



The real me: Authenticity, interpersonal goals, and conflict tactics



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ABSTRACT

Dispositional authenticity is associated with positive intra- and interpersonal outcomes, yet how authenticity relates to conflict solving strategies has not been examined. The present study aims to explore the relationship between authenticity and conflict solving strategies in close friendships and proposes that interpersonal goals (i.e., compassionate goals and self-image goals) might mediate the relationship. Three hundred sixty-three Taiwanese college students completed a survey package. Results showed that authenticity was positively associated with strategies that promote the needs of both oneself and one's friend (i.e., integrating and compromising) while negatively, or not, associated with those that don't concern one's own needs (i.e., obliging) or one's friend's needs (i.e., dominating and avoiding). Further, compassionate goals mediated the relationship between authenticity and integrating, compromising, and dominating strategies, while suppressing the relationship between authenticity and avoiding and obliging strategies. Self-image goals mediated only dominating and avoiding strategies.

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1. Introduction

Conflict in close relationships is inevitable. What matters is how people attempt to resolve conflict. That is, do people respond negatively, exacerbating the strain between partners, or positively, working toward a resolution (Gottman & Notarius, 2000)? According to prior research, during conflict with others people are concerned with (1) their own needs and (2) the needs of their partner to varying degrees. The combinations of these two concerns are reflected in five different approaches to conflict that reflect the motivational orientation of a person during conflict: Integrating, compromising, avoiding, dominating, and obliging (Rahim, 1983). The goal of the present research was to examine whether and how dispositional authenticity is associated with different approaches to conflict. Specifically, we test a model in which authenticity is positively associated with conflict resolution strategies that emphasize both concerns for one's own and close other's needs (i.e., integrating, compromising), but negatively or not at all with strategies that reflect either low concern for the self (i.e., obliging), for the other (i.e., dominating), or both (i.e., avoiding). Further, we were interested in the mediating roles of two types of interpersonal goals: compassionate and self-image goals. We present data from a sample of Taiwanese undergraduates about their dispositional authenticity, interpersonal goals, and approaches to conflict with close friends.

1.1. Authenticity

Authenticity refers to state of being in which one's self is highly integrated and one's behaviors are felt to be in line with one's beliefs and values (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). In other words, one has a sense of being able to express and act on one's 'true self' in everyday life. Kernis and Goldman (2006) describe authenticity as consisting of four components: awareness, unbiased processing, behavior, and relational orientation, which are essential to understanding authentic individuals and the underlying processes that make them authentic. Awareness is knowing the true self, accepting that self, and wanting to expand that self. Unbiased processing concerns the ability to take positive and negative feedback at face value. Behavioral authenticity refers to feeling that one acts out of internal motives in accord with their values, preferences, and needs. Finally, the relational orientation involves valuing and pursuing openness, honesty, and sincerity in one's close relationships. Importantly, while each of these components represents a unique construct, they are all heavily interrelated and collectively represent authenticity.

Dispositional authenticity has been found to be associated with a host of indicators of psychological well-being. For instance, authenticity is associated with better coping, more life-satisfaction and self-actualization, and lower contingent self-worth (e.g., Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Additionally some researchers have begun to examine the role of authenticity in relationship quality. For instance, relational authenticity—defined as unacceptability of deception and intimate risk-taking (Lopez & Rice, 2006)—found associations with higher relationship satisfaction. Further, research has found that both

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one's own and one's partner's overall dispositional authenticity is associated with relationship well-being in the form of less self-concealment, fear of intimacy, neglect of partners, as well as more accommodation, self-disclosure, satisfaction, commitment, and trust (Brunell et al., 2010).

However, to date, no research has examined whether and how authenticity is related to approaches to conflict with close others. When conflicts arise, people often need to contend with competing concerns for one's own and one's partner's needs. Prior research has outlined five approaches to conflict resolution that reflect different combinations of these two dimensions (i.e., concern for own needs, concern for partner's needs). An integrating strategy reflects high concern for both one's own needs and one's partner's needs, and is composed of attempts to find an optimal solution for both parties. Compromising reflects mild concern for both one's own and one's partner's needs. A dominating approach means people are trying to get their way entirely, and falls high on concern for one's own needs and low on concern for partner's needs. An obliging approach involves giving in to partners, and reflects high concern for partner's needs but very little concern for one's own needs. Finally, an avoiding approach involves not engaging in the conflict, representing a lack of concern for both partner's and own needs (Rahim, 1983).

Some indirect evidence suggests that authenticity may promote more concern for both one's own and partner's needs. For instance, authenticity has been found to be associated with accommodation (Brunell et al., 2010), which involves forgoing one's immediate desire for revenge in order to benefit the relationship as a whole (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Further, as authenticity reflects a sense of integration and being able to act according to one's 'true' self, people higher in authenticity are able to be aware of and care for partner's needs during conflict while still being aware of one's own needs. Indeed, autonomous motivation, a concept that is conceptually related to authenticity (Kernis & Goldman, 2006), has been shown to promote less defensive, more open responses to conflict with romantic partners (Knee, Lonsbary, Canevello, & Patrick, 2005). We propose that authenticity is positively associated with conflict resolution strategies that emphasize both concern for one's own and close other's needs (i.e., compromising, integrating), which ultimately lead to a true resolution of the conflict. However, we expect authenticity will be negatively related to or not at all related to strategies that reflect either low concern for the self (i.e., obliging), for the other (i.e., dominating), or both (i.e., avoiding), in which the person does not attempt to find a truly satisfying resolution for both parties.

1.2. Interpersonal goals

As noted above, we propose that authenticity promotes conflict strategies that involve engaging in the conflict and finding solutions that benefit both partners. We expect this primarily because authenticity should promote both concern for one's own and one's partner's needs. Recent research has proposed an interpersonal model of relationship development that highlights the importance of two types of interpersonal goals. Compassionate goals in relationships involve care and concern for one's partner's well-being without a desired outcome for oneself (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Self-image goals in relationships emerge from a sense of insecurity of how one is perceived by others, and are intentions to get close others to acknowledge an idealized image of oneself (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Although compassionate goals appear to reflect a concern for close other's needs, self-image goals are not as straightforward. Rather than emerging from an awareness of one's needs, self-image goals arise from a contingent sense of self-worth, and manifest as a hope to attain approval from close others. As such, we expect that authenticity should predict higher compassionate but lower self-image goals.

Further, regarding conflict, research has found that compassionate goals are related to less frequent conflict, whereas self-image goals are

associated with more frequent conflict (Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Crocker, Olivier, & Nuer, 2009; Moeller, Crocker, & Bushman, 2009). Additionally, compassionate and self-image goals predict less and more defensiveness during conflict, respectively (Niiya, Crocker, & Mischkowski, 2012). This is presumably because compassionate goals promote a focus on the partner's needs, whereas self-image goals inhibit a focus on partners, and rather create a sense that one's self-concept must be defended. To our knowledge, no research has examined interpersonal goals in the context of concern for self and other during conflict.

Given the nature of compassionate goals, we expect they will be associated with approaches to conflict that stress the importance of partner's needs. However, in addition to integrating and compromising, compassionate goals could reasonably be associated with obliging strategies, in which one acquiesces to partner's concerns. In this sense, compassionate goals would not necessarily promote pursuit of genuine resolution to conflict. Self-image goals, on the other hand, should be associated with use of conflict strategies that emphasize shutting down the conflict or proving one's own position right. That is, self-image goals should be associated with dominating (attempting to prove one's position), avoiding, and obliging (to prevent revealing flaws by shutting down the conflict), as these strategies serve to protect one's image.

1.3. Present research

The present research was designed to test the roles of both authenticity and interpersonal goals in approaches to conflict resolution. We expect dispositional authenticity to promote approaches to conflict that emphasize both one's own and one's partner's needs. As such, in the present study, we hypothesize that authenticity will be positively associated with integrating and compromising strategies. Meanwhile, authenticity should either be negatively associated or not at all associated with strategies that emphasize only one's own or one's partner's needs, or neither, as these strategies do not reflect true engagement or resolution of the conflict. We are agnostic, then, about the associations between authenticity and avoiding, dominating, and obliging strategies.

We are also interested in the mediating role of interpersonal goals between authenticity and conflict strategies. Specifically, we expect that compassionate goals will mediate the association between authenticity and integrating, compromising, avoiding, and dominating strategies. We expect this primarily because people higher in authenticity should be concerned about partner's well-being, and thus engage more in conflict resolution strategies that jointly emphasize partner's and one's own needs (i.e., integrating and compromising), and less in strategies that neglect partner's needs (i.e., avoiding and dominating). However, regarding obliging strategies, our hypotheses for compassionate goals and authenticity diverge, as authenticity should be associated with less obliging, as people are more aware of their own needs as well. Thus we do not anticipate mediation. Meanwhile, we expect that self-image goals will negatively mediate the associations between authenticity and conflict strategies. That is, authenticity should be associated

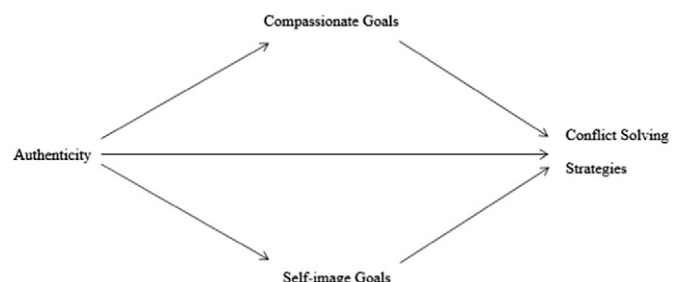


Fig. 1. Integrated mediation model for the current study.

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