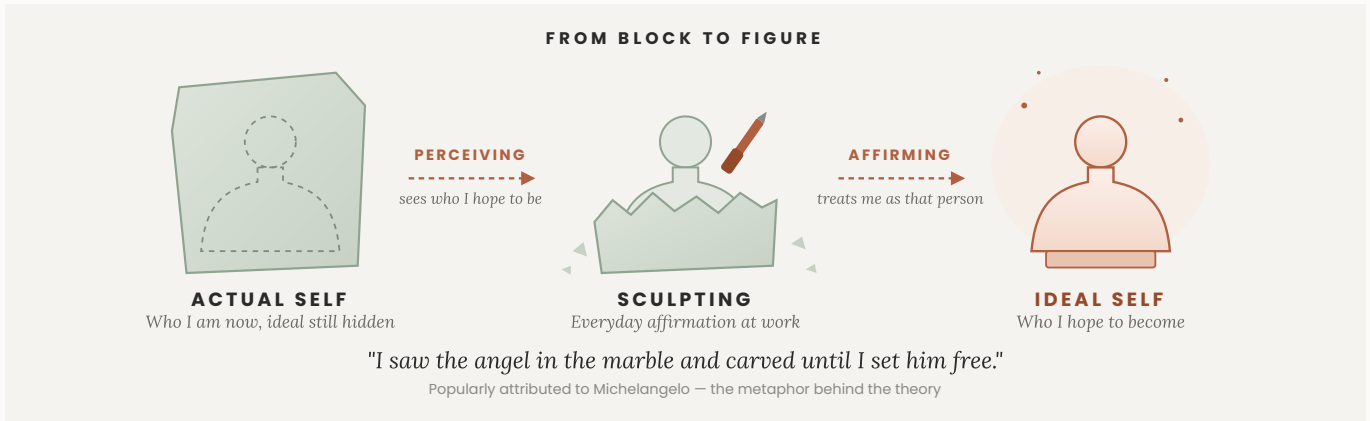


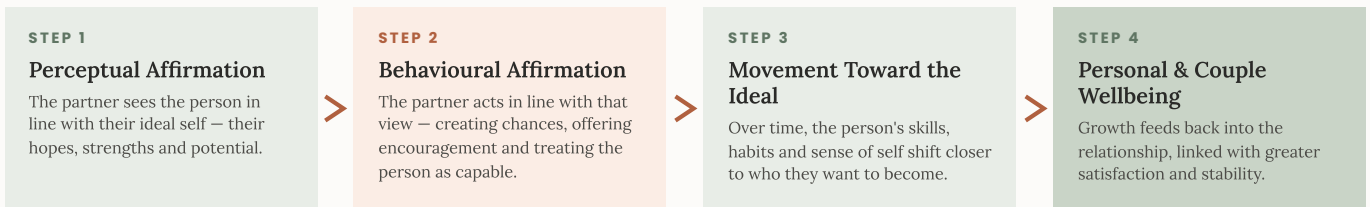
# The Michelangelo Phenomenon

DRIGOTAS, RUSBULT, WIESELQUIST &amp; WHITTON

Michelangelo described sculpting as freeing a figure already hidden in the stone. Caryl Rusbult and colleagues used the image to describe how close partners help each other become who they hope to be — not by reshaping them, but by seeing and affirming the ideal self that is already there.



## How Sculpting Works Model adapted from Drigotas et al. (1999)



## Three Ways a Partner Can Shape Us Not all influence helps us grow



## Evidence & Everyday Practice What the research suggests, and how to use it

### WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

- Affirmation predicts growth.** In dating and married couples, people whose partners affirmed their ideal selves moved closer to those ideals over time.
- Growth benefits the couple.** Moving toward the ideal self was linked with greater relationship satisfaction and a lower likelihood of breaking up.
- Similarity helps.** Partners who already resemble someone's ideal self find it easier to bring that self out.
- It's not only romantic.** The same process can occur between close friends and family.

### PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

#### Ask, don't assume

Find out who they hope to become — their ideal, not yours for them.

#### Notice small steps

Name effort and progress out loud, not just big achievements.

#### Make room for change

Offer time, practical help or encouragement.

#### Let go of old stories

People outgrow earlier versions of themselves. Update your view.

### REFLECT ON YOURSELF

Who do I hope to become? Who in my life seems to bring that version of me out?

### REFLECT ON SOMEONE CLOSE

What does someone I love hope for themselves? How could I affirm that this week?

### SOURCES

Drigotas, S. M., Rusbult, C. E., Wieselquist, J., & Whitton, S. W. (1999). Close partner as sculptor of the ideal self: Behavioral affirmation and the Michelangelo phenomenon. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77(2), 293–323.

Rusbult, C. E., Finkel, E. J., & Kumashiro, M. (2009). The Michelangelo phenomenon. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 18(6), 305–309.

Rusbult, C. E., Kumashiro, M., Kubacka, K. E., & Finkel, E. J. (2009). "The part of me that you bring out": Ideal similarity and the Michelangelo phenomenon. *JPSP*, 96(1), 61–82.