Chapter 2

Regulatory Focus and the Michelangelo Phenomenon: How Close Partners Promote One Another’s Ideal Selves

People have hopes, dreams, and aspirations, or mental representations of the skills and traits that they would ideally like to acquire. Ideal self representations shape cognition, emotion, and motivation, such that people dedicate considerable effort to the goal of bringing the actual self into closer alignment with the ideal self (Higgins, 1987). Success at goal pursuit rests on diverse individual-level attributes, including insight, ability, and motivation. But such intrapersonal processes do not tell the whole story, in that people do not pursue goals in social isolation. Goal pursuit also rests on interpersonal processes, the most prominent theory of which is the Michelangelo phenomenon, a model of the process whereby interaction partners shape one another’s ideal goal pursuits (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Stocker, & Wolf, 2005).

To date, we know a good deal about individual-level elements of goal pursuit. The sizeable intrapersonal literature has examined such phenomena as the nonconscious activation of goals, goal attainment and emotional experiences, and the association of strategic inclinations with decision making and creativity (e.g., Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001; Friedman & Förster, 2001; Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997). In this tradition, regulatory focus theory highlights the distinction between promotion and prevention orientation – whether people are attuned to that which they ideally wish to become versus that which they believe they ought to become (Higgins, 1998).

Unfortunately, we know far less about the interpersonal elements of goal pursuit. The handful of extant studies has examined nonconscious mimicry, the association of significant other representations with goals and goal pursuits, and how close partners may promote versus inhibit core elements of one another’s ideals (e.g., Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003). However, the existing literature overlooks interpersonal effects involving promotion and prevention orientation. The present work examines the intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences of promotion orientation in the context of the Michelangelo model (Rusbult et al., 2005).

The Michelangelo Phenomenon

Michelangelo Buonarroti described sculpting as a process whereby the artist releases an ideal figure from the block of stone in which it slumbers (cf. Gombrich, 1995). The artist’s task is simply to chip away at the stone, allowing the ideal form to emerge. Humans, too, possess ideal forms. The human equivalent of the ideal form is the ideal self – the internal representation of the attributes that an individual would ideally like to possess (hopes, dreams, aspirations). For example, one element of Mary’s ideal self may be to publish innovative and important research. Mary may to some extent reduce the discrepancy between her actual self and her ideal self through her own actions – for example, by regularly asking herself “what makes this work important?” or by reading thought-provoking works of fiction and nonfiction.
However, Mary's pursuit of the ideal self is also shaped by interpersonal experience. The Michelangelo phenomenon describes a process whereby interaction partners sculpt one another in such a manner as to move each person closer to (vs. further from) each person's ideal self (Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult et al., 2005). This process is likely to be particularly powerful in close relationships, in that interdependence creates a basis for powerful reciprocal influence across diverse behavioral domains. As such, close partners shape one another over the course of extended interaction – over time, the behaviors that begin as interaction-specific adaptations become embodied in relatively stable skills, traits, and behavioral tendencies (Kelly, 1983).

Partner affirmation describes the extent to which a partner elicits key elements of the target's ideal self. For example, John may affirm Mary's ideal self by rewarding specific ideal-relevant behaviors (e.g., praising her most original ideas), by creating situations that elicit ideal congruent behaviors (e.g., suggesting a sabbatical in an inspirational locale), or by enacting ideal-congruent behaviors that Mary may imitate (e.g., carrying out creative work, earning an innovation grant). In turn, partner affirmation yields target movement toward the ideal self: As a result of adjusting to John's behavior, Mary increasingly achieves key aspects of her ideal self. To the extent that this process is successful – that is, John affirms Mary and Mary moves toward her ideal self – personal well-being and couple well-being are enhanced (Rusbult et al., 2005).

Targets differ in the extent to which they elicit partner affirmation and achieve movement toward the ideal self, and partners differ in the extent to which they affirm the target's ideals. For example, targets with greater locomotion focus are easier to sculpt, and partners with greater locomotion focus exhibit superior affirmation-relevant insight, ability, and motivation (Kumashiro, Rusbult, Finkenauer, & Stocker, 2007). Also, partners are more affirming to the extent that they are more strongly committed to the target, possess key elements of the target's ideal self, and sculpt toward the target's ideals rather than their own ideals (Rusbult, Kumashiro, Kubacka, & Finkel, 2009; Rusbult et al., 2005; Rusbult, Reis, & Kumashiro, 2009).

**Regulatory Orientations and Regulatory Congruence**

How might concepts from the intrapersonal literature regarding goal pursuit illuminate our understanding of the Michelangelo process? Self-discrepancy theory distinguishes between two types of desired end state (Higgins, 1987). As noted earlier, the ideal self is the internal representation of the attributes that an individual would ideally like to possess (hopes, dreams, aspirations). In contrast, the ought self is the representation of the attributes that an individual believes that he or she ought to possess (duties, obligations, responsibilities). Two types of self-regulatory system are associated with these self representations (Higgins, 1998). Promotion orientation relates to dreams
and aspirations, and entails concern with the presence versus absence of positive outcomes. Prevention orientation relates to duties and responsibilities, and entails concern with the presence versus absence of negative outcomes. The accessibility of a given self-regulatory system may vary chronically (e.g., some people are routinely more promotion oriented) or momentarily (e.g., some situational cues activate promotion orientation).

Promotion orientation focuses attention on positive outcomes, and should therefore enhance ideal self goals; prevention orientation focuses attention on negative outcomes, and should therefore enhance ought self goals. When people experience congruence between their predominant regulatory orientation and their self-goals, their goal pursuit should be facilitated. For example, if Mary is promotion oriented, she will experience congruence when she pursues aspects of her ideal self, such as engaging in innovative scientific activities – she will be highly motivated about what she is doing, she will enjoy goal-pursuit activities, and she will be more likely to succeed. We define goal regulatory congruence as the match between people’s regulatory orientation and the correspondent self-goals. This concept is similar to the one of regulatory fit, which is experienced when there is a match between people’s regulatory orientation and the manner, or strategy, with which they pursue a goal (Higgins, 2000). Research has shown that when people experience regulatory fit, they experience stronger engagement and motivation in goal pursuit ( Förster, Higgins, & Idson, 1998), they perform better (Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998), they enjoy the goal pursuit more (Freitas & Higgins, 2002), and they value their goals more (Higgins, Idson, Freitas, Spiegel, & Molden, 2003). Extending these findings, we predict that goal regulatory congruence should lead to similar motivational benefits for people’s goal pursuit (e.g., increased motivation).

**Promotion Orientation and the Michelangelo Phenomenon**

According to the person-situation interaction literature, individual differences interact with the social environment in several ways. Individual dispositions influence the type of situations individuals seek, they cause people to (unintentionally) elicit certain responses from the social environment, and they lead people to consciously manipulate situations (Buss, 1987). Our model of goal pursuit combines principles from the intrapersonal and interpersonal literatures, identifying four ways in which people’s dispositional promotion orientation may affect an interpersonal situation, such as the Michelangelo phenomenon. Figure 2.1 displays key elements of our model. We also address the motivational, cognitive, and behavioral mechanisms by which such effects come about, and outline the role that prevention orientation may play in this process.

**Intrapersonal consequences.** First, we consider the implications of target-goal regulatory congruence, or congruence between the target’s regulatory orientation and the target’s goal. By definition, movement toward the ideal self is a promotion goal.
Thus, Mary should benefit from target-goal regulatory congruence to the extent that she is promotion oriented – highly sensitive to the presence versus absence of positive outcomes, and therefore highly attuned to her hopes, dreams, and aspirations. To the extent that Mary is promotion oriented, she should eagerly pursue her ideal self goals – she should experience strong motivation, develop good strategies for goal pursuit, and exhibit persistence. Thus, target promotion orientation should promote target movement toward the ideal self, independent of interpersonal influence by the partner.

**Figure 2.1.** Target and partner regulatory orientation, partner affirmation, and target movement toward the ideal self.

**Intrapersonal Consequences**

- Target Promotion Orientation
- Target Prevention Orientation

**Interpersonal Consequences**

- Partner Affirmation
- Target Movement Toward Ideal

**Interpersonal consequences.** However, given that pursuit of the ideal self is not wholly intrapersonal, we anticipated a second consequence of target-goal regulatory congruence. To the extent that Mary is promotion oriented, she should be skilled at communicating her ideal self goals to John, exhibit receptivity to any useful suggestions that he might proffer, and effectively elicit his support and assistance. Mary may also be particularly sensitive to detecting John’s acts of affirmation, and may thereby perceive him as highly affirming. Such tendencies should maximize the odds that promotion oriented targets elicit affirmation from their partners.

We also examine the interpersonal implications of **partner-goal regulatory congruence**, or congruence between the partner’s regulatory orientation and the target’s
goal. To the extent that John is promotion oriented, he should be particularly attentive to Mary’s hopes, dreams, and aspirations, and should therefore express interest in her ideal self goals, identify good strategies by which she might achieve her goals, and provide effective assistance. Such tendencies should maximize the odds that promotion oriented partners exhibit effective partner affirmation.

In addition, we anticipated a higher-order type of congruence – interpersonal regulatory match, or a match between the target’s orientation, the partner’s orientation, and the target’s goal. To the extent that both Mary and John are promotion oriented, they should work in harmony toward ideal self goals – they should frame goals similarly, embrace similar values about what is important, and conceive of compatible strategies for achieving goals. Thus, when both the target and the partner are promotion oriented, partners should exhibit greater affirmation and targets should exhibit greater movement toward the ideal self. These benefits should be evident beyond that which is attributable to each individual’s promotion orientation. Thus, people are influenced not only by the main effect of each person’s promotion orientation, but also by the similarity of the two partners’ promotion orientations.

**Mediating mechanisms.** Congruence between target’s regulatory orientation and target’s self-goal should yield diverse motivational consequences that, in turn, promote partner affirmation and target movement toward the ideal self. We suggest that this type of regulatory congruence should promote several target-based mechanisms, including greater target motivation to achieve ideals, increased goal importance, superior strategies for achieving ideal goals, greater feelings of efficacy, and greater receptivity to partner affirmation. From an intrapersonal point of view, these mechanisms should promote target movement toward the ideal self. Similarly to the regulatory fit phenomenon, to the extent that Mary is promotion oriented, she should be highly motivated to pursue ideal self goals. During the course of her life, she probably devoted much time pursuing ideal self goals and developed good strategies to successfully achieve these goals. Therefore, Mary should have good insights in how to achieve ideal self goals and she should feel confident about her abilities to achieve these goals. This, in turn, should translate in her successfully moving toward her more recent ideal self goals. From an interpersonal point of view, target-based mechanisms should also facilitate partner affirmation. To the extent that Mary is promotion oriented, and therefore, highly motivated and confident about her ideal self goals, she should be eager to receive assistance for the pursuit of her goals. She should be highly receptive to John’s affirmation, open to listen to his suggestions and seek his assistance. Furthermore, through self-fulfilling prophecy processes Mary should expect affirmation from John and elicit this type of behavior (Darley & Fazio, 1980; Harris & Rosenthal, 1985).

Congruence between the partner’s regulatory orientation and the target’s goal should also yield diverse motivational consequences that, in turn, promote partner
affirmation and target movement toward the ideal self. We suggest that this type of regulatory congruence should promote several partner-based mechanisms, including greater motivation to promote the target’s ideals, tendencies to challenge the target to achieve his or her ideals, greater clarification of the target’s ideals, superior strategies for promoting the target’s ideals, more active assistance of the target, and greater responsiveness to the target’s ideal pursuit activities. To the extent that John is promotion oriented, he should be more motivated to see Mary moving toward her ideal self. He should be more willing to support and facilitate her goal pursuit. Thanks to his personal history of promotion orientation, he should also be more familiar with the pursuit of ideal self goals, have greater insight on how to achieve them, and be able to transfer this knowledge to Mary. Finally, John should be more likely to be responsive when Mary communicates her goal (pursuit). He should convey understanding, validation, and care for her needs and wishes (Reis & Shaver, 1988), and in turn, Mary should feel accepted and encouraged to pursue her ideal self goals.

Prevention orientation. What role might prevention orientation play in this process? Promotion and prevention are conceptualized as independent constructs, not as opposing motivational forces (Higgins, 1998). Thus, a given individual may be characterized by strong promotion orientation, strong prevention orientation, or both, suggesting that prevention orientation may be irrelevant to the Michelangelo phenomenon. At the same time, to the extent that people with strong prevention orientation are preoccupied with the ought self, they may dedicate less time and energy to pursuit of the ideal self. Indeed, the presence of alternative goals may undermine commitment to a focal goal by serving as a tempting diversion, and thereby drain resources from the focal goal (Shah, Kruglanski, & Friedman, 2002). Therefore, we anticipated that target and partner prevention orientation would be either irrelevant to or weakly negatively associated with partner affirmation and target movement toward the ideal self.

Hypothesis and Research Overview

The present work extends previous research regarding individual-level goal pursuit by identifying both the intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences of regulatory congruence. Our model predicts four ways in which promotion orientation may affect the Michelangelo process (see Figure 2.1). In short, given that the Michelangelo phenomenon concerns pursuit of the ideal self, target promotion orientation and partner promotion orientation should facilitate this process, in that promotion regulatory orientation is congruent with the character of the goal at hand.

Due to target-goal regulatory congruence, we anticipated that: (a) to the extent that targets are promotion oriented, they will enjoy greater movement toward the ideal self (Hypothesis 1); and (b) to the extent that targets are promotion oriented, they will elicit greater affirmation from their partners (Hypothesis 2). Due to partner-goal
regulatory congruence, we anticipated that: (c) to the extent that partners are promotion oriented, they will exhibit greater partner affirmation (Hypothesis 3). And due to interpersonal regulatory match, we anticipated that: (d) to the extent that both target and partner are promotion oriented, partners will exhibit greater affirmation and targets will experience greater movement toward the ideal self (Hypothesis 4). In parallel manner, we anticipated that target and partner prevention orientation would be either irrelevant to or weakly negatively associated with partner affirmation and target movement toward ideal.

Our model also implies specific patterns of mediation: We should find that: (e) partner affirmation partially mediates the associations of target and partner promotion orientation with target movement toward the ideal self (Hypothesis 5); (f) the predicted associations with target promotion orientation will be mediated by target-based motivational, cognitive, and behavioral mechanisms (e.g., strategies, efficacy, receptivity to affirmation; Hypothesis 6); and (g) the predicted associations with partner promotion orientation will be mediated by partner-based mechanisms (e.g., partner clarification, strategies, assistance; Hypothesis 7).

We also sought to ensure that our findings are not attributable to alternative constructs with which promotion orientation might be associated. For example, if individuals who are promotion oriented also exhibit approach tendencies – tendencies to orient themselves toward positive objects, events, or opportunities – it will be important to demonstrate that the observed associations of promotion with model variables are not attributable to approach, operationally defined in terms of behavioral activation (i.e., hope and approach; Carver & White, 1994; Shah, at al., 1998). And for example, if individuals who are promotion oriented also exhibit locomotion focus – the inclination to proceed with sustained dedication from one goal state to another – it will be important to demonstrate that the observed associations with promotion are not attributable to the confounding of promotion with locomotion (Kruglanski et al., 2000). Thus, in auxiliary analyses we controlled for possible associations with behavioral inhibition and activation, assessment and locomotion focus, and socially desirable response tendencies (Carver & White, 1994; Kruglanski et al., 2000; Paulhus, 1984). Finally, to ensure that our findings were not affected by relationship variables, we also controlled for commitment (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998) and relationship length.

To test our hypotheses, we employed data from three research occasions of a five-wave longitudinal study concerned with goal pursuits in the context of ongoing close relationships. We analyzed the associations among model variables using data obtained using four complementary and challenging measurement methods: (a) participants’ self-reports of their own and the partner’s everyday behaviors (Times 1, 3, and 5 of the project); (b) data from an eight-day daily diary procedure during which participants provided measures of each construct in situ, in the context of their everyday lives (Time 3); (c) participants’ ratings of their own and the partner’s behavior during
conversations regarding each person’s ideal goal pursuits (Time 1); and (d) trained coders’ ratings of target and partner behavior during conversations regarding each person’s ideal goal pursuits (Time 1).

Method

Participants

Participants were couples who took part in research activities at Times 1, 3, and 5 of a five-wave longitudinal study. At Time 1, 187 couples took part in the project (183 heterosexual couples, 4 lesbian couples). At Time 1 participants were 26.47 years old, on average; most couples dated steadily or were engaged or married (25% dating steadily, 29% engaged, 38% married, 8% other), and most lived together (84%). On average participants had been involved with their partners for 37.58 months ($SD = 24.55$). At Time 3, 138 of the original couples participated in project activities, and at Time 5, 96 couples participated. Longitudinal studies are often affected by attrition, the loss of participants between two different times of data collection (Cook & Campbell 1979). In our sample, we experienced a loss of 91 couples between Time 1 and Time 5. This rate is comparable to other longitudinal studies with data collection at multiple time points (e.g., Haugen, Welsh, & McNulty, 2008; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Neff & Karney, 2009). To assess whether the couples who had dropped out by Time 5 differed from the couples who remained in our study, we performed attrition analyses. At Time 1, couples that persisted until Time 5 had a longer relationship duration ($M = 41.04$, $SD = 24.11$), were more promotion oriented ($M = 6.44.04$, $SD = 1.00$) and less prevention oriented ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.35$) than couples that dropped out ($M = 33.86$, $SD = 24.53$, $M = 6.19$, $SD = 1.22$, and $M = 3.56$, $SD = 1.33$, respectively), $t(183) = 2.13$, $p < .05$, $t(185) = 2.01$, $p < .05$, and $t(185) = - 2.30$, $p < .05$. However, couples that persisted until Time 5 and couples that dropped out before did not differ in age, education, income, and commitment ($ts$ ranged from 1.11 to 1.47, $ps$ ranged from .27 to .14).

Procedure

Participants were recruited via announcements posted in the Chapel Hill, NC community. The requirement for participation was that couples be “newly committed” – at the beginning of the study, couples had begun living with one another, become engaged, or married one another within the previous year, or planned to do so during the coming year. Participants took part in project activities once every six months, such that Times 1, 3, and 5 were separated by one-year intervals. Prior to each research occasion, participants were mailed questionnaires that they were asked to complete in advance and return to us during their laboratory session. At Times 1 and 5, partners completed additional questionnaires and engaged in a videotaped conversation about each person’s pursuit of his or her ideal self. At Time 3, partners completed additional questionnaires
and received materials relevant to a daily diary procedure that they completed over the course of the following eight days. At the end of each session, participants were partially debriefed, paid, and thanked for their assistance. Couples were paid $80 for participating in Time 1 activities, $120 for Time 3 activities, and $110 for Time 5 activities.

**Target- and Partner-Report Questionnaire Measures**

Participants completed questionnaires prior to or during Time 1, 3, and 5 laboratory sessions. We measured regulatory orientation using the Lockwood, Jordan, and Kunda (2002) scale (18 items; e.g., for promotion, “Overall, I am more oriented toward achieving success than preventing failure,” and for prevention, “I am more oriented toward preventing losses than I am toward achieving gains”; 0 = do not agree at all, 8 = agree completely; Time 1, 3, and 5 αs = .88, .88, and .88 for promotion, and .80, .85, and .84 for prevention). We measured partner affirmation of target using a modified, three-item version of the Drigotas et al. (1999) scale (e.g., “I behave in ways that help my partner become who he/she most wants to be”; 0 = do not agree at all, 8 = agree completely; Time 1, 3, and 5 αs = .88, .91, and .92), and measured perceived partner affirmation of target using parallel items worded so as to describe the partner’s behavior toward the target (e.g., “My partner behaves in ways that help me become who I most want to be”; Time 1, 3, and 5 αs = .84, .88, and .91). We measured target movement toward ideal by asking participants to think about their ideal selves – “your goals, dreams, and aspirations, or the person you ideally would like to be” – and to identify the six most important components of their ideals. We specified that they should describe the person that they ideally would like to be, and not the person that they thought they “ought” to be (e.g., based on friends’, parents’, or society’s standards). Participants identified diverse aspects of their ideal selves, including professional goals, interpersonal goals, or personal dispositions or skills that they wished to acquire. Later, they rated the extent to which they had moved closer to achieving each goal over the past six months. Given that the top three goals are the most significant components of a target’s ideal self, we employed movement ratings for the top three goals as a measure of target movement toward ideal (−4 = I have moved further from achieving this goal, 0 = I have not changed, +4 = I have moved closer to achieving this goal; Time 1, 3, and 5 αs = .51, .50, and .31). We measured perceived target movement toward ideal using a parallel procedure whereby each person rated movement over the past six months for the top three goals identified by the partner (−4 = partner has moved further from achieving this goal, 0 = partner has not changed, +4 = partner has moved closer to achieving this goal; Time 1, 3, and 5 αs = .52, .44, and .46). We developed a single measure of each construct at each research occasion by averaging the items designed to tap each model variable.

At Times 3 and 5, participants also completed questionnaires relevant to understanding the mechanisms by which their own and the partner’s regulatory
orientation might promote partner affirmation and target movement toward ideal. We examined 11 mechanisms, five of which were target mechanisms (i.e., ways in which targets might elicit affirmation or directly achieve movement), and six of which were partner mechanisms (i.e., ways in which the partner might affirm). Participants described their own and the partner’s behavior from the point of view of the target, describing target behavior as they perceived themselves, and describing perceived partner behavior as they perceived the partner. The five target mechanisms were: *motivation to achieve ideal self* (3 items; e.g., “I am strongly motivated to achieve my personal goals”; unless otherwise indicated, for all items, 0 = *do not agree at all*, 8 = *agree completely*; Time 3 and 5 αs = .83 and .85), *increasing importance of ideal goals* (a 1-item rating for each of the top three goals; -4 = *this goal has become much less important to me*, 0 = *importance has not changed*, +4 = *this goal has become much more important to me*; Time 3 and 5 αs = .55 and .56), *strategies for achieving ideal goals* (3 items; e.g., “I am good at developing strategies to use in achieving my goals”; Time 3 and 5 αs = .65 and .69), *goal likelihood/efficacy* (a 1-item rating for each of the top three goals; “How likely is it that you will achieve this goal within the next five to ten years?” 0 = *not at all likely*, 8 = *extremely likely*; Time 3 and 5 αs = .57 and .57), and *receptivity to partner affirmation* (2 items; e.g., “I welcome my partner’s support of my pursuit of this goal”; Time 3 and 5 αs = .74 and .77). The six partner mechanisms were: *motivation to promote target’s ideals* (3 items; e.g., “My partner dedicates a lot of thought and effort to helping me achieve my goals”; Time 3 and 5 αs = .88 and .90), *challenge of target to achieve ideals* (3 items; e.g., “My partner challenges me to become my ideal self”; Time 3 and 5 αs = .72 and .79), *clarification of target ideals* (3 items; e.g., “My partner helps me gain a clearer understanding of the type of person I ideally would like to become”; Time 3 and 5 αs = .73 and .76), *strategies for promoting target’s ideals* (3 items; e.g., “My partner is good at developing strategies I can use to achieve my goals”; Time 3 and 5 αs = .84 and .84), *assistance in target’s goal pursuits* (3 items; e.g., “My partner joins with me in my attempts to accomplish my goals”; Time 3 and 5 αs = .85 and .84), and *responsiveness to target’s goal pursuits* (3 items; e.g., “My partner understands why I care about my goals”; Time 3 and 5 αs = .82 and .79).

At Times 1, 3, and 5 we measured *socially desirable response tendencies* using a 20-item version of Paulhus’ (1984) scale (e.g., for self deception, “I never regret my decisions,” and for impression management, “I never take things that don’t belong to me”; for all items, 0 = *do not agree at all*, 8 = *agree completely*; Time 1, 3, and 5 αs = .65, .70, and .69 for self-deception, and .69, .70, and .69 for impression management). At Time 4 we measured *behavioral inhibition* and *behavioral activation* using the Carver and White (1994) scale (18 items; e.g., for BIS, “If I think something unpleasant is going to happen, I usually get pretty ‘worked up,’” for BAS reward responsiveness, “When I get something I want, I feel excited and energized,” for BAS drive, “When I want something, I usually go all-out to get it,” and for BAS fun seeking, “I will often do
things for no other reason that they might be fun”; respective αs = .76, .76, .86, and .74). And at Time 5 we measured assessment and locomotion orientation using the Kruglanski et al. (2000) scale (26 items; e.g., for assessment, “I often critique work done by myself or others,” and for locomotion, “I am a ‘doer’”; respective αs = .76 and .85). At Times 1, 3, and 5 we measured commitment using the Rusbult et al. (1998) scale (e.g., “I will do everything I can to make our relationship last for the rest of our lives”; Time 1, 3, and 5 αs = .87, .90, and .88). Finally, at Time 1 we assessed length of relationship in months (1 item; “For how long have you been romantically involved with your partner?”).

**Daily Diary Records**

We also measured model variables in the context of partners’ everyday interactions with one another, asking participants to complete a record at the end of each day for a period of eight days following their Time 3 laboratory sessions. We asked participants not to speak with one another about their records. Each daily diary record inquired about the events that transpired during that day, with particular attention to their goal pursuit activities. Over the course of the eight days, participants engaged in goal pursuit activities regarding diverse aspects of their ideal selves, including professional or educational goals, interpersonal goals, or dispositions and skills that they hoped to acquire. In each record, participants described events that transpired during that day, reporting on partner affirmation of target (8 items; e.g., “I motivated my partner to improve himself/herself, achieve his/her goals”; for all daily diary items, 1 = do not agree at all, 5 = agree completely; across days, α = .95), perceived partner affirmation of target (8 items; e.g., “My partner motivated me to improve myself, achieve my goals”; across days, α = .94), target movement toward ideal (3 items; e.g., “I feel close to attaining my goals”; across days, α = .80), and perceived target movement toward ideal (3 items; e.g., “My partner feels close to attaining his/her goals”; across days, α = .80). Participants returned diary records following Days 4 and 8. At the end of the eight-day period, participants completed an exit questionnaire that inquired about the validity of their daily diary records; participants described their records as moderately to high timely, accurate, and representative. We developed a single measure of each construct by averaging the items designed to tap each model variable across all eight days of the procedure.

**Ideal-Relevant Interactions**

At Time 1 of the project, we also measured target and partner behavior during ideal-relevant interactions.¹ We asked couples to engage in two conversations – one conversation about a component of each person’s ideal self. We selected interaction topics from participant’s descriptions of their top three ideals, identifying a component of each person’s ideal self (a) that was important to the participant, (b) that was not yet
achieved yet was likely to be achieved during the next five to 10 years, and (c) that the participant was willing to discuss. As noted earlier, partners discussed diverse aspects of their ideal selves, including professional goals, interpersonal goals, or dispositions or skills that they hoped to acquire. Following a two-minute warm-up interaction during which they discussed the events of the previous day, we explained that we had randomly determined which person’s topic would be addressed first, and read that person’s ideal description aloud. We noted that the two might talk about such issues as how the ideal might be achieved, whether there were obstacles to achieving it, and what the implications of achieving it might be for other parts of their lives. Partners then discussed the ideal for six minutes. Following this conversation, participants engaged in a second conversation regarding the component of the ideal self that we had selected for the other person.

**Participant-ratings of interaction behaviors.** To obtain participant-ratings of target and partner behaviors during ideal-relevant interactions, following the two conversations, partners were seated in separate rooms, each facing a monitor on which the videotaped interactions were replayed. The experimenter stopped the video replay at the end of each two-minute segment, and participants completed rating scales regarding that segment of the conversation. For conversations in which each person was target (i.e., partners discussed that person’s own ideal), participants rated *perceived partner affirmation of target* (1 item; “My partner said and did things that helped me move closer to my goal”; for all interaction ratings, 0 = do not agree at all, 8 = agree completely; across segments, $\alpha = .89$) and *perceived partner motivation of target* (1 item; “My partner challenged and motivated me to work toward my goal”; across segments, $\alpha = .90$). After rating all three segments, participants also rated *target movement toward ideal* (3 items; e.g. “I moved closer to attaining my goal; $\alpha = .90$). For conversations in which each person was partner (i.e., partners discussed the other person’s ideal), participants provided parallel ratings of *partner affirmation of target* (across segments, $\alpha = .81$), *partner motivation of target* (across segments, $\alpha = .86$), and *perceived target movement toward ideal* ($\alpha = .93$). For each conversation, we developed a single measure of each construct by averaging ratings of target and partner behaviors across the three segments of the conversation.

**Coder-ratings of interaction behaviors.** We also developed a coding scheme for use in rating behavior during the two interactions, asking two trained coders to independently rate target and partner behaviors during each two-minute segment of each conversation. In assessing target and partner behavior in each conversation, for each two-minute segment, coders rated diverse and specific partner behaviors (e.g., helped target frame goal, offered assistance, communicated disinterest) and target behaviors (e.g., expressed determination, exhibited flexibility about goal, exhibited inability to deal with complexities of goal pursuits). After rating each two-minute segment, coders made a series of global judgments, rating *positive partner instrumental behavior* (1
item; “Partner exhibited positive instrumental behavior toward target’s goal”; for all coder ratings, 1 = not at all true, 5 = clearly true; across coders, α = .84), negative partner instrumental behavior (1 item; “Partner exhibited negative instrumental behavior toward target’s goal”; across coders, α = .86), positive target behavior toward goals (1 item; “Target exhibited positive behavior regarding goal and goal attainment”; across coders, α = .95), and negative target behavior toward goals (1 item; “Target exhibited negative behavior regarding goal and goal attainment; across coders, α = .90).

For each conversation, we developed a single measure of each construct by averaging the two coders’ ratings of target and partner behavior across the three segments of the conversation.

Results

Analysis Strategy

The data provided by a given participant on multiple research occasions are nonindependent, as are data from the two partners in a given relationship; in like manner, the data from the two ideal-relevant interactions are nonindependent. Accordingly, we analyzed our data using hierarchical linear modeling (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). This technique accounts for the nonindependence of observations by simultaneously examining variance associated with each level of nesting, thereby providing unbiased hypothesis tests. Our analyses were of the following form: (a) target and partner self-report questionnaire measures – data obtained at Times 1, 3, and 5 were nested within participants, and data from the two partners in a given relationship were nested within couple; (b) target and partner daily diary measures – data from the two partners in a relationship were nested within couple; and (c) target, partner, and coder ratings of interaction behaviors – data from the two conversations were nested within participants, and data from the two partners in a relationship were nested within couple. Following recommended procedures for couples research, we represented intercept terms as random effects and represented slope terms as fixed effects (Kenny, Mannetti, Pierro, Livi, & Kashy, 2002).

In order to examine the unique variance attributable to each predictor variable, we performed key analyses as multiple-predictor models, regressing each criterion simultaneously onto all four predictors – target promotion, target prevention, partner promotion, and partner prevention. Indeed, although preliminary within-participant analyses revealed that promotion orientation and prevention orientation are independent (β = -.04, p = .26), across-partner analyses revealed significant associations between partners’ orientations – target promotion orientation is positively associated with partner promotion orientation (β = .12, p < .01), and target prevention orientation is positively associated with partner prevention orientation (β = .19, p < .01).
The analyses reported below not only: (a) test key predictions using data obtained via four complementary measurement methods – self-report questionnaires, daily diary records, target and partner interaction ratings, and coder interaction ratings; but also (b) test key predictions using criteria as reported by both the target and the partner – partner affirmation of target as reported by both the target (perceived partner affirmation) and the partner (partner affirmation) as well as target movement toward ideal as reported by both the target (target movement) and the partner (perceived target movement). Thus, these are challenging tests, not only in that they (a) rest on diverse measurement methods as reported by both target and partner, but also in that (b) they examine variance uniquely attributable to each of four regulatory orientations (i.e., controlling for the other three predictors), and (c) half of the associations that we examine are across-partner effects (e.g., target-reported criterion, partner-reported regulatory orientation).

We performed preliminary analyses to explore possible moderation by participant sex, performing the Table 2.1 analyses including main effects and interactions for sex. These analyses revealed very few sex effects – out of 90 possible main effects or interactions involving participant sex, only eight effects were even marginal. Given that very few associations were significantly moderated by participant sex, and given that these effects were quite inconsistent across predictors and criteria, we dropped participant sex from the analyses. Consequently, we treated dyad members as if they were indistinguishable. This means that when describing the effects of target variables we considered both members in the couple as a target (having the role of the target in our model) and when describing the effects of partner variables we considered both members in the couple as a partner (having the role of the partner in our model) (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006).

**Testing Key Model Predictions**

Hypothesis 1 predicted that due to target-goal regulatory congruence, to the extent that targets are promotion oriented, they would experience greater movement toward the ideal self. To test this prediction, we regressed measures of target movement toward ideal (as reported by the target, using self-report questionnaires, daily diaries, and participant-ratings of interaction behaviors; see Table 2.1), perceived target movement toward ideal (as reported by the partner, using parallel measure methods), and target behavior toward target goals (positive and negative target behaviors during interaction, as rated by coders) simultaneously onto target and partner promotion and prevention orientation. Indeed, target promotion orientation, as reported by both members of the couple, regardless of their gender, is significantly positively associated with indices of target movement toward ideal for self-report questionnaire criteria (see Table 2.1, $\beta$s = .13 and .12, both $p$s < .01), daily diary criteria ($\beta$s = .50 and .31, both $p$s < .01), target-ratings of target interaction behaviors ($\beta$ = .26, $p$ < .01 for target ratings; $\beta$
= .07, p = .19 for partner ratings), and coder-ratings of positive and negative target interaction behaviors (βs = .12 and - .10, both ps < .05). Thus, our analyses revealed very good support for Hypothesis 1, in both within-participant and across-partner analyses (7 of 8 effects) – target-goal regulatory congruence yields positive intrapersonal consequences, as revealed using diverse indices of target movement toward the ideal self. Our analyses also revealed that indices of target movement are significantly or marginally associated with target prevention orientation (5 of 8 negative effects; see Table 2.1).

Hypothesis 2 predicted that due to target-goal regulatory congruence, to the extent that targets are promotion oriented, they would elicit greater partner affirmation. To test this prediction, we regressed measures of perceived partner affirmation of target (as reported by the target, using self-report questionnaires, daily diaries, and participant-ratings of interaction behaviors; see Table 2.1), partner affirmation (as reported by the partner, using parallel measurement methods), perceived partner motivation of target and partner motivation of target (additional participant interaction ratings), and partner instrumental behavior toward target (coder-ratings of positive and negative partner interaction behaviors) simultaneously onto target and partner promotion and prevention orientation. As anticipated, target promotion orientation is significantly or marginally positively associated with indices of partner affirmation for self-report questionnaire criteria (see Table 2.1, βs = .27 and .09, both ps < .01), daily diary criteria (βs = .29 and .13, both ps < .01), participant-ratings of partner affirmation during interaction (βs = .24 and .15, both ps < .03), and participant-ratings of partner motivation of target during interaction (βs = .21 and .12, both ps < .09). However, associations with target promotion orientation were nonsignificant for coder-ratings of positive and negative partner behaviors during interaction (βs = .08 and -.00, ps = .12 and .99). Thus, our analyses revealed good support for Hypothesis 2 (8 of 10 effects) – target-goal regulatory congruence yields positive interpersonal consequences, as revealed using diverse indices of partner affirmation. In addition, indices of partner affirmation are marginally or significantly associated with target prevention orientation (6 of 10 negative effects). (Parallel associations for the partners’ orientations are reported below, for Hypothesis 3.)

Hypothesis 3 predicted that due to partner-goal regulatory congruence, to the extent that partners are promotion oriented, they would exhibit greater partner affirmation. To test this prediction, we regressed indices of partner affirmation (described above, for Hypothesis 2) simultaneously onto target and partner promotion and prevention orientation. As predicted, partner promotion orientation, as reported by both members of the couple, regardless of their gender, is significantly positively associated with indices of partner affirmation for self-report questionnaire criteria (see Table 2.1, βs = .13 and .26, both ps < .01), daily diary criteria (βs = .14 and .32, both ps < .01), participant-ratings of partner affirmation during interaction (βs = .13 and .28,
both \( ps < .01 \), participant-ratings of partner motivation of target during interaction (\( \beta s = .12 \) \( \text{and} \) .30, both \( ps < .02 \)), and coder-ratings of negative partner instrumental behaviors (\( \beta = -.11 \), \( p < .04 \)). The association was nonsignificant for positive partner instrumental behaviors (\( \beta = .02 \), \( p = .70 \)). Thus, our analyses revealed very good support for Hypothesis 3, in both within-participant and across-partner analyses (9 of 10 effects) – partner-goal regulatory congruence yields positive interpersonal consequences, as revealed using diverse indices of partner affirmation. In addition, indices of partner affirmation are significantly or marginally associated with partner prevention orientation (7 of 10 negative effects). (Parallel associations for the target’s orientations were reported above).

**Hypothesis 4** predicted that due to interpersonal regulatory match, to the extent that both target and partner are promotion oriented, partners would exhibit greater affirmation and targets would exhibit greater movement toward ideal (controlling for the main effects of target and partner promotion). To test this prediction, we regressed the self-report questionnaire measures of partner affirmation and target movement simultaneously onto target promotion orientation, partner promotion orientation, and their interaction. Consistent with earlier analyses, the main effects of target and partner promotion were significant for all four criteria (for target promotion, \( \beta s = .28 \), .09, .14, and .12, all \( ps < .01 \); for partner promotion, \( \beta s = .14 \), .26, .13, and .13, all \( ps < .01 \)). Relevant to Hypothesis 4, the interaction of target by partner promotion orientation was nonsignificant in predicting partner affirmation (\( \beta s = -.00 \) \( \text{and} \) -.01, \( ps = .97 \) \( \text{and} \) .70). However, the interaction was significant or marginal for both indices of target movement toward ideal (\( \beta s = .06 \) \( \text{and} \) .07, both \( ps < .06 \)); these associations were also evident when we controlled for indices of partner affirmation of target (for both effects, \( ps < .05 \)). Thus, we observed partial support for Hypothesis 4 (2 of 4 effects) – interpersonal regulatory match yields positive consequences for target movement toward ideal, but not for partner affirmation of target.

**Change over time in key model variables.** To explore the prediction of change over time in model criteria, we performed residualized lagged regression analyses on the self-report questionnaire measures. In turn, we regressed later partner affirmation and later target movement toward ideal simultaneously onto earlier target and partner promotion and prevention orientation, controlling for the earlier measure of each criterion (simultaneously predicting Time 3 criteria from Time 1 predictors and predicting Time 5 criteria from Time 3 predictors). These are particularly challenging tests, in that they are residualized lagged associations, and therefore rest on adequate change over time in each criterion. As anticipated, earlier target promotion orientation was marginally predictive of increases over time in perceived target movement toward ideal (Hypothesis 1; \( \beta = .15 \), \( p < .01 \); but not for target movement toward ideal, \( \beta = .07 \), \( p = .11 \)), and was marginally predictive of increases over time in perceived partner
Table 2.1: Predicting Key Model Variables from Target and Partner Promotion Orientation and Prevention Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Target Promo</th>
<th>Target Preve</th>
<th>Partner Promo</th>
<th>Partner Preve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target- and Partner-Report Questionnaire Criteria</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Partner Affirmation of Target (TR)</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Affirmation of Target (PR)</td>
<td>.09**</td>
<td>-.07*</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Movement Toward Ideal (TR)</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>-.08*</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Target Movement Toward Ideal (PR)</td>
<td>.12**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target and Partner Daily Diary Criteria</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Partner Affirmation of Target (TDD)</td>
<td>.29*</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>-.15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Affirmation of Target (PDD)</td>
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<td>-.16**</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Movement Toward Ideal (TDD)</td>
<td>.50**</td>
<td>-.14**</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Target Movement Toward Ideal (PDD)</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>-.16**</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>-.01</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Participant-Ratings of Interaction Behavior Criteria</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Partner Affirmation of Target (TRI)</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.13**</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner Affirmation of Target (PRI)</td>
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<td>-.15**</td>
<td>.28**</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Partner Motivation of Target (TRI)</td>
<td>.21**</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner Motivation of Target (PRI)</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Movement Toward Ideal (TRI)</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Target Movement Toward Ideal (PRI)</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coder-Ratings of Interaction Behavior Criteria</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Partner Instrumental Behavior (CRI)</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Partner Instrumental Behavior (CRI)</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.11*</td>
<td>-.11*</td>
<td>.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Partner Behavior Toward Goals (CRI)</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>-.15**</td>
<td>-.10</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Partner Behavior Toward Goals (CRI)</td>
<td>-.10*</td>
<td>.16**</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* TR and PR = target- and partner-report questionnaire criteria, TDD and PDD = target and partner daily diary criteria, TRI, PRI, and CRI = target, partner, and coder interaction ratings criteria. Each row presents coefficients from a four-factor hierarchical linear modeling analysis. Analyses using questionnaire criteria are based on data from 96 to 187 couples at each of three research occasions; analyses using daily diary criteria are based on data from 138 couples; analyses using target, partner, and coder interaction ratings criteria are based on data from 187 couples; *p < .05 and **p < .01.
affirmation (Hypothesis 2; $\beta = .07$, $p < .10$; but not for partner affirmation, $\beta = .03$, $p = .41$). Earlier partner promotion orientation significantly predicted increases over time in partner affirmation (Hypothesis 3; $\beta = .14$, $p < .01$; but not for perceived partner affirmation, $\beta = .01$, $p = .11$). These findings provide weak support for our claims regarding the prediction of change over time in model variables (3 of 6 effects). Our analyses also revealed weak support for change over time in both criteria predicted by earlier target prevention orientation (2 of 4 negative effects), whereas we found good support for change over time predicted by earlier partner prevention orientation (4 of 4 negative effects).

**Mediation Analyses, Overall Model**

*Hypothesis 5* predicted that partner affirmation would partially mediate the observed associations of target and partner promotion orientation with target movement toward the ideal self. We performed mediation analyses using data from the self-report questionnaires, examining the mediation of associations with target movement toward ideal by perceived partner affirmation of target (both variables as reported by the target), in the context of models that included all four predictors – target and partner promotion and prevention orientation (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Consistent with predictions, the associations of promotion orientation with target movement were significantly – yet partially – mediated by perceived partner affirmation, for both target promotion orientation ($z = 3.95$, $p < .01$) and partner promotion orientation ($z = 2.94$, $p < .01$). We observed parallel findings when we replicated these analyses to examine mediation by partner affirmation of target (as reported by the partner; $zs = 1.98$ and 2.79, both $ps < .05$). These findings provide excellent support for the claim that promotion orientation influences target movement toward ideal in part because it affects partner affirmation, which in turn promotes target movement. (The mediation of associations with target prevention orientation were marginal [$zs = -1.72$ and -1.71, both $ps < .09$]. Associations with partner prevention orientation were nonsignificant in earlier four-predictor models.)

**Mediation Analyses, Target- and Partner-Based Mechanisms**

*Hypothesis 6* predicted that the observed associations with target promotion orientation would be mediated by target-based motivational, cognitive, and behavioral mechanisms. First, we examined target mechanisms that might account for the association of target promotion orientation with target movement toward ideal, controlling for perceived partner affirmation. We performed mediation analyses using data from the Time 3 and 5 self-report questionnaires, examining the mediation of associations with target movement toward ideal by each of five target-based mechanisms (controlling for partner affirmation), in the context of models that included all four predictors – target and partner promotion and prevention (see Table 2.2). As
Table 2.2: Mechanisms That Mediate the Association of Target and Partner Promotion Orientation with Partner Affirmation and Target Movement Toward the Ideal Self

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediation of Associations with Target Movement Toward Ideal (TR)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Controlling for Partner Affirmation (PR)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mediation of Target Promotion Associations (TR):</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Target – Motivation to Achieve Ideal Self (TR)</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target – Increasing Importance of Ideal Goals (TR)</td>
<td>2.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target – Strategies for Achieving Ideal Goals (TR)</td>
<td>1.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target – Goal Likelihood/Efficacy (TR)</td>
<td>2.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target – Receptivity to Partner Affirmation (TR)</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mediation of Associations with Perceived Partner Affirmation (TR)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mediation of Target Promotion Associations (TR):</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target – Motivation to Achieve Ideal Self (TR)</td>
<td>4.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target – Increasing Importance of Ideal Goals (TR)</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target – Strategies for Achieving Ideal Goals (TR)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Target – Receptivity to Partner Affirmation (TR)</td>
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<table>
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<th>Mediation of Partner Promotion Associations (PR):</th>
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<tr>
<td>Partner – Motivation to Promote Target’s Ideals (TR)</td>
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<td>Partner – Challenge of Target to Achieve Ideals (TR)</td>
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<td>Partner – Clarification of Target Ideals (TR)</td>
<td>2.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partner – Strategies for Promoting Target’s Ideals (TR)</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner – Assistance in Target’s Goal Pursuits (TR)</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner – Responsiveness to Target’s Goal Pursuits (TR)</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* TR and PR = target- and partner-report questionnaire measures. Table values are Sobel’s zs; each row describes mediation by a given mechanism of the association of a given orientation with a given criterion. Analyses are based on data from 96 to 138 couples at each of two research occasions.
anticipated, above and beyond variance attributable to perceived partner affirmation – and beyond variance attributable to the other three predictor variables – the associations of target promotion with target movement were significantly or marginally mediated by all five target mechanisms, including greater target motivation to achieve the ideal self, increasing importance of ideal goals, superior strategies for achieving ideal goals, greater goal likelihood/efficacy, and greater receptivity to partner affirmation (see Table 2.2, zs ranged from 1.69 to 4.11, all ps < .09). Thus, beyond benefits attributable to affirmation by their partners, targets with greater promotion orientation achieve greater movement toward their ideal selves at least in part because they display superior target-based motivational, cognitive, and behavioral mechanisms.

Next, we examined target mechanisms that might account for the association of target promotion orientation with partner affirmation. Once again, we examined the mediation of associations with perceived partner affirmation by each of five target-based mechanisms, in the context of models that included all four predictors – target and partner promotion and prevention. Consistent with predictions, beyond variance attributable to the other three predictor variables, the associations of target promotion orientation with perceived partner affirmation were significantly or marginally mediated by all five target mechanisms (see Table 2.2, zs ranged from 1.80 to 5.06, all ps < .07). (When we replicated these tests in across-partner analyses, predicting partner-reported partner affirmation, mediation was marginal for two of five mechanisms – increased importance of ideal goals and receptivity to partner affirmation [zs = 1.61 and 1.69, both ps < .10].) Thus, targets with greater promotion orientation elicit partner affirmation at least in part because they exhibit superior target-based motivational, cognitive, and behavioral mechanisms, which in turn elicit greater partner affirmation.

Hypothesis 7 predicted that the observed associations with partner promotion orientation would be mediated by partner-based mechanisms. As in earlier analyses, we examined the mediation of associations with perceived partner affirmation by each of six partner-based mechanisms, in models that included all four predictors. As anticipated, beyond the other three predictors, the associations of target promotion orientation with perceived partner affirmation were significantly mediated by all six partner mechanisms – by greater partner motivation to promote the target’s ideals, greater challenge of the target to achieve his or her ideals, greater clarification of the target’s ideals, superior strategies for promoting the target’s ideals, greater direct assistance in the target’s goal pursuits, and greater responsiveness to the target’s pursuits (see Table 2.2, zs ranged from 2.04 to 3.91, all ps < .04). (When we replicated these tests in across-partner analyses, predicting partner-reported partner affirmation, mediation was significant or marginal for four of six mechanisms [zs ranged from 1.77 to 2.81, all ps < .07].) Thus, partners with greater promotion orientation exhibit greater partner affirmation at least in part because they display superior partner-based motivational, cognitive, and behavioral mechanisms.
Controlling for Alternative Constructs

**Behavioral inhibition and activation.** Is it possible that our findings are attributable to the confounding of promotion or prevention orientation with tendencies toward approach or avoidance? To address this question, we assessed whether promotion and prevention account for unique variance beyond any variance attributable to approach and avoidance, operationally defined in terms of behavioral activation and inhibition (Carver & White, 1994). Time 4 was the only research occasion at which we assessed behavioral inhibition and activation. First, we examined the simple associations of Time 5 promotion and prevention with Time 4 behavioral activation and inhibition. Indeed, prevention was positively correlated with behavioral inhibition ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$), and promotion was positively correlated with the behavioral activation subscales, reward-, drive-, and fun-based activation ($\beta$s = .29, .33, and .17, all $ps < .02$).

Next, we replicated the earlier four-predictor analyses using Time 5 data from self-report questionnaires, in turn regressing perceived partner affirmation, partner affirmation, target movement, and perceived target movement onto target and partner promotion and prevention orientation. In these analyses, 63% of the coefficients for target or partner promotion or prevention were significant or marginal (10 of 16 effects). Finally, we performed five-predictor analyses, replicating the four-predictor models including, in turn, each of the Time 4 measures of target or partner behavioral inhibition or activation. In these 32 five-predictor models, out of the 10 effects for target or partner promotion or prevention that were significant or marginal in the four-predictor models, 81% of the coefficients remained significant or marginal (65 of 80 effects). In contrast, across all analyses, only 34% of the coefficients for behavioral inhibition or activation were significant or marginal (11 of 32 effects). For the 10 effects that were significant or marginal in the four-predictor models, in these five-predictor models, the average absolute value of coefficients for target and partner promotion and prevention ranged from .11 to .34 (averaging coefficients across multiple analyses for a given criterion), whereas average coefficients for behavioral activation and inhibition ranged from only .01 to .09. Thus, our findings do not appear to be attributable to the confounding of promotion or prevention orientation with approach or avoidance – target and partner promotion and prevention orientation reliably account for unique variance beyond behavioral inhibition and activation.

**Locomotion and assessment focus.** Are our findings attributable to locomotion or assessment focus? To address this question, we assessed whether promotion and prevention predict model criteria beyond target and partner locomotion and assessment focus. The only research occasion at which we obtained measures of all relevant predictor variables was Time 5. First, we examined the simple associations of Time 5 promotion and prevention orientation with Time 5 locomotion and assessment. Indeed, promotion orientation was significantly positively associated with locomotion and negatively associated with assessment ($\beta$s = .43 and -.17, both $ps < .02$), and prevention...
orientation was significantly positively associated with assessment and negatively associated with locomotion ($\beta_s = .45$ and $.26$, both $p < .01$).

Next, we replicated the original four-predictor models using Time 5 data only; the criteria in these analyses were perceived partner affirmation, partner affirmation, target movement, and perceived target movement. In these analyses, 63% of the coefficients for target or partner promotion or prevention orientation were significant or marginal (10 of 16 effects). Finally, we performed five-predictor models, replicating the four-predictor models including, in turn, measures of target or partner locomotion or assessment focus. In these 16 five-predictor models, out of the 10 effects for target or partner promotion or prevention orientation that were significant or marginal in the four-predictor models, 88% of the coefficients remained significant or marginal (35 of 40 effects). In contrast, only 6% of the coefficients for target or partner locomotion or assessment focus were significant or marginal (1 of 16 effects). For the 10 effects that were significant or marginal in the four-predictor models, in these five-predictor models, the average absolute value of coefficients for target and partner promotion and prevention ranged from .13 to .32, whereas average coefficients for locomotion and assessment ranged from only .04 to .08. Thus, our findings do not appear to be attributable to the confounding of promotion or prevention with locomotion or assessment – target and partner promotion and prevention orientation fairly reliably account for unique variance beyond locomotion and assessment.

**Socially desirable response tendencies.** Do target and partner promotion orientation predict model criteria beyond tendencies toward socially desirable responding? To address this question we performed analyses using self-report questionnaire criteria – perceived partner affirmation, partner affirmation, target movement, and perceived target movement. First, we examined the simple associations of promotion and prevention orientation with self-deception and impression management. Prevention orientation was negatively correlated with both self-deception ($\beta = -.31, p < .01$) and impression management ($\beta = -.12, p < .01$). Promotion orientation was positively correlated with self-deception ($\beta = .19, p < .01$) but not with impression management ($\beta = .04, ns$). In the earlier four-predictor models, 81% of the coefficients for target or partner promotion or prevention orientation were significant or marginal (see Table 2.1; 13 of 16 effects). We replicated those analyses including measures of self-deception and impression management as control variables. In these six-predictor models, out of the 13 effects for target or partner promotion or prevention orientation that were significant or marginal in the four-predictor models, 92% remained significant or marginal (12 of 13 effects). Thus, our findings do not appear to be attributable to socially desirable response tendencies.

**Commitment and relationship length.** Do target and partner promotion orientation predict model criteria beyond commitment and relationship length? To address this question we performed analyses using self-report questionnaire assessing
whether promotion and prevention orientation predict model criteria beyond commitment (at all time points) and relationship length (at Time 1). First, we examined the simple associations of promotion and prevention orientation with commitment and relationship length. Promotion orientation was positively correlated with commitment ($\beta = .15, p < .01$) but not with relationship length ($\beta = .01, p = .99$). Prevention orientation was neither correlated with commitment ($\beta = .01, p = .68$) nor with relationship length ($\beta = -.08, p = .14$). In the earlier four-predictor models at all time points, 81% of the coefficients for target or partner promotion or prevention orientation were significant or marginal (see Table 2.1; 13 of 16 effects). We replicated these analyses including measures of target or partner commitment as control variables. In these 16 five-predictor models, out of the 13 effects for target or partner promotion or prevention orientation that were significant or marginal in the four-predictor models, 96% remained significant or marginal (25 of 26 effects) when controlling for commitment. In the original four-predictor models using Time 1 data only, 50% of the coefficients for target or partner promotion or prevention orientation were significant or marginal (8 of 16 effects). We replicated these analyses including measures of relationship length as control variable. In these 16 five-predictor models, all effects for target or partner promotion or prevention orientation that were significant or marginal in the four-predictor models remained significant or marginal (8 of 8 effects) when controlling for relationship length.

Examining Attrition Effects in Regulatory Orientation

As we mentioned earlier, couples that persisted until Time 5 were more promotion oriented and less prevention oriented than couples that dropped out. Do these differences in promotion and prevention orientation affect our findings? To address this question we replicated the four-predictor analyses from self-report questionnaires separately for Wave 1 and Wave 5. The analyses revealed a consistent pattern of results for the key model variables in the two separate time points. At Wave 1, 50% of the coefficients for target or partner promotion or prevention promotion or prevention were significant or marginal (8 of 16 effects). At Wave 5, 63% of the coefficients for target or partner promotion or prevention promotion or prevention were significant or marginal (10 of 16 effects). Thus, although we found mean differences in promotion and prevention orientation between the couples who dropped out and those who persisted in the study, our model does not show relevant differences between Wave 1 and Wave 5, revealing the robust role of promotion orientation in predicting affirmation and movement toward the ideal self across time.

Discussion

Our work advanced and tested a model of the intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences of regulatory orientation for understanding the Michelangelo
phenomenon. Our findings replicate earlier results regarding key components of the Michelangelo process (e.g., Drigotas et al., 1999; Rusbult et al., 2005). Importantly, our findings extend earlier work by applying the concept of regulatory orientation to an interpersonal domain, demonstrating that people’s promotion and prevention orientations yield crucial across-partner consequences. By investigating the interpersonal consequences of self-regulatory orientations, this work helps bridge the person-focused and dyad-focused traditions in social psychology.

We tested key predictions of our model using data obtained via four complementary measurement methods – self-report questionnaire measures, measures from daily diary records, participant-ratings of target and partner interaction behaviors, and coder-ratings of target and partner interaction behaviors (the latter two based on partners’ ideal-relevant conversations). Moreover, hypothesis tests were performed using criteria as reported by both the target and the partner – that is, we examined the associations of target and partner promotion and prevention orientation (as reported by each person) not only with perceived partner affirmation and target movement toward ideal (as reported by the target) but also with partner affirmation and perceived target movement toward ideal (as reported by the partner). To facilitate the review of findings relevant to each hypothesis, we developed a meta-analytic summary of our results, weighting each finding by the sample size on which it was based. We calculated direct associations with target movement toward ideal using target-reported target movement, controlling for both target- and partner-reports of partner affirmation. Figure 2.2 summarizes the results of this meta-analysis.

Promotion Orientation and the Michelangelo Phenomenon

People have hopes, dreams, and aspirations, or mental representations of the skills and traits that they would ideally like to acquire. The Michelangelo phenomenon concerns pursuit of the ideal self – a promotion goal. Accordingly, we anticipated that target promotion orientation and partner promotion orientation would yield four important consequences in the context of the Michelangelo model. Based on the concept of target-goal regulatory congruence, Hypothesis 1 predicted an intrapersonal consequence – that to the extent that targets were promotion oriented, they would enjoy greater movement toward the ideal self. Analyses performed on data from multiple measurement methods – using both target- and partner-reported criteria, and controlling for both indices of partner affirmation – revealed excellent support for this prediction (meta-analytic $\beta = .23, p < .01$).

We also anticipated that regulatory congruence would promote several interpersonal consequences. Based on the concept of target-goal regulatory congruence, Hypothesis 2 predicted that to the extent that targets were promotion oriented, they would elicit greater affirmation from their partners. We observed very good support for this prediction as well, once again for multiple measurement methods and for both
Figure 2.2. Target and partner regulatory orientation, partner affirmation, and target movement toward the ideal self (* $p < .05$ and ** $p < .01$).
target- and partner-reported criteria (meta-analytic $\beta = .15, \ p < .01$). Based on the concept of partner-goal regulatory congruence, Hypothesis 3 predicted that to the extent that partners were promotion oriented, they would exhibit greater affirmation of the target. This prediction, too, received good support (meta-analytic $\beta = .17, \ p < .01$). Thus, targets elicit greater partner affirmation and partners exhibit greater affirmation to the extent that one or both people are attentive to hopes, dreams, and aspirations. These findings extend our knowledge of ideal goal pursuit processes by demonstrating the interpersonal consequences of regulatory congruence. Finally, based on the concept of interpersonal regulatory match, Hypothesis 4 predicted that to the extent that both target and partner were promotion oriented, partners would exhibit greater affirmation and targets would enjoy greater movement toward the ideal self. This prediction received partial support: Once we took account of the benefits attributable to the main effect of each person’s promotion orientation, the target-by-partner interaction effect was significant for target movement toward the ideal self (controlling for partner affirmation; meta-analytic $\beta = .06, \ p < .05$), but not for partner affirmation (meta-analytic $\beta = .00, \ ns$). Thus, the benefits of interpersonal regulatory match have little or nothing to do with partner affirmation, yet rest on the fact that both partners are promotion oriented. We believe that such benefits might involve rather automatic and nonconscious interpersonal mechanisms.

Precisely how do target and partner promotion orientation influence target movement toward ideal? To begin with, the associations of both target and partner promotion orientation with target movement toward ideal were significantly – yet partially – mediated by partner affirmation (Hypothesis 5; meta-analytic $zs = 2.97$ and $2.87$, both $ps < .01$). That is, each person’s promotion orientation advances each person’s ideal goal pursuits in part because target promotion orientation elicits affirmation from the partner (meta-analytic $\beta = .15, \ p < .01$), partner promotion orientation promotes affirmation of the target (meta-analytic $\beta = .17, \ p < .01$), and, in turn, partner affirmation promotes target movement toward the ideal self (meta-analytic $\beta = .32, \ p < .01$). Moreover, beyond variance attributable to partner affirmation and the other three measures of target and partner orientation, target promotion orientation directly promotes target movement toward the ideal self (meta-analytic $\beta = .23, \ p < .01$).

We also examined the precise motivational, cognitive, and behavioral mechanisms that underlie these associations. From a within-person perspective, we found that (a) links with target promotion orientation were mediated by target-based mechanisms such as motivation to achieve the ideal self, strategies for achieving ideal goals, goal efficacy, and receptivity to partner affirmation (Hypothesis 6), and (b) links with partner promotion orientation were mediated by partner-based mechanisms such as motivation to promote the target’s ideal self, challenge of the target to achieve his or her ideals, clarification of the target’s ideals, strategies for promoting the target’s ideals, and direct assistance in the target’s goal pursuits (Hypothesis 7). And importantly, from an
across-partner perspective, we found that (c) links with target promotion orientation were also mediated by partner-based mechanisms, and (d) links with partner promotion orientation were also mediated by target-based mechanisms. Our findings regarding the precise mechanisms by which promotion works its magic further highlight the interpersonal character of goal pursuit. Promotion oriented individuals not only exhibit more effective behaviors in pursuing their ideal selves, but they also elicit more effective support from their partners, and provide more effective support to their partners.

Of what relevance is prevention orientation to understanding the Michelangelo process? Beyond variance attributable to target and partner promotion orientation, partner prevention orientation is reliably negatively predictive of partner affirmation (meta-analytic $\beta = -.11$, $p < .03$). This finding is consistent with our earlier speculation that the salience of prevention goals might serve as a tempting diversion, thereby draining resources from affirmation of a target’s ideal self goals (Shah et al., 2002). However, the parallel association of target prevention orientation with partner affirmation was nonsignificant (meta-analytic $\beta = -.07$, ns). Moreover, although we observed scattered negative associations of target and partner prevention orientation with target movement toward ideal, these associations were unreliably observed, and typically accounted for nonsignificant variance beyond partner affirmation (meta-analytic $\beta$s = -.06 and -.02, both ns). These findings are congruent with our earlier suggestion that target and partner prevention orientation might be largely irrelevant to the Michelangelo phenomenon. These findings also support the validity of the Michelangelo model: That promotion orientation reliably promotes this process – and prevention orientation by and large does not – is consistent with our claim that the Michelangelo process indeed concerns ideal self goals.

We also took care to demonstrate that our findings are valid. To begin with, we examined possible moderation by participant sex. We replicated key analyses including main effects and interactions for participant sex, and observed very few significant interactions. Thus, our results do not differ for women and men in substantively meaningful ways. In addition, our findings are not attributable to alternative constructs with which promotion or prevention orientation might be associated. For example, key results were reliably evident beyond any variance attributable to socially desirable response tendencies, locomotion focus, assessment focus, and behavioral inhibition and activation (Carver & White, 1994; Kruglanski et al., 2000; Paulhus, 1984). These findings are particularly important in light of recent claims that the instrument we employed to assess promotion orientation and prevention orientation (Lockwood et al., 2002) “functions [like] a measure of approach and avoidance (the BIS/BAS)” (Summerville & Roese, 2008, p. 253). Although promotion and prevention orientation were indeed moderately correlated with behavioral inhibition and activation (i.e., BIS/BAS), multiple-predictor models revealed that promotion and prevention
orientation reliably account for unique variance beyond behavioral inhibition and activation. Finally, our results held even when controlling for social desirable response tendencies and relationship variables, such as commitment (Rusbult, et al., 1998) and length of the relationship.

Broader Implications and Directions for Future Research

These findings have several broader implications. First, our work is one of the few extant projects to investigate the role of regulatory orientation in an interpersonal context. Traditionally, goal pursuit behaviors – and regulatory focus, in particular – have been examined as individual-level phenomena. During the past decade, scientists have increasingly focused their attention on the interpersonal components of goal pursuit, examining in particular the role that close others may play in this process (e.g., Andersen, Reznik, & Manzella, 2005; Drigotas et al., 1999; Fitzsimons & Bargh, 2003; Shah, 2003). The present work extends this literature, highlighting the fact that people do not pursue goals in social isolation, but rather, are influenced by close others in their goal accomplishments. Through their comments, suggestions, and behaviors, close partners can help each other achieve important goals or they can interfere with what each person wishes to accomplish.

In particular, our study focused on the importance of regulatory orientation for understanding how close partners influence each person’s pursuit of ideal self goals. In future research, it might be fruitful to explore the consequences of regulatory orientation for close partners’ pursuit of ought self goals. Paralleling our findings on the Michelangelo Phenomenon, one could expect that prevention orientation would be beneficial for the pursuit of prevention goals (duties, obligations, responsibilities) for both the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of goal pursuit. A recent examination of the interpersonal regulatory fit phenomenon (Righetti, Finkenauer, & Rusbult, 2011) suggests, however, that the effects of prevention orientation in the interpersonal domain might not be so straightforward. Righetti et al. (2011) examined how the individual’s goal pursuit is affected by advice and support received from a close other whose regulatory orientation fits (versus does not fit) the individual’s orientation. Across several studies, it was found that only promotion oriented individuals, but not prevention oriented individuals, showed the motivational benefits of interpersonal regulatory fit. To explain this asymmetry, the authors suggest that because prevention oriented individuals are characterized by a local processing style (Forster & Higgins, 2005), they need to concentrate on the specific features of the task to maintain security and are not open to external sources of influence, including interpersonal influences. These findings suggest that the interpersonal consequences of target-goal congruence are different for prevention orientation in that prevention oriented targets may not be receptive to affirmation from a partner, even for the pursuit of prevention goals.
This work also has important implications for relationships science. Previous research has mainly focused on examining the impact of self traits on relationships outcomes, including individual’s attachment style (for a review, see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007), self-control (e.g., Finkel & Campbell, 2001), self-esteem (e.g., Murray, Rose, Bellavia, Holmes, & Kusche, 2002), and narcissism (e.g., Campbell & Foster, 2002). Fewer studies have focused on the impact of partner’s traits on self’s relationship outcomes (e.g., Kumashiro et al., 2007). Our work significantly contributes to both lines of research, highlighting the influence of both self and partner’s traits for relationship processes.

Furthermore, numerous prior studies have demonstrated that similarity in partners’ traits and attitudes promotes trust, familiarity, and prosocial motivation, as well as global attraction and harmony (e.g., Byrne, 1971; Caspi, Herbener, & Ozer, 1992; Kubacka, Finkenauer, & Rusbult, 2009; Luo & Klohnen, 2005). Our work reveals that similarity in promotion orientation has instrumental value, such that when both partners were predominantly promotion oriented, each person enjoyed greater movement toward his or her ideal self. In future work, it would be interesting to examine the generalizability of the present similarity effect for regulatory orientation to other types of goals, as well as examining the instrumental versus social-emotional bases for this and other similarity-attraction effects. Moreover, given that partner affirmation and target movement toward ideal have been shown to promote couple well-being (Dregotss et al., 1999), it would be interesting to explore the possible contributions of promotion and prevention orientation to shaping broader couple dynamics.

Our findings are also consistent with an interdependence theoretic conceptualization of adaptation, or the claim that (a) during the course of everyday interaction, partners elicit some behaviors from one another and inhibit the display of other behaviors, and that (b) over time, such adaptations frequently become embodied in relatively stable skills, traits, and behavioral tendencies (Kelly, 1983). As such, our work suggests implications of regulatory focus theory for models of interpersonal adaptation such as behavioral confirmation (Darley & Fazio, 1980; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), revealing that regulatory orientation may shape people’s expectations and behavior, thereby eliciting specific behaviors from others, and ultimately, sculpting others’ skills and traits. These findings have important practical implications as well – implications for understanding goal pursuit in the context of interactions involving non-romantic partners such as parents and children, supervisors and employees, or teachers and students.

Our results also have implications for the concept of social constructionism, or the assumption that perception is not a direct reflection of reality – the claim that perceptions of people and events merely reflect one person’s point of view, as filtered through that person’s unique biases, cultural filters, and the like (Gergen, 2003). Of
course, most social psychologists acknowledge that different people perceive events somewhat differently. Indeed, in the present work we took care to examine both target and partner reports of specific phenomena (e.g., partner-reported partner affirmation vs. target-reported perceived partner affirmation). At the same time, it is easy to overstate the degree to which perception is constructed, and to overemphasize the possibilities for across-partner disparities in perception. Indeed, we observed moderately good agreement between partners’ reports of parallel constructs, for both partner affirmation and target movement toward ideal (meta-analytic $\beta$s = .39 and .41, both $p$s < .01). We also observed good agreement across analyses utilizing parallel within-participant and across-partner criteria (e.g., partner promotion predicts target- and partner-reported partner affirmation). The consistency we observed across differing points of view highlights the fact that although perception to some degree may be constructed, perception also rests solidly on reality.

**Strengths and Limitations**

Before closing, it is important to note several strengths and limitations of the present work. One limitation is that we examined a unilateral model of regulatory congruence. Given that the Michelangelo phenomenon was developed as a means of understanding personal growth in a relational context, this work examines individuals’ personal goals (ideal self goals, or promotion goals) rather than the goals that others might like the individual to pursue (ought self goals, or prevention goals). Thus, it remains to be seen whether the concepts of regulatory orientation and regulatory congruence can fruitfully be applied to understanding close partners’ pursuit of ought self goals. Specifically, future research should explore whether prevention orientation is beneficial for the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of ought self goal pursuit.

Second, it could be argued that we should have employed a different instrument to assess regulatory orientation. As mentioned earlier, the Lockwood et al. scale (2002) has recently received a cautionary note by Summerville and Roese (2008). These authors argued that for this scale, promotion orientation is correlated with approach and positive affect, whereas prevention orientation is correlated with avoidance and negative affect. Although we are aware of this work, there are several reasons to consider this scale an appropriate instrument to assess regulatory orientation. The Lockwood et al. scale (2002) has good face validity. The items used in this scale directly tap into the theoretical definition of regulatory orientation, including both the orientation toward gains versus losses (e.g., for promotion, “Overall, I am more oriented toward achieving success than preventing failure”; for prevention “I am more oriented toward preventing losses than I am toward achieving gains”) and the orientation toward aspirations vs. duties (e.g., for promotion, “I see myself as someone who is primarily striving to reach my “ideal self” – to fulfill my hopes, wishes, and aspirations”; for prevention, “I see myself as someone who is
primarily striving to become the self I “ought” to be – to fulfill my duties, responsibilities and obligations”). Furthermore, empirical studies assessing regulatory orientation using the Lockwood et al. scale (2002) consistently replicate findings obtained using standard manipulations of the construct, highlighting the correspondence of the two operationalizations (e.g., Brebels & De Cremer, 2008; Keller & Bless, 2006; Lockwood, Marshall, & Sadler, 2005; McGregor, Gailliot, Vasquez, & Nash, 2007; Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008; Oyserman, Uskul, Yoder, Nesse, & Williams, 2007). Finally, our studies showed that the Lockwood et al. (2002) instrument assesses more than simply approach and avoidance. When controlling for behavioral activation and inhibition, the same measure that Summerville and Roese (2008) used to tap approach and avoidance motivation, promotion orientation remained a good predictor of partner affirmation and movement toward the ideal self, underlining its unique contribution to explaining the Michelangelo Phenomenon.

Finally, the data employed in our analyses were from a single longitudinal study (albeit from multiple research occasions). Although we observed relatively consistent findings across diverse measurement methods, our hypothesis tests ultimately rest on data from a single sample of newly-committed couples. Moreover – and as might be anticipated in an ambitious longitudinal study of this sort – we suffered moderate couple mortality over the course of the project.

But at the same time, our results are noteworthy in that they rest on data obtained from both partners in ongoing relationships, and in that we observed good across-partner agreement in tests of key hypotheses. In addition, we measured key Michelangelo model variables using four measurement methods, including self-report questionnaire measures, daily diary measures, and both participants’ and coders’ ratings of ideal-relevant interactions. Analyses using data from these complementary measurement methods revealed relatively consistent evidence for the role of promotion orientation in shaping the Michelangelo process. And finally, our predictions were upheld even in analyses that controlled for socially desirable responding, assessment and locomotion focus, and behavioral inhibition and activation. Such convergence of results in within-participant and across-partner analyses – using diverse measurement methods – promotes confidence in our findings regarding promotion orientation and the Michelangelo process.

Conclusions

The present work investigated the role of regulatory orientation in shaping the Michelangelo phenomenon, a model of the means by which close partners shape one another’s ideal self goal pursuits. We advanced predictions regarding the intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences of target and partner promotion orientation using the concepts of target-goal congruence, partner-goal congruence, and interpersonal match.
Using four complementary measurement techniques, and performing both within-participant and across-partner hypothesis tests, we observed consistent support for our predictions. Promotion oriented targets elicit greater affirmation from their partners, and promotion oriented partners exhibit greater affirmation of targets; in turn, partner affirmation promotes target movement toward the ideal self. Independent of these processes, target promotion orientation contributes directly to target movement toward the ideal self, as does target-partner similarity in promotion orientation. The present work extends prior research by studying the effects of regulatory orientation not only as a within-person process, but also as an across-partner process, thereby contributing to our understanding of the interpersonal character of personal goal pursuits.
Over the course of the past decade the Lockwood et al. (2002) instrument has been a commonly-employed measure of the dispositional regulatory orientation (e.g., Brebels & De Cremer, 2008; Keller & Bless, 2006; Lockwood, Marshall, & Sadler, 2005; McGregor, Gailliot, Vasquez, & Nash, 2007; Murray, Derrick, Leder, & Holmes, 2008; Oyserman, Uskul, Yoder, Nesse, & Williams, 2007). The instrument has good face validity, with items that are clearly linked to the theoretical definitions of promotion and prevention orientation. The instrument also has demonstrated reliability and validity. Summerville and Roese (2008) recently urged caution in use of this instrument, arguing that the promotion and prevention subscales are associated with approach and avoidance tendencies (i.e., BIS/BAS, or behavioral inhibition and activation; Carver & White, 1994). Accordingly, we performed auxiliary analyses in which we statistically controlled for behavioral inhibition and activation, examining the unique contribution of regulatory orientation in predicting key variables of the Michelangelo phenomenon.

The reliability coefficients for these “top three goals” were relatively low. The lower reliability may be due to the fact that people do not have identical experiences across their top three goals. In the present research the three reported goals could pertain to different domains (e.g., professional goals, interpersonal goals, hobbies). It is unlikely that goal pursuit happens consistently and similarly across different domains. Nevertheless, these measures are arguably valid, in that they tap the overall experience of multiple concerns, assessing the movement toward different and multiple goals.

Couples also took part in ideal-relevant videotaped interactions at Time 5 of the study, but these data are not yet available for analysis.

Preliminary analyses revealed that for the three measurement methods for which target and partner provided parallel reports – that is, for self-report questionnaires, daily diary records, and ratings of interaction behaviors – targets and partners exhibited good agreement in their reports of one another’s behavior. We observed good across-partner agreement not only for (a) partner affirmation – target-reported perceived partner affirmation was associated with partner-reported partner affirmation (βs = .33, .58, and .31, all ps < .01), but also for (b) target movement toward ideal – target-reported target movement toward ideal was associated with partner-reported perceived target movement toward ideal (βs = .48, .46, and .29, all ps < .01).

Of course, target promotion orientation may also influence partner-based mechanisms. Accordingly, we also examined the mediation of associations with partner affirmation by each of six partner-based mechanisms (all variables as reported by the target), in the context of models that included all four predictors. As anticipated, the associations of target promotion orientation with perceived partner affirmation were significantly mediated by all six partner mechanisms – by partner motivation to promote
the target’s ideals, challenge of the target to achieve his or her ideals, clarification of the target’s ideals, strategies for promoting the target’s ideals, assistance in the target’s goal pursuits, and responsiveness to the target’s goal pursuits ($zs$ ranged from 4.15 to 5.80, all $ps < .01$). Thus, promotion oriented targets also enjoy greater partner affirmation because they elicit superior partner-based motivational, cognitive, and behavioral mechanisms from their partners.