

To Thine Own Self be True:

An Examination into the Construct of Authenticity

A Research Paper

Presented to

The Faculty of the Adler Graduate School

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree of Master of Arts in

Adlerian Counseling and Psychotherapy

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May 2012

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### Abstract

The notion of being true to one's self has been around for centuries and discussions of the concept of authenticity can be found across many disciplinary traditions. Although much has been discussed and written about being authentic or true to ones' self, historical musings are broad and address different aspects of being authentic. Recent work in the fields of psychology and sociology has provided a clearer, cohesive and measurable description of the construct of authenticity. This paper provides a historical philosophical and psychological overview of the concept of authenticity, presents emerging themes within the construct, and outlines contemporary research that defines and measures it. Research on the correlation between authenticity and healthy psychological functioning is presented. This review also draws comparisons between the authenticity construct and Adlerian concepts and provides counseling implications.

To Thine Own Self be True:

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The concept of authenticity or being true to one's self permeates modern day Western culture. Be yourself. Be true to yourself. Be *your* true self. Be authentic. Live authentically. People often speak of the need to find themselves or get in touch with who they really are. Messages promoting authenticity are written in classic literature and self-help books. These messages are found on television programs and songs on the radio.

The authenticity message comes from diverse sources. Shakespeare writes, "This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man" (Trans., 1992, 1.2.70-72). Musician David "Ziggy" Marley propels the authenticity message when he sings, "Got to be true to myself" (2003) as does the contemporary rock band Audioslave with their lyrics, "And to be yourself is all you can do" (Cornell, 2005). Dr. Phil advises his viewers to "Be your authentic self. Your authentic self is who you are when you have no fear of judgment..." (McGraw, n.d.). When asked what the secret to a successful talk show was Oprah Winfrey replied, "The secret is authenticity" (Rudolf, 2010).

Cultural messages indicate that being authentic is important and worth pursuing. However, what does it mean to be authentic? How is authenticity defined and how is it measured? Is authenticity truly important, and if so, in what ways? Does authenticity come at a cost? The objective of this paper is to help answer those questions. This literature review examines the construct of authenticity. The paper presents the philosophical and psychological roots of authenticity and describes how authenticity is defined and measured in contemporary psychological work. The paper also reviews research showing the relationship between

authenticity and healthy psychological functioning and presents threads linking authenticity and Adlerian concepts.

### **History**

People across time and discipline have sought to define who one really is. Discussions on the subject of authenticity are centuries old and cross the arts, sciences, and fields of philosophy, sociology, and psychology. Although much has been written on the subject across the various disciplines, descriptions are often vague and loosely defined (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). According to Harter (2002), “there is no single, coherent body of literature on authentic-self behavior, no bedrock of knowledge. Rather, there are unconnected islands that address different aspects of authenticity in rather piecemeal fashion including historical analyses, clinical treatments, social-psychological perspectives, and developmental formulations” (p. 382). Although there is some overlap in definition among the social sciences in regards to authenticity, Erikson (1995) laments that “one manifestation of this historical embeddedness is that any attempt to trace the concept’s meaning across time constantly encounters problems of definition” (p. 123). Adding to the complexity of describing and defining the construct of authenticity is that much of what has been written on the topic has been characterized in terms of its opposite (i.e., inauthenticity) or false self behavior (Harter, 2002; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). For the purpose of this paper I examine the historical philosophical and psychological foundations of authenticity.

### **Philosophical Foundation**

Scholars and philosophers have long discussed the idea of authenticity or being true to ones’ self. The roots of authenticity have a long tradition in philosophy and authenticity, or

authentic functioning, has been described in terms of self-inquiry, essential knowing, taking responsibility for one's choices and actions, and as an ethical and moral imperative.

**Ancient Greek philosophy.** The earliest discussions on authenticity are traced back centuries ago to the time of the ancient Greek philosophers. The words "Know thyself" are inscribed at the temple of Apollo at Delphi (Harter, 2002; Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009). The earliest insights into authentic functioning come from the time of Socrates and his belief that the "unexamined" life is not worth living (Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

Whereas Socrates focused on the importance of self-inquiry, Aristotle (350 BCE/(1998) emphasized the importance of actions. He viewed "eudaimonia" as a life that is lived in truth with one's "daimon," or spirit (Schlegel, et al., 2009; Waterman, 1990). Aristotle spoke of ethics in terms of pursuing the "higher good" (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) and noted that the highest good is "activity of the soul in accordance with the best and most complete virtue in a complete life" (Hutchinson, 1995). Kernis and Wood (2006) note that "from this perspective, authentic functioning is the result of sustained activity in concert with a deeply informed sense of purpose" (p. 285).

**Existential philosophy.** Many philosophical writings on the topic of authenticity come from the postmodern era and existential perspectives of Heidegger, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Sartre (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Schlegel, et al., 2009). These philosophers discussed authenticity as emerging from the anxiety of being "in the world" and having responsibility to make one's own choices. Nietzsche and Heidegger both viewed anxiety as a necessary component to acting authentically (Thompson, 2005). Heidegger (1968) spoke of individuals being thrown into a world they did not construct and over which they had little control. From this

perspective, authentic possibility results from individuals reconciling the fact that they need to build their own lives and are answerable for the choices they make (Guigon, 2006).

Although Heidegger was the first philosopher to use authenticity as a technical term, Nietzsche was an important precursor for Heidegger's philosophy (Thompson, 2005). According to Thompson, (2005) Nietzsche saw an authentic person as one capable of overcoming the fears of living and accepting reality for what it is.

Heidegger and Nietzsche saw existential anxiety as an accompaniment to acting authentically. Kierkegaard discussed that it is people's essential knowing of the meaning of their existence and truth of who they are that relates to an authentic way of functioning (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Kierkegaard, 1849/1983). Kierkegaard (1849/1983) has written, "to will to be that self which one truly is, is indeed the opposite of despair" (p. 3).

Essential knowing is an important element in Kierkegaard's discussion of authenticity. For Sartre, the authentic imperative relates to people's choices and responsibility for their actions. In Sartre's view, authentic functioning results from people's "behavioral self-regulation" (Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

Collectively, the existential philosophy perspective stresses the importance of self-understanding for individuals being in the world (existence) and owning their truth, making their own choices and taking responsibility for their actions.

**Ethics and morality.** Authenticity has also been discussed in terms of ethics and morality. In *The Ethics of Authenticity (1991)*, Taylor makes the case for authenticity being a moral imperative and ties the concept to modernity stating that "the ethic of authenticity is something relatively new and peculiar to modern culture" (p. 26). Speaking to the moral imperative of being authentic, he argues that people are called upon to live their life in a way that

is unique and individual to them. He explains the moral imperative of being one's self and living from one's own inner nature. Taylor writes:

There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's. But this gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life, I miss what being human is for me. This is the powerful moral ideal that has come down to us. It accords crucial moral importance to a kind of contact with myself, with my own inner nature, which it sees as in danger of being lost, partly through the pressures towards outward conformity, but also because in taking an instrumental stance to myself, I may have lost the capacity to listen to this inner voice. Not only should I not fit my life to the demand of external conformity, I can't even find the model to live by outside myself, I can find it only within. (p. 29).

In conjunction with morality and ethics, the idea of sincerity also emerges in the literature around authenticity. Much of Taylor's theory followed the groundwork laid by Trilling in his book, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), which teases out the difference between the two concepts. Trilling, a literary critic, shows how an understanding of the term authenticity has been used in Western Literature. Trilling never comes out and defines authenticity, and the closest he gets to a definition comes in his writing, "The work of art is itself authentic by reason of its entire self-definition: it is understood to exist wholly by the laws of its own being, which include the right to embody painful, ignoble, or socially unacceptable subject-matters" (p. 93). Here we get the sense that authenticity, as reflected in art, does not need to meet social approval. It is not about what is reflected to another. Implied is the truth of the art for the sake of the art.



Sincerity, on the other hand, as discussed by Trilling (1972), reflects the need for truth towards another. He defines sincerity as “a congruence between avowal and actual feeling” (p. 4). Sincerity, then, refers to congruence between one’s true inward thoughts and feelings and outward actions. From this perspective, people are being *sincere* when they represent themselves truthfully to others and *authentic* when they are being truthful to themselves (Erickson, 1995; Trilling, 1972).

### **Psychological Foundation**

**Humanistic perspective.** Much of what has been discussed around authenticity in the field of psychology comes from the humanistic tradition (Gillath, Sesko, Shaver, & Chun, 2010; B. M. Goldman, 2005; Kernis & Goldman, 2005). Authenticity was an important theme in the psychological theories proposed by Rogers (1961, 1963) and Maslow (1968), both mid-20<sup>th</sup> century humanistic psychologists. For Rogers, authenticity was viewed as a central therapeutic goal and essential in the development of the “fully functioning person” (1961). In Roger’s view, maladjustment resulted from the discrepancy between one’s self-concept and external experience. Authenticity emerged as the self-concept and external experience became congruent (Rogers, 1961). From this perspective, authenticity is a dynamic concept, one that changes in relation to how congruent the self-concept and immediate experience are.

Rogers viewed authenticity as being represented in the “fully functioning person.” Maslow (1968) saw authenticity as essential to psychological health and the development of the “self-actualized” person. Movement toward self-actualization occurs when lower order needs (such as physiological, safety, social and esteem) are met and individuals can begin focusing on their “being needs.” Focusing on growth-oriented needs allows individuals to gain self-knowledge, accept their true nature and realize their full potential (Maslow, 1968). From this

perspective authenticity emerges as individuals' needs are met, they become self-aware, and move toward self-actualization or reaching their true capabilities.

**Existential-humanistic perspective.** Taking an existential-humanistic approach to authenticity, Bugental (1965) acknowledged existential anxiety and the need to take responsibility for one's choices. He also stressed the importance of resolving the "self-world" dichotomy. Similar to Rogers and Maslow, Bugental viewed authenticity as a dynamic concept, "not a perfect state, but a quantitative dimension along which we can move" (p. 45). He viewed authenticity both as an ideal state of "at-oneness with the cosmos" and as a continuum leading to that ultimate goal (Bugental, 1965). Bugental proposed that the authentic person has three functional characteristics; being fully aware, choosing what decisions to make in any moment, and taking responsibility for the choices made. Bugental saw authenticity as an imperative for psychological health. In his view, the main responsibility of psychotherapy was to help individuals "discard distortions of awareness" and "accept the responsibilities and opportunities of being authentic in the world" (Bugental, 1965).

Authenticity from the humanistic and existential-humanistic perspectives is a fluctuating state, characterized by open awareness, reflecting the relationship between self-concept and external experience with movement toward the realization of an individual's full potential.

**Self-determination-theory (SDT).** Self-determination theory (SDT) is a psychological perspective that views autonomy, competence, and relatedness as the three basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Self-determination theory focuses on the nature of positive growth tendencies and examines factors that inhibit these tendencies. According to self-determination theory, authenticity emerges as individuals behave in ways that are autonomous and self-determining.

## **The Self**

A common thread across the different philosophical and psychological traditions is the importance of the self in the development of the construct of authenticity. Whether it is in knowing the self, acting in accordance with the self, or being our true or false selves, all concepts of authenticity relate back to the idea of the self and the self-concept. The self literature is broad, spanning different disciplines across time and often focusing on specific aspects of the construct. The literature most pertinent to the construct of authenticity focuses on the self-concept, true and false selves, the self in social context, and whether the self is consistent and static or flexible and multifaceted.

**Self-concept.** The self-concept is what people hold as their truth of who they are and what they are capable of becoming. It is deep, complex and may even include contradictory information. Turner (1968) describes the self-conception as a “vague but vitally felt idea of what I am like in my best moments, of what I am striving toward and have some encouragement to believe I can achieve...”(p. 105). Authenticity is historically framed as being true to one’s self. As such, the self-concept, knowing who one is, the beliefs one holds about him or her-self is imperative to the development of the concept of authenticity.

**True vs. false selves.** Implied in the construct of authenticity is the idea of a real or true self. Historically these constructs, authenticity and the notion of a true self, have been difficult to clearly define (Schlegel, et al., 2009). The notion of a true self and its converse, the false self, is evident in the writings of Jung and Winnicott (Carey, Wingert, & Harlacher, 2010). Jung (1953) distinguished between the individual’s inner self and the conscious ego, or false self. Winnicott (1960) described the true self as being creative and feeling real whereas the false self

is based on others' expectations and results in feeling unreal (1960). This false self also "denies what is meaningful and true to one's authentic being" (Carey, et al., 2010).

**Social self.** Another important theme in the self literature is the view of the self as a social entity. The self is social. It is formed within social context and interactions with others (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Rosenberg, 1981; Winnicott, 1960). Being a social product and force (Rosenberg, 1981), it is important to reflect on the social nature of the self and what that means for authenticity.

The self is socialized and forms after its "emergence from a social flurry" of shoulds and should nots (Anton, 2001). In being true to one's self there exists the implication of truth to myself versus appeasing another. There is a perceived tension between external socially derived expectations (the should and should nots) and internal wants and needs.

**The consistent vs. multifaceted self.** Two additional important themes emerge from the self literature relevant to the topic of authenticity. The first is a debate on whether the self is stable and consistent or flexible and multifaceted. The second is whether being true to the self is defined by behaving in ways consistent with one's inherent traits, or behaving in ways that feel authentic or personally expressive.

**Possible selves.** Historically the self-concept was treated as a stable, unitary and monolithic entity (Campbell, et al., 1996; Markus & Wurf, 1987). What emerges through the contemporary literature, however, is a picture of the self-concept that is flexible, dynamic (Erickson, 1995; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Sande, Goethals, & Radloff, 1988), and socially formed and influenced (Rosenberg, 1981). Current views, both in the field of psychology and sociology, emphasize a multidimensionality aspect of the self-concept. Markus & Wurf (1987) describe a "working self-concept" that is both static and malleable, taking into

account core self-conceptions while allowing for temporal flexibility according to present social circumstances. From this understanding there are core components to the self and also more tentative self-conceptions activated by current external circumstances.

***Trait selves.*** Proponents of “The Big Five” model of personality (Carey, et al., 2010; McCrae & John, 1992) hold that people have inherent traits which form the primary basis of personality. These traits are integral to who an individual is as a person. The traits are stable over time, situation and social roles. The five behavioral traits include extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. From the Big Five trait perspective, the self is primarily defined by static and consistent traits, and being true to one’s self or acting authentically is to behave in a way that is consistent with one’s traits (McCrae & Costa, 1994).

***Self-concept clarity.*** Self-concept clarity is defined as “the extent to which self-beliefs are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent, and temporally stable” (Campbell, et al., 1996). Proponents of the self-concept clarity construct (Campbell, 1990; Campbell, et al., 1996) hold that self-concepts are characterized by high clarity when descriptions of the self are consistent and non-contradictory. For example, an individual who identifies as having a certain trait and consistently reports that trait over time and social situations would be described as having high self-concept clarity. Individuals who are inconsistent in their trait descriptions would be described as having lower self-concept clarity.

## **Modern Conceptualizations**

### **Defining Authenticity**

According to Harter (2002), authenticity involves “owning one’s personal experiences, be they thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, or belief....further implies that one acts in

accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings” ( p. 382). Although there has previously been no “coherent body of literature on authentic behavior” (Harter, 2002), interest in the concept of authenticity has been revived over the past decade. Increased interest in the topic correlates with the emergence of the recent “positive psychology” movement (Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006; Seligman, 2002), and much of the current research on the topic comes out of positive and social psychology perspectives.

Current research on the topic of authenticity provides two different means to define authenticity; a tripartite conception (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008), and a multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity (B. M. Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

**Tripartite conception of authenticity.** The tripartite conception of authenticity described by Wood, et al.(2008) is based on Rogers’ (1961) person-centered conception of authenticity. The construct is defined by three components; self-alienation, authentic living, and accepting external influence.

**Self-alienation.** Self-alienation occurs when there is a disparity between an individual’s conscious awareness and actual experience. In the person-centered view, perfect congruence between these two aspects is never possible (Rogers, 1961). The extent to which a person experiences self-alienation represents the first component of authenticity (Wood, et al., 2008).

**Authentic living.** The second component of authenticity, as presented in the tripartite conception, involves the congruence between an individual’s consciously perceived experience and behavior. This is characterized as authentic living, which involves “being true to oneself in most situations and living in accordance with one’s values and beliefs” (Wood, et al., 2008).

***Accepting external influence.*** The third component of authenticity involves accepting external influence. This aspect is grounded in the belief that humans are fundamentally social beings, living and interacting in a social environment. Self-alienation and the experience of authentic living are both affected by accepting external influence.

**Multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity.** Much of the contemporary research on authenticity comes from the social psychology perspective and work of Michael Kernis and Brian Goldman. They define authenticity as “the unobstructed operation of one’s true or core self in one’s daily enterprise” (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Kernis, 2003). Kernis and Goldman do not view authenticity as a single unitary process, but rather a process composed of four unique and interrelated components. These components include awareness, unbiased process, behavior, and relational orientation (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

***Awareness.*** Awareness of the self is the first component in Kernis and Goldman’s description of the authenticity process. This component includes the knowledge one has about the self such as likes and dislikes. It also includes understanding deeper aspects such as characteristic traits, motives, goals, strengths, weaknesses and motivation to increase the self-knowledge base. It is important to know who one is, what motivates one to action, and what holds one back. Additionally, Kernis and Goldman stress the importance of self-awareness being a first step which then helps promote self-*acceptance*.

The authors’ view of awareness differs from Campbell’s description of self-concept clarity, which defines self-concepts high in clarity as those that are confidently held and remain stable and consistent over time (Campbell, 1990; Campbell, et al., 1996). From the self-concept clarity perspective, an individual who self-describes as both extroverted and introverted would

rate low in self-concept clarity. In contrast, Kernis and Goldman (2006) view the self as complex, multifaceted and having the propensity to call in different and potentially contradictory self-aspects over time. According to Kernis and Goldman (2006), “Awareness involves knowledge and acceptance of one’s multifaceted and potentially contradictory self-aspects....as opposed to rigid acknowledgement and acceptance only of those self-aspects deemed internally consistent with one’s overall self-concept” (p. 295).

***Unbiased processing.*** Unbiased processing of self-relevant information is the second aspect in the multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Unbiased processing refers to objectively looking at information about the self and accepting both the positive and negative aspects. It is looking at the truth of what is presented without denying, distorting, minimizing, exaggerating, or rationalizing what is there. The individual removes him or herself from the interpretation and takes self-relevant information as it is without becoming defensive.

***Behavior.*** Behaving in a way that honors the true self is the third component of authenticity. Authentic behavior is in line with an individual’s values and honors the needs and preferences of the individual. Inauthentic behavior, on the other hand, serves to please others, receive rewards, or avoid punishment (Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

An important aspect of authentic behavior is that it is guided by a conscious level of awareness and intention. Kernis and Goldman (2006) state that “authentic behavior is choiceful behavior oriented toward a ‘solution’ derived from consciously considering one’s self-relevant ‘problems’ (e.g., potentially competing self-motives, beliefs, etc.)” (p. 299).

Another important aspect of authentic behavior is that it is not a compulsion to act in accordance with the true self but rather is a representation of “core feelings, motives, and



inclinations” (Kernis & Goldman, 2005). Conflict may arise when behavior which is congruent with values, feelings and motives is at odds with the immediate external environment. How an individual navigates the conflict has implications for one’s sense of integrity and authenticity. Kernis and Goldman (2005) note that authenticity is not always reflected in actions and it is important to be mindful of the awareness and unbiased processing components that inform how one behaves. They write:

For example, when a person reacts to pressure by behaving in accord with prevailing social norms that stand in contrast with his or her true self, authenticity may still be operative at awareness and processing levels. In such instances, although authenticity is compromised at the behavioral level, it can be preserved at the awareness and unbiased processing levels. As this example indicates, sometimes the needs and values of the self are incompatible with those of society. In these instances, authenticity may be reflected in awareness of one’s needs and motives and an unbiased assessment of relevant evaluative information. In some instances the resulting behavior may also reflect authenticity, but in others it may not. (p. 217-218).

***Relational orientation.*** The fourth component of authenticity is relational orientation. This component takes into account that humans are social beings and authenticity is reflected in one’s ability to be one’s self around others. It is important that there is sincerity and openness in one’s close relationships and others are able to see the “real” person, both the good and the bad. Kernis and Goldman (2005) state that “authentic relational authenticity involves a selective process of self-disclosure that fosters the development of mutual intimacy and trust” (p. 218). Furthermore, relational authenticity includes developing relationships that support a genuine

expression of “core self aspects without threat of reprisal or criticism” (Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

### Assessing Authenticity

**Authenticity Scale (AS).** Wood et al. (2008) created an Authenticity Scale that measures authenticity from their tripartite perspective which takes into account the aspects of *self-alienation, authentic living, and accepting external influence*. The scale is a self-report questionnaire which is relatively short and designed for use in counseling psychology settings. Twelve questions are included in the questionnaire; four questions to assess each of the three components of authenticity with participants expressing agreement on a 1 (*does not describe me at all*) to 7 (*describes me very well*) scale. Questions from the Authenticity Scale (Wood, et al., 2008) include:

#### Self-alienation

1. *“I feel as if I don’t know myself very well.”*
2. *“I feel out of touch with the “real me.””*
3. *“I feel alienated from myself.”*
4. *“I don’t know how I really feel inside.”*

#### Authentic living

1. *“I always stand by what I believe in.”*
2. *“I am true to myself in most situations.”*
3. *“I think it is better to be yourself, than to be popular.”*
4. *“I live in accordance with my values and beliefs.”*

#### Accepting external influence

1. *“I usually do what other people tell me to do.”*
2. *“Other people influence me greatly.”*
3. *“I am strongly influenced by the opinions of others.”*
4. *“I always feel I need to do what others expect me to do.”*

**Authenticity Inventory (AI).** Goldman and Kernis (2004) developed an Authenticity Inventory (AI) to assess authenticity. The inventory is based on their definition of authenticity (B. M. Goldman & Kernis, 2002) and is comprised of four subscales: *awareness, unbiased processing, behavior, and relational orientation*. The inventory is a 45 item self-report questionnaire with responses expressing agreement on a 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*) scale.

**Authenticity of self aspects.** A five item scale developed by Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne and Illardi (1997) looks at authenticity of “self aspects.” It was originally developed to look at authenticity across felt roles and has since been used in other research on authenticity. The scale is comprised of the following items:

- “I experience this aspect of myself as an authentic part of who I am”
- “This aspect of myself is meaningful and valuable to me”
- “I have freely chosen this way of being”
- “I am only this way because I have to be (reversed scored)”
- “I feel tense and pressured in this part of my life (reversed scored)”

**Authenticity in Relationship Scale (AIRS).** Lopez and Rice (2006) define *authenticity in relationships* as “A relational schema that favors the benefits of mutual and accurate exchanges of real self-experiences with one’s intimate partner over the attendant risks of personal discomfort, partner disapproval, or relationship instability” (p 364). The authors developed the Authenticity in Relationship Scale (AIRS), a relationship-specific self-report assessment to measure authenticity. The initial scale included 37 questions designed to assess costs and benefits of acting authentically within intimate relationships. The questions included in the scale contain both positively and negatively worded statements that addressed “strategic deception” (e.g., “I purposely hide my true feelings about some things in order to avoid upsetting

my partner”) and “uninhibited self-disclosure” (e.g., “My life is an open book” for my partner to read”).

The initial scale was refined to include only 24 questions representing two subscales, Unacceptability of Deception (UOD) and Intimate Risk Taking (IRT). Unacceptability of deception relates to an unwillingness to engage in and accept self and partner misrepresentations. The second subscale, intimate risk taking, captured dispositions toward truthful self-disclosure and risk taking with one’s partner. Participants were asked to reflect on their current intimate relationship and to use a 9-point rating scale (1 being not at all descriptive to 9 being very descriptive) to rate how well each question described their current relationship experience.

## **Empirical Research**

### **Self-Esteem**

Wood et al (2008) using their 12-item Authenticity Scale examined the relationship between authenticity and self-esteem. There were three separate samples of participants which included undergraduates (158 total), second year psychology students (213 total), and a community sample (117 total), respectively. Participants were given a questionnaire packet including the Authenticity Scale and Rosenberg’s (1965) 10-item Self-Esteem Scale to assess global self-esteem. Results showed that all subscales of the Authenticity Scale (self-alienation, authentic living, accepting external influence) were correlated with self-esteem.

Goldman and Kernis (2002) using an earlier version of the Authenticity Inventory, AI version 1 (B. M. Goldman & Kernis, 2001), examined the relationships between authenticity and self-esteem level and contingent self-esteem--feelings of self-worth that are dependent on specific achievements or outcomes (Kernis, 2003). The study included 79 male and female college-age participants. Participants completed the Authenticity Inventory, Rosenberg’s (1965)

Self-Esteem Scale and a scale developed by Kernis and Paradise (in preparation) to assess contingent self-esteem.

Correlations were computed between self-esteem measures and AI scores and subscale AI scores (awareness, unbiased processing, behavior, relational orientation). Total Authenticity Scale scores were positively associated to self-esteem level and negatively associated to self-esteem contingency. According to subscale AI Scores, greater self-reported awareness related to higher self-esteem. In addition, higher behavioral authenticity was related to higher levels of self-esteem.

Lopez and Rice (2006) using their AIRS measure of authenticity in relationships and Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (1965) surveyed 487 undergraduate students involved in intimate relationships. The authors found that scores on each individual AIRS subscale (unacceptability of deception and intimate risk taking) were correlated with self-esteem.

### **Subjective Well-Being**

Subjective well-being (SWB) is a concept associated with quality of life or sense of satisfaction with life. It is subjective in that it refers to people's evaluations of their own lives and involves the components of affect and life satisfaction (Diener, 2000; Kernis & Paradise, in preparation) Subjective well-being is most often defined as experiencing high positive affect, low negative affect and high satisfaction with one's life (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Research studies have examined if there is a relationship between the constructs of subjective well-being and authenticity.

Wood et al (2008) using the 12-item Authenticity Scale looked at the relationship between authenticity and SWB. The study participants consisted of three separate samples including ethnically diverse (180 total), college undergraduates (158 total) and a community

sample (117 people). To assess SWB participants were given the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) which is commonly used to measure SWB.

Participants rated statements relating to life satisfaction (e.g., “I am satisfied with my life”) on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Affect was measured using the 20-item Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988).

Each of the authenticity subscales (self-alienation, authentic living, accepting external influence) were correlated with all three of the measures of SWB. There was high stability among the relationships between the self-alienation and authentic living variables and satisfaction with life and positive affect. Accepting external influence showed similar patterns but the correlations were not consistent across samples Wood et al (2008).

Goldman and Kernis (2002) also found an association between authenticity and subjective well-being. The AI version 1 was used to assess authenticity (Goldman & Kernis, 2001). Life satisfaction was assessed using The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, et al., 1985) and affect was measured using Positive Affect/Negative Affect Scale (Brunstein, 1993). Results showed that overall authenticity was positively associated to life satisfaction and all subscales were correlated negatively with negative affect. In addition, all subscales were positively associated with life-satisfaction. The awareness, unbiased processing and relational orientation subscales were positively associated with life-satisfaction and also were statistically significant (Goldman & Kernis, 2002).

Two studies conducted by Ryan, LaGuardia, and Rawsthorne (2005) examined the relationship between authenticity, well being and resilience to stressful events. In their first study the authors assessed authenticity using the 5 item scale developed by Sheldon, et al. (1997) that looks at authenticity of self-aspects. Depressive symptoms were measured with the Center

for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D) (Radloff, 1977). Stress was measured with the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen, Kamarack, & Mermelstein, 1983) and anxiety was assessed with the State-Trait Anxiety Scale (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970).

Participants included 89 undergraduate students. Results of study 1 showed that authenticity ratings of self-aspects were associated with lower depressive symptoms, lower anxiety and stress, and greater subjective vitality (Ryan, et al., 2005).

A second study was conducted by Ryan et al (2005) to retest the authenticity of self-aspects on stress and well-being found in their first study. Authenticity was again assessed using the Sheldon et al (1997) scale. Perceived stress was assessed using the PSS. Depressive symptoms were assessed using the CES-D depression scale (Radloff, 1977). In this second study the authors also examined stressful life events using the College Student Life Events Scale (CSLES) developed by Levine and Perkins (1980, August). Again greater authenticity was associated with lower depressive symptoms and perceived stress. In addition, the individuals reporting greater authenticity tended to experience fewer negative life events (Ryan, et al., 2005).

Ménard and Brunet (2010) looked at the relationship between authenticity and well-being in the workplace. The authors surveyed 360 managers from public organizations using self-report questionnaires. Authenticity was assessed using 25 items from Goldman and Kernis' Authenticity Inventory (2004) (tailored for a workplace setting) that related to the components of authentic behavior and unbiased awareness. Subjective well-being at work was assessed using the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, et al., 1985) again contextualized for the workplace and the affect scale used to assess positive and negative affect (Diener, Smith, & Fugita, 1995).

Results show that authenticity was related to subjective well-being at work. Satisfaction at work was positively associated with the authenticity subscales of unbiased awareness and

authentic behaviors. In addition, positive affect at work was positively related to authentic behaviors and unbiased awareness at work.

### **Psychological Well-Being (PWB)**

Ryff (1989) proposed a multicomponent conceptualization of psychological well-being (PWB) that is deeply rooted in the humanistic tradition. The multidimensional construct of PWB contains six core aspects: self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth. Studies have been conducted examining the relationship between psychological well-being and authenticity.

Wood et al (2008) using the 12-item Authenticity Scale looked at the relationship between authenticity and PWB. Psychological well-being was assessed using the six subscales of Ryff's (1989) Scales of Psychological Well-Being (RSPW) with each subscale containing three items. Each of the authenticity subscales (self-alienation, authentic living, accepting external influence) was correlated with the components of PWB with the exception of authentic living which was not correlated with purpose in life.

The relationship between authenticity and PWB was also examined using Goldman and Kernis' (2002) Authenticity Inventory (AI) and Ryff's (1989) Psychological Well-Being subscales (Goldman, Kernis, Piasecki, Hermann, & Foster, 2003). The study found that awareness, behavioral, and relational orientation subscale scores were positively and significantly correlated with each of Ryff's subscales (self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth). The exception was with behavioral authenticity and the self-acceptance subscales which were not correlated Goldman et al. (2003).



Pisarik and Larson (2011) also found correlations between psychological well-being and authenticity as measured through the Authenticity Inventory (Goldman & Kernis, 2002). The authors assessed authenticity using the awareness and unbiased processing subscales of the AI and assessed PWB using the self-acceptance and personal growth subscales of Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being (1989).

Results from the study suggest that the awareness subscale was positively related to both measures of psychological well-being (self-acceptance and personal growth). In addition, the unbiased processing subscale was related to higher self-acceptance and personal growth. All positive correlations were statistically significant (Pisarik & Larson, 2011).

### **Relationships**

Research has been conducted examining the relationship between authenticity and healthy relationship functioning. A study by Brunell, Kernis, Goldman, Heppner, Davis, Cascio and Webster (2010) investigated the relationship between authenticity and healthy relationship behavior. The authors used the Authenticity Inventory AI3 (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) to assess authenticity. Different questionnaires and assessment measures were utilized to assess various aspects of positive relationship functioning including fear of intimacy, measure of accommodation and interpersonal trust. In addition, personal well-being was also assessed using three separate measures.

Brunell et al. (2010) found that higher authenticity was correlated with higher relationship functioning and well-being for both men and women. Additionally, higher authenticity was positively associated with relationship outcomes for men but not for women. Women's dispositional authenticity related to well-being and relationship functioning but not to relationship outcomes. It appears that the higher an individual's authenticity score, the more

likely he or she is to behave in ways that are less destructive to the relationship which relates to having more satisfying relationships.

Additionally, using their Authenticity in Relationship Scale (AIRS) Lopez and Rice (2006) found that subscale scores of Intimate Risk Taking and Unacceptability of Deception (which forms the structure for their relationship authenticity) explained variance in relationship satisfaction. Respondents who were more likely to take risks to be open and share with their partners reported higher relationship satisfaction.

### **Mindfulness and Verbal Defensiveness**

A study conducted by Lakey, Kernis, Heppner and Lance (2008) looked at the relationship between authenticity and mindfulness and verbal defensiveness. Authenticity was assessed using Goldman and Kernis' (2004) Authenticity Inventory. Mindfulness was assessed using the 15- item Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) and defensiveness was measured with the Defensive Verbal Behavior Assessment (DVBA) (Feldman Barrett, Williams, & Fong, 2002). The three assessment tests were given to 101 undergraduate student participants.

Total authenticity scores were inversely correlated with verbal defensive scores. In addition, the authenticity subscales of awareness, unbiased processing, and behavior were also associated with lower defensive scores. Higher mindfulness was linked to higher total authenticity scores as well as to each of the authenticity subscales. In summary, mindfulness and authenticity were positively correlated and both related to lower levels of verbal defensiveness.

### **Costs of Being Authentic**

Authenticity has been correlated with an increase in self-esteem, life-satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, psychological well-being and mindfulness. Authenticity has also been

correlated with a decrease in verbal defensiveness, depressive symptoms, anxiety and stress.

One might ask why people aren't more authentic more of the time.

Kernis and Goldman (2006) suggest that there are costs associated with being authentic. For example, becoming aware of self-aspects can be painful when the aspects are perceived as negative or unpleasant. Through unbiased processing the potential exists to encounter negative information about the self. It takes courage to acknowledge the information and not distort it to serve an ego agenda. One may feel vulnerable stepping out into the world and exposing one's true self.

In addition, *behaving* in a way that is authentic can feel threatening when serving one's truth is in conflict with the ideals of one's peers or authority figures. Acting authentically can come at the cost of other's judgment or ridicule which can be a powerful inhibitor.

### **Adlerian Psychology**

Alfred Adler's Individual Psychology emerges around the same time and as an antithesis to Freud's method of psychoanalysis (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Although the name may suggest a separation from other, Individual Psychology is based on the belief that people are deeply rooted in social connection and are social beings. Adler uses the word individual to describe a person that cannot be separated into distinct parts and must be understood holistically. Freud's psychoanalytic theory proposes that people can be divided into ego, id, and superego. Adlerian psychology, the popularized name given to Adler's school of psychology, views people as *indivisible* and socially embedded (Oberst & Stewart, 2003).

Adlerian psychology takes an optimistic and growth oriented view of human nature. Individuals are viewed as self-determining and creative, assigning meaning to circumstances in

their life (reality is as we perceive it) and behaving in ways that are purposive (even if the purpose is not known or understood).

### **Authenticity and Adler**

Adlerian psychology never formally addresses the concept of being authentic or authenticity. Core concepts within Adlerian psychology, however, very closely represent the spirit held within the construct of authenticity and it is easy to draw comparisons.

**Social interest.** Social Interest is the most core and distinct concept of Adlerian psychology and also the concept that is most difficult to articulate (Ansbacher, 1968). Adler originally uses the German word *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* to describe this social component of his psychology. *Gemeinschaftsgefühl* has been translated into English at various times to mean the following: social feeling, community feeling, community interest, social sense and social interest, the latter which Adler eventually prefers and adopts (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler views social interest as a core component of healthy mental functioning and globally as promoting “ascending development and welfare of all mankind” (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1979) (p. 211). In the Adlerian view, social interest is paramount to healthy psychological functioning. Psychological maladjustment points to a lack of social interest.

The Adlerian literature suggests a possible connection between a deepened sense of social interest and possessing attributes of being authentic (e.g., relational orientation, autonomy, awareness and unbiased processing).

**Relational orientation.** Social interest reflects a general connectedness among humanity and shows “the relationship of an individual to his environment” (Adler, 1954). This directly parallels the relational orientation component of authenticity which views individuals in social context and stresses that authenticity occurs in being able to be oneself around others.

***Autonomy.*** The link between social interest and autonomy is referenced by Ansbacher (1968) who states that “Adler consistently associates social interest with courage and independence” and one goal of psychotherapy is the “development of greater independence of the opinion of other people” (p. 146). A modern examination of the self and Adlerian psychology goes on to describe Individual Psychology as reflecting “a modern emphasis on the uniqueness of the individual person and dedication to his or her individual fulfillment to the fullest extent possible” (Manaster, Weinfeld, Richardson, & Mays, 1999)(p. 477). Manaster et al. furthermore state that personal fulfillment and purpose go “hand in hand with deepening social interest” (1999).

***Awareness and unbiased processing.*** Social interest also may be related to self-awareness and the ability to view one’s self wholly and objectively. For instance, Mosak (1989) notes the genuineness of individuals with developed social interest stating that they are “willing to commit to life and the life tasks without evasion, excuse or sideshows” (p. 80). According to Watts (1998) Adler suggests that therapists with developed social interest possess self-awareness and are able to relate to clients with genuineness. Manaster and Corsini (1982) go on to state that individuals with developed social interest have “learned how to accept themselves with their frailties and weaknesses” and have what Adlerians call the courage to be imperfect (p. 49).

Neufield (1964) may best sum up the relationship between authenticity and social interest when he writes, “Authentic existence could be expressed as a life style integrated by social concern and social commitment. Inauthentic existence could be expressed as a life style integrated by one’s private, idio-synchratic logic lacking adequate social concern and still less social commitment” (p. 16).

**The fourth life task.** Alfred Adler proposes that healthy mental functioning is associated with successfully meeting the three tasks of life: work, love and sex, and relationships with other people (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Dreikurs and Mosak (1967) add a fourth life task, that of getting along with oneself. The fourth life task shares similarities with the construct of authenticity including the concepts of autonomy, awareness and unbiased processing.

To successfully meet the fourth life task, individuals must get along with themselves rather than resist or fight their nature. Dreikurs and Mosak (1967) suggest that people must accept who they are (awareness) and free themselves from the prejudices they have about themselves (unbiased processing). The authors point out the importance of individuals owning their mistakes and accepting those aspects that might be perceived as negative. Dreikurs and Mosak state, “To make mistakes is human—the point is that we have to learn to live with ourselves with all our imperfections. We need the courage to be imperfect, to make and accept our mistakes graciously” (p. 54). This concept parallels the notion of being authentic and showing one’s true self to the world.

Dreikurs and Mosak also stress the importance of honoring internal evaluations of oneself and not depending on the opinions of others (autonomy). They state that “It is the opinion of ourselves which counts, and we must learn to respect ourselves” (p. 54). Personal responsibility is also important in getting along with oneself. They stress that individuals hold the power to change and move forward in life once they accept themselves and stop resisting their nature stating that, “We have tremendous inner resources if we would only believe in them and thereby believe in ourselves as we are” (p. 55).

### **Implications for Counseling**

Research has correlated authentic functioning with an increase in self-esteem, life-satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, psychological well-being, mindfulness, and decrease in verbal defensiveness, depressive symptoms, anxiety and stress. As a result, a primary treatment goal of any form of counseling (traditional therapy, coaching, ministerial work), should be to encourage increased authenticity in the client.

#### **Promoting Self-Awareness**

Promoting self-awareness is the first step in encouraging clients to become more authentic. Counselors can bring awareness to their clients by serving as mirrors and reflecting behaviors, beliefs, attitudes, fears, etc...back to the client. Counselors may also use exploratory tools to encourage self-discovery among clients. Such tools may include exercises in discovering core values and fears, strengths, energy drains and fuels, personality typing, and satisfaction among the life tasks.

#### **Encouraging Authentic Behavior**

Counselors also need to promote authentic behavior with their clients. Authentic behavior, as presented by Kernis and Goldman (2005), honors the “core feelings, motives and inclinations” of an individual. It is important, then, that counselors acknowledge and encourage behaviors that support a client’s values, beliefs, motives and inclinations and challenge those behaviors that do not. This encouragement will facilitate clients’ ability to recognize when their behaviors are and are not congruent with self-held truths.

#### **Acknowledging Choice and Responsibility**

Authentic living comes from making one’s own decisions and taking responsibility for the choices made. Counselors can help promote authentic expression by taking every

opportunity to point out when a client is at choice. In addition, it is important for the counselor to illustrate the consequences of choices made by a client, both positive and negative, and to encourage the client to take responsibility for those choices.

### **Encouraging Self-Disclosure and Authentic Relationships**

Authenticity involves showing the true self to others. It is important that there is openness and sincerity in the relationships one has with others. Counselors should work with clients to become more comfortable expressing their true self around others. In addition, counselors should encourage clients to develop relationships that support a genuine expression of their authentic self.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of authenticity or being true to one's self has been around for centuries. It has deep roots in both philosophy and psychology and until recently has been historically elusive to define and quantify.

Modern descriptions of authenticity or authentic functioning often depict a construct composed of many elements including autonomy, self-awareness, unbiased examination, social embeddedness and behavior congruent with values and beliefs.

Contemporary work in the fields of sociology and psychology has yielded both a manner to define and quantify authenticity. Wood, et al. (2008) provides a tripartite definition of authenticity and an Authenticity Scale to measure it. Goldman and Kernis (2002) define authenticity through their multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity and an Authenticity Inventory (2004) to quantify it.

Much of the current research on the construct of authenticity comes from the work of Goldman and Kernis and their definition of authenticity which is "the unobstructed operation of



one's true or core self in one's daily enterprise" (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Kernis, 2003). This research has shown a correlation between authentic functioning and increase in self-esteem, life-satisfaction, relationship satisfaction, psychological well-being, and mindfulness. Authentic functioning has also been linked to a decrease in verbal defensiveness, depressive symptoms, anxiety and stress.

Because authenticity has been correlated with many levels of healthy psychological functioning it is suggested that encouraging authenticity should be considered a primary goal of counseling. Counselors are encouraged to promote self-awareness in their clients, encourage behavior in clients that is congruent with values and beliefs, and empower clients by identifying opportunities to make choices and prompting clients to take responsibility for their actions. In addition, those subscribing to the philosophy of Alfred Adler can help promote authenticity by encouraging clients to view themselves holistically, to deepen their social interest, and to foster their courage to be imperfect.

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