



Psychology Today



“The true, ideal, or authentic self depends on help from the outside.”

Joachim I. Krueger, Ph.D.

- Home
- Find a Therapist
- Topics
- Tests
- Magazine
- Psych Basics
- Blogs
- Diagnosis Dictionary

BLOGS One Among Many

The self in social context
by Joachim I. Krueger, Ph.D.



Joachim Krueger is a social psychologist at Brown University who believes that rational thinking and socially responsible behavior are attainable goals. [See full bio](#)

Michelangelo meets Carl Rogers

The Michelangelo phenomenon as a path to personal growth.
Published on January 26, 2010

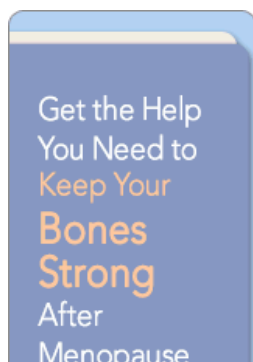
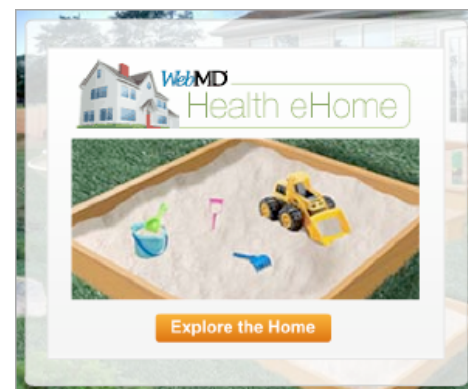
Subscribe to One Among Many
[Subscribe via RSS](#)



This essay was written with Theresa E. DiDonato.

Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475 - 1564) presumably said that of his creations, such as his sculptures of David and Moses, that they were already inside the blocks of marble before he started working on them. All he did was to release the figures by chipping away at the marble. Ah, what a metaphor! What modesty! But surely, Mr. Buonarroti was jesting for he could not have said the same about his ceiling mural in the Sistine Chapel or his architectural work on the dome of St. Peter. We once tried to write an article by taking black sheets of paper and rubbing away the ink, hoping that ultimately only the words of the manuscript would be left. It didn't work.

So yes, Michelangelo gave us a powerful metaphor, and modern-day psychology has named a phenomenon after him. The idea is that within each of you, a better version of yourself awaits release. The true, ideal, or authentic self depends on help from the outside just as the statues of David and Moses did. The people who can help release your better self are those who are close to you and who care about you. They want to help you to be the best you can be on your own terms, not theirs. Thus, the Michelangelo phenomenon is different from the better known Pygmalion effect, which occurs when a more powerful and persistent person shapes another, less developed, person according to his or her own design. For the Michelangelo maneuver to succeed it is crucial that the other person recognizes the [goals](#), ideals, and plans you have for yourself, and that he or she accepts a facilitating role. In other words, the supportive other affirms your version of your better self perceptually (recognition) and then behaviorally (facilitation). In turn, this affirmation enables you to grow by moving toward your individual psychological goals.



A successful move towards personal goals is a reflection of psychological growth. A person benefiting from the Michelangelo phenomenon would become more authentic. In a recent study (in [Self & Identity](#), forthcoming), we measured the three components of the Michelangelo phenomenon and authenticity as a fourth. In other words, we tested if the sequence of perceptual affirmation, behavioral affirmation, move towards a goal, and authenticity, can be modeled as a causal chain, in which any positive change depends on a positive change at the preceding stage. The findings supported this idea.



The affirmation of a person, which leads to his or her personal growth, lies at the heart of humanistic psychology, and this is where Carl

Recent Posts in One Among Many



[The Michelangelo phenomenon as a path to personal growth.](#) by Joachim I. Krueger, Ph.D.



[Doing one's duty as a counterpoint to destructive obedience](#) by Joachim I. Krueger, Ph.D.



[Ignoring a third, dissenting, opinion can lead to bad decisions.](#) by Joachim I. Krueger, Ph.D.



[Women choose whom other women choose.](#) by Joachim I. Krueger, Ph.D.



[Confidence predicts success, unless you choose your own challenge.](#) by Joachim I. Krueger, Ph.D.

[More of One Among Many blog](#)

Most Popular Posts



Rogers comes in. Like the Renaissance sculptor, Rogers believed in the pre-existence of a beautiful inner form that is vulnerable and easily obscured, but that can be liberated and revealed under the right circumstances. To Rogers, a person's inner self is not necessarily perfect in the sense that it comprises the top 10 socially desirable character traits; it is perfect in the sense that it is true to its own potential rather than the designs of others; it is not a façade, a sham, a role, or a "persona" in the original Roman sense (i.e., a mask). In other words, the perfect self is authentic. It is this self that can be accepted and loved for its own sake. It is not "preferred" or "desired" because it has the highest value as a commodity. Yet, the authentic self requires an interpersonal context in order to flourish. Whereas a façade is a false front erected to deceive others or to protect the self, the authentic self requires a benevolent ("congruent" in Rogers's terminology) other as an astute observer and caring participant.

Humans are inescapably social creatures. On a bedrock of self-interest, most humans manage to be caring, benevolent, and fair, at least some of the time. Taking on the robe of Michelangelo and helping others to fulfill their own potential is an eminently altruistic stance that does not even come at a high cost. So let's do more of it.

Note. To illustrate how the stages of the Michelangelo phenomenon and four facets of authenticity are measured, consider the selection of representative items below.

Perceptual affirmation:

"My partner sees me as the person I ideally would like to be."

Behavioral affirmation:

"My partner behaves as though I possess the traits that I believe most desirable."

Move towards goal:

[After participant lists 4 characteristics of his or her ideal self] Think about your relationship with your partner. To what degree have you changed with respect to Characteristic #1 as a result of being involved with your partner?

Authenticity 1 (self-awareness):

"I understand why I believe the things I do about myself."

Authenticity 2 (unbiased processing): "I am very uncomfortable objectively considering my limitations and shortcomings." (reverse coded)

Authenticity 3 (relational orientation):

"I want people with whom I am close to understand my weaknesses."

Authenticity 4 (behavior):

"I frequently pretend to enjoy something when in actuality I really don't." (reverse coded)

References

DiDonato, T. E. & Krueger, J. I. (2010). Interpersonal affirmation and self-authenticity: A test of Rogers's self-growth hypothesis. *Self & Identity*, in press.

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a913840017&db=all>

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

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/123207290/abstract?CRE...>

MOST POPULAR POSTS

Most Read | Most Emailed

- 1 **British Newspapers Make Things Up**
by Satoshi Kanazawa
- 2 **Why are Narcissists (Initially) so Popular?**
by Scott Barry Kaufman, Ph.D.
- 3 **Removing the Temptation to Cheat**
by Christopher Ryan
- 4 **The Dramatic Rise of Anxiety and Depression in Children and Adolescents: Is It Connected to the Decline in Play and Rise in Schooling?**
by Peter Gray
- 5 **Fidelity**
by Pepper Schwartz, Ph.D.

- Teen Pregnancy Surges
- Study: Ablation Beats Drugs for Atrial Fibrillation
- Green Tea Extract May Treat Uterine Fibroids
- Flame-Retardant Exposure May Harm Fertility
- Half With Diabetes Skip Insulin Injections

> More Health News

©2005-2009 WebMD, LLC. All rights reserved. WebMD does not provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. See additional information.



The Power to Change Everything
Yehuda Berg
The more you want to change the world, the more you have to change yourself.
[Read more](#)



Wakunaga
Take Kyolic, the sociable, odorless garlic!
[Read more](#)

Current Issue



Heartbreak and Home Runs: The Power of First Experiences
How early life experiences shape our character.

MORE FROM THIS ISSUE
ISSUE ARCHIVES
SUBSCRIBE

Print | Send to friend |

1 Reader comments [join the discussion here!](#)

Tags: [altruism](#), [authenticity](#), [personal growth](#)

Psychology Today

© Copyright Sussex Publishers, LLC

The Therapy Directory [HealthPros.com](#) [BuildingPros.com](#)

© Copyright Sussex Directories, Inc.

[About/Contact](#)
[Privacy Policy](#)
[Site Help/Customer Service](#)
[Terms of Service](#)

[Therapy Directory Index](#)
[Healthpros Index](#)
[Buildingpros Index](#)