



Short Communication

# Authenticity and well-being: Exploring positivity and negativity in interactions as a mediator☆



Zachary G. Baker<sup>a,\*</sup>, Reese Y.W. Tou<sup>a</sup>, Jennifer L. Bryan<sup>b,c,d</sup>, C. Raymond Knee<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Houston, United States

<sup>b</sup> VA HSR&D Center for Innovations in Quality, Effectiveness and Safety, Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, Houston, TX, United States

<sup>c</sup> South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center, Houston, TX, United States

<sup>d</sup> Baylor College of Medicine, Department of Psychiatry, Houston, TX, United States

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 8 November 2016

Received in revised form 4 March 2017

Accepted 8 March 2017

Available online 22 March 2017

### Keywords:

Authenticity

Interaction

Valence

Well-being

Ill-being

## ABSTRACT

Personality-level authenticity is a robust predictor of both well- and ill-being. Recent research has explored the ways in which this element of personality is associated with interpersonal relationships and interactions. The present study examines the valence of interpersonal interactions (i.e., positivity and lack of negativity) as a mediator of the associations between authenticity and well-/ill-being. Participants reported authenticity at baseline, recorded their perceptions of valence for each interaction in which they participated for two weeks, and reported several indicators of well- and ill-being at follow-up. We then averaged each interaction valence report within participants to get a participant-level (i.e., chronic) measurement of interaction valence. Results revealed that authenticity positively predicted well-being and that interaction valence mediated these associations. These same mediation analyses were not significant for ill-being, though all results were in the predicted directions. Results were interpreted as evidence suggesting that the personality trait of authenticity has implications for interaction with others and that these interactions, in turn, may have implications for one's state of being.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Authenticity, well-being, and ill-being

Authenticity refers to an individual's tendency to express and behave in accord with his or her true feelings, thoughts, and attitudes, and is composed of four factors: awareness, unbiased processing, behavior, and relational orientation (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Awareness emphasizes one's motivation to increase self-relevant knowledge, becoming more in touch with one's feelings, thoughts, and desires. The learning process of understanding and accepting one's strengths and

weaknesses, desires and needs, and dispositional characteristics thus enables an individual to integrate one's various self-aspects. Unbiased processing addresses an individual's ability to view one's positive and negative aspects more objectively, rather than denying or distorting information about the self. Such relative objectivity reduces tendencies to engage in self-serving biases following success or failure, promotes a more non-defensive view of one's performance, and improves an individual's long-term functioning. Behavior focuses on the extent to which an individual acts based on his or her awareness, rather than to acquire rewards or avoid punishments. Finally, relational orientation reflects individuals' motivation to express and share their true-self within close relationships, with the motivation to increase openness, sincerity, and trust in close relationships (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). When researchers are interested in individual components of authenticity as opposed to the overall personality construct, these components may be examined separately (e.g., Wickham, Williamson, Beard, Kobayashi, & Hirst, 2015). When researchers are interested in an overall authenticity personality construct, these components have been shown to collectively represent this construct well (Brunell et al., 2010; Bryan, Baker, & Tou, 2015; Tou, Baker, Hadden, & Lin, 2015).

Authenticity is positively associated with well-being and negatively associated with ill-being. It predicts higher levels of self-actualization and vitality (Kernis & Goldman, 2006), greater subjective well-being

☆ This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. This material is the result of work supported by the South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center and the resources and use of facilities at the Houston VA Health Services Research and Development Center for Innovations in Quality, Effectiveness and Safety (Cln13-413). The opinions expressed reflect those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. government or Baylor College of Medicine.

\* Corresponding author at: Department of Psychology, University of Houston, 3695 Cullen Boulevard Room 126, Houston, TX 77204-5022, United States.

E-mail address: [zbaker@uh.edu](mailto:zbaker@uh.edu) (Z.G. Baker).

and more positive affect (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008), and higher levels of life satisfaction (Brunell et al., 2010). In addition, authenticity is related to greater self-esteem at both between- and within-person levels (Heppner et al., 2008; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Authenticity is negatively associated with psychological stress and physical symptomatology (Kernis & Goldman, 2006), and is predictive of fewer depressive and anxiety symptoms among college students (Bryan et al., 2015). Given evidence of associations between authenticity, well-being, and ill-being, we wished to explore underlying mechanisms. We propose that the positivity, and lack of negativity of one's interpersonal interactions, may account for some of these associations.

### 1.2. Authenticity and interpersonal interactions

Researchers have begun to examine how authenticity benefits not only the individual, but also interpersonal relationship functioning. More authentic individuals are able to consider their true needs in a more realistic way, resulting in willingness to take others' needs into consideration when conflicts arise. Tou et al. (2015) examined the strategies that more authentic individuals take during conflict with friends, and found that individuals with higher levels of authenticity tended to choose strategies that harmoniously took one's own and the other's needs into consideration (i.e., integrating and compromising strategies). The authors demonstrated that one reason for taking others' needs into consideration along with one's own may be that one's goals align with consideration of both sets of needs. In the context of romantic relationships, more authentic individuals are more likely to exhibit positive relationship functioning behaviors, consisting of accommodation, self-disclosure, and trust in one's partner (Brunell et al., 2010). Furthermore, feeling authentic was found to be key in reaping positive personal and relationship outcomes from sacrifice behaviors (Le & Impett, 2013).

Given that more authentic individuals tend to consider both their own and others' needs and prefer engaging in pro-relationship behaviors in interpersonal interactions, more positive and less negative interactions may result. Wickham, Reed, and Williamson (2015) investigated whether authenticity buffered the effects of negatively valenced interactions. They found that negatively valenced interactions were negatively associated with well-being, but such a relationship was not observed for those with higher levels of authenticity.

### 1.3. The present study

We propose that the valence (i.e., felt positivity and lack of negativity) of interpersonal interactions is one mechanism by which associations between authenticity and well-/ill-being may be explained. Here, we examine naturally occurring interpersonal interactions, instead of specific contexts, such as friendships and close relationships, in order to increase the generalizability of our findings. Similarly, we studied broad conceptualizations of well-/ill-being in line with past research (Uysal, Lin, & Knee, 2010) with the desire that our findings may be able to generalize to many kinds of both.

**Hypothesis 1.** Authenticity would be (a) positively associated with well-being indices, (b) negatively associated with ill-being indices, and (c) positively associated with the valence of interpersonal interactions.

**Hypothesis 2.** The valence of interpersonal interactions would be (a) positively associated with well-being indices, and (b) negatively associated with ill-being indices.

**Hypothesis 3.** The valence of interpersonal interactions would (a) positively mediate the association between authenticity and well-being indices, and (b) negatively mediate the association between authenticity and ill-being indices.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Procedures

The present data were collected at a large southwestern university and represent supplementary hypotheses for that data collection. The present analyses make use of data from each set of time points collected but are looking at between-, rather than within-person effects. After attending an orientation session in the laboratory that explained procedures, informed consent was obtained and participants were emailed a baseline survey. Once the baseline survey had been completed, they made two weeks of diary entries ( $M_{\text{Entries}} = 10.43$ )<sup>1</sup> in line with recommendations that in studies of social participation 2 weeks of entries is sufficient to capture meaningful variation (Reis, Gable, & Maniaci, 2014). Participants answered a series of survey questions via an online link every time they had an interaction as soon as possible after the interaction. They could access these links with any internet-connected computer or mobile device they had at their disposal. Following methodology of past research (Reis & Wheeler, 1991; Reis, Gable, Maniaci, Reis, & Judd, 2014) an interaction was defined as any instance in which participants were actively following the conversation and could enter the conversation when they wished. They were given examples of interactions including "Someone says something to you, you respond, and so forth," as well as non-interactions, "Sitting side-by-side watching television." To qualify, a situation had to contain at least 20 min of continuous interaction in the hope of reducing participant burden. It was expected that significantly fewer interactions would have to be recorded when the limit was set at 20 min as opposed to the more typical 10-minute span (Reis & Wheeler, 1991). Qualitative examination of our findings found that a random sample of 245 interactions took place in the following contexts: 18% Family, 7% Work, 25% Friends, 27% Other, 19% Unclear, and 4% Classmates. Finally, after the two weeks of surveys, participants were emailed an additional link to a follow-up survey. Participants were compensated with extra credit for participating in this study at the discretion of their instructors.

### 2.2. Participants

Of 143 students who completed the baseline survey, 98 (78%) completed both diary entries and follow-up surveys. All analyses and descriptive statistics reported in this paper include only those final 98 participants. Participants were 23.56 years old on average ( $SD = 7.42$ ), 78% female, and ethnically diverse: 19% Caucasian, 14% African-American, 29% Asian, 2% Middle Eastern, 34% Hispanic/Latino, and 2% Other.

### 2.3. Measures

All estimates of internal consistency were calculated with the present sample. For each measure, higher scores reflect higher levels of that construct.

**Baseline Authenticity.** The Authenticity Inventory-3 (Kernis & Goldman, 2006;  $\alpha = 0.86$ ) was used to examine trait authenticity at time 1. The assessment consists of 45 items (e.g., I find that my behavior typically expresses my values.) rated from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

**Interaction Valence.** The extent to which individuals perceived their interactions to be less negative and more positive was assessed with a single item, following each qualifying interaction. This item was "How did you feel about this interaction?" rated from -3

<sup>1</sup> One helpful reviewer noted that we could examine the correlation between our measure of the number of interactions and authenticity. This correlation demonstrated that reporting oneself as more authentic was related to reporting fewer interactions of >20 min over two weeks ( $r = -0.21$ ,  $p = 0.041$ ).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5035788>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5035788>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)