship. Why we found no effects of complementarity among women high in neuroticism is relevant for future research to examine. It might be argued that men are more confronted with gender norms that exclude attributes of emotional instability such as moodiness, worry, or internal insecurity (John & Srivastava, 1999); the prescriptive and

formative character of these gender norms would make it likely that men wish not to be emotionally unstable or sensitive (Bem, 1981; Troche & Rammsayer, 2011).

Similar to research on change goals (Hudson & Fraley, 2015, 2016a), future research should examine whether people successfully become the self they ideally wish to be or remain stagnant or even change in the opposite direction of their ideal (Robinson, Nofhle, Guo, Asadi, & Zhang, 2015). Similarly, the mechanisms and principles that initiate changes toward the ideal self and that make these changes long-lasting need further research (Allemand & Flückiger, 2017). In addition, this study focused on personality-trait attributes in people's ideal selves and their links to personality traits. Future studies might focus on the nonpersonality aspects that people mentioned in their ideal selves and examine possible predictors of those, such as people's age: According to developmental task theory (Erikson, 1968; Havighurst, 1972), each life period confronts people with challenges and opportunities that might have an impact on the ideal selves they mention. For example, it is in older age that physical and cognitive resources usually decrease (Braun, Rohr, Wagner, & Kunzmann, 2018; Reynolds & Finkel, 2016), developmental tasks become centered around the maintenance of a functional status quo (Ebner, Freund, & Baltes, 2006; Heckhausen, Schulz, & Wrosch, 1989), and health goals become more salient (Bühler, Weidmann, Nikitin, & Grob, 2019; Hutteman, Hennecke, Orth, Reitz, & Specht, 2014; Nurmi, 1992). As such, "being healthy" might be more prominently mentioned in the ideal selves of older people compared to their younger counterparts. We encourage future research on whether people mention age-graded developmental-task attributes in their ideal selves and whether age predicts these attributes.

### **Research Aim II. An Intra- and Interpersonal Personality Perspective on the Michelangelo Phenomenon**

To address the intra- and interpersonal personality effects in the Michelangelo phenomenon, we first applied a dyadic perspective on the Michelangelo phenomenon and tested for overall actor and partner effects. Next, we applied the personality perspective and

tested the actor and partner effects of personality traits on the single components and outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon.

**A dyadic perspective on the Michelangelo phenomenon.** Using an actor–partner perspective, we mainly found support for the Michelangelo phenomenon and extended it by means of applying this dyadic perspective. We discuss our findings from a dyadic standpoint.

First, partner behavioral affirmation was positively predicted by partner perceptual affirmation for targets and partners of both genders. In other words, women and men were more likely to perceive their partners as behaviorally affirming if they also perceived their partner as perceptually affirming and if they were perceived by their partner as perceptually affirming themselves. Hence, affirmation tended to be a reciprocal process embedded within the dyad, indicating that affirmation begets affirmation within and between partners.

Second, the findings for movement toward the ideal self conflict with results of previous research (e.g., Drigotas et al., 1999) in that we did not find partner perceptual affirmation and partner behavioral affirmation to serve as significant predictors of movement toward the ideal self. Reasons for this lack of findings may lie in our operationalization of the variable “movement toward the ideal self.” As described in the Method section, we aggregated the scores by which people indicated whether they had moved closer to or further away from a certain ideal self (up to four ideal selves). This overall movement score might mask variation: A person might have indicated a “6” for moving closer to the ideal self of “being dutiful,” but a “2” for moving away from the ideal self of “being compassionate.” This person’s overall mean score of “4”—indicating stagnation—would obscure the different movement processes that were taking place. Hence, in future research, it would be promising to analyze separately the single movement scores that participants report for each ideal self. In a similar vein, additional valuable insights might be gained by examining people’s coherence in their movement toward their ideal selves; that is, while some people might experience similar movement in all their ideal selves, others might experience movement toward one

ideal self but movement away from another. The question of whether such (in-)coherence in movement toward the ideal self is relevant for people's well-being is worth exploring in future research (for research on coherence, see, e.g., Sedikides, Wildschut, Routledge, & Arndt, 2015; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997).

Third, for women, relationship satisfaction was positively predicted by women's partner behavioral affirmation and both partners' movement toward the ideal self. For men, relationship satisfaction was positively predicted by men's partner perceptual affirmation and by women's movement toward the ideal self. These findings imply that, for both women and men, it was conducive for their relationship satisfaction if they perceived their partner as affirming their ideal self (behaviorally for women and perceptually for men) and if they experienced movement themselves (for women) or if their partner experienced movement (for women and men). Life satisfaction was positively predicted by women's and men's own partner behavioral affirmation, suggesting that people were more satisfied with their life in general if they perceived their partner as behaviorally affirming their ideal self.

Possible underlying mechanisms for the beneficial role of affirmation might be the positive feelings that are associated with an affirming partner (Gordon, Impett, Kogan, Oveis, & Keltner, 2012; Kubacka, Finkenauer, Rusbult, & Keijsers, 2011). Such feelings may positively shape one's evaluations of one's relationship, and life in general. Possible explanations for the beneficial intrapersonal effect of movement might be the genuinely satisfying experience of personal growth (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2000; Maslow, 1962; Rogers, 1961). The beneficial interpersonal effect of the other partner's movement, however, is an intriguing topic for future research. At least three explanations are plausible.

First, it is possible that it is also genuinely satisfying to experience partners moving closer to their ideal self and to help partners become who they wish to be (Rogers, 1961). Second, based on the concurrent assessment of the Michelangelo phenomenon and its outcomes in this study, it is possible that a satisfying relationship is a context that makes

partners more likely to move toward their ideal self (rather than the reverse, with movement toward the ideal self shaping relationship satisfaction). Third, targets might incorporate their partner's ideal self in their own ideal self and hence move closer to the partner's ideal self. This process, however, would not constitute the Michelangelo phenomenon but rather a process similar to the *Pygmalion phenomenon*, in which a partner perceives the target and behaves toward the target in a way that corresponds with the partner's own ideal self (Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009). Although such a process is detrimental to targets moving toward ideal selves that are not their own (Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009), the consequences of this process for their partners remain to be explored.

**Personality traits as predictors of the Michelangelo phenomenon.** We argued that not every target is open and receptive to perceiving affirmation and not every romantic partner is able or willing to offer such affirmation. In testing actor and partner effects of personality traits on the key components and outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon, we addressed these individual differences in receptivity. We observed predictive intrapersonal effects of neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion that were largely in line with our hypotheses: Neuroticism was negatively linked to women's partner perceptual and behavioral affirmation and to both partners' movement toward the ideal self; agreeableness was positively linked to both partners' movement; and extraversion was the trait that was positively linked to all components of the Michelangelo phenomenon for both genders. Below, we discuss the relevance of each of these personality traits for personal growth in couples.

**Neuroticism.** Women high in neuroticism were less likely to perceive their partners as perceptually and behaviorally affirming. It may be that people high in neuroticism tend to harbor negative thoughts and negative attributions about their relationship and their romantic partner (Karney et al., 1994), interpret ambiguous situations and ambiguous partner behavior more negatively, and anticipate that an upcoming interaction with their partner will be



negative (Finn et al., 2013). This negative cognitive mindset might fuel the perception that the partner will not be responsive and affirmative, regardless of the partner's actual behavior (Boothby, Thorn, Overduin, & Ward, 2004). This might eventually lead partners of targets high in neuroticism to display more negative behavior in joint interactions (McNulty, 2008). In addition to the affirmative components, female and male targets high in neuroticism were also less likely to move toward their ideal self. This might be due to people high in neuroticism being less likely to hold approach motivations (e.g., Gomez, Allemand, & Grob, 2012; Watson & Clark, 1992). An approach motivation, however, would be a necessary condition for approaching one's ideal self. Finally, it might also be possible that these individuals experienced the same movement toward their ideal self as others did but did not recognize such movement because of their negatively biased mindset or their preoccupation with failure (John & Srivastava, 1999).

***Agreeableness.*** Women and men high in agreeableness were more likely to move toward their ideal self, but they were not more likely to perceive their partners as perceptually and behaviorally affirming. It might be that other qualities within or outside the relational setting drove these individuals to move toward their ideal self. For instance, people high in agreeableness tend to be gentle and good-natured (John & Srivastava, 1999), which might create an environment of positive social relationships (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Positive processes other than affirmation (e.g., responsiveness; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004), as well as processes in contexts other than the romantic relationship (e.g., with friends or at work) might have helped people high in agreeableness move closer to their ideal self.

***Extraversion.*** Women and men high in extraversion were more likely to perceive their partners as perceptually and behaviorally affirming and to move closer to the ideal self. As such, extraversion was the trait that showed positive predictive effects on all components of the Michelangelo phenomenon. This beneficial link might be explained by the assertive and

active nature of extraverted individuals, as well as by their tendency to seek out potentially rewarding situations (John & Srivastava, 1999), which they might transfer to the couple environment and to their movement toward the ideal self. In addition, their motivational orientation and inclination to approach—compared to avoidance motivation among individuals high in neuroticism—might enhance the likelihood of actively striving to approach the ideal self (McAdams, 2013, 2015) and to embed related activities within the relational setting. Furthermore, people high in extraversion tend to be talkative and sociable (John & Srivastava, 1999), which might create an environment of positivity and positive emotions, leading to a positive cyclical process whereby partners share and capitalize on day-to-day positive events and experiences (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; Langston, 1994). Positivity and capitalization, in turn, might build a conducive environment for affirmation and personal growth within the couple.

It was also for the other two personality traits—openness and conscientiousness—that we expected significant predictive effects on the Michelangelo phenomenon. While we found predictive effects on the outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon, we found no significant effects on the key components. Our findings hence need further discussion.

**Openness.** We expected people's open-mindedness to be advantageous to the Michelangelo phenomenon. However, we found no effect of openness on partner perceptual affirmation, partner behavioral affirmation, or movement toward the ideal self, but we did find an effect on outcomes, to different degrees for women and men. While women high in openness were more satisfied with their life and had partners who were less satisfied with their relationship, men high in openness were more satisfied with their relationship and had partners who were also more satisfied. Although research exists on the role of openness in a person's individual life (e.g., Schwaba, Luhmann, Denissen, Chung, & Bleidorn, 2018), far less is known about how openness impacts romantic relationship processes. For example, it might be that when a woman has broader interests and is more curious, her partner might feel

less secure and satisfied in the relationship. Why female partners of male targets high in openness were even more satisfied with their relationship should be investigated in future research. Insights might be gained through applying experience-sampling studies to investigate the day-to-day thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that people high in openness and their partners experience in their daily relationship life.

***Conscientiousness.*** For people high in conscientiousness, we expected actor and partner effects on the Michelangelo phenomenon's key components and outcomes, and we found an actor effect on women's relationship satisfaction. Why we found no predictive effects on the Michelangelo phenomenon's key components could be because people high in conscientiousness might experience movement toward their ideal self for other reasons. That is, movement might be due to a person's own investment, dutifulness, and effectivity (John & Srivastava, 1999) and not primarily due to their relationship and their partners' affirmation. In the present investigation, however, we would not have captured this movement, because we explicitly asked about movement in the romantic context. To gain insights into movement across different contexts, future research addressing how the Michelangelo phenomenon is embedded and enacted in other contexts (e.g., friendships, the working context) is needed.

**Unpacking the how and why: Potential underlying mechanisms.** The findings of the present study have shown that people's individual differences in neuroticism, agreeableness, and extraversion are linked to the key components of the Michelangelo phenomenon. A next step for future research will be to address the underlying mechanisms that drive these effects. We see two plausible routes.

First, in terms of mate selection (e.g., Botwin, Buss, & Shackelford, 1997; Eastwick, Finkel, & Simpson, 2019), people high in certain traits might be more apt to choose partners who will perceptually and behaviorally affirm their ideal selves. This might be particularly true for the trait extraversion, for which we found positive effects on both affirmation components: Given their tendency toward sociability (John & Srivastava, 1999), people high

in extraversion might have more opportunities to meet potential partners (e.g., by going out to social events) and could hence be more selective in their mate choice. Whether a potential mate is perceptually and behaviorally affirming in the early stages of dating and relationship formation might serve as an impetus for continued relationship development among people high in extraversion (Birnbaum & Finkel, 2015).

Second, in terms of relationship processes, previous research has shown that couple members' individual differences shape the daily life of their romantic relationship (e.g., Finn et al., 2013; Sadikaj, Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2015; Vater & Schröder-Abé, 2015). Applied to the present study, people high in certain traits might be better equipped to create a daily couple life that allows them to exchange affirmation and/or to personally grow. This might be particularly true for emotional stability, agreeableness, and extraversion, for which we found positive effects on the affirmation and/or movement components of the Michelangelo phenomenon. People with high scores on these traits have a tendency toward positive affectivity, cooperation, and sociability (John & Srivastava, 1999), which might help them create a positive and supportive environment in their daily couple life. Future research targeting both the beginning of a romantic relationship and the couple's daily processes will be equipped to answer questions on the how and why behind the associations we found between personality traits and the Michelangelo phenomenon.

### **Strengths, Limitations, and Outlook**

We see it as a strength that participants in this study were on average older and had longer relationship durations than participants in previous studies assessing the Michelangelo phenomenon (e.g., Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult, Kumashiro et al., 2009); analyzing such samples allows researchers to draw conclusions that are more generalizable across the individual and relational life span. In addition, given that romantic relationships are thought to be interdependent (e.g., Kelley et al., 1983; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003), it is a strength that the present study included couple data from long-term committed romantic partners over a

period of 4 years. This allowed us to test intra- and interpersonal effects as well as longitudinal effects. Finally, although research has investigated how individual differences in personality, such as locomotion or self-esteem (e.g., Drigotas et al., 1999; Kumashiro et al., 2007), relate to the Michelangelo phenomenon, we are not aware of any study that has looked at the most dispositional features of a person's personality—personality traits—and how they relate to people's ideal selves and the Michelangelo phenomenon's key components and outcomes.

The present study has limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, our findings rely on self-report data. This implies that it is unclear whether targets high in any of the investigated traits *elicited* less affirmation in their partner or *perceived* less affirmation from their partner, or both. To address this issue, it would be worthwhile to also include partner reports (“what do you think about your partner?”) and/or meta-reports (“what do you think your partner thinks about you?”) in future research and to link this information to the self-report measures of the target. In addition, future studies might consider including observational data, such as assessments of a person's behavior in a lab setting, or real-world data via diary studies. Measurement boost designs that collect diary data of the couple are a promising tool to provide insights into these state-level personality manifestations and their links to ideal selves and the Michelangelo phenomenon.

Second, we recruited participants from a European country, which is an advantage given that much of the research on the Michelangelo phenomenon has been conducted in the United States. However, Switzerland is also a Western and predominantly individualistic culture. In future research, it will be important to assess the degree to which our findings can be replicated in more collectivist cultures that place less emphasis on the self and more emphasis on relationships with the family and wider society (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). We think it likely that culture shapes how people conceptualize their ideal self; that is, people might pursue certain ideal selves because normative demands emphasize a given trait as a

marker of success or value. Findings of the present study therefore need to be viewed in the context of a Western sample (for further discussion, see, e.g., Tasfiliz et al., 2018).

Third, even though our data spanned a time interval of 4 years, data for the Michelangelo phenomenon stemmed from the last measurement occasion. Thus, the data did not allow for inferences regarding cause and effect within the Michelangelo phenomenon and its outcomes. This shortcoming might be compensated for by findings of previous research that support the benefits of the Michelangelo phenomenon to outcomes in both concurrent and longitudinal analyses (Rusbult et al., 2005). Nevertheless, in ongoing relationships, variables might mutually influence each other, leading to a mutual cyclical growth (Drigotas et al., 1999). Thus, future research might consider assessing the Michelangelo phenomenon at multiple measurement occasions to test for longitudinal change effects in couples.

### **Conclusion**

Personality matters for romantic relationships. In the present study, we examined questions of intra- and interpersonal personality-trait effects on the Michelangelo phenomenon: We explored the intrapersonal effects of people's personality traits on their ideal selves and examined the intra- and interpersonal effects of personality traits on the Michelangelo phenomenon's key components and outcomes. We conclude with a differential view on the Michelangelo phenomenon: First, we found that women and men mentioned attributes of all personality traits in their ideal selves but were most likely to report attributes that related to agreeableness. Personality traits were linked to the ideal-self attributes: The most consistent findings here were (1) complementarity effects among men, suggesting that male participants low in emotional stability were more likely to wish to be emotionally stable, and (2) additive effects, showing that women and men high in agreeableness were even more likely to wish to be agreeable. Second, we conclude that the target's own personality traits were linked to the Michelangelo phenomenon's own key components, most notably emotional stability, agreeableness, and extraversion. Future researchers are encouraged to investigate the

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cognitive, emotional, and behavioral state-level processes underpinning how these traits are related to the Michelangelo phenomenon in the couple's daily life.

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## Footnotes

- 1 Please note that in addition to testing personality traits as predictors of the key components and outcomes of the framework, we also tested personality traits as moderators on the main associations within the framework (i.e., partner-affirmation hypothesis, movement-toward-ideal hypothesis, well-being hypothesis). For the moderation analyses, we applied actor–partner interdependence moderation models (Garcia, Kenny, & Ledermann, 2015; see Figure S1) in that we used personality traits from Time 1 as moderators on the Michelangelo phenomenon’s associations at Time 3. We found personality traits to intra- and interpersonally moderate the associations within the Michelangelo phenomenon in the following ways.

Among women, from a total of 90 possible moderations, 7 actor effects and 3 partner effects were observed, which means that moderations emerged in 9% of the cases. In general, for women, associations tended to be more pronounced the higher women scored in extraversion and conscientiousness. However, these traits moderated only parts of the Michelangelo phenomenon. We found mixed results for a potential beneficial moderating role of women’s agreeableness and no support for a potential detrimental moderating role of neuroticism (as might have been speculated for these traits; see Hypothesis 1). Among men, from a total of 90 possible moderations, 7 actor effects and 13 partner effects emerged, which means that moderations emerged in 18% of the cases. In general, while associations were more pronounced the higher men scored in agreeableness, we also found that associations were more pronounced the lower men scored in conscientiousness and extraversion. We found no support for a potential detrimental moderating role of neuroticism (as might have been speculated for this trait; see Hypothesis 1), and only mixed results for openness. Overall, among men, we found partner effects to be more pronounced than actor effects. Future

research is needed to test the interpersonal relevance of men's traits in the associations for his partner's Michelangelo phenomenon.

So far, from the overall findings, it is reasonable to conclude that although the key components and outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon were predicted by personality traits (see Tables 3 and 4), variations in the main associations can be less clearly ascribed to individual differences in personality traits.

- 2 At the time of submission, 14 published papers have been based on data from this research project, but no study has investigated the hypotheses that are the focus of the present paper. The hypotheses for this paper were not preregistered. Please note that [first author] developed the study idea, conducted the data analyses, and wrote the paper; [second author] revised the paper and approved the final version of the paper; [third author] designed the CoDiP study, collected the data, revised the paper, and approved its final version.
- 3 We very much embrace the open-science policy: We provide a comprehensive overview of all variables assessed in the CoDiP study and our data-analysis script on the Open Science Framework (OSF). Both are accessible through the following link: [https://osf.io/bnmvr/?view\\_only=f5a923b32e074a6cb7af48f343e7935b](https://osf.io/bnmvr/?view_only=f5a923b32e074a6cb7af48f343e7935b). We are, however, not able to share the data for the following reasons: Given that relationship duration is included in the data set and given that this is a strongly identifiable variable, sharing our data might enable participants to find their own and their partner's data. This would compromise our confidentiality promise to our participants (see also Finkel, Eastwick, & Reis, 2015). Therefore, sharing data is important, but in the case of couples' data, a very delicate undertaking.
- 4 Due to statistical constraints (i.e., the statistical package to run APIM analyses in R [lavaan; Rosseel, 2012] does not, as yet, allow the user to include outcome variables at

a nominal level [as would be the case with the dichotomous ideal-self variable]), the logistic regression analyses focus on actor effects only.

- 5 We compared participants who participated across the entire study period (i.e., long-term sample) with those who were involved only at Time 3 (i.e., short-term sample). Couples from the short-term sample had a significantly shorter relationship duration ( $M = 83.28$  months vs.  $M = 371.18$  months),  $t(134) = -11.19, p < .001$ . Among women, short-term coupled participants, compared to long-term coupled participants, were significantly younger ( $M = 37.14$  years vs.  $M = 55.32$  years),  $t(82) = -5.62, p < .001$ , and had significantly lower scores in agreeableness at Time 3 ( $M = 3.73$  vs.  $M = 3.87$ ),  $t(100) = -2.04, p = .04$ , higher scores in partner perceptual affirmation ( $M = 3.56$  vs.  $M = 3.31$ ),  $t(101) = 2.17, p = .03$ , higher scores in partner behavioral affirmation ( $M = 4.01$  vs.  $M = 3.61$ ),  $t(98) = 3.35, p = .001$ , and higher scores in movement toward the ideal self ( $M = 3.56$  vs.  $M = 3.31$ ),  $t(101) = 2.17, p = .03$ . No other differences were statistically significant (all  $ps \geq .05$ ). Among men, short-term coupled participants, compared to long-term coupled participants, were significantly younger ( $M = 39.66$  years vs.  $M = 57.01$  years;  $t(86) = -5.37, p < .001$ , and had lower scores in agreeableness ( $M = 3.62$  vs.  $M = 3.82$ ),  $t(72) = -2.07, p = .04$ , lower scores in conscientiousness ( $M = 3.81$  vs.  $M = 4.00$ ),  $t(96) = -2.15, p = .03$ , and lower scores in life satisfaction ( $M = 3.93$  vs.  $M = 4.14$ ),  $t(77) = -2.03, p = .04$ . No other differences were statistically significant (all  $ps \geq .05$ ).
- 6 Given the considerable ranges in age and relationship duration, we conducted bivariate correlations between age/relationship duration and the framework's variables to check whether the analyses should be controlled for age/relationship duration (see Table 2).
- 7 We also applied McNemar tests to examine (a) differences between genders, that is, whether women and men differed in the ideal selves that they mentioned in the first, second, third, or fourth position, and (b) differences within gender, that is, whether

women and men were more likely to mention certain ideal selves at certain ideal-self positions. For (a), we found a significant difference between women and men in mentioning conscientiousness as the second ideal self, with men more likely than women to mention it in their second ideal self (20.4% vs. 5.3%;  $p < .001$ ). No other differences between women and men were statistically significant (all  $ps > .05$ ). For (b), we observed that women were more likely to mention emotional stability in the fourth compared to the second position (23.3% vs. 14.5%;  $p = .04$ ), while men were more likely to mention agreeableness in the third compared to the second position (28.0% vs. 17.7%;  $p = .04$ ) and more likely to mention conscientiousness in the second compared to the first position (20.4% vs. 11.4%;  $p = .04$ ). No other differences were statistically significant (all  $ps > .05$ ).

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations of Personality Traits, Michelangelo Phenomenon Variables, and Outcome Measures for Female and Male Couple Members*

Variable	Women		Men		Cohen's $d^a$
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Personality traits T1					
Neuroticism	2.93	0.74	2.43	0.62	<b>0.58</b>
Agreeableness	3.89	0.49	3.84	0.42	0.09
Extraversion	3.68	0.74	3.46	0.69	<b>0.23</b>
Openness to experience	3.64	0.56	3.67	0.61	0.05
Conscientiousness	4.06	0.61	3.99	0.55	0.10
Michelangelo phenomenon T3					
Partner perceptual affirmation	3.32	0.70	3.39	0.72	0.10
Partner behavioral affirmation	3.62	0.71	3.73	0.65	0.16
Movement toward the ideal self	5.05	1.05	5.06	0.94	0.03
Outcomes T3					
Relationship satisfaction	4.31	0.55	4.37	0.51	0.06
Life satisfaction	4.14	0.62	4.14	0.55	0.003

*Note.* Significant results ( $p < .05$ ) are shown in bold. T1 = Time 1, T3 = Time 3.

<sup>a</sup> *t* test for paired samples.



Table 2

*Zero-Order Correlations Between Personality Traits (Variables 1–5), Variables of the Michelangelo Phenomenon (Variables 6–8), Outcome Measures (Variables 9 and 10), and Age and Relationship Duration (Variables 11 and 12)*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1 Neuroticism	<b>.22</b>	<b>-.25</b>	-.14	.06	-.09	.04	.06	<b>-.26</b>	<b>-.29</b>	-.18	.13	.16
2 Agreeableness	<b>-.32</b>	<b>.08</b>	.12	.00	.08	.01	.01	.12	.00	.12	-.09	-.18
3 Extraversion	<b>-.32</b>	.02	<b>.12</b>	<b>.39</b>	<b>.19</b>	.13	.09	<b>.27</b>	<b>.20</b>	<b>.23</b>	-.14	<b>-.19</b>
4 Openness to experience	.02	.01	<b>.31</b>	<b>.25</b>	.17	.12	.11	.15	.07	<b>.19</b>	-.04	-.07
5 Conscientiousness	<b>-.35</b>	<b>.22</b>	<b>.29</b>	.06	<b>.27</b>	.05	-.10	.10	.08	.03	<b>.31</b>	<b>.21</b>
6 Perceptual affirmation	<b>-.23</b>	.12	<b>.20</b>	-.18	.08	<b>.46</b>	<b>.81</b>	.13	<b>.40</b>	<b>.50</b>	-.14	-.09
7 Behavioral affirmation	<b>-.26</b>	<b>.22</b>	<b>.19</b>	<b>-.22</b>	.16	<b>.74</b>	<b>.52</b>	.15	<b>.37</b>	<b>.44</b>	<b>-.19</b>	-.08
8 Movement toward ideal	-.16	<b>.29</b>	.13	.00	.11	.17	.24	<b>.34</b>	.10	<b>.22</b>	-.13	-.14
9 Life satisfaction	<b>-.35</b>	.14	<b>.31</b>	.09	<b>.19</b>	<b>.34</b>	<b>.49</b>	<b>.26</b>	<b>.31</b>	<b>.35</b>	-.05	-.04
10 Relationship satisfaction	<b>-.24</b>	<b>.28</b>	<b>.21</b>	-.08	<b>.23</b>	<b>.47</b>	<b>.69</b>	<b>.37</b>	<b>.60</b>	<b>.64</b>	-.03	.03
11 Age	-.04	.17	-.07	-.04	.12	.01	-.12	.04	-.11	-.07	<b>.85</b>	<b>.85</b>
12 Relationship duration	-.04	.16	-.11	-.16	.10	.07	-.06	.07	-.08	-.05	<b>.88</b>	–

*Note.* Correlations for women are displayed below the diagonal (in gray) and correlations for men are shown above the diagonal. The diagonal shows correlations between the two partners. Measures of personality traits stem from Time 1, while measures of the Michelangelo phenomenon and outcomes stem from Time 3. Coefficients in bold are significant ( $p < .05$ ).

Table 3

*Actor–Partner Interdependence Models Testing the Michelangelo Phenomenon in Couples*

Variable	Women						Men					
	Actor effects			Partner effects			Actor effects			Partner effects		
	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>
Partner behavioral affirmation												
PPA	<b>.68</b>	.71 [.62, .79]	<.001	<b>.15</b>	.15 [.06, .23]	.001	<b>.74</b>	.71 [.62, .79]	<.001	<b>.15</b>	.15 [.06, .23]	.001
Movement toward ideal self												
PPA	-.04	-.05 [-.25, .16]	.67	.02	.02 [-.18, .21]	.88	-.04	-.05 [-.25, .16]	.67	.02	.02 [-.18, .21]	.88
PBA	.17	.16 [-.05, .37]	.12	.10	.11 [-.10, .31]	.55	.17	.16 [-.05, .37]	.12	.10	.11 [-.10, .31]	.55
Relationship satisfaction												
PPA	-.09	-.09 [-.27, .09]	.34	.02	.02 [-.13, .18]	.78	<b>.34</b>	.31 [.09, .53]	.006	.02	.02 [-.13, .18]	.78
PBA	<b>.58</b>	.57 [.39, .76]	<.001	.11	.12 [-.05, .27]	.16	.09	.09 [-.14, .33]	.44	.11	.12 [-.05, .27]	.16
M	<b>.19</b>	.19 [.07, .31]	.03	<b>.13</b>	.14 [.04, .24]	.009	.09	.09 [-.05, .24]	.20	<b>.13</b>	.14 [.04, .24]	.009
Life satisfaction												
PPA	.07	.06 [-.10, .23]	.49	-.07	-.07 [-.23, .10]	.61	.07	.06 [-.10, .23]	.49	-.07	-.07 [-.23, .10]	.61
PBA	<b>.20</b>	.20 [.01, .38]	.03	.002	.002 [-.18, .19]	.08	<b>.20</b>	.20 [.01, .38]	.03	.002	.002 [-.18, .19]	.08
M	.01	.01 [-.11, .14]	.88	.02	.02 [-.11, .14]	.78	.01	.01 [-.11, .14]	.88	.02	.02 [-.11, .14]	.78

*Note.*  $N_{\text{couples}} = 113$ . CI = Confidence interval. PPA = Partner perceptual affirmation. PBA = Partner behavioral affirmation; M = Movement toward the ideal self. Actor effects denote intrapersonal effects within partners. Partner effects of women signify effects of a woman's predictors on her partner's outcomes. Partner effects of men signify effects of a man's predictors on his partner's outcomes. In predicting life satisfaction, we controlled for relationship satisfaction. Significant results are presented in bold ( $p < .05$ ). For predicting partner behavioral affirmation, movement toward the ideal self, and life satisfaction, we were able to set the actor and partner paths equal. For predicting relationship satisfaction, we were able to set partner effects equal.

Table 4

*Actor–Partner Interdependence Models with Personality Traits as Predictors (Time 1) of the Michelangelo Phenomenon’s Key Components (Time 3)*

Variable	Women						Men					
	Actor effects			Partner effects			Actor effects			Partner effects		
	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>
	Partner perceptual affirmation											
Neuroticism <sup>3</sup>	<b>-.23</b>	-.21 [-.36, .06]	.006	.002	.002 [-.12, .18]	.98	.05	.04 [-.13, .23]	.60	.002	.002 [-.12, .18]	.98
Agreeableness <sup>1</sup>	.07	.06 [-.07, .19]	.36	.10	.10 [-.30, .23]	.13	.07	.06 [-.07, .19]	.36	.10	.10 [-.30, .23]	.13
Extraversion <sup>1</sup>	<b>.16</b>	.15 [.03, .28]	.02	.08	.08 [-.04, .21]	.20	<b>.16</b>	.15 [.03, .28]	.02	.08	.08 [-.04, .21]	.20
Openness <sup>3</sup>	-.13	-.14 [-.32, .03]	.11	-.03	-.03 [-.17, .09]	.61	.10	.10 [-.07, .27]	.26	-.03	-.03 [-.17, .09]	.61
Conscientiousness <sup>1</sup>	.05	.05 [-.08, .18]	.46	.07	.07 [-.06, .20]	.29	.05	.05 [-.08, .18]	.46	.07	.07 [-.06, .20]	.29
	Partner behavioral affirmation											
Neuroticism <sup>3</sup>	<b>-.28</b>	-.27 [-.42, -.12]	.001	-.03	-.02 [-.15, .10]	.72	.10	.10 [-.06, .28]	.20	-.02	-.02 [-.15, .10]	.72
Agreeableness <sup>1</sup>	.11	.10 [-.02, .34]	.11	.12	.10 [-.02, .23]	.08	.12	.10 [-.02, .34]	.11	.10	.10 [-.02, .23]	.08
Extraversion <sup>1</sup>	<b>.13</b>	.14 [.01, .26]	.04	.07	.06 [-.06, .19]	.32	<b>.13</b>	.14 [.01, .26]	.04	.06	.06 [-.06, .19]	.32
Openness <sup>3</sup>	-.16	-.18 [-.35, -.001]	.05	-.04	-.04 [-.17, .09]	.53	.08	.07 [-.08, .22]	.12	-.04	-.04 [-.17, .09]	.53
Conscientiousness <sup>3</sup>	.14	.14 [-.02, .30]	.09	.06	.06 [-.07, .18]	.37	-.11	-.11 [-.28, .05]	.17	.06	.06 [-.07, .18]	.37
	Movement toward ideal self											
Neuroticism <sup>1</sup>	<b>-.17</b>	-.17 [-.30, .04]	.01	-.14	-.12 [-.25, .01]	.03	<b>-.16</b>	-.17 [-.30, .04]	.01	-.10	-.12 [-.25, .01]	.03
Agreeableness <sup>1</sup>	<b>.23</b>	.23 [.10, .36]	.001	.02	.01 [-.11, .14]	.83	<b>.22</b>	.23 [.10, .36]	.001	.01	.01 [-.11, .14]	.83
Extraversion <sup>1</sup>	<b>.19</b>	.20 [.07, .33]	.004	.06	.06 [-.08, .19]	.41	<b>.20</b>	.20 [.07, .33]	.004	.05	.06 [-.08, .19]	.41
Openness <sup>1</sup>	.08	.09 [-.04, .22]	.17	-.01	-.01 [-.15, .12]	.85	.10	.09 [-.04, .22]	.17	-.01	-.01 [-.15, .12]	.85
Conscientiousness <sup>1</sup>	.10	.10 [-.04, .24]	.15	-.01	-.01 [-.14, .13]	.89	.10	.10 [-.04, .24]	.15	-.01	-.01 [-.14, .13]	.89

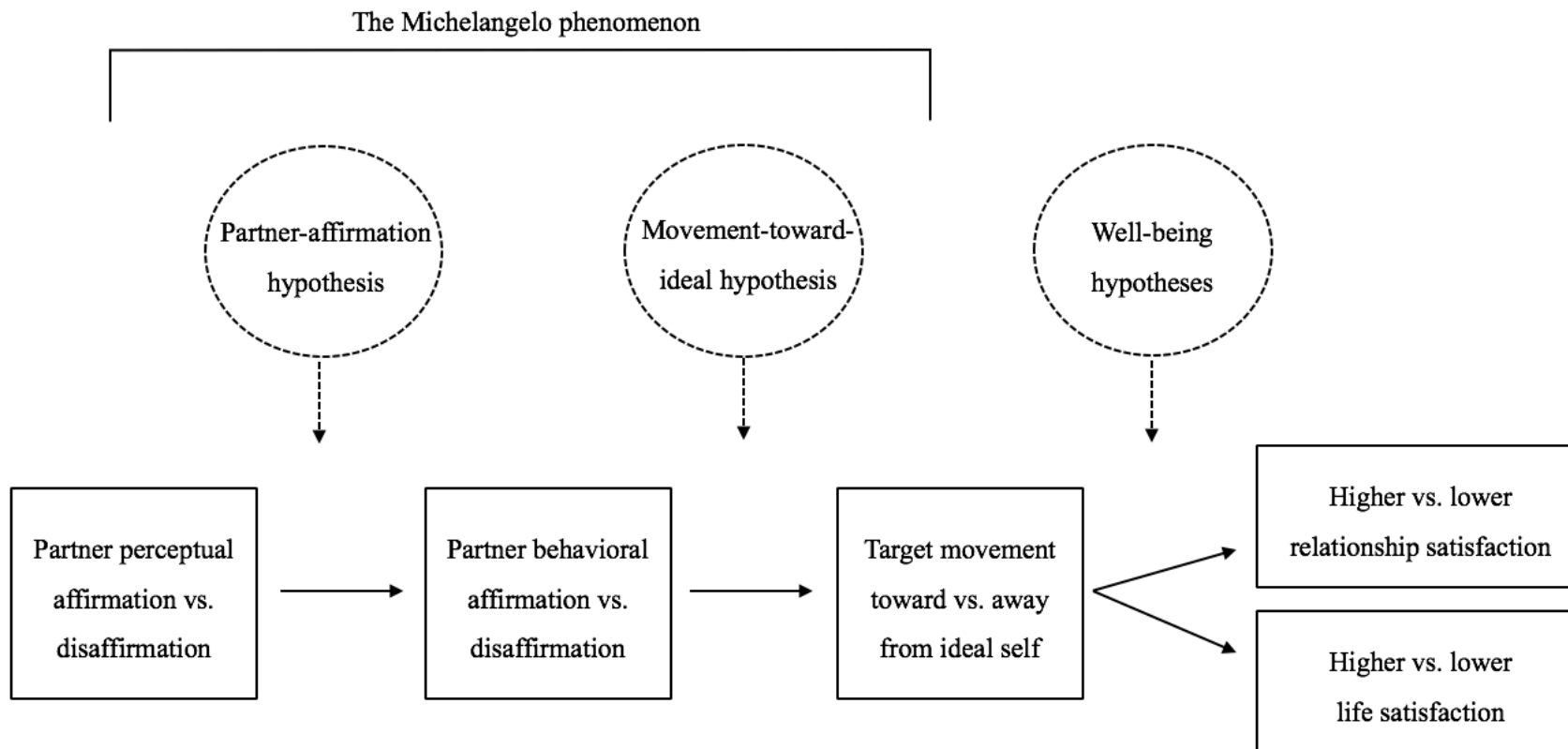
*Note.*  $N_{\text{couples}} = 113$ . CI = Confidence interval. Actor effects denote intrapersonal effects within partners. Partner effects of women signify effects of a woman’s personality traits on her partner’s relationship satisfaction, while partner effects of men signify effects of a man’s personality traits on his partner’s relationship satisfaction. Coefficients in bold are significant ( $p > .05$ ). Superscript numbers refer to the modeling approaches outlined in the Method section (see Fit indices): 1 = all paths were set equal; 2 = actor paths were set equal; 3 = partner paths were set equal; 4 = neither actor nor partner paths were set equal.

Table 5

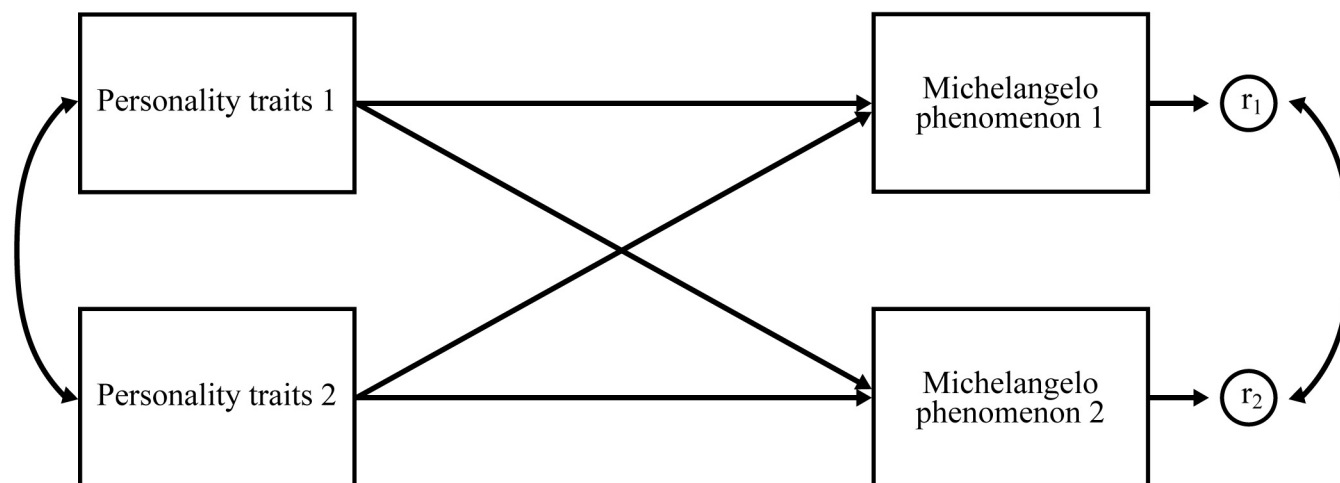
*Actor–Partner Interdependence Models with Personality Traits as Predictors (Time 1) of Relationship Satisfaction and Life Satisfaction (Time 3)*

Variable	Women						Men					
	Actor effects			Partner effects			Actor effects			Partner effects		
	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i> [95% CI]	<i>p</i>
Relationship satisfaction												
Neuroticism <sup>2</sup>	<b>-.18</b>	-.18 [-.30, -.06]	.004	-.08	-.07 [-.21, .07]	.30	<b>-.17</b>	-.18 [-.30, -.06]	.004	<b>-.27</b>	-.31 [-.48, -.14]	<.001
Agreeableness <sup>2</sup>	<b>.20</b>	.20 [.07, .32]	.002	.10	.09 [-.05, .24]	.21	<b>.19</b>	.20 [.07, .32]	.002	<b>.27</b>	.30 [.13, .47]	<.001
Extraversion <sup>1</sup>	<b>.20</b>	.20 [.08, .33]	.001	.10	.10 [-.27, .22]	.13	<b>.20</b>	.20 [.08, .33]	.001	.09	.10 [-.27, .22]	.13
Openness <sup>4</sup>	-.13	-.14 [-.35, .06]	.17	<b>-.20</b>	-.20 [-.39, .02]	.03	<b>.25</b>	.23 [.06, .40]	.01	<b>.21</b>	.21 [.02, .39]	.03
Conscientiousness <sup>3</sup>	<b>.21</b>	.21 [.06, .36]	.007	.09	.08 [-.04, .20]	.19	.002	.002 [-.16, .002]	.98	.07	.08 [-.04, .20]	.19
Life satisfaction												
Neuroticism <sup>3</sup>	<b>-.22</b>	-.22 [-.37, -.08]	<.00	.02	.02 [-.09, .12]	.72	<b>-.20</b>	-.20 [-.36, -.03]	.02	.02	.02 [-.09, .12]	.72
Agreeableness <sup>3</sup>	-.02	-.02 [-.18, .13]	.77	-.03	-.02 [-.13, .09]	.67	-.09	-.09 [-.25, .08]	.54	-.02	-.02 [-.13, .09]	.67
Extraversion <sup>3</sup>	<b>.21</b>	.21 [.07, .36]	.005	.06	.05 [-.06, .16]	.34	.11	.10 [-.06, .26]	.21	.05	.05 [-.06, .16]	.34
Openness <sup>3</sup>	<b>.15</b>	.16 [.001, .33]	.049	.009	.01 [-.11, .12]	.89	-.01	-.01 [-.16, .14]	.26	.008	.008 [-.11, .12]	.89
Conscientiousness <sup>3</sup>	.06	.06 [-.09, .14]	.43	.03	.03 [-.09, .14]	.65	.04	.04 [-.12, .20]	.36	.02	.03 [-.09, .14]	.65

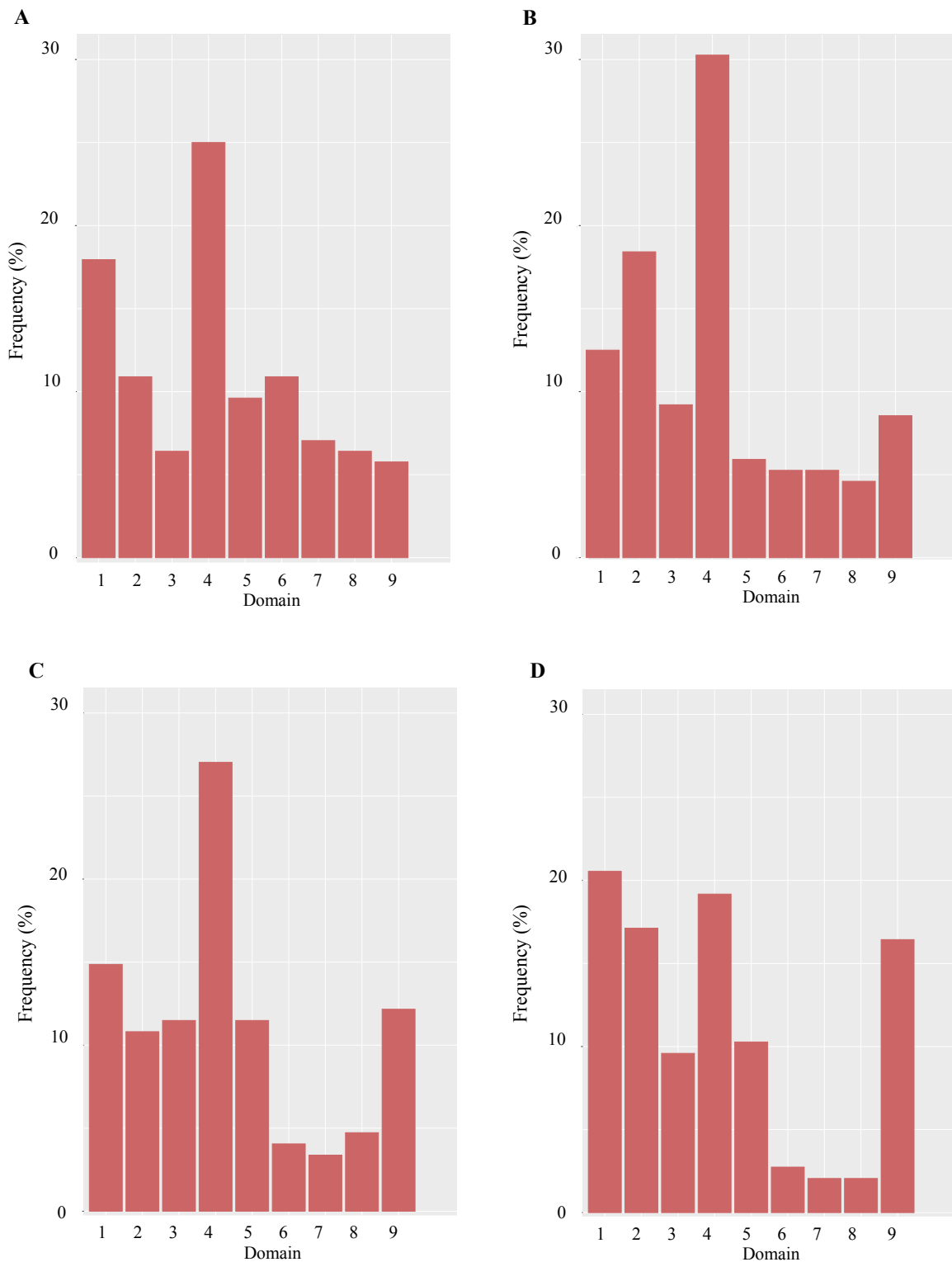
*Note.*  $N_{\text{couples}} = 113$ . CI = Confidence interval. Actor effects denote intrapersonal effects within partners. Partner effects of women signify effects of a woman's personality on her partner's relationship satisfaction, while partner effects of men signify effects of a man's personality on his partner's relationship satisfaction. In predicting life satisfaction, we controlled for relationship satisfaction. Coefficients in bold are significant ( $p > .05$ ). Superscript numbers refer to the modeling approaches outlined in the Method section (see Fit indices): 1 = all paths were set equal; 2 = actor paths were set equal; 3 = partner paths were set equal; 4 = neither actor nor partner paths were set equal.



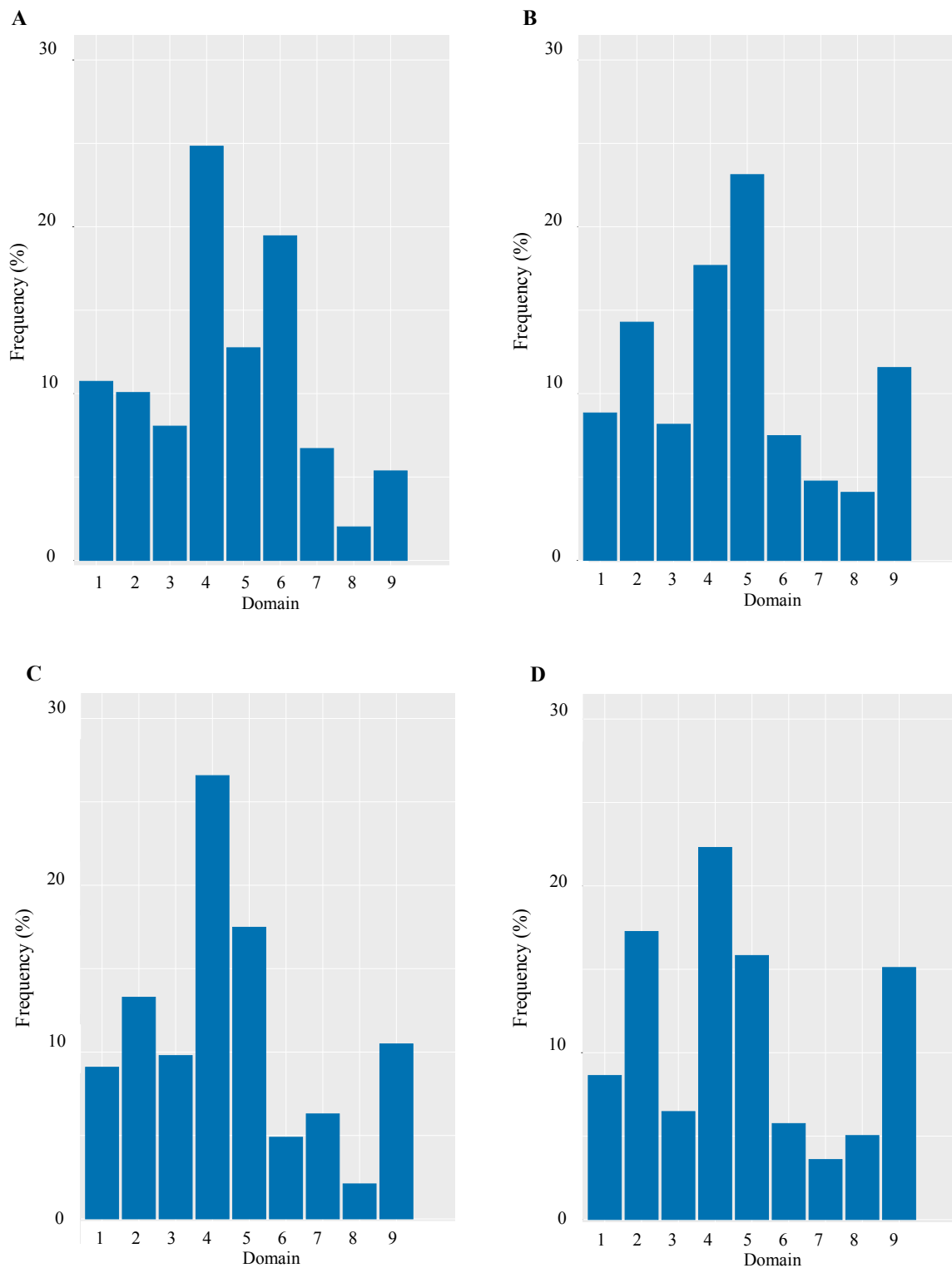
*Figure 1.* Key components, outcomes, and main associations of the Michelangelo phenomenon; based on Drigotas, 2002; Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999; Rusbult, Finkel, & Kumashiro, 2009.



*Figure 2.* Actor-partner interdependence model with personality traits as predictors of the Michelangelo phenomenon. Please note that the term Michelangelo phenomenon stands for the single components and outcomes of the Michelangelo phenomenon that will be tested in this research. Note.  $r$  = residual; 1 = female; 2 = male.



*Figure 3.* Attributes mentioned by female couple members as their first (A), second (B), third (C), and fourth (D) ideal self. Attributes were coded along personality-trait domains (i.e., 1 = emotional stability, 2 = extraversion, 3 = openness, 4 = agreeableness, and 5 = conscientiousness) and nonpersonality-trait domains (i.e., 6 = health, 7 = satisfaction, 8 = intelligence/wisdom, 9 = other). Note. The percentages within each of the four ideal selves sum up to 100%.



*Figure 4.* Attributes mentioned by male couple members as their first (A), second (B), third (C), and fourth (D) ideal self. Attributes were coded along personality-trait domains (i.e., 1= emotional stability, 2 = extraversion, 3 = openness, 4 = agreeableness, and 5 = conscientiousness) and nonpersonality-trait domains (i.e., 6 = health, 7 = satisfaction, 8 = intelligence/wisdom, 9 = other). Note. The percentages within each of the four ideal selves sum up to 100%.