

Relational Spirituality and Virtue Formation: Exploring Mediation through Human and Divine Differentiation

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Key Questions

“What is it about human persons that they are morally transformed by God in these ways?”

How do individual differences factor in?

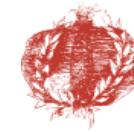
And what accounts for (mediates) change?



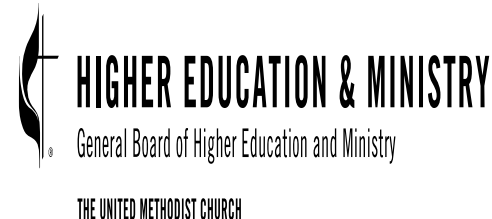
Gratitude

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Virtues

Virtues: “Virtues are qualities of human character and excellence which enhance the capacity to live well, to live ‘the good life’” (Sandage & Hill, 2001, p. 243; see Battaly, 2015).

- Characterological strengths and skills to promote holistic well-being and generativity (eg, humility, forgiveness, hope, gratitude, justice, compassion)
- **Reflect relational developmental/formative processes**
- Intrinsically motivated (not forced)
- Require practical wisdom for contextualization
- Culture- and tradition-laden (Wong)
- Individual and communal levels



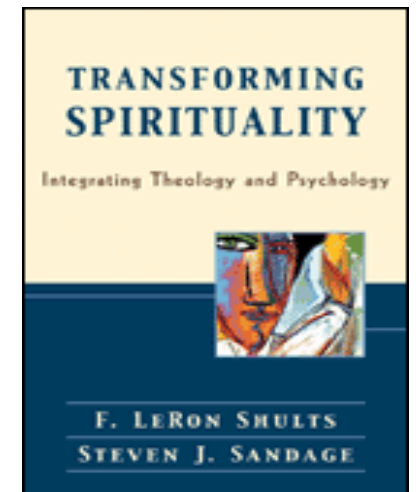
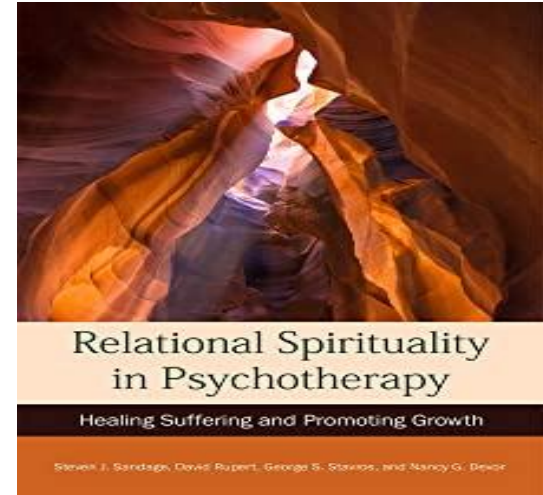
Heather Battaly



Y. Joel Wong

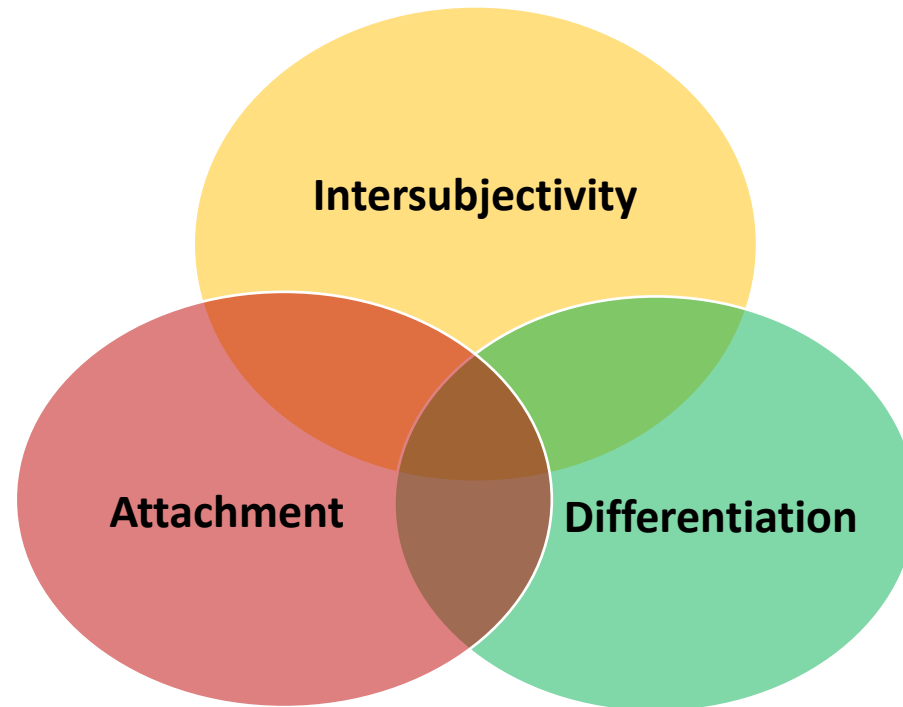
Relational Spirituality Model (RSM)

- **Relational Spirituality:** ways of relating to God and the sacred (Sandage, Rupert, Stavros, & Devor, 2020). *Unconscious theologies* (Duvall, 2000)
- Relational development & systemic dynamics shape spirituality, change, and transformation ([Carpenter: knowledge gaps: Right Brain Functioning](#))
- Dialectic of spiritual dwelling and seeking related to (a) holistic flourishing and (b) mature alterity
- 40+ empirical studies published



RSM Core Concepts: Relational Development Systems

1. Mutuality/intimacy
2. Power dynamics
3. Repair of ruptures



1. Trust/security
2. Relational regulation
3. Exploration

1. Cooperation across differences
2. Self- and social-identity
3. Self-regulation

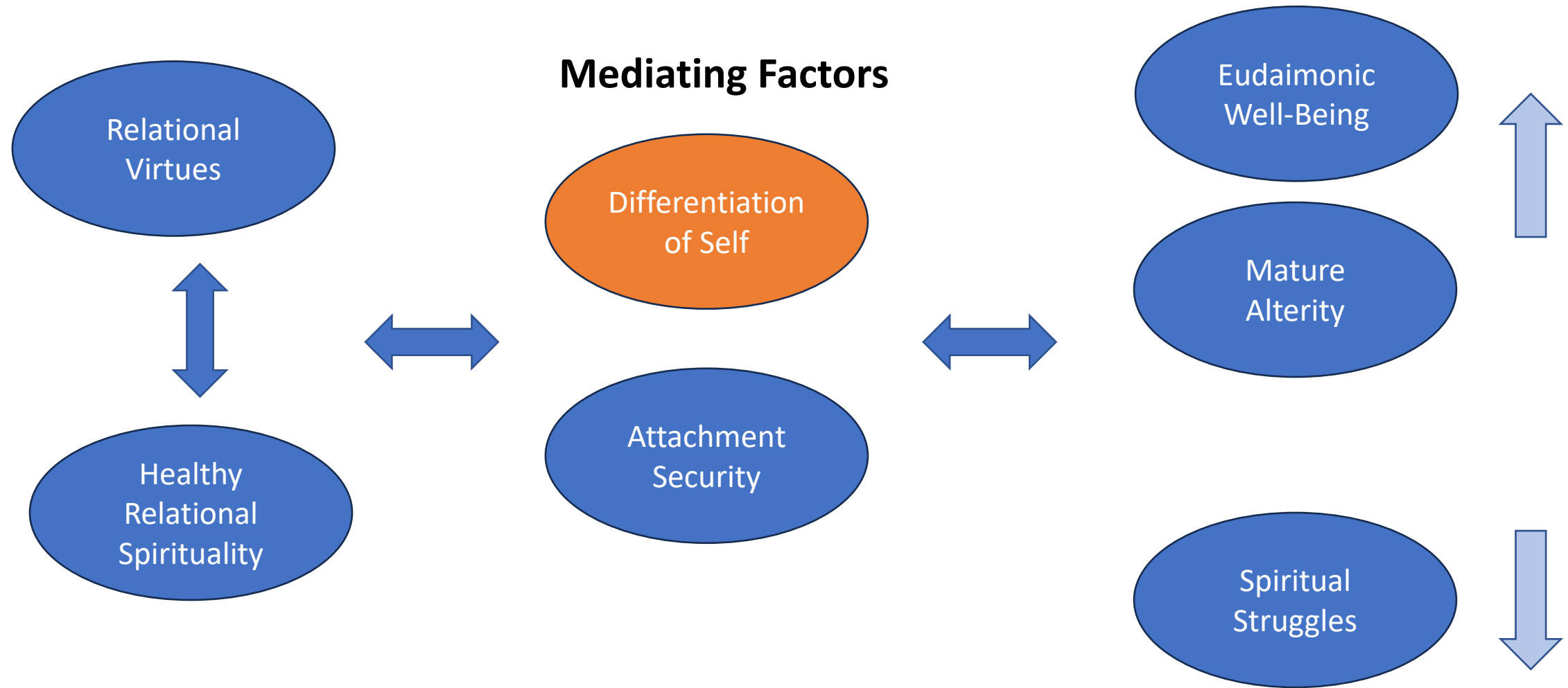
RSM Core Concepts: Differentiation

Differentiation of Self (DoS)

- Represents the capacity to balance:
 - (a) cognitive and emotional functioning (**emotion regulation**), and
 - (b) **connection and autonomy** in relationships (Friedman, 2011; Lam, 2015; Rodriguez-Gonzalez, 2016; Schnarch, 2009; Wimberly, 2019)
 - (c) **dwelling and seeking**
- How do I function collaborating across human **differences** (eg, couples, parenting, family, sociocultural or racial diversity, church/group settings)?
- Do I have spiritual capacities for both **self-soothing & self-confrontation**?
- Can I root into **existential anchors** to tolerate distress?
- Am I willing to grapple with **integrity dilemmas**?

*God as Ground of
Differentiated Relationality*

Summary of RSM Theory & Research Findings

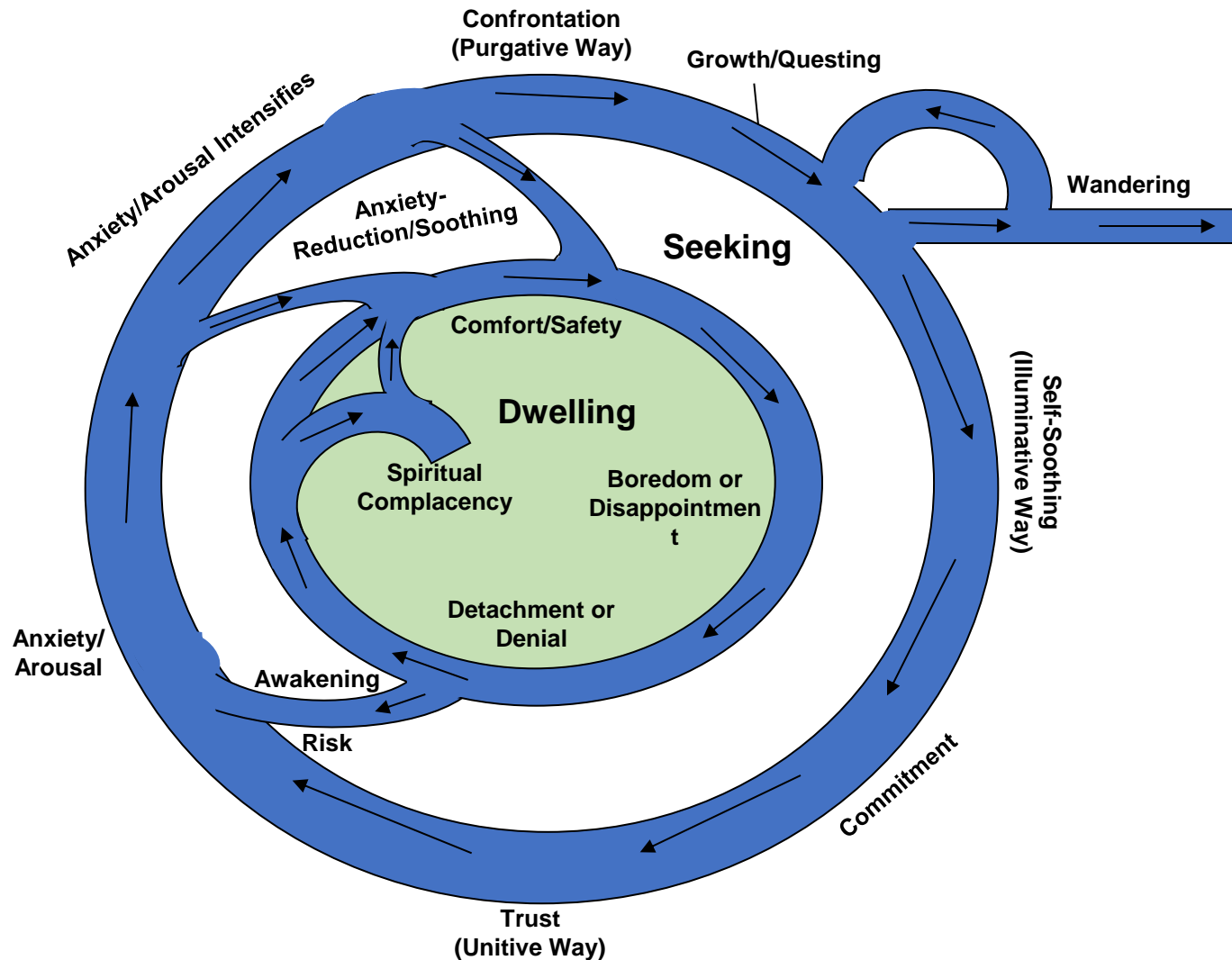


Empirical Findings

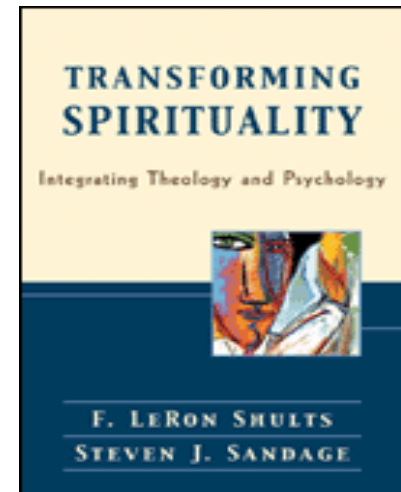
- 21 quantitative studies (N= 3, 177) showing associations between DoS, relational spirituality, mature alterity, and virtue
- Numerous mediation effects for DoS but mostly cross-sectional
 - Some longitudinal and intervention studies showing downstream positive outcomes
 - Some studies controlling for **impression management**
- Mostly (not exclusively) majority white, Christian, straight samples of faith leaders from U.S.
 - Some predominantly BIPOC and Jewish samples
 - Some clinical (pluralistic context) samples

Crucibles of Transformation: Balancing Spiritual Dwelling and Seeking

(Shults & Sandage, 2006; adapted from Schnarch, 1997; developed by D. & B. Fairfield of Lanham, MD)



Crucibles as
“Dissonant
Intersections”
between values and
growth needs



Implications

1. RSM highlights the importance of cultivating healthy and differentiated relational dynamics or “**relational ecologies**” to foster authentic virtue formation (eg **Chrysalis**). *I believe these relational dynamics are key to God’s work of moral transformation.*
2. Need for integrative (psychology & theology) attention to **embodiment** and wisdom about relational developmental dynamics and corresponding strategic formation plans.
3. Paradoxically, virtue formation also often starts in painful **vulnerability** and moves through crucibles in non-linear ways toward growth.
4. Attend to inter-related areas of **diversity competence**, cultural humility, and mature alterity as part of spiritual and virtue formation.





**See Danielsen Institute Website for resources
and updates on our work**

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