

ROMANCE
AND
SELF-ESTEEM

ARE GOOD
PEOPLE
HAPPIER?

HOW
TO TALK TO
ANYONE

SURVIVING
JOB
LOSS

Psychology Today

PSYCHOLOGYTODAY.COM
DECEMBER 2020



CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Why Smart People
Fall for
Bizarre Ideas



**WHO LOVES
GOSSIP?**
& More Traces
of Personality



A BETTER YOU

Certain traits may help partnered individuals become their best selves.

CAN YOU become who you want to be? In what's known as the "Michelangelo phenomenon," people are thought to move toward an ideal self with a partner's help. But some may be more able than others to harness this strategy, our research suggests.

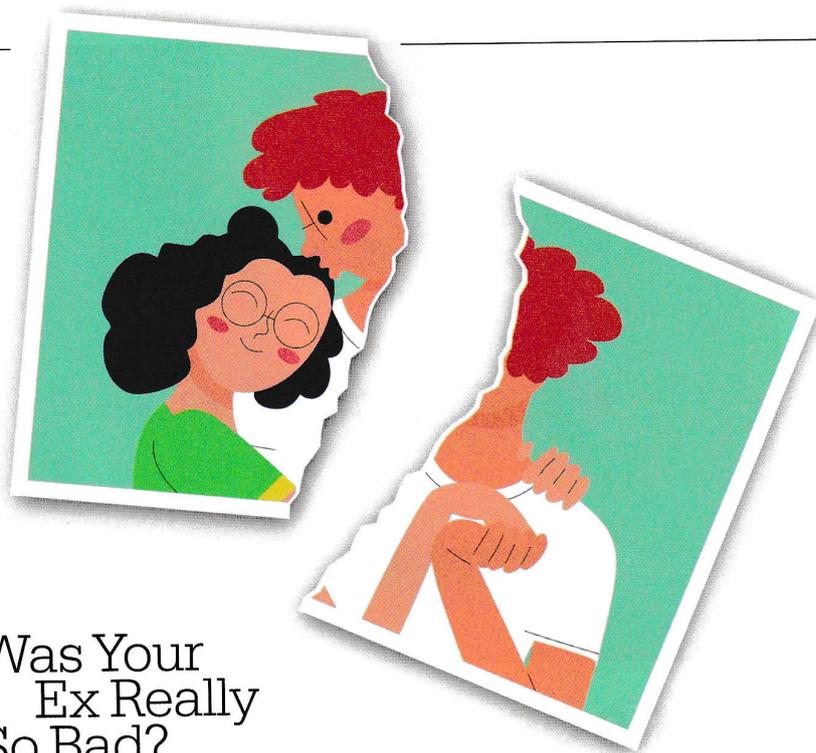
My colleagues and I asked the partners in 163 couples to describe their ideal self and rate how much they had moved toward it due to the



relationship. They also completed measures assessing the Big 5 personality traits and reported how much their partner affirmed them.

Surprisingly, affirmation did not predict movement toward an ideal self. However, people who were more agreeable, more extraverted, and less neurotic were more likely to say that their relationship helped them get closer to their personal ideal.

That doesn't mean introverts or neurotics can't benefit from the Michelangelo phenomenon, says psychologist Madoka Kumashiro of Goldsmiths, University of London. But certain traits may foster relationships that are ideal for growth. Extraverts, for one, may be "more open about thoughts and feelings. This makes it easier for their partner to support their pursuit of an ideal self." —Janina Larissa Bühler, Ph.D.



Was Your Ex Really So Bad?

A relationship might seem worse in the rearview mirror.

MANY REMEMBER their former romantic partners with a touch of disdain, or at least recall that they and their ex just weren't compatible. Recent research suggests, however, that after a breakup, people sometimes misremember how they really felt about their relationship, giving it a more negative spin.

In a paper published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, researchers had 184 participants who were in relationships complete two surveys, four months apart. The first survey assessed perceived relationship quality and measured commitment, trust, passion, intimacy, love, and satisfaction. For the second survey, participants indicated whether they were still together; a quarter had broken up. All then completed the same satisfaction measures, as well as provided a

retrospective assessment of how happy they had been in their relationship four months earlier.

Overall, participants tended to judge their relationship more negatively and describe their partner as less compatible than they had four months prior. But among couples who had broken up, this difference was nearly three times larger than it was among couples who were still together.

Our "psychological immune system" may shield us from the unpleasant consequences of our actions.

Remembering a past relationship as more negative than it really was could be a feature of a "psychological immune system" that helps to shield us from the unpleasant consequences of our actions, the researchers propose. The "ex-appraisal bias" they identified may be a form of self-deception that makes it easier to move on after a breakup. After all, it is likely easier to cope with a split if one remembers the relationship as incompatible or unpleasant.

—Arash Emamzadeh