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Abstract

As organizations continue to adopt cultural scripts of authenticity, bringing one's "whole self" to professional life is becoming an expectation, not a rebellion. Moreover, cultivating an authentic impression – one that feels real, genuine, and true to oneself – is increasingly valued in professional interactions. Yet how to effectively signal one's authenticity in the workplace can be fraught with challenges, especially in light of extensive research that demonstrates the value of filtering behavior to enhance one's image in organizational contexts. Taken together, research on identity, impression management, and emotional labor suggests that individuals across a range of professional interactions now face a paradox of self-presentation – to seem authentic, but also polished – in order to succeed in their work. In this dissertation, I explore the perks and perils of cultivating authentic impressions in brief professional interactions; how individuals (attempt to) signal their authenticity in these ephemeral settings; and how these processes and associated outcomes may differ for men and women. In Chapter 2, I explore how organizational expectations to be one's authentic self can be challenging and potentially detrimental to performance, due to this paradox of self-presentation. Gender differences were apparent in how organizational expectations to be authentic were enacted in mock job interviews: men engaged in more "raw" or unregulated authenticity, while women engaged in "bounded" or regulated authenticity, which led to a decrease in men's but not women's expert-rated performance. In Chapter 3, I examine how authentic first impressions predict relationship development over time. In a longitudinal sample of attendees of networking events, I find that both felt (self) and perceived (other) authenticity during interactions at the event were predictive of relational outcomes, but these effects are more pronounced for (and in some cases, limited to) female attendees. These results highlight the complexity of cultivating authentic impressions in professional interactions, and suggest that women may value and enact authenticity more effectively than men in professional settings.

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THE COMPLEXITY OF BEING ME:
UNDERSTANDING THE PERKS AND PERILS OF CULTIVATING AUTHENTIC
IMPRESSIONS AT WORK

Julianna Pillemer

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OF CULTIVATING AUTHENTIC IMPRESSIONS AT WORK

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Julianna Pillemer

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ABSTRACT

THE COMPLEXITY OF BEING ME:

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IMPRESSIONS AT WORK

Julianna Pillemer

Adam M. Grant & Nancy P. Rothbard

As organizations continue to adopt cultural scripts of authenticity, bringing one's "whole self" to professional life is becoming an expectation, not a rebellion. Moreover, cultivating an authentic impression – one that feels real, genuine, and true to oneself – is increasingly valued in professional interactions. Yet how to effectively signal one's authenticity in the workplace can be fraught with challenges, especially in light of extensive research that demonstrates the value of filtering behavior to enhance one's image in organizational contexts. Taken together, research on identity, impression management, and emotional labor suggests that individuals across a range of professional interactions now face a paradox of self-presentation – to seem authentic, but also polished – in order to succeed in their work. In this dissertation, I explore the perks and perils of cultivating authentic impressions in brief professional interactions; how individuals (attempt to) signal their authenticity in these ephemeral settings; and how these processes and associated outcomes may differ for men and women. In Chapter 2, I explore how organizational expectations to be one's authentic self can be challenging and potentially detrimental to performance, due to this paradox of self-presentation. Gender differences were apparent in how organizational expectations to be authentic were enacted in mock job interviews: men engaged in more "raw" or unregulated authenticity, while women

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CHAPTER 1

THEORY AND OVERVIEW OF STUDIES

Perceptions of authenticity are central to successful relationships across all facets of life. We relate more readily and deeply to individuals who we feel are genuine and who engage in deep and honest self-disclosure (Aron et al. 1997; Altman & Taylor, 1973) and with whom we feel a sense of shared reality (Rossignac-Milon & Higgins, 2018). Interpersonally, we are attracted to those who seem spontaneous and uncalculating in their behavior and appearance, because this makes them seem more genuine and authentic (Berger & Barasch, 2017, Hahl, Kim, & Zuckerman Sivan, 2018). We associate authenticity with having good character, and inauthenticity with feelings of immorality and filth (Gino, Kouchaki, & Galinsky, 2015).

In organizational settings, we admire and trust leaders, colleagues, and potential hires who behave in ways that we see as real and sincere (Avolio & Gardner, 2005), and similarly reject those who seem phony or to be purposefully acting in pursuit of a desired persona (Zuckerman, 2016). Expressing one's true or "authentic" identity positively impacts outcomes such as work transitions (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), social relationships at work (Dutton, Roberts, & Bednar, 2010), newcomer socialization and performance (Cable, Gino & Staats, 2013) and innovation and organizational change (Swann et al., 2009). Given that these outcomes all depend on successful social interactions, it makes sense that interpersonal perceptions of authenticity are critical to the development and continuation of meaningful relationships and high-quality

connections at work, which often require mutual vulnerability, openness, and self-disclosure to grow and to thrive (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Collins & Miller, 1994; Stephens, Dutton & Heaphy, 2011).

As our economy continues to shift toward knowledge, service, and experience-driven industries, relating to colleagues, customers, and potential professional contacts in a seemingly genuine, personal way is likely to be both increasingly important, yet also pose new challenges (Grant & Parker, 2009; Oldham & Hackman, 2010). While questions regarding the value of enacting one's "true self" in social situations date back decades or even centuries (James, 1890; Trilling, 2009), admonitions to be authentic, real, and to bring one's "whole self" to the workplace are increasingly prevalent in our culture (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Lehman, O'Connor, Kovács, & Newman, 2018; Roberts, Cha, Hewlin, & Settles, 2009). Now, more than ever, we celebrate individuals (Hahl, Zuckerman, & Kim, 2017), organizational leaders (Hahl, Kim, & Zuckerman Sivan, 2018), and organizations themselves (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009) that we perceive as being honest and genuine about who they are and what they believe regardless of whether they conform to social norms or organizational expectations (Avolio et al., 2005; Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015).

Moreover, the world of work, organizations, and technology is undergoing massive shifts that are fundamentally altering the way we create professional connections. Due to increasing numbers of employees in non-traditional working arrangements (Ashford et al. 2007; Petriglieri, Ashford, & Wrzesniewski, 2019) and technological innovations, many evaluators will be those with whom we interact only briefly – sometimes even virtually or unilaterally (McFarland & Ployhart, 2015;

Rothbard, Ollier-Malaterre, & Berg, 2014). The importance of perceived authenticity is also relevant to these brief, fleeting interactions, such as between employees and customers (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015) and employers and job candidates (Moore, Lee, Kim, & Cable, 2017). Authenticity has also been shown to be a critical factor in virtual and/or unidirectional encounters, such as between bloggers and their online followers (Caza, Moss, & Vough, 2017) and political candidates and their constituents (Hahl et al. 2017). However, numerous challenges accompany making accurate attributions about whether an individual is being “true to themselves,” especially in relatively ephemeral, low information contexts. Despite our propensity to make quick attributions about specific traits in individuals (Willis & Todorov, 2006), we aren’t always accurate in these attributions (Ambady & Gray, 2002). Discerning what is authentic for someone with high self-complexity (Caza, Moss, & Vough, 2017) or multiple identities (Creary, Caza & Roberts, 2015; Ramarajan, 2014) may be especially difficult, if not absurd.

Yet, despite the debatable philosophical veracity of the “true self” construct in general, there is overwhelming evidence that people still consistently make attributions about the nature of this self (Strohming, Knobe, & Newman, 2017) and that individuals persist in making authenticity attributions based on limited interactions (Johnson, Robinson, & Mitchell, 2004). That is, they reward leaders, colleagues, and organizations for their authenticity, even when the content of these so-called authentic behaviors is in opposition to sacred values such as basic truth-telling, morality, or cleanliness (Hahl & Zuckerman, 2017; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009). In sum, there appears to be unique value in perceived authenticity, that likely goes above and beyond other important interpersonal traits. Thus, the ability to “seem authentic” (whether due to inherent qualities or strategic

behaviors) is likely to continue to be valued by organizations and perceived as important and desirable in both fleeting and lasting workplace interactions, both from the perspective of individuals as well as organizations. The present dissertation examines when these perceptions are indeed valuable, and when attempts to be authentic may actually backfire.

Downsides of authenticity in professional interactions: need for image management and emotional regulation

Despite the widely shared admiration for people who are perceived to be authentic, behaving in an unvarnished, *truly* authentic manner (i.e., without attempts to regulate one's emotions and disclosures, conform to social norms, and/or fulfill organizational or social demands) may carry substantial interpersonal and occupational risks, especially when trying to make a strong first impression. Acting authentically may not always be straightforward or desirable in work situations, especially when there are also salient demands to present oneself in a manner that is both professionally appropriate (Hewlin, 2003; 2009) but that also showcases one's most desirable personal qualities (Reid, 2015) or "best self" (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013; Cable & Kay, 2012). Employees frequently perceive a need to act in ways that are socially prescribed, unnatural, or even inauthentic to fulfill role requirements and to conform to social norms (Hewlin, 2003; 2009; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). This need for conformity, and subsequent emotional and behavioral approaches to address it, are well documented by organizational scholars, and include putting on facades of conformity (Hewlin, 2003; 2009), conveying particular emotions that are desired and/or required by one's organizational role (Grandey, 2000;

Hochschild, 2015; Tsai et al., 2018), or more generally altering one's behavior or expressed personality in a chameleon-like fashion depending on the situation (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002; Kilduff & Day, 1994, Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001).

Taken together, this extensive body of work on impression management, self-presentation, and emotional labor stands in seeming opposition to the notion that appearing authentic is the best route to success in organizations. Indeed, this research suggests that carefully constructed external displays or presentations of self are necessary for effective functioning in organizations, and that these purposeful acts are central to positively shaping social identities and behavior (Baumeister, 1982; Bolino & Turnley, 2008; Goffman, 1959; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013; Reid, 2015). To succeed in organizations, many individuals need to actively seek to control the impressions of others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990), strategically shifting their presentations of self to construct desired images that will bring about social rewards and positive identities depending on a given audience (Bolino & Turnley, 2008; Schlenker, 1985; Synder, 1974). The ability to cultivate positive impressions in the eyes of others is critical to many objective performance outcomes including hiring decisions (Kristof-Brown, Barrick, & Franke, 2002), performance evaluations (Wayne & Liden, 1995), and boardroom appointments (Westphal & Stern, 2006, 2007). People who are able to engage in successful regulation or “deep acting” (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015), and to adapt their personality to “fit” a range of organizational situations (Kilduff & Day, 1994; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001; Reid, 2015), tend to perform better than their non-acting, or more *truly* authentically-behaving peers.

A paradox of self-presentation: seeming simultaneously authentic *and* professional

The social rewards of perceived authenticity and increasing cultural pressures to “bring your whole self” to professional situations, coupled with the rewards of and demands for maintaining a high level of professionalism and cultural “fit” within an organization (Cable & Judge, 1996; Reid, 2015), suggest that individuals, especially those in jobs that actively encourage authentic impressions or connections, may increasingly face a uniquely challenging paradox of self-presentation. Specifically, they may perceive organizational and cultural demands to be simultaneously true to themselves and authentic, while also being professional, polished, and conforming closely to norms of behavior. In other words, employees must give the impression of not actively managing (but still conveying) a desirable impression that is “true to themselves” – revealing a consistency between internal states and their internal actions – yet consonant with the expectations of the particular role and organizational culture (Lehman et al. 2018; Roberts et al.2005).

The essence of this tension is eloquently stated by Zuckerman (2016): “Somehow, we must master the ever-shifting challenge of presenting ourselves in a manner that is conventional enough to demonstrate capability and commitment to the audience but different (and indifferent) enough to demonstrate an internal compass” (p. 194). This particular challenge is distinct from the *internal* debate some individuals feel between being true to themselves and conforming to external expectations; it is an expressly *external*, or self-presentational, dilemma about being perceived as both professional and authentic. How individuals within organizations respond to and manage this dilemma –

how to signal authenticity without undermining professional success – and how these efforts are perceived by others remains largely unexplored.

While likely to be present in myriad organizational situations, this self-presentational paradox may be especially pronounced in workplace situations in which there are norms and benefits attached to self-enhancement (as opposed to self-verification), and in which individuals have only thin slices of information about those with whom they are interacting. These types of high-pressure, ephemeral situations – including the use of brief video pitches in the hiring process, high-speed networking events, virtual work interactions, and establishing and maintaining social media connections with colleagues and clients – are becoming central fixtures in the new world of work (Hinds & Mortensen, 2005; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015; Leonardi & Vaast, 2017; Schinoff, 2017). Yet, the majority of research on how authenticity impacts organizational relationships focuses on more stable, long term relationships in traditional settings (Cable et al. 2013, Hewlin, 2003, 2009). Moreover, prior work has shown that the attributions people make about others' authenticity vary as a function of how well they know them – that is, in short-term relationships, evaluators look to an actor's behavior more than intent for judging authenticity, but the reverse is true for long-term relationships (Johnson et al., 2004). Given these trends in both research and practice, in this dissertation I focus specifically on contexts in which there is high demand for self-enhancement but also rewards for authenticity, in order to evaluate how individuals perceive and signal their authenticity in first impressions to others under such conditions.

How do individuals convey authenticity in brief professional interactions?

Given that it may be increasingly important to show to others that one is being “authentic” in brief professional interactions, how do individuals go about successfully conveying this authenticity? Moreover, how do they do so in a way that doesn’t undermine their professional appeal and interpersonal goals – or successfully navigate the self-presentational paradox of polished authenticity? In general, lay beliefs and extant research suggest that the answer to this question is straightforward: that by behaving in a way that *feels* authentic to oneself, others will perceive the focal actor as also *seeming* authentic, and outcomes associated with this perception will be positive (Cable, Gino, & Staats, 2013, Caza et al. 2017). Yet, while in the majority of prior work there has been an implicit assumption that observers will be able to accurately perceive others’ authenticity (or this question is simply not explored), some extant work casts doubt on the veracity of this simple assumption (Caza et al. 2017; Lehman, Kovacs & Carroll, 2019). Whether it be struggling to determine to tell if individuals are lying (Bond & DePaulo, 2006), working hard to regulate their emotions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000), or key elements of their personality (Ambady & Gray, 2002) in brief interactions, there is no reason to suspect that if they are behaving in a manner that they consider to be authentic to themselves, others will perceive it as such. Taken together, this work has shown that there can often be a mismatch between actor feelings and observer perceptions of internal states, whether the actor feels authentic but others don’t perceive them as such (Caza et al. 2017; Sedikedes et al. 2018) or when individuals or organizational entities strategically assert or claim their own authenticity, without necessarily feeling or being what they say they are (Lehman et al. 2019).

The inherent complexity of enacting authenticity at work – especially regarding the distinction between self and others’ perceptions of it – has been illuminated in recent organizational scholarship. In a qualitative study of individuals with multiple careers, Caza and colleagues (2017) found that being, seeming, and feeling authentic in one’s career and at work was a process fraught with challenges and tensions. In particular, individuals often struggled with reconciling their own beliefs about what made them feel authentic and seem authentic to others, leading to actively needing to manage this tension via impression management (Caza et al. 2017). A recent review of the organizational literature on authenticity supports the idea that the construct of authenticity within organizational settings is multi-faceted and can be expressed and interpreted in a number of different ways, some of which may even be conflicting (Lehman et al. 2019). For example, authenticity can on the one hand be expressed by conformity to expectations for a given group or category (Lehman et al, 2019) but also by rejecting commonly held norms (Hahl, Kim & Zuckerman, 2017). As such, the act of conveying one’s authenticity to others, especially in professional settings, is likely to be challenging, complex, and multi-faceted.

Given the challenges that seem to be present in convincing others of one’s own authenticity, it is possible and desirable for those seeking to convey an authentic impression, whether genuinely felt or not, to find ways to signal or cue this authenticity to others in such fleeting, low information interactions (Connelly, Certo, Ireland & Reutzel, 2011; Caza et al. 2017). In order to elucidate the means by which this process might occur, I utilize psychological and organizational theories on behavioral cues and signals (Connelly et al. 2011; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Stiglitz 2000) and prior

psychological, sociological, and organizational research on perceived authenticity in a variety of contexts that involve making assumptions based on very limited interpersonal information (e.g. Berger & Barasch, 2018; Hahl, Kim, & Zuckerman Sivan, 2017; Lehman et al. 2018) to outline what verbal and behavioral cues individuals may be consciously or unconsciously enacting to signal their authenticity to others, and how favorably these targeted others are likely to interpret the conveyors of such signals. In addition, I explore how gender may impact both the use, the link between the signal and perceptions of authenticity, and the interpersonal effectiveness of these signals in the eyes of evaluators, and show evidence for these differences across two empirical studies.

Behavioral Cues and Authenticity

Scholars across a range of literatures in psychology and organizational behavior have noted the ways in which organisms (including both people and organizations) can show others that they possess valuable characteristics (Connelly et al. 2011; Cuddy et al. 2008; Fiske et. 2007; Goodwin et al. 2014; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Across these literatures, there are a variety of labels to capture the act of conveying a quality to others (e.g. cue, signal, perception) and the content of what is being conveyed. Despite having varying labels, all broadly focus on cues that convey someone's willingness to do to something (e.g. benevolence, warmth, intent), and one's capabilities to do so (e.g. competence, ability, quality; Connelly et al. 2011; Cuddy et al. 2008; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Signaling theory has been recently used by organizational scholars to understand behavior that occurs when two parties have access to different information, and it is important for the evaluating party to understand and be aware of the quality that

the signaling party is trying to convey (Bangerter, Roulin, & Konig, 2012; Connelly et al. 2011; Spence, 2002). It is a particularly useful framework for brief interactions (as opposed to lasting relationships) and for the notion of strategic behavior, because it does not assume that the actor actually possesses the trait (as more generally the case in literature on person perception and trust; Fiske et al. 2007; Mayer et al. 1995). Therefore, while I draw from literature on social perception and behavioral cues in exploring how individuals may convey authenticity in brief professional interactions, I use signaling as a label and overarching framework.

In order to signal authenticity – which is both a highly valuable trait to others, and may be also very difficult to perceive by outsiders due to informational asymmetries - individuals may need to engage in costly but potentially high reward signaling.

Authenticity is a relatively rare characteristic in that it may encapsulate both quality and intent in terms of its signaling value – that is, authenticity signifies both how good someone is or might be at a particular role or as a professional contact, as well as how honest and “real” they are in their intentions. This is why the construct of authenticity is both so important and so complex (and also potentially frustrating and challenging to enact) – it can mean multiple things at once, which can threaten it to be reduced to meaning something entirely unintended (Kovacs, Carroll, & Lehman, 2017; Lehman et al. 2019). The signaling of authenticity may be especially high risk in organizations, because in order to effectively show that one is being “authentic” or genuine, real and true to oneself, one may also need to actively *reject* other behavioral cues that are likely to be valued in organizations – such as conformity (Hewlin, 2009), conscientiousness (Barrick & Mount, 1991), and emotional regulation (Grandey, 2015). Moreover,

attempting but failing to signal one's own authenticity may backfire if it is a) seen as false (Gershon & Smith, 2018; Kovacs et al. 2017) or b) one's behavior seen as very misaligned with what is desired within a given context or role (Caza et al. 2017; Lehman et al. 2019).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the social value of *perceived* authenticity has seen a dramatic rise in recent years, which has resulted in individuals doing both explicit and implicit signaling of authenticity to others (Lehman et al. 2019). In reviewing psychological and organizational scholarship on authenticity and related literature, I have developed a model of what the most common authenticity signals may be in these brief, relatively low information and short-term interactions, and tested to see how they are utilized by individuals to impact both overall perceptions of authenticity and other-rated performance across two common professional contexts – job interviews and networking events. An important feature of each of the proposed authenticity signals is while they have the potential to benefit their enactors by increasing perceptions of authenticity, they all come with accompanying risk when carried out in certain evaluative situations, which may undermine their effectiveness for performance. In the remainder of this chapter I address the following question: 1) what are the ways that people convey or signal their authenticity to others, especially in brief professional interactions? Then, in Chapter 2 and 3, I theorize and empirically test 2) when and for whom are these signals effective, and when and for whom might they backfire in professional contexts?

Two types of authenticity signaling – Script-breaking and Backstage-sharing

One's authentic self is challenging to discern in brief interactions, especially when there may be additional professional norms influencing appropriate forms of self-expression. As such, individuals who successfully convey this impression must signal their authenticity – or convey that they are genuine, real, and true to themselves – to others. I argue that there are two key categories of behaviors (each containing two subcategories) that individuals can employ to consciously or subconsciously convey this image. The goals underlying these strategies are to indicate that one is acting from one's own volition – to show a consistency between thoughts and feelings and behaviors.

One way to do this is to clearly separate oneself from the crowd - in doing so, one shows that they are clearly an independent actor and not swayed by social norms and desires. By distinguishing oneself from those around him or her, he or she can clearly signal consistency between external behaviors and internal states, because these external behaviors are not driven by social pressures to conform. Therefore, the first category of authenticity signals involves breaking the common scripts and norms that individuals have for social and professional situations. Such *script-breaking* behavior conveys that an individual is acting from their own volition. When they discount the typical ways that people speak and behave, they show that they are doing so not simply to fit in, but because these words and behaviors are honest indicators of what they internally think and believe. Script-breaking may manifest itself in terms of the actions that people carry out (conveying both trait and state *non-conformity*) as well as the way in which they speak and interact with others (conveying *spontaneity*).

A second way of doing this is to convey an openness about what one's internal states are – regardless of whether these deviate from norms. By sharing what is beneath one's external veneer, an individual signals authenticity by simply making externally known what is internal. The second category involves sharing one's inner thoughts and feelings – or giving an interaction partner access to one's psychological “backstage” (Goffman, 1959). This *backstage-sharing* behavior conveys a consistency between one's internal thoughts and feelings, and external expressions, which is a key indicator of authenticity (Lehman et al. 2019). Backstage-sharing can involve both being *transparent* about one's actual beliefs, opinions, and feelings, and also conveying *vulnerability* by being open about one's mistakes and flaws. I describe the underlying subcategories in more detail below.

Category 1: Script-breaking – Diverging from Social Norms and Scripts

Non-conformity. The origins of the word authenticity derive from the Greek “*authentēs*,” which means “one who acts with authority” or “made by one's own hand” (Ibarra, 2015). The most common modern definition of authenticity – the extent to which one's inner experience matches one's outer behavior - clearly links to this more archaic definition. Specifically, the historic origins of this word suggest that the individual is the ruler of his or her own destiny, and not influenced by the norms and whims of those surrounding him or her, or broader societal or cultural expectations. Decades of scholarship have focused on individuals' propensity to closely conform to the behaviors and actions of those around them (Bond & Smith, 1996; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). In workplace settings, this conformity can be more pronounced, because there are often strong norms for

professional behavior (Davis-Blake & Pfeffer, 1989; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018) and concerns for signaling an appropriate fit and solid performance (Cable & DeRue, 2002). Yet recent empirical research (Belleza et al. 2014; 2015; Hahl, Kim, & Zuckerman, 2017) has highlighted the ways in which actually deviating from norms can be an undervalued yet critical driver of creativity and innovation, as well as necessary organizational change. Another way in which breaking standard norms and scripts of behavior can be potentially valuable is for an impression management concern: signaling to others that one is authentic and acting from one's own volition. However, this signal can also come with the risk of promoting negative evaluations from others if not enacted carefully or in the right context.

It is entirely possible (and perhaps even a common occurrence) that an individual could be simultaneously behaving in a way that feels authentic but also conforms to a given situation or cultural expectation. For example, at a dinner with new friends who are all ordering pizza, an individual could truly love pizza and therefore order it along with everyone else at the table. Or, someone might agree with one's boss in a meeting, and also genuinely believe they are correct. These examples are instances in which the conforming, or socially desirable behavior is actually consonant with the individual's authentic reaction or preference. In other words, eating what everyone else is eating, or agreeing with the person who you are supposed to agree with, is actually aligned with your "true self". An outsider to each of these situations – and especially one who was not already familiar with a focal actor's genuine beliefs and preferences – would be unlikely to think they are seeming particularly authentic in any of these situations, even if these behaviors were perfectly aligned with their internal states, and therefore "authentic".

However, if someone ordered the kale salad amongst a group of pepperoni pizza eaters, or outwardly disagreed with their boss in a meeting in favor of an intern's point of view, these situations should be more likely to spur perceptions of authenticity, because the behavior is *misaligned* with what would conform to typical expectations, and therefore should be seen as crafted by the focal actor's "own hand" versus succumbing to social pressure. This would be true even if a person hated kale or agreed with their boss, and therefore was behaving in a manner that was inauthentic. Therefore, signaling authenticity in this way can function independently of what is actually "true" to the focal actor. In sum, the first *signal* of authenticity to others is non-conformity – eschewing social norms in favor of non-traditional or unexpected behavior – to show that one is acting from one's own volition (regardless of whether this is actually true).

Spontaneity. In most evaluative situations and social interactions – from job interviews, to public speaking, to meeting someone at a networking event – individuals are taught from an early age that preparation is critical to success. Indeed, possessing the trait of conscientiousness – or the tendency to be planful and organized – is one of the most consistent predictors of job performance (Barrick & Mount, 1991). However, when such practice or preparedness leads individuals to speak or behave in a way that seems overly calculated or scripted, this fastidiousness can potentially undermine perceptions of their authenticity, and therefore paradoxically have a negative impact on overall impressions. Because authenticity is defined as behaving in a way that is in alignment or accordance with inner states, scriptedness can undermine perceptions of authenticity by making it seem as though an individual is explicitly acting in a way that is aimed at enhancing

others' perceptions of them, or simply conforming to role expectations instead of simply speaking or behaving in a way that is true or genuine to their nature.

However, the balance between adequate preparation and scriptedness is often challenging for those who want or need to impress others, and they often err on the side of being overly practiced or polished versus acting in ways that feel natural and off the cuff (Berger & Barasch, 2017). For example, while individuals tend to believe that a posed picture will lead to more favorable evaluations (e.g. dating, work sites) recent research has actually found that candid photos are viewed more favorably by others when connecting or being liked was the primary goal (Berger and Barasch, 2017). However, these photos were only received more favorably if the audience believed that the individual in the photo was not aware that their photo was being taken – in other words, it needed to be a *true* signal of spontaneity or lack of scriptedness to be effective (posing in a candid way can actually undermine these perceptions). In other words, it seems that once individuals are made self-aware, this may hamper the enactment of authenticity (Duval & Wicklund, 1973; Wicklund, 1979). In addition, many people tend to repeat stories or anecdotes that they know are interpersonally effective. In fact, it is probably wise for people to rely on stories, anecdotes, and intellectual points that they know others will react positively to. However, self-repetition (a form of scriptedness) has been found to make people seem less authentic (Gershon & Smith, 2018).

A pertinent example of this paradox: an awareness of the problem with coming across as scripted or rehearsed even in professional settings, but a hesitance to change it due to the risks involved, was expressed by presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in her

post 2016 election loss memoir, *What Happened* (Clinton, 2017). She bemoans the fact that others doubted her authenticity, and wondered what she could have done differently, noting clearly that she should have been more spontaneous in her behavior:

“What could I do to be “more real”? Dance on a table? Swear a blue streak? Break down sobbing? That’s not me. And if I *had* done any of those things, what would have happened? I’d have been ripped to pieces.” (Clinton, 2017: 122)

While these references touch upon issues of both non-conformity and vulnerability, her calculation and thought about these potential behaviors are actually related to this second signal of authenticity – spontaneity, or the extent to which someone’s words or behaviors do not feel purposeful, calculated, or scripted. In important, high pressure evaluative situations, impression management concerns (Leary & Kowalski, 1990) can lead people to be overly calculating in what they say and do, which can come across as disingenuous. However, this kind of interpersonal care and preparedness is often wise – in many organizational or leadership contexts, it is just as important to be seen as respected as to be liked (Cuddy, Glick, & Beninger, 2011; Ollier-Malaterre, Rothbard & Berg, 2013).

What is striking about Clinton’s revelations is her keen awareness of what types of behaviors would have “seemed” less scripted and therefore more spontaneous or more “real” – and how this spontaneity was a signal that might verify her genuineness and therefore make her more likeable (Anderson, 1968). Yet, the irony is that by expressing this awareness of such signals, she digs herself more deeply into the hole of seeming overly calculating and robotic, or the political equivalent of noting that a candid photo

would have been better upon reflection. While it is possible for signals of authenticity to be staged (for example, purposely acting in ways that show non-conformity or vulnerability) – spontaneity is one that by definition should not be referenced as a strategic move, therefore undermining its efforts as stemming from the individual's own volition (Berger & Barasch, 2017; Zuckerman, 2016). Accordingly, it is only *true* unscriptedness and spontaneity that will lead to perceptions of authenticity, however they should be a reliable signal.

Category 2: Backstage-sharing – Sharing Internal States and Experiences

Transparency. Being perceived as authentic means indicating to others that you aren't hiding anything – specifically, that what you are saying or doing is consonant with what you are actually feeling or what you believe, even if it is unpopular (Hewlin, 2009; Roberts et al. 2009). This extends to aspects of one's personality that might not be readily our outwardly visible to others in common professional situations. Especially in highly evaluative contexts, people tend to err on the side of doing their best to say what others want to hear, or simply holding back on sharing views that might be seen as not fitting in within the culture (Hewlin, 2009, Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Yet other studies show that self-disclosure can be a powerful tool for bringing others closer, fostering close relationships and facilitating trust (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Ensari & Miller, 2002; Greene, Derlega & Mathews, 2006). Moreover, when individuals fail to self-disclose, or to conceal, even potentially harmful information, this can actually be detrimental to others' perceptions of them (John, Barasz, & Norton, 2016; Phillips et al. 2009; Uysal,

Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012), which can result in reduced interpersonal success in the form of increased conflict and less relationship satisfaction and commitment.

Being transparent about one's inner thoughts and beliefs can be a valuable signal of authenticity, because it shows a willingness to express oneself in a truthful and open way, even if it means risking revealing information that might not be consonant with one's conversation partners or onlookers. It is important to note that being transparent is not typically negative in nature, but rather connotes more of an unfiltered "openness" about oneself. The ability to take interpersonal risks in teams and organizations has been shown to lead to success within organizations (Edmonson, 1999), and is the guiding principle for some organizational cultures such as hedge fund Bridgewater Associates (Dalio, 2017; Gino, 2018) and e-commerce clothing company Everlane. Overall, while potentially risky, the perception that one is being transparent about (even unpopular) inner states and beliefs is likely to increase perceptions of authenticity, because it gives the perception that one is "lifting the curtain" that blocks their "backstage" from interactions partners to reveal the "real" them:

Vulnerability. In some cases, the specific elements that an individual is transparent about are more likely to be potentially harmful or lead others to see someone in a negative light, such as mistakes and flaws. While related to transparency in that it involves sharing aspects about oneself that might not be readily visible or apparent to onlookers, the content of disclosure is not necessarily negative or risky – rather, it just requires that someone be open about their internal experience and share elements of their personality. Being vulnerable, however, inherently entails sharing or revealing something that feels

scary or potentially makes someone seem “weak” – such as expressing sadness or anger, showing insecurities or imperfections, or asking for help and advice that may cause them to appear incompetent (Brown, 2012; Bruk, Scholl, & Bless, 2018; Brooks, Gino & Schweitzer, 2015). For example, when Bridgewater CEO Ray Dalio speaks of his mission of “radical transparency” – he is quick to note that the most important elements of this are sharing features of oneself that are typically hidden, implying that sharing them signifies a sense of vulnerability: “So when I say I believe in radical truth and radical transparency, all I mean is we take things that ordinarily people would hide, and we put them on the table, particularly mistakes, problems, and weaknesses. We put those on the table, and we look at them together. We don’t hide them” (Dalio, 2017; Gino, 2017). Thus, it is specifically transparency about the very things that would make us vulnerable to negative impressions by others that he feels is most valuable – yet clearly this type of openness and disclosure may come with additional costs on the very interpersonal and organizational benefits they purport to improve.

Recent scholarship on the psychological or *intrapersonal* experience of vulnerability requires an “authentic and intentional willingness to be open to uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure in social situations in spite of fears” (Bruk et al. 2018). In other words, being vulnerable from the actor’s perspective must be based on their own volition, but also based on a genuine experience of their own vulnerability. Yet from an interpersonal perspective, the intentionality and authenticity of expressed vulnerability can not be truly known, but only inferred. However, this kind of self-revealing behavior may be an especially strong signal of authenticity, especially in organizational settings or contexts with high norms for self-enhancement. While in some instances vulnerability

can be strategic (such as crying or expressing remorse when it is appropriate to show; Bruk et al. 2018) – it is likely to be a riskier one in very brief, evaluative interactions.

Overview of studies

The present dissertation explores these ideas and questions – how do individuals attempt to navigate competing demands to seem both authentic and professional, and which interpersonal signals are most effective? In Chapter 2, I experimentally manipulated the desired impression of authenticity in a mock job interview scenario and evaluated authenticity signals and performance using ratings from multiple experts. In Chapter 3, I conducted a longitudinal field study of attendees of networking events, and followed their relationships development over time based on felt (“self”) and perceived (“other”) authenticity, and authenticity signals of individuals they met at the event. Across these two complementary empirical settings, I provide new evidence for the question of how individuals respond to the tension between seeming authentic and professional (whether explicitly stated, or implicit in the goals of the setting), and for whom authentic impressions are most critical and most effective. In Chapter 4, I conclude with contributions, limitations, and directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

BOUNDED AUTHENTICITY:

THE PARADOX OF BEING GENUINE IN PROFESSIONAL INTERACTIONS

The paradox of self-presentation put forth in Chapter 1 raises the question: Is it wise to try to be your authentic self in an evaluative situation? Or, could this approach potentially backfire, especially if you engage in truly unvarnished, “raw” authenticity – that is, uncalculated emotional expression or behavior with only minimal regard for external demands and pressures?

Findings on the value of being oneself in workplace scenarios are mixed. Some studies suggest that expressing one’s authentic self (or at least a version of this self) to others is beneficial for not only one’s job satisfaction, but also for performance. However, upon closer examination, in many of these studies there is an implicit qualifying feature, or bounded element, to the desired “authentic” presentation – either in the version of the self that is presented or in the type of person who benefits from authentic self-disclosure. For example, Cable and colleagues (2013) found that sharing one’s “best self” with others at work has been shown to lead to improved satisfaction and performance over time for new employees. Yet, the key finding of this particular study was not about employees sharing the most real or “unfiltered” version of themselves; rather, it was about them creating a deliberately *favorable* version of themselves – their “best” self as it naturally exists in a non-work context. In a similar way, another study found that individuals who self-verify, or express themselves authentically, tend to do better in job interviews – but only if they were already evaluated to be in the top 10% of

applicants (Moore et al., 2015).. Taken together, this work suggests that it may be effective to be yourself, but only if you are the type of person who already fits the template of desirable qualities for the organization.

Amidst evidence that cultivating authentic impressions can be effective in evaluative work settings, there is ample research to suggest that trying to be their “authentic self” may actually be difficult for employees to enact – even more so than being professional or trying to conform – and that doing so can be harmful for performance. For example, people experience the highest levels of state *inauthenticity* when they are being evaluated (Sedikides et al. 2017) and have difficulty separating feedback on their ideas from their personal identity when the work is creative, suggesting that authenticity in creative or knowledge-based fields may be particularly challenging (Baer & Brown, 2012; Grimes, 2017). Decades of work have demonstrated that high self-monitors – who are perhaps less concerned with being true to themselves, but rather conforming to situational demands – tend to perform better in organizational settings (Day et al. 2002). Moreover, as Roberts (2005) suggests, only professional images that are both authentic *and* credible lead to positive interpersonal outcomes – one can’t just be one or the other and expect to succeed. Other scholars have identified the tensions that accompany being one’s authentic self, especially when individuals have high self-complexity (Caza et al., 2017). For these individuals, the pressure to be seen as authentic required additional work and active cultivation – perhaps more so than if individuals had chosen to act inauthentically (Caza et al., 2017). Some participants even went as far as to explicitly claim their “unapologetic authenticity” to others, in an attempt to show that they were being who they really are (but clearly struggled with just doing it, as opposed

to articulating it). In many workplace situations today, it is not enough to identify either credibility or authenticity as single self-presentational goals; rather, one needs to accomplish both to succeed. Moreover, the pursuit of this cultivated brand of authenticity requires nuanced interpersonal navigation – and may have the potential to backfire if enacted clumsily or improperly.

In contexts without previously established interpersonal relationships, knowing whether individuals really are being “true to themselves” is especially difficult, since observers have few cues at their disposal to determine the “trueness” of the self they are viewing. Yet as described in a recent article on the increasing demand for authenticity among politicians: “We persist in deciding who people authentically are even though we often get it wrong — and even when it’s ultimately beside the point” (Szalai, 2016). Yet being truly authentic in workplace settings— especially in brief, fleeting interactions with high demands for self-enhancement – has the potential to backfire because individuals may see admonitions to be authentic as an excuse to not comply by the emotional display rules that govern successful behavior in organizations (Grandey, 2015; Hochschild, 1983).

Given that authenticity is defined as a consistency between one’s internal states (such as one’s opinions and emotions) and external expressions (Roberts et al. 2005), a key implication of seeming authentic should be a lack of purposeful acting in order to align with professional expectations. As discussed previously, there are a number of constructs utilized by organizational scholars which measure the idea of faking one’s behaviors at work to achieve a desirable end – including impression management (Wayne

& Liden, 1995), facades of conformity (Hewlin, 2003) and self-monitoring (Kilduff & Day, 1994). However, the aforementioned constructs tend to focus on overarching tendencies at work, as opposed to momentary orientations towards acting a part.

Emotional labor, conversely, measures the extent to which an individual engages in surface and deep acting in a given interaction to achieve a goal, and therefore is used as the primary theoretical frame for the present study.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that some degree of emotional labor, or regulating emotions as part of one's work role, is often key to success in organizations (Grandey, 2000; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). Matching one's emotions to one's job (whether by faking them via "surface acting" or trying to deeply feel them via "deep acting") is typical of jobs that are characterized by brief interactions, such as customer-oriented positions and flight attendants (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). Failing to perform the necessary work to show the conform to display rules or to convey appropriate feelings for the job is likely to lead to reductions in other-rated performance (Grandey, 2015; Joseph & Newman, 2010). Given that expectations of authenticity may imply that one can simply "be themselves" in a way that seems unfiltered and without conforming to expectations or norms, attempting to enact this expectation in a brief interaction will be likely to be interpreted as permission to reduce emotional regulation and conformity to display rules, which in turn will reduce other-rated performance:

Hypothesis 1: Expectations of authenticity in a brief, evaluative professional situation will be negatively associated with others' evaluations of performance, because individuals engage in less emotional regulation.

Gender differences in cultivated authenticity in professional interactions

Decades of scholarship have demonstrated that both men and women are expected to act in a manner that is congruent with gender expectations in organizational settings, even when these do not align with the expectations of their organizational role (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly, 1987; Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013; Kennedy & Kray, 2015). Role congruity theory suggests that based on opposing standards for what is gender-appropriate versus work-role appropriate, there are ubiquitous dilemmas that women face in organizations when it comes to presenting themselves effectively (Eagly & Karau, 2002). In situations such as negotiating a pay raise (Bowles & Babcock, 2013) or attaining leadership roles (Bowles, 2012; Heilman, 2001), women encounter unique, sometimes paradoxical constraints in terms of their self-expression based on opposing demands. This well-documented “double bind” suggests that in many professional contexts women need to master and enact multiple, seemingly conflicting self-presentational goals (Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013), such as being seen as both agentic and communal (Bowles & Babcock, 2013). As a whole, this body of work has painted a relatively grim picture for female leaders: these challenges are likely to be stable, persistent hurdles that will continue to negatively shape career success and trajectory.

However, some recent research has also highlighted the unique ways in which women can craft their situation or behavior to overcome professional obstacles that stem from the incongruity between expectations for women and professionals. For example, when situations such as negotiations are framed in a way that is less constrained or more ambiguous, women do less well than when the setting is highly structured (Bowles,

Babcock, & McGinn, 2005). Similarly, when women's gender is made less salient through "gender blindness" – that is, downplaying differences between women and men – they gain confidence and are able to close the gap in a number of male-dominated organizational situations (Martin & Phillips, 2017). Moreover, particularly talented or high potential women may experience a premium that men do not in some contexts (Leslie, Manchester, & Dahm, 2017).

Despite these promising insights, the complex self-presentational expectations that women face at work have been (understandably) cast in an almost uniformly negative light. In short, research suggests that because the impressions that women need to strike to be successful are more complex - and therefore harder to navigate - women are less likely to succeed at them. An alternative perspective would suggest, however, that given their frequent and repetitive experiences with such complex, conflicting demands in a myriad of situations, women may be both more aware of, and adept at, cultivating multidimensional impressions. As has been effectively communicated by role congruity theory, women leaders are often required to seem both communal yet agentic, soft yet strong, emotionally intuitive yet rational (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Oakley, 2000). Because these norms are more difficult to enact – a tightrope trickier to traverse – this may uniquely prepare women to interpret and enact these goals more effectively in the future. Accordingly, compared with men in the same situation, women may be able to cultivate an authentic impression – or try to "be themselves" – but do so in a way that doesn't undermine their professionalism. They will instead be alert to subtle cues suggesting that a more nuanced self-presentational approach is advisable. In addition, they may also be more skilled than men at enacting

such nuanced and complex self-presentational goals, while better hiding the fact that they are actively cultivating their image.

Using this logic, I hypothesize that women's frequent experiences with various forms of a double-bind – which require them to accomplish seemingly paradoxical self-presentational goals – may make them more aware of, and adept at, workplace demands for bounded authenticity, or seeming true to one's self without undermining professionalism. On the other hand, given their general lack of exposure to double-bind scenarios, men will be more likely to interpret instructions to “be authentic” or “be true to yourself” in a less-nuanced way, that is, as a suggestion to engage in a more “raw” unfiltered authenticity and to reduce their emotional regulation. Women, conversely, will view this directive more tentatively, and carry out a version of authenticity that involves deep acting while also trying to fulfill the demands called for by the role or situation.

Hypothesis 2a: Gender moderates the relationship between expected authenticity and performance, such that expectations to appear authentic in professional contexts are more detrimental to men's than women's performance.

Hypothesis 2b: Emotional regulation mediates the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between expected authenticity and performance, such that men engage in less emotional regulation (deep and surface acting) than women when trying to seem authentic, and this reduced emotional regulation more negatively impacts performance.

In addition to reducing their levels of emotional regulation, men's responses to organizational expectations to be authentic may also involve different behavioral manifestations – or signals – than women's attempts at fulfilling these presentational goals, which may also have implications for their performance. As detailed in Chapter 1, I suggest that individuals signal their authenticity in two types of ways –“script-breaking”

(being quirky, non-conforming, and spontaneous in one's interpersonal style) and "backstage-sharing" (being transparent and vulnerable). These can also be thought of as *diverging* from the expectations or commonly understood social norms of a situation, or *disclosing* one's inner beliefs, feelings, and even flaws or mistakes. Extensive research on gender differences suggests that typical male behaviors are seen as more agentic – individualistic, assertive, and aimed at separating oneself from the group – while typical female behaviors are viewed as more communal – warm, helpful, and focused on connecting with others (Eagly, 2013; Heilman & Okimoto, 2007). When expected to enact authenticity from a strategic perspective, men and women may adopt signals that are appropriate to their gender. Men may adopt a more agentic approach to signaling authenticity – by showing they are individuals and going against the grain in a script-breaking manner. Women will be more likely to reveal their inner feelings and weaknesses, which is likely to be seen as more communal in nature (Heilman, 2001). As such, in addition to reducing their emotional regulation, men who are explicitly encouraged to be authentic will be more likely to enact script-breaking or divergent behaviors than women will, while women will be more likely to enact backstage-sharing behaviors.

While both script-breaking and backstage-sharing may increase perceptions of authenticity, I argue that script-breaking may be more likely to reduce performance in brief interactions. Deviating from the norm can certainly be conducive to performance in certain situations – especially for powerful, high-status individuals. For example, leaders who deviate from norms of truth-telling have been shown to be perceived as more authentic (Hahl et al. 2017). In addition, individuals who wear nonconforming clothing

choices, such as red sneakers with a suit, are seen as more competent and higher status than their conforming counterparts (Bellezza, Gino, & Keinan, 2013). However, in situations in which individuals already have lower status (such as interviewing for a job with a more advanced evaluator) these script-breaking behaviors may not lead to better other-rated performance. Moreover, if individuals aren't assumed to be universally aware of the norms of the situation, this non-conformity can come across as naïve or even offensive, making it a far riskier strategy for an initial impression. As such, men's greater tendency towards more agentic, individualistic reactions to expectations of authenticity will also explain their reduced performance when expected to be authentic:

Hypothesis 3: The display of script-breaking behaviors mediates the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between expected authenticity and performance, such that men engage in more script-breaking behaviors than women when trying to seem authentic (who engage in more backstage-sharing behaviors), and men's increased divergence from norms more negatively impacts performance than women's increased disclosing.

METHOD

To test whether trying to act authentically is an effective strategy in brief, evaluative professional interactions, and gender differences in how expectations to be authentic impact behavior, I had participants film a brief (up to ninety seconds) video pitch for a hypothetical job at a fictional consulting agency. Participants were randomly assigned to receive “insider tips” about whether the organization preferred individuals who presented themselves in a manner that was seen as 1) authentic, 2) professional, 3) both authentic and professional, or 4) no tip (control condition). Participants were allowed to record their pitch up to four times. After filming, they rated their own psychological experience and perceptions of performance while doing the interview.

Their performance was rated by two domain experts (directors in career services whose primary role is to prepare job applicants for interviews), and their signaling behavior was rated by a third domain expert who did not rate performance.

Sample and Procedure

350 undergraduate participants were recruited by the behavioral lab of a northeastern university to take part in the study; they were paid \$10 per hour for their participation (plus additional options for bonus pay for the top two videos as described below). For the first part of the study, participants were taken into a private soundproof cubicle to film their video pitches. They were informed that a group of university faculty, career services advisors, and graduate student mentors are in the process of creating a new support center to help students secure the right job for them by providing coaching, mentorship, and support. As part of this process, they are having students do a brief pitch to a prospective employer about why they are a great fit for the job, which will be videotaped and evaluated by career counseling and industry experts for their effectiveness and the likelihood of students being hired. They were also informed that the top two participants would receive \$25 Amazon gift cards in bonus pay to add an additional incentive for strong performance (the winners did indeed receive these gift cards at the end of data collection). Participants then read a description of a summer internship at High Impact Associates (HIA). Responsibilities included “identifying key trends in information” and “translating these insights into recommendations” while desired qualities included: “leadership skills”, “effective prioritization” and “organization amidst many moving parts”, which were adapted from the role descriptions for internship

positions at consulting firms for which many students across disciplines and programs apply.

Following the role description, participants were randomly assigned to receive one of three “insider tips” (or no tip) which served as the experimental manipulation. The tip provided participants with additional information about the type of candidate that the organization desires. These tips were intended to encourage participants to try to seem authentic, to try to seem professional, or to try to portray both qualities. The beginning of the tip read: “In addition to fulfilling the requirements for the job, Career Services has emphasized that HIA traditionally looks for candidates: (*authentic condition*) “...who behave in a way that is true to themselves (i.e. authentic) at work. They prefer that employees feel comfortable showing their “real” self at work, and don’t just conform to a certain way of being to impress other colleagues or clients”; b) (*professional condition*) “...who behave in a way that is highly professional at work. They prefer that their employees always convey a polished self, and will go out of their way to ensure they will make a good impression on colleagues and clients”; c) (*professional and authentic condition*) “...who behave in a way that is both true to themselves (i.e. authentic) and highly professional at work. They prefer that employees feel comfortable showing their “real” self at work, but will also go out of their way to ensure they will make a good impression on colleagues and clients; or d) no insider tip received – they filmed their pitch based only on the job description.

Participants were then asked to indicate that they had carefully read the instructions and insider tip (if applicable) and told that they could use the webcam to

record their video up to four times. They were also told not to delete or save any videos themselves, and that a research assistant would take care of this. Upon completion, they alerted a research associate that they were finished. The RA then led them to a different computer to complete the follow-up survey about their experience when filming the interview. Participants who opted out of having their video used in the study (an option they were given after completing it, due to the personal sensitivity of the data) ($n = 67$) were removed from the dataset, leaving 283 participants with full data. Of those 283, 16 failed the manipulation check, and 4 had corrupted or unusable video data, resulting in a usable N of 263 (66% women).

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all items used a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored at 1 = *disagree strongly* and 7 = *agree strongly*.

Instruction comprehension (Manipulation Check 1)

To indicate whether they read and remembered the insider tip, participants were asked to fill in a) an open-ended question “Did you receive an insider tip? If so, what did it say? Please enter a brief summary below” and b) a multiple-choice question “Please choose the most appropriate option(s) below regarding the instructions you received (check as many as apply).” Options included: “be authentic”, “be professional”, “be both authentic and professional”, and “did not receive an insider tip”.

Authentic vs. professional impression attempts (Manipulation Check 2)

Adherence to the insider tip's instructions was also measured with 6 items, including three items measuring attempted authenticity, including "I tried to appear authentic", "I made a concerted effort to seem like my true self" and "I tried to look as though I was just being myself" ($\alpha = .85$) and three items for attempted professionalism, including "I tried to appear professional", "I made an effort to convey a polished image", and "I really tried to make a good impression to potential colleagues". ($\alpha = .84$).

Felt Authenticity

Felt authenticity during the job pitch was measured with one visual item (adapted from Sedikides et al. 2017) consisting of overlapping circles asking participants to select the degree of overlap between their "video self" and their "actual self".

Emotional Labor (Surface Acting and Deep Acting)

Emotional labor, including both surface and deep acting, was measured using the appropriate subscales from Brotheridge and Lee's (2003) emotional labor scale. The items were adapted to pertain to the interview specifically ("please indicate your agreement with the following statements about your pitch"). Sample items included "I resisted expressing my true feelings" and "I hid my true feelings" for surface acting ($\alpha = .90$) and "I made an effort to actually feel the emotions that I needed to display" and "I really tried to feel the emotions I felt I have to show to get the job" for deep acting ($\alpha = .90$).

Performance: Performance was rated by two associate directors of career services in the same university, each of which had over a decade of experience working with students to optimize their performance in job interviews. Performance was a composite of five questions, each rated on a 1-7 Likert scale, which were partially adapted from Goodwin et al. 2014, including: “How positive or negative is your overall impression of this person?”; “How effective was this person's job pitch?”; “How impressive or unimpressive are this person's abilities?”; “How competent does this person seem?” and “How likely would this person be to get hired for this role”? ($\alpha = .98$ and $.93$ for each rater, respectively, ICC (2) = $.73$). The two raters’ scores were averaged for each participant to serve as their overall performance score.

Authenticity signals: An additional expert (also an associate director of career services) rated the extent to which individuals displayed authenticity signals of script-breaking (including the subcategories of non-conformity, quirkiness, and spontaneity) and backstage-sharing (including the subcategories of transparency and vulnerability).¹ The list of authenticity signal items and overall categories are shown in Appendix A.

Trait Non-Conformity. Perceived trait non-conformity was measured with 4 items adapted from Openness and Rebelliousness scales (e.g. Goldberg; 1990; McDermott, 1988): this person seemed “quirky”, “eccentric”, “non-conforming”, “unconventional”, ($\alpha = .85$).

¹ Because there was a single rater in this study, the items and factors were determined to be the best fit in a factor analysis on the data from a field study (described in Chapter 3). However, the acceptable alphas indicate that the scales are sound for use on this dataset as well. The items were adapted from literatures and scales that measured these qualities as traits (listed below), but to be relevant to attributions about single interactions or “state” authenticity, for which there are not well validated metrics (Sedikides et al, 2013).

State Non-conformity. Perceived non-conformity was measured with 2 items adapted from McDermott's (1988) Rebelliousness scales and extant work on state non-conformity (Belleza et al.2013): "deviated from what is typical in this situation" and "did or said things that were unexpected or surprising" ($\alpha = .88$).

Spontaneity. Perceived spontaneity was measured with 3 items derived from research on candid and spontaneous impressions (Berger & Barasch, 2017; Hahl et al. 2017): this person seemed "unscripted", "spontaneous," and "off-the cuff", ($\alpha = .92$).

Script-breaking composite: the above 9 items (used in several analyses as an overall composite) have a Cronbach's alpha of .87.

Transparency. Perceived transparency was measured with 3 items adapted from workplace social integration and interaction scales (Dumas, Phillips & Rothbard, 2013; Nippert-Eng, 1996): this person "shared personal details or experiences", "disclosed very little about themselves" (reverse scored), and "revealed their true feelings" ($\alpha = .89$).

Vulnerability. Perceived vulnerability was measured with 3 items derived from research on humility (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013) and vulnerability (Bruk et al. 2018): this person "made themselves vulnerable", "was open about their mistakes or flaws" and "shared their imperfections" ($\alpha = .83$).

Backstage-sharing composite: the above 6 items (used in several analyses as an overall composite) have a Cronbach's alpha of .82.

RESULTS

Means and standards deviations of key variables by condition and gender are shown in Table 1. Authenticity and professionalism were coded as separate factors (either 0 or 1) and therefore a 2 (authentic or not) x 2 (professional versus not) x 2 (gender) ANOVA was run. There was a significant interaction between attempted authenticity and professionalism on performance, $F(1, 254) = 5.12, p = .024$. Simple effects² showed that individuals performed the strongest in the “no tip” condition or the absence of instructions to be either authentic or professional ($M = 4.89, SD = 1.05$), and this was significantly better than when they were only encouraged to be authentic ($M = 4.31, SD = 1.16; F(1, 254) = 5.45, p < .05$) and professional ($M = 4.45, SD = 1.06, F(1, 254) = 6.21, p < .05$). Thus, there is only partial support for Hypothesis 1 – that trying to be authentic can backfire in terms of other’s evaluations (see Figure 1). It appears that both trying to be authentic and trying to be professional (and both simultaneously) can impede performance compared to receiving no additional instructions for how to act. When it comes to trying to do well in a very brief evaluative situation, it may have been challenging to think through and enact self-presentational instructions (even when they encouraged individuals to be themselves).

An examination of how men versus women performed, and how this differed by condition, provides a more complex story regarding the relationship between attempted authenticity and performance. There was a main effect of gender on performance $F(1, 254) = 7.03, p = .009$; ratings of men ($M = 4.39, SD = 1.18$) were lower than ratings of

² All reported simple effects are pairwise comparisons utilizing a Sidak adjustment for multiple comparisons.

women ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.0$). In support of Hypothesis 2a, there was a significant interaction between expected authenticity and gender $F(1, 254) = 5.26$, $p = .023$: gender differences in performance were entirely driven by conditions in which individuals were expected to be authentic. Simple effects indicated that men expected to be authentic ($M = 4.06$, $SD = .174$) performed significantly worse than women expected to be authentic ($M = 4.75$, $SD = .110$; $F(1,254) = 11.14$, $p < .001$), but there were no significant differences between men ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.08$) and women ($M = 4.69$, $SD = 1.08$) when they were not expected to be authentic (i.e. only professional, or no insider tip; $F(1,254) = .07$, $p = .79$). This difference held even when participants were also prompted to be authentic and professional simultaneously³ (see Figure 2).

To examine whether differences in the degree of skilled emotional regulation, or deep acting, may be driving gender differences in performance, I first ran an additional 2 (authentic vs. not authentic) x 2 (professional vs. not professional) x 2 (gender) ANOVA to examine how the degree of deep and surface acting differ across these conditions. Results indicated a main effect of authenticity $F(1, 256) = 4.54$, $p = .034$ on surface acting, but no interaction with gender – that is, men and women report significantly lower surface acting overall when attempting to be authentic ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.14$) vs. not attempting to be authentic ($M = 2.89$, $SD = 1.40$). However, for deep acting there was a significant interaction between gender and authenticity $F(1, 256) = 5.06$, $p = .025$.

³ A closer examination of the manipulation check, which included both multiple choice and free response options, provided preliminary evidence that when told to be both professional and authentic, the authenticity instruction was more salient for many participants. This may be due to the fact that trying to seem professional is more normative for an organization, and therefore was not as memorable.

Specifically, simple effects showed that men report significantly less deep acting when prompted to be authentic ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.32$) versus when they are not prompted to be authentic ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.34$; $F(1, 256) = 6.4$, $p < .01$) while women do not experience this difference – their deep acting is not different when told to be authentic ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 1.40$) versus not ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 1.41$; $F(1, 256) = .11$; $p = .75$). The pattern of means in deep acting mirror the differences in performance according to gender and condition (see Figure 3).

Next, to evaluate whether differences in the display of script-breaking authenticity signals, or non-conformity (trait and state) and spontaneity may be driving gender differences in performance, I ran an additional 2 (authentic vs. not authentic) x 2 (professional vs. not professional) x 2 (gender) ANOVA to examine how the degree of script-breaking differs across these conditions by gender. Results indicated a main effect of gender $F(1, 255) = 8.71$, $p = .003$ on script-breaking, such that men across conditions display greater script-breaking behaviors ($M = 4.64$, $SD = 1.12$) than women do ($M = 4.19$, $SD = 1.16$) overall. There was not a significant two-way interaction between gender and authenticity on script-breaking; however, the results indicated a significant three-way interaction between gender, professional (vs. not professional) and authentic (vs. not authentic) conditions $F(1, 255) = 4.52$, $p = .034$. Men demonstrate the highest degree of script-breaking in the authentic condition ($M = 5.15$, $SD = 1.14$), and simple effects indicate that the mean is significantly different from that of women in this condition ($M = 4.14$, $SD = 1.10$; $F(1, 255) = 7.3$, $p < .01$). However, simple effects indicate that the means are not significantly different between men and women in the other three experimental conditions (see Figure 4). Thus, while there is partial support for the idea

that expected authenticity leads to men displaying more script-breaking behaviors, this was only evident in the solely authentic condition, not the authentic and professional condition. Implications of this finding are considered further in the Discussion section.

Mediation Analyses

Hypothesis 2b (conditional indirect effects, i.e. moderated mediation) reflects Edwards and Lambert's (2007) *first stage moderation model*: deep acting mediates the relationship between trying to seem authentic and performance, and gender moderates the path from trying to seem authentic to deep acting. Thus, the indirect effect through deep acting is hypothesized to be conditional on gender. As recommended by Edwards and Lambert (2007), I generated 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence intervals to assess the significance of the conditional indirect effects. I used Hayes' (2012) PROCESS macro (Model 7) for SPSS to conduct these analyses.

In support of hypothesis 2b, the conditional indirect effects of expected authenticity on performance via deep acting indicate a significant negative effect for men ($\beta = -.40$, $SE = .28$, 95% CI [-1.2, -.03]) but not for women ($\beta = .06$, $SE = .13$, 95% CI [-.11, .44]). The 95% CI for the overall index of moderated mediation did not contain zero, thus the overall model was significant ($\beta = .46$, $SE = .35$, 95% CI [.03, 1.5]).

Hypothesis 3 also reflects a *first stage moderation model*: script-breaking mediates the relationship between expected authenticity and performance, and gender moderates the path from trying to seem authentic to script-breaking. However, because the test of the three-way interaction indicated no two-way interaction between gender and expected authenticity alone (only a 3-way interaction), this analysis was not appropriate

and therefore Hypothesis 3 was not fully supported. However, because the three-way interaction did indicate gender differences in script breaking according to expected authenticity, as described above, I tested a *first stage moderated moderated mediation model* (Model 11 in Hayes PROCESS): script-breaking mediates the relationship between trying to seem authentic and performance, and gender moderates the path from trying to seem authentic to script-breaking, and expectations to be professional moderates the moderating effect of gender. The 95% CI for the overall index of moderated moderated mediation did not contain zero, thus the overall model was significant ($\beta = -.38$, $SE = .21$, 95% CI [-.82, -.02]). Specifically, the indirect effect of expectations to be authentic on performance through deep acting were only significantly negative for men who were not also explicitly expected to be professional ($\beta = -.23$, $SE = .11$, 95% CI [-.48, -.04]).

DISCUSSION

A common admonishment across many interpersonal situations is to “just be yourself.” Often the implicit message in this ubiquitous advice is not just to do so because it feels good, but also because this is an advantageous interpersonal strategy. But is being yourself always appealing to others in professional settings? The present study suggests that cultivating an authentic image might not always be a good idea, especially in brief, evaluative contexts in which evaluators do not have prior experience with the focal actor. Individuals should take care and caution in how they display the “authentic” aspects of their personality, and when possible, try to ensure that they maintain the appropriate levels of emotional regulation.

This experimental study explored whether purposefully cultivating an authentic impression (as a reaction to organizational expectations to seem authentic) is a useful self-presentational strategy in brief interactions, or whether this approach may backfire when attempted authenticity undermines professionalism. I hypothesize and find gender differences in the tendency to enact authenticity, or trying to be oneself by reducing emotional regulation (both surface acting and deep acting) and “bounded” authenticity, by trying to seem authentic while still engaging in skilled emotional regulation (i.e. only deep acting). When prompted to seem authentic in a professional setting with high norms for self-enhancement, men engage in a more unregulated form of self-presentation, and as a result their performance suffers when they are attempting to enact this goal. Women, however, are more likely to engage in skilled emotional regulation even when told to “be true to themselves.” In other words, they do not see cultivating an authentic impression in a professional setting as an invitation to reduce their levels of skilled emotional regulation or to eschew common norms of behavior – they recognize that seeming like one’s true self requires conscious cultivation and skilled interpersonal work.

Theoretical Contributions

A recent surge of both popular press and scholarship has extolled the benefits of being true to oneself, and revealing one’s “whole self,” across a range of professional contexts. However, work that focuses on the interpersonal implications of these admonitions suggests a more complex story. Workers may struggle with how to communicate their real or “true” inner selves when there are also high demands for impression management (Caza et al. 2017; Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Moreover,

authenticity may only be beneficial when the revealed self actually fits with the demands of the role (Moore et al., 2015). The present study builds upon this recent stream of research on the potential challenges or downsides to being perceived as authentic. By experimentally exploring the relationship between purposefully cultivating an authentic impression and other's evaluations in brief interactions with high demands for self-enhancement, this work helps to clarify the causal relationship between attempted authenticity and evaluations of effectiveness.

Specifically, these results highlight a paradox of trying to seem authentic to others in highly evaluative professional settings: that doing so successfully (i.e. without undermining evaluations of one's proficiency or adequacy for a job) involves actively managing, or cultivating, an authentic impression by also engaging in skilled deep acting. These results distinguish between the success of attempts at cultivating authenticity that are "raw" and emotionally unregulated, versus those that are "bounded," involving skilled deep acting. Moreover, the results provided some support for the relationship between expectations to be authentic and script-breaking behavior – men were also more likely to do these behaviors when encouraged to be only authentic (but this effect was diminished when they were also told to be professional, unlike their deep acting which was not affected by this addition). The present study highlights how just being your unfiltered self – not conforming to the emotions required of the job, and even purposely violating common scripts in favor of an authentic impression – can potentially backfire in situations in which one also has to maintain a polished or professional impression. In the midst of admonishments to be one's whole, authentic self in all types of professional

settings, individuals must endeavor to carefully cultivate a bounded authentic impression that doesn't undermine others' evaluations of their performance.

The present study also extends work on gender differences in impression management in organizations. Specifically, these findings shed light on how men and women may have differing interpretations of and subsequent reactions to how to “be true to oneself” in organizational settings. Men and women may have unique constructions of what it means to cultivate an authentic impression - especially when one is also trying to perform a task that requires a certain degree of polish, such as interviewing for a job at a professional services firm. Women appear to be better equipped to recognize and grapple with the apparent paradox of bounded or restrained authenticity, and enact this sort of nuanced impression more effectively than their male counterparts, whose performance suffered in authentic conditions due to reduced levels of skilled emotional regulation and script-breaking behaviors. This extends recent work which highlights the conditions under which women can overcome potential biases in organizations, even amidst apparent barriers and “double binds” (e.g. Martin & Phillips, 2018; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). When it comes to seeming authentic, it may be that women's experience with often paradoxical self-presentational constraints make them well-equipped to cultivate an authentic impression that makes them appear both “real” and professional.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several important limitations that are also opportunities for future research. First, the research context provided a controlled setting to examine the impact of attempted authenticity on external perceptions of performance. However, because it

was carried out in a laboratory setting with a student population, external validity and generalizability is somewhat limited. Chapter 3 of this dissertation helps to address this concern by exploring the importance of perceived authenticity in first impressions in a naturalistic setting (professional networking events), and how these impressions as well as various authenticity signals impact relationship development. Other of my works in progress examine perceived authenticity and authenticity signaling on social media (including Twitter and Instagram). Future work should examine the role of perceived authenticity in additional field settings – including both traditional organizational contexts and other types of professional situations that are becoming increasingly common. These studies will help to illuminate the ways in which individuals attempt to cultivate authentic impressions in contexts that also have high demands for self-enhancement, and the conditions under which these attempts are successful.

Second, an unexpected finding revealed that receiving no additional instructions for how to prepare a successful job pitch (the control condition) was associated with the best performance ratings overall. It may be particularly challenging to purposefully develop a tailored self-presentational strategy—authentic or professional—under limited time and situational constraints. The present study was a first step towards understanding the causal relationship between purposely cultivated authenticity and performance; new research should examine how this plays out in a more diverse range of professional contexts. Moreover, in order to rule out issues of cognitive overload driving effects in this brief interaction, a future design might allow participants more time to prepare after learning about the job and desired impression and see if these findings are replicated.

In addition, this study sheds light on one important psychological mechanism that explains when attempted authenticity may backfire for potential job candidates. A lack of self-reported deep acting was the key psychological mechanism that determined whether job pitches were rated as less effective. In addition, future work should continue to explore the external cues that evaluators pick up on when making these evaluations. In the present study, preliminary data with a third expert coder suggests that behavioral patterns, or “authenticity signals,” differed between men and women in the authentic conditions. Specifically, men were more likely to view authenticity as permission to engage in script-breaking (non-conforming and spontaneous) behaviors, which were negatively related to performance evaluations. Future work, and Chapter 3 of this dissertation, should move towards further specifying the signals that others consciously or unconsciously enact when trying to “seem” authentic, and how others view these signals in professional contexts.

Finally, the present study suggested some compelling differences between men versus women’s attempts to seem authentic in professional contexts. The finding that men are more inclined to engage in unregulated behavior as compared to women when told to be themselves has important implications for understanding gender differences in performance in professional contexts. Future work should continue to explore this difference, as well as the role of other gender differences in felt and perceived authenticity, to better understand why women and men might differ in both their interpretations of “seeming authentic,” their ability to cultivate impressions that are simultaneously authentic and polished, and their reactions to people who do or do not signal authenticity. One limitation of the present exploration is that the women and men

in the sample were all relatively low-status – they were college students who were ostensibly applying for an entry level or intern position (which aligns with their most probable real-world experience). Some extant work on the positive effects of signaling authenticity through non-conformity and vulnerability focuses mainly on the potential benefits for individuals who are already in relatively high-status positions (e.g. Belleza, Gino, & Keinan, 2013; Hahl et al. 2018). Future work will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role played by both gender and status (both ascribed and achieved) when gauging the impact of signaling authenticity to others in professional settings.

In order to address the concerns of external validity and generalizability of the sample, the relatively low status and limited work experience of participants, and questions about gender differences in authentic impressions and signals, I conducted a longitudinal field study of strangers meeting at professional networking events, and followed their relationship development over time. Chapter 3 explores the relationship between felt (“self”) and perceived (“other”) authenticity at an initial meeting, the use and effectiveness of authenticity signals of both script-breaking and backstage-sharing, and relationship development over time.

CHAPTER 3

BACKSTAGE PASS:

THE ROLE OF AUTHENTICITY SIGNALING IN PROFESSIONAL FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT OVER TIME

The world of work, the nature of organizations, and the ways in which we communicate with and relate to others are all simultaneously undergoing massive shifts (Ashford et al. 2007; Cappelli; 1999; Wrzesniewski et al. 2019). As knowledge, service, and experience economies eclipse manufacturing and goods, as careers become more self-directed, nebulous, and less constrained within a single organization – the nature of our professional connections are also changing (Grant & Parker, 2009; Oldham & Hackman, 2010). It is becoming much rarer for individuals to spend the bulk of their career at a single organization. Recent polls indicate that 64% of workers favor job-hopping as a career strategy – a number that is even higher among millennials, with three quarters of individuals under 34 years old favoring frequent career switches (Chatsky, 2018). Organizational scholars are increasingly examining the rapid pace at which technology is changing the nature of work, organizations, and the preferences individuals have for their careers – allowing for and privileging flexibility over stability, autonomy over embeddedness, and piecemeal gigs over 9-5 jobs (Ashford et al. 2007; Cappelli, 1999). Given that individuals will be consistently moving between jobs and even careers more than ever before (and therefore constantly forging new connections and relationships), the importance of effectively building one’s social network is likely to

become increasingly critical to professional success (Grant & Parker, 2009; Oldham & Hackman, 2010).

However, extant research on forming professional relationships suggests that doing so effectively in a brief time-span can be tension-filled and challenging – even to the point of eliciting feelings of dirtiness and disgust (Casciaro, Gino, & Kouchaki, 2014). The experience of purposely building instrumental ties makes people feel immoral and even physically unclean, due to the use of relationships in service of instrumental goals (Casciaro et al. 2014). Indeed, balancing the tension between behaviors that promote social ties and friendship, and those that are conducive to professional relationships, may often be perceived to be in conflict (Ingram & Zou, 2008; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). However, due to the changing nature of work and technology, and the reliance on ephemeral interactions in these relationally “fuzzy” situations, individuals who can successfully master the interpersonal and psychological approaches to making strong connections that may be both personal and professional in nature are those who will succeed in today’s workforce (Ollier-Malaterre, & Rothbard, 2015).

While there has been a wide body of research focusing on what qualities make a positive first impression – such as warmth, competence, morality, and attractiveness – the importance and ways in which one goes about cultivating an authentic impression has received comparatively far less empirical attention (Fiske, Cuddy & Glick, 2007; Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin, 2014). However, it is likely that authenticity is especially critical for relationship development in these nebulous and ephemeral interpersonal domains, in which the goals and ultimate outcomes of the relationship are typically

somewhat unclear. While a sense of genuineness may have always held relational weight, emerging research and societal trends suggest it may be becoming even more central to impression formation in today's cultural landscape (Chen, 2018; Lehman et al. 2018). It seems that individuals in the Western world care more about others' authenticity more than ever, as evidenced by searches of authenticity on Google rising dramatically in the last several decades and increased scholarship in this domain (Lehman et al. 2019), and mentions of authenticity seemingly ubiquitous when referring to political and organizational leaders (Hahl et al. 2017).

Individuals and organizations seem to be announcing and claiming their own authenticity, and denouncing others inauthenticity more frequently than ever (Kovacs et al. 2017; Lehman et al. 2019). Authenticity might become especially critical in a world in which people feel confused about what is real and legitimate vs. false, and in which even breaking the norm of "truth-telling" is seen as a marker of genuineness (Hahl et al. 2017). Technology is also a key driver of this fundamental sense of confusion and loss of a firm grasp of what is real. In the era of fake news, social media filters, and internet bots it's increasingly challenging to distinguish what's real from what's fake – and sometimes the difference between the two things is completely blurry to onlookers (Allcott & Gentzkow 2017; Lazer et al. 2018). As such, an individual's efforts to move beyond a superficial impersonal veneer to a deeper sharing of flaws, vulnerabilities, personal moments, and quirks can all serve to create an aura of authenticity, whether these signals are enacted deliberately or strategically (Jordan & Rand, 2019).

Despite the public fascination and emerging organizational scholarship on authenticity in interpersonal relationships, there is still relatively little known about whether the self-experience of state authenticity and perceptions of an interaction partner's authenticity in the initial moments of connecting actually lead to successful relationship development over time. Given that knowing the "true" self is challenging, if not impossible, with a new connection, it is especially important to also consider how one's apparent authenticity is conveyed in such brief, fleeting interactions in professional environments. Moreover, findings from the second chapter of this dissertation, additional extant research on authenticity, and other work on the gender double bind and interpersonal impressions suggest that women and men may have differing experiences when it comes to authenticity and relationship development. As such, the following chapter explores these questions in a naturalistic, empirical setting that is meant to foster relationship development with brand new connections.

Authenticity signaling in professional first impressions

As discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, there are two overarching categories in which I propose that people might signal their authenticity to others in brief interactions with a new professional connection. The first mode of signaling involves diverging from social norms and expectations to show that one is truly acting from their own volition, and not merely conforming to social norms or scripts of behavior (Hahl et al. 2017; Lehman et al. 2019). By eschewing the common ways that people conform, an individual is able to show to others that they are acting in a way that is indeed "true to themselves" and not merely adapted to what they think others would want. This script-breaking behavior

might involve displaying one's quirkiness or eccentricity by actively eschewing norms such as truth-telling (or conveying trait nonconformity; Hahl et al. 2017) or simply deviating from what is typical or expected in a given situation such as wearing brightly colored footwear (or conveying state non-conformity; Bellezza et al. 2013). Whether dressing in an unexpected way or rejecting typically held values, non-conformity can be a powerful signal of authenticity to those who are not familiar with a focal individual. In addition, script-breaking can be reflected simply by speaking in a manner that seems spontaneous and not overly rehearsed – thereby showing that one is not putting a “filter” on what is externally expressed based on what is internally felt. Indeed, research across fields of marketing, organizational behavior, psychology, and sociology has indicated that there are ways in which these signals that differentiate oneself from the norm can lead to perceptions of authenticity and/or interpersonal success across a number of types of first impressions including romantic, political, and professional contacts (Bellezza et al. 2013; Berger & Barasch, 2018; Hahl et al. 2017; Moore et al. 2017).

While the situation of professional networking and subsequent relationship formation poses a slightly different set of social norms and standards than some of the above situations, it is likely that script-breaking behaviors in these domains pose similar potential rewards towards building relationships by signaling authenticity to others. When individuals may only have a few minutes to prove they are worthy of developing a relationship with, script-breaking may serve as a very clear indicator of authenticity, which could have a potential advantage for developing future relationships (Bellezza et al. 2013; Berger & Barasch, 2018). This may be especially important when future interactions are not a given (or involuntary), as is the case in networking situations as

opposed to a typical organizational setting with many involuntary relationships and interactions (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). Here, differentiation from a sea of mundane conversations and conformity to norms may lead to greater perceptions of authenticity, which may in turn prove valuable for relationship development:

Hypothesis 1a: A new interaction partner's script-breaking behavior is positively related to viewing this individual as authentic ("other authenticity").

The other category of behaviors that individuals may consciously or unconsciously employ to signal their authenticity to interaction partners (as previously discussed in Chapter 1 and 2) and thereby foster future relationships is disclosing elements of one's inner self, that goes beyond the frontstage or "performative" self to reveal what is actually beneath these superficial social veneers (Goffman, 1959; Nippert-Eng, 1995; Roberts et al. 2005). This type of backstage-sharing can involve both being transparent about one's personal ideas, feelings, and beliefs (Dumas et al. 2009) also well as making oneself expressly vulnerable by being honest about mistakes, flaws, and other elements of the personal self that might be seen as imperfect or even shameful (Brak et al. 2018). Processes of self-disclosure have been shown to bring people closer together over time, as long as these processes involve mutual sharing and reciprocation – in other words, being transparent and vulnerable about one's inner states (Phillips et al. 2009; Ensari & Miller, 2002; Greene, Derlega & Mathews, 2006; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). The converse is also true – suppressing one's emotions is associated with less satisfaction, due to a feeling of inauthenticity in the relationship (Chen, 2018; English & John, 2013). Indeed, closeness has been shown to even be able to be experimentally

induced by asking people to share progressively more intimate elements of themselves (Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997).

However, the overall impact of engaging in these backstage-sharing behaviors in an initial *professional* meeting on perceptions of authenticity and future relationship development over time is not well understood, although scholars have hypothesized that integrating personal with professional identities is valuable for relationship building (Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015). Given the overarching positive effects of backstage-sharing behaviors that have been documented in both work and non-work relationships, and the association with a lack of these behaviors (i.e. emotional suppression) and inauthenticity, backstage-sharing may also have a positive impact in first impressions in which the professional goal is fostering future relationship development (Chen, 2018; Dumas et al. 2009; English & John, 2013; Ensari & Miller, 2002). As such, it is likely that perceptions of individuals engaging in backstage-sharing behaviors (transparency and vulnerability) in an initial professional impression will lead to perceptions of authenticity of this individual:

Hypothesis 1b: A new interaction partner's backstage-sharing behavior is positively related to viewing this individual as authentic ("other authenticity").

Other authenticity in professional first impressions and relationship development

Once authenticity is signaled in a brief interaction via script-breaking and backstage-sharing, perceiving one's interaction partner as authentic is likely to also be related to positive relational outcomes with this person in the future. While Chapter 2 of this dissertation examined the challenges associated with *expectations* to be authentic in a

context characterized by self-enhancement, the naturalistic experience of actually perceiving one's interaction partner as authentic in a conversation may be more beneficial for fostering relationship development. Extant research has demonstrated the challenges individuals face when trying to form professional connections in nebulous and flexible environments such as online (Ollier-Malaterre et al. 2013) and networking events (Casciaro et al. 2014). Indeed, Casciaro and colleagues find that when individuals engage in networking behaviors for the purposeful goal of making work-related ties, this can leave them feeling immoral and even physically dirty (Casciaro et al. 2014). However, developing connections in the interest of future potential instrumental gains have been found to be critical for career success (Wolff & Moser, 2009), leaving individuals who want to do well in their career and feel good about themselves and their relationships in an apparent predicament – feel bad about building instrumental ties, or avoid the types of initial interactions that would lead to potentially fruitful relationships.

I propose that the experience of perceived authenticity in these interactions – seeing one's interaction partner as seeming authentic – can be critical for fostering future contact and relationship development. As described in the above section, the sense of liking and shared reality that may accompany perceived authenticity – even when professional desires are made explicitly known – are likely to facilitate contact and beliefs about the connection moving forward (Collins & Miller, 1994; Rossignac-Milon & Higgins, 2018). Moreover, by seeing someone else being true to themselves, and signaling this authenticity, others may feel free to be themselves as well which can facilitate future contact and high quality connections (Dutton et al. 2010). In a low information scenario, the sense that someone is conveying who they really are is a useful

signal of both quality and intent of the individual, and therefore encourage individuals to be motivated to continue that relationship (Connelly et al. 2011; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). As such, I predict also that a sense of perceived authenticity may be a critical feature of forming a professional connection based on an initial meeting, leading to relationship development (including both contact after the event and expected future interaction); and that other authenticity mediates the relationship between authenticity signals and relationship development:

Hypothesis 2a: The perceived authenticity (“other authenticity”) of an interaction partner at a networking event is positively related to relationship development with this individual following the event.

Hypothesis 2b: The perceived authenticity (“other authenticity”) of a new interaction partner mediates the associations of (a) script-breaking and (b) backstage-sharing with relationship development.

Self authenticity in professional first impressions and relationship development

Much of the psychological and organizational work on individuals’ authenticity (as opposed to organizational authenticity; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009) has focused on one’s self authenticity from the perspective of a focal actor – namely, how does the experience and pursuit of feeling like one is acting true to oneself influence relational and organizational outcomes (e.g. Cable et al. 2013; Chen, 2018; Sedikides et al. 2017)? While multiple definitions and constructions of authenticity make the determination of outcomes challenging (Chen, 2018), overall the research in this domain suggests that feeling authentic in one’s interpersonal interactions is likely to lead to more positive feelings, which will in turn lead to a greater chance of relationship development (Cable et al. 2013; Chen, 2018; Sedikides et al. 2017). Feeling like another individual sees you as

you really are has been found to be linked to success in close relationships and positive feelings in social situations (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Chen, 2018; Fleeson & Wilt, 2010); however, the positive benefits of self-verification striving are more complex in situations that involve professional goals in addition to personal ones (Dumas, Phillips, & Rothbard, 2013; Moore et al. 2017). However, generally speaking, when people feel free to reveal aspects of themselves that lay beneath the surface, this begets a feeling of closeness that can be self-perpetuating in the building of close relationships (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Collins & Miller, 2004).

Much of this extant work has examined how authenticity impacts already established relationships (e.g., experiences of being one's authentic self with a colleague, partner, or parent). However, the need to feel authentic in burgeoning relationships, and even first impressions or interactions, may also be critical in understanding work-related interactions. This is especially true in today's changing workforce and social landscape, which require more than ever that people master these sorts of fleeting interactions and transform them into more lasting connections and sources of identity in precarious and nebulous work environments (Ibarra & Obudaru, 2016; Petriglieri et al. 2018). A sense of trueness to oneself, and the feeling that one is safe to do this in a conversation, is likely to serve as an important cue that enhances the sense of trust and connection needed to foster the development of such relationships (Mayer et al. 1995). If authenticity is felt in an initial meeting, it may make a lasting impression on both parties that encourages a positive and strong connection in future endeavors.

Feeling like one can be their “true self” may also invite others to reveal more about themselves, and vice versa, because people often look to others in terms of how to behave and how much to disclose about themselves (Altman & Taylor, 1973, Andersen & Chen, 2002, English & John. 2013). The sense of reciprocity – achieved during mutual disclosure and affirmation – is key to the sense of building a close bond and likely to predict how viable the connection will be in the future, even in a professional interaction (Collins & Miller, 1994; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). In addition, people are likely to attribute their internal states to others, which affects social perception processes (Ross, Greene & House, 1974). Therefore, feeling like one’s authentic self in an interaction is likely to be related to viewing the conversational partner as worth continuing a relationship with – the experience in a dyadic interaction will be a sense of shared reality and trueness (Rossignac-Milon & Higgins, 2018). As such, I propose the following hypotheses regarding the impact of self authenticity on relationship development (including both contact after the event and expected future interaction):

Hypothesis 4: Feeling authentic (“self-authenticity”) at a networking event is related to relationship development with the individuals that one meets.

Gender differences in the importance of authenticity in professional first impressions

Although both perceived (“other”) and felt (“self”) authenticity and signaling may be critical determinants of relationship development after first impressions, there are likely to be key gender differences in the value of these experiences and impressions. As detailed in Chapter 2, role congruity theory suggests that women face fundamentally different interpersonal expectations and associated challenges in social and professional

situations than men do (Eagly & Karau, 2002). They are expected to exhibit warm, communal traits even in strictly professional interactions – and may be more rewarding of others who in turn display these qualities because it mirrors their own experience, and rejecting of those who don't (Fiske et al. 2007; Derks, Van Laar, & Ellemers, 2016). Even in professional interactions, women may be more comfortable with disclosing more elements of their personal identities than men – and feel better about conversations in which both they and their conversation partner are able to do this effectively (Dindia & Allen, 1992; Rothbard, 2001). As such, it is likely that women may place a bigger premium on both self and other authenticity in professional interactions – that both feeling like one can be true to themselves and that an interaction partner is being genuine and authentic will be more important to them for dictating whether they will pursue future interactions.

In addition to role expectations, there is some evidence to suggest that individuals who are lower status in a given situation (such as minorities and women) may be more likely to be suspicious of messages supporting the status quo, and therefore more attuned to the fakeness (versus genuineness) of others' signals such as smiling (Galinsky et al. 2006; Kuntsman et al., 2016). In this case, the suspicion would likely be regarding the instrumental goals of forming business contacts, making the experience of felt and perceived authenticity more critical for feeling comfortable to continue a relationship. Other research has shown that women are better at and more comfortable with integrating multiple selves – or professional and personal identities – than men are (Rothbard, 2001) and that women need to perceive a trusting personal environment to engage in issue-selling (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998). The need for mutual disclosure and

vulnerability may be stronger for women in developing professional relationships, and it is more role congruent – and this may be true in organizational settings as well (Kennedy & Kray; 2015; Eagly & Karau, 2002). However, when actively choosing whom to develop relationships with, women may be more attuned to both their own felt (“self”) authenticity, and perceived (“other”) authenticity of their interaction partner – and value these more in initiating contact and future interactions.

Hypothesis 5a: Gender moderates the association between the perceived authenticity of an interaction partner (“other-authenticity”) and relationship development with this individual, such that the association is stronger for women than men.

Hypothesis 5b: Gender moderates the association between felt authenticity at a networking event (“self-authenticity”) and relationship development with the individuals that one meets, such that the association is stronger for women than men.

METHOD

To examine whether felt and perceived authenticity predicted relational outcomes, and which interpersonal signals of authenticity in brief interactions are linked to both 1) increased perceptions of authenticity as well as 2) positive relational outcomes in the future, attendees at professional networking events in several major U.S. cities completed 3 time-lagged surveys about their initial impressions of up to three people they met at the event. The first survey measured perceptions of others as well as their own experiences at the event, and the 2nd and 3rd surveys (completed 2 and 4 weeks later, respectively) evaluated both professional and personal relationship development and outcomes with these individuals.

Sample and Procedure

Recruitment and compensation

Participants were individuals who had voluntarily agreed to attend one of a number of professional networking events at major U.S. cities. The companies organizing these events encourage an informal and collegial atmosphere, with opportunities for people to get to know each other in a relatively relaxed environment. However, they all have the underlying goal of fostering meaningful professional connections and future relationships. I worked directly with company representatives to facilitate participant recruitment and survey distribution, since I was not able to physically attend all of the geographically dispersed events. Participants were recruited directly at the event by employees and volunteer ambassadors who helped to run the networking events. Individuals who expressed interest received information about the study both verbally by event ambassadors upon entering and leaving the event. They then either signed up and filled out a survey immediately following the event with a survey link, or received an email link later that evening or the following morning to complete the first survey within 24 hours. Participants who completed all three surveys in the appropriate time frame received free admission to future events with the networking group (valued at \$50-\$100 depending on the event city).

Procedure

Participants completed three time-lagged surveys following a single professional networking event about their connections and experience there. Participants attended the event voluntarily and without knowledge of the details of the study prior to their

attendance. They were given personal Qualtrics links that automatically saved their entries for individuals they met, and therefore were reminded of the identities of these people upon opening the two follow-up surveys. The first survey was completed immediately (i.e. within 24 hours) after the event, the second was completed 2 weeks after the event, and the final survey was completed 1 month following the event. Overall, 178 participants completed all three surveys within the allotted time frame and with complete responses, which comprised the final sample reported here.

Measures

Survey 1 – Taken within 24 hours of event

Perceived Authenticity (“other” authenticity)

Perceived authenticity of interaction partner(s) at the event was measured with 4 items adapted from definitions of authenticity (e.g. Lehman et al. 2019): At the event, this person seemed “real”, “genuine” “authentic” and “true to themselves” ($\alpha = .97$).

AUTHENTICITY SIGNALS

Non-conformity (interaction partner)

Perceived non-conformity of interaction partner(s) at the event was measured with 8 items adapted from Openness and Rebelliousness scales (e.g. Goldberg; 1990; McDermott, 1988): At the event, this person seemed “quirky”, “eccentric”, “non-conforming”, “unconventional”, “deviated from what is typical in this situation”, “did or said things that were unexpected or surprising”, “acted or spoke in a distinctive way”, appeared like an independent thinker “. ($\alpha = .89$).

Spontaneity (interaction partner)

Perceived spontaneity of interaction partner(s) at the event was measured with 4 items adapted from research on candid and spontaneous impressions (Berger & Barasch, 2017; Hahl et al. 2017): At the event, this person seemed “unscripted”, “spontaneous,” “off-the-cuff”, “rehearsed” (reverse scored) ($\alpha = .80$).

Transparency (interaction partner):

Perceived transparency of interaction partner(s) at the event was measured with 4 items adapted from workplace social integration and interaction scales (Dumas, Phillips & Rothbard, 2013; Nippert-Eng, 1996):: At the event, this person “shared personal details or experiences”, “disclosed very little about themselves” (reverse scored), “revealed their true feelings”, “seemed like they were saying what others wanted to hear” (reverse scored) ($\alpha = .77$).

Vulnerability (interaction partner): Perceived vulnerability of interaction partner(s) at the event was measured with 4 items derived from research on humility (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013) and vulnerability (Bruk et al. 2018): at the event, this person “made themselves vulnerable”, “was open about their mistakes or flaws “shared their imperfections”, “seemed close to perfect” (reverse scored) ($\alpha = .67$).

Interpersonal attributions (interaction partner): In addition to the above performance measures, participants also rated perceived warmth, morality, and competence of their interaction partners with one item measures: “how warm or cold does this person seem”;

“how good or bad does this person’s character seem”, and “how impressive or unimpressive are this person’s abilities?” (adapted from Goodwin et al. 2014)

Felt Authenticity (“Self Authenticity”)

The degree of authenticity participants felt during the entire networking event was measured visually with varying degrees (7 options) of overlapping circles asking participants to select the degree of overlap between their “event self” and their “actual self” (Adapted from Sedikides et al. 2017).

Demographics

Interaction partners were coded for gender using clues from names and descriptions wherever possible. Gender, race, and age of individuals completing the surveys were collected at the end of the survey.

Survey 2 – taken two weeks after event

Contact with interaction partner

Contact with an interaction partner was measured with the binary item: “Have you been in contact with this individual since the event (yes or no)?”

Expected future interaction

Expected future interaction was measured with two items: “how likely is it that you will develop an ongoing professional relationship with __?”, and “how likely is it that you will develop an ongoing personal relationship with __?” ($\alpha = .81$ at T2, $\alpha = .88$ at T3). The correlation between contact and expected future interaction at T3 is .48.

Survey 3 – taken 1 month following event

The one month survey items were identical to the 2 week items listed above, however indicative of the appropriate time frame that had passed (e.g. referring to the event “4 weeks ago” as opposed to “2 weeks ago”).

RESULTS*Factor Analyses*

Lisrel 8 was used to conduct a confirmatory factory analysis of the authenticity signals: namely whether four or five aforementioned categories were a more appropriate fit (with one or two factors for non-conformity and eccentricity), and whether the items correctly loaded on the appropriate factors. A CFA was initially run using all 20 items mentioned above, loading onto 4 factors. This initial model showed a number of poor fit issues across multiple indices, suggesting it was not the best model for the data. The goodness of fit statistic was significant [$\chi^2(178) = 637.55, p = .000$] which can be expected given the relatively large sample size. However, the size of the residuals (RMSEA = 0.11) and other fit indices (CFI = .88) were outside of the acceptable range (Bentler & Bonnet, 1980, Rothbard, 2001). An examination of the factor loadings suggested that several items were significantly reducing the fit of the model, and that a five factor solution would be more appropriate. Specifically, the following items loaded poorly with any factor and/or loaded onto multiple factors: (at the event, this person) “acted or spoke in a distinctive way”, “appeared like an independent thinker”, “seemed rehearsed”, “seemed like they were saying what others wanted to hear”, and “seemed close to perfect”. In addition, there seemed to be two factors within the “nonconformity”

signal bucket: personality traits (“quirky”, “eccentric”) and situational behaviors (“deviated from what is typical in this situation”, “did or said things that were unexpected or surprising”), or trait and state nonconformity (addressed with these labels in the rest of the paper).

Making these adjustments (dropping 5 items, indicating a 5-factor model) improved fit indices significantly. While the goodness of fit statistic was still significant, it was much lower than the prior model [$\chi^2 (178) = 181.06, p = .000$], and other fit indices were within the range of commonly accepted cut-offs (RMSEA = .097, 90% CI: .08; .11), (CFI = .95). As such, this model and the items that loaded on each factor were used for the final analyses. Final items and factor loadings are shown in Table 2.

Regression Analyses

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of the resulting signal scales and other variables are displayed in Table 3. To test the hypothesized relationships between authenticity signals, felt (“self”) authenticity, perceived (“other”) authenticity, and relational outcomes, I conducted two sets of empirical tests. For hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2a and 2b, and 4a (or those focused on a specific interaction), I examined only the first person rated by each individual – there was a 100% response rate in this case, and this allowed for a more precise test of the most salient individual whom they met at the event, with less concern about recall or order effects (i.e. differences between the people who were listed first vs. third), which some exploratory comparisons of means of variables of interest suggest may be systematically different. For hypotheses 3 and 4b (or those focused on self authenticity and future relationships) I aggregated the relational DVs (a

binary contact variable, and likelihood of a future relationship) across interaction partners, which had reliabilities of ($\alpha = .51$) and ($\alpha = .83$), respectively. Because of the low alpha for the contact variable, I focused on the future relationship predictions for this analysis. For both sets of analyses, I used both ordinary least squares and moderated regression procedures suggested by Aiken and West (1991).⁴

In addition, I measured relational outcomes at each time period (predictions about relationships at T1, and both predictions and behavioral outcomes at T2 and T3). Because I did not hypothesize about the ways in which relational outcomes at one time point will impact the later ones (and T2 and T3 are cumulative, in these sense that T3 allows reporting of outcomes that also occurred in the first two weeks). Therefore, for simplicity of interpretation of an already complex data structure, I do not report repeated measures analyses below (taking into account change between T2 and T3) – and report only T3 outcomes as my dependent variable.

To test Hypothesis 1a, I first tested the proposed relationships with script-breaking as a composite of all three signal types, and then tested them as separate independent variables. The overall script-breaking composite (comprised of trait and state non-conformity and spontaneity) did not significantly predict perceptions of authenticity ($\beta = -.01, p = .89$). Examining each type of signal and its relationship to perceived authenticity separately yielded somewhat more complex results: spontaneity was

⁴ In order to test the relationships between perceptions of all ratees (in most cases, 3 – though sometimes 2 or 1) and relational outcomes, one would need to account for the fact that ratees were nested within raters and therefore there can be unexplained variance with simple OLS regressions. To analyze these nested data, I conducted a multilevel analysis accounting for the random effects of raters (Hofmann, Griffin & Gavin, 2000). In most cases the results were the same, however there was added complexity with order effects that made the results challenging to interpret. For parsimony, I first report OLS results below for simply the first individual each person rated.

positively related to perceptions of authenticity ($\beta = .48, p < .001$), trait non-conformity or “quirkiness” was not related to perceptions of authenticity ($\beta = .12, p = .17$) and state non-conformity was negatively related to perceptions of authenticity ($\beta = -.46, p < .001$). Therefore, there was only partial support for Hypothesis 1a, in that only spontaneity positively predicted authenticity impressions.

To test Hypothesis 1b, I again tested the proposed relationships with backstage-sharing as a composite of both signal types, and then tested them as separate independent variables. The overall backstage-sharing composite (comprised of transparency and vulnerability) significantly predicted perceptions of authenticity ($\beta = .41, p < .001$). Examining each type of signal and its relationship to perceived authenticity separately suggested that spontaneity was positively related to perceptions of authenticity ($\beta = .48, p < .001$), and vulnerability was not related to perceptions of authenticity ($\beta = .024, p = .77$). Therefore, in general Hypothesis 1b was supported, though the overall effect was driven by transparency signals and not vulnerability signals.

To test the relationship between other authenticity and relationship development, I conducted an ordinary least squares regression analysis with variables based on the first person each rater interacted with. There was a significant positive relationship between perceived authenticity and contact ($\beta = .29, p < .001$) and expected future interaction ($\beta = .39, p < .001$) at T3, providing support for Hypothesis 2a. Because script-breaking was not associated with perceived authenticity, I did not test mediation for this variable. To test whether perceived authenticity mediates the relationship between backstage-sharing and relationship development, I generated 95% bias-corrected bootstrapped confidence

intervals to assess the significance of the indirect effects (Hayes, 2012). The 95% CI for the indirect effect of backstage-sharing on contact through perceived authenticity was did not contain zero ($\beta = .23$, $SE = .14$, 95% CI [-.06, .52]) but the direct effect of backstage sharing on contact did ($\beta = .18$, $SE = .08$, 95% CI [.05, .38]) indicating full mediation and support for Hypothesis 2b. The 95% CI for both the direct effect of backstage-sharing on expected future interaction ($\beta = .27$, $SE = .11$, 95% CI [.05, .48]) and the indirect effect of backstage-sharing on relationship development through perceived authenticity ($\beta = .18$, $SE = .06$, 95% CI [.07, .31]) did not contain zero, indicating partial mediation and additional support for Hypothesis 2b

To test the relationship between self authenticity and relationship development, I conducted an ordinary least squares regression analysis using expected future interaction across all interaction partners as the dependent variable. The relationship between self authenticity at the event and positive predictions about a continued relationship across all reported interaction partners was not significant ($\beta = .15$, $p = .09$), therefore Hypothesis 3 was not supported.

To test whether gender moderates the relationships between other and self authenticity and relationship development (Hypotheses 4a and 4b), I conducted moderated regression analyses outlined by Aiken and West (1991). Results examining whether gender moderates the relationship between other authenticity and relationship development with that interaction partner indicated that there was not a significant interaction between gender and perceived authenticity and contact ($\beta = .42$, $p = .31$) and expected future interaction ($\beta = .30$, $p = .44$) with this interaction partner at T3. Therefore

Hypothesis 4a was not supported (see Table 4 for moderated regression results for other authenticity). Results examining whether gender moderates the relationship between self authenticity at the event and expected future interaction across all reported interaction partners indicated a significant interaction ($\beta = .375, p < .01$) I interpreted the form of the interactions by plotting the simple slopes for men versus women (see Figure 5 for a graph of the simple slopes). Simple effects indicated that the impact of self authenticity was significantly related to expected future interaction for women ($\beta = .38; p < .01$) but not men ($\beta = .01; p = .89$), providing support for Hypothesis 4b (see Table 5 for moderated regression results).

DISCUSSION

In the rapidly changing landscape of work and technology, forming meaningful connections with individuals outside one's immediate personal or professional circle is likely to become more critical to professional success than ever before. Yet how does one interact in a manner that achieves this end when there may just be a few moments to make a lasting impression? The present study examines the role of authenticity – both felt or “self” and perceived or “other” – in the development of relationships following brief interactions with strangers at professional networking events, and how the importance of authenticity in relationship development may differ for men and women. Moreover, this longitudinal field study examines the ways in which this authenticity may be conveyed, or signaled, in these brief interactions and how these behavioral cues impact both perceptions of authenticity and future relational outcomes.

The results of the present study suggest important boundary conditions to cultivating authentic impressions in initial interactions. In terms of effective signaling, script-breaking was a less effective strategy than backstage sharing for positively impacting perceptions of authenticity and future relationships. When examining the types of signals individually, the results yielded that spontaneity and transparency seemed to be the most effective for signaling authenticity and future relationships, while non-conformity and vulnerability were less effective. Overall, an interaction partner's perceived authenticity at an initial meeting was predictive of being in contact with this individual and expected future interaction one month later. However there were gender differences determining whether felt or "self" authenticity was related to future relationships: the experience of felt authenticity was positively linked to relationship development across interaction partners for women but not for men.

Theoretical contributions

This study makes several core theoretical contributions. First, it advances research on the experience and consequences of state authenticity (Sedikides et al. 2017) in professional settings. Scholars have called for developing a better understanding of what leads to feelings and perceptions of authenticity that are momentary as opposed to lasting (Chen, 2018; Sedikides et al. 2017). This research serves as one answer to these calls, and more firmly situates the phenomenon of state authenticity both the realm of professional connections, but also interpersonal interactions – focusing on how feeling and seeming authentic in an initial conversation can impact future contact and relationship development. This study therefore adds to a growing body of work that examines

authenticity as a fleeting, transitory experience – not a quality of an individual – and one that is impacted by one’s surroundings, especially one’s interaction partners and burgeoning connections (Caza et al. 2017; Chen, 2018; Gan & Chen, 2017; Sedikides et al. 2017).

This study also contributes to a growing body of organizational scholarship that is focused on the complexities of enacting interpersonal authenticity and personal identities in professional settings (Caza et al. 2017; Creary et al. 2015; Reid, 2015; Ramarajan & Reid, 2013). As has been highlighted in these studies, simply “being authentic” or expressing one’s real thoughts, beliefs, and multiple identities at work is not always straightforward and risk free, but rather fraught with challenge and complexity. This work adds to this body of work by uncovering how individuals may successfully and unsuccessfully signal their real self to new contacts, and for whom this may be more important. Moreover, this work contributes to an emergent literature that examines how individuals navigate self-expression and identity formation not just in longstanding relationships, but brief “undefined” interactions and holding spaces (Wrzesniewski et al. 2018). As fewer individuals occupy traditional roles at work, it will be increasingly important to understand relational and identity dynamics in these “fuzzy” spaces, in which the overarching purpose of the interaction may not be clear cut (Ashford et al. 2007).

Last, this study provides insight into gender differences in relationship formation following brief professional interactions. A wide body of work has documented gender disparities in women’s and men’s professional networks as one key driver of performance

differences for men and women in organizations (Burt, 1998; Ibarra, 1992). The findings from the present research suggest that the subjective sense of intrapersonal alignment, or felt authenticity, is a critical component for women to form meaningful bonds following “networking” events, and to perceive others as being authentic themselves. For men, this was not a critical factor – only seeing others as authentic led to relationship development, not feeling authentic. This distinction may help clarify prior findings and add conceptual nuance to extant work on gender differences in professional networks, while also informing future work on gender differences in networking and professional relationship formation.

Future Directions and Limitations

There are several important limitations and opportunities for future work that are raised by this study. First, because data were collected in a naturalistic, uncontrolled setting (by design), this study provided strong external validity. However these data do fall short of demonstrating a causal relationship between the proposed relationships. A future study might attempt to experimentally manipulate authenticity in a networking setting (whether felt or perceived authenticity or authenticity signaling). However, prior work has noted how challenging it can be to manipulate perceived authenticity – and as Study 1 of this dissertation indicated, being expected to seem authentic does not necessarily translate to effectively enacting this impression and getting others to hold these beliefs (Sedikides et al. 2017). However, a successful manipulation of felt (“self”) or perceived (“other”) authenticity in a naturalistic setting that focused on first impressions would be a valuable next step to address concerns associated with causality.

A promising opportunity for greater experimental control might be to look at first impressions in online or social media contexts and how initial perceptions of authenticity and specific signals predict future contact and relationship formation.

A second limitation of the present study is the time frame over which individuals were followed (4 weeks) was relatively brief. While this design was appropriate for understanding how first impressions predict initial contact, it still leaves open questions regarding whether strong professional and/or personal bonds were actually formed, and what types of benefits were enjoyed over a longer time span. Future work could institute a more extensive longitudinal design (6 months to a year) to allow for a richer understanding of the power of these initial impressions in more solidified relationship formation and to explore other professional outcomes. This design might be combined with the above idea in testing how people connect with others online, form impressions, and actually convert these relationships to real life ties (and the role of authenticity and authenticity signaling in these bonds).

In addition, the present findings raised some interesting questions around the ways in which authenticity is interpreted and signaled in this setting. There were several findings that were not anticipated that should be examined with future work. For example, non-conformity did not drive perceptions of authenticity or relational outcomes as was hypothesized, nor did vulnerability. However, spontaneity and transparency both were more reliable signals of authenticity that also did not undermine the ability to form meaningful professional contacts. It may be that these types of signals simply “safer” in professional settings, in that they accomplish authenticity perceptions, without

undermining effectiveness in terms of relationship development. Future work should continue to explore these signals and their relationship to other important professional outcomes.

Last, this study explored gender as a critical moderator of the experience and impact of authenticity in a professional networking setting. Future work should systematically examine additional boundary conditions of these findings, by testing how different moderators and contexts influence the role of authenticity and authenticity signals in relationship development. For example, does this effect hold across different types of industries? Would a creative industry networking event be different than an accounting firm event in terms of which signals are effective? National culture might be another interesting factor to examine – especially along the lines of individualism and collectivism, which may determine the value of authenticity broadly speaking, but also the appropriateness of the various signals. Moreover, different markers of social identity such as race, sexual orientation, and status may all impact the importance and effectiveness of felt and perceived authenticity, and specific authenticity signals.

Practical implications

There are several practical implications that stem from this research regarding how individuals should approach forming relationships in the new world of work and technology. While public and scholarly interest in interpersonal authenticity is rapidly increasing, there still remains a great deal of unanswered questions regarding how this desire actually translates into behaviors and outcomes in professional settings. Scholars have noted that although authenticity increasingly important, it can also mean a number

of different things to different people (Lehman et al. 2019). This study helps to clarify how and for whom felt and perceived authenticity may be important in a professional networking or relationship-building setting. In general, with these new potential contacts, individuals may be better off refraining some of their more non-conforming and vulnerable behaviors, and focus instead on not seeming rehearsed and saying what they really mean and believe. It is important to realize that what behaviors may be effective in a professional setting in terms of signaling authenticity may differ from that in a personal relationships, and individuals should cultivate the ability to manage the apparent paradox of seeming both authentic and professional simultaneously by signaling the former without undermining the latter.

Moreover, this study sheds light on the ways in which women and men may differ in the value they place on feeling authentic in professional interactions, and how this impacts how these connections develop over time. It is important for both men and women, as well as both employees and leaders, to realize that there may be key differences in the ways in which women and men place value on authenticity in professional settings. For women, it is important to feel like one can be oneself at these events, while for men this was not critical. Having a better grasp of these differences may be critical to forming bonds and understanding one's own network.

CHAPTER 4

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Seeming as if one is being true to oneself has been established not only as a positive intrapsychic phenomenon, but also a successful interpersonal strategy across a range of domains such as friendship, dating, and political campaigns. Increasingly, the importance of perceived authenticity or being one's "whole self" in professional settings has gained considerable traction and attention by both researchers and practitioners (Caza et al, 2017; Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014). Yet, this seemingly straightforward advice (after all, one might naively suggest - how challenging can it be to simply be oneself?) fails to account for some of the complexities and even potential downsides that may come with behaving in a way that is actually authentic when there are conflicting expectations for desired behavior.

These challenges may be especially apparent in brief professional interactions with high demands for self-enhancement (e.g. job interviews or networking events) in which actors don't have a chance to build genuine and deep relationships over time, but rather have to strike a balance between authenticity and professionalism in cultivating a first impression. Extant work has suggested that behaving authentically (or even purposefully cultivating an authentic impression) can be valuable and even advisable, but only when the content of this authenticity fits within the bounds of what is also desirable or acceptable behavior. Given the constraints that may make informal relationships and deep self-disclosure problematic in many organizational contexts (Gibson, 2018; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018), the value of acting authentically may not be fully realized in these

brief first impressions, and is likely to depend on the way in which this authenticity is enacted. Moreover, the value of feeling authentic for relationship formation (versus being perceived as authentic) may depend on actor attributes such as gender.

This may be particularly true in brief interactions, in which some of the interpersonal benefits of authenticity, such as building trust and liking, might not be especially relevant. In particular, men should be aware of the pitfalls of attempting to signal their authenticity through reduced emotional labor and increased nonconformity, and consider how they might be able to be themselves in a more regulated fashion that simultaneously achieves goals of both seeming authentic and professional. Women, conversely, might view their past experience with cultivating paradoxical self-presentational goals as a potential advantage when it comes to these challenging interpersonal situations. Moreover, women may realize that they may be more likely to value the experience of authenticity in their budding relationships, and purposely seek this out in “fuzzy” interpersonal situations.

In addition, a number of prominent leaders and well-known organizational cultures highlight the critical importance of bringing your whole self to work, suggesting that this may become less of a personal choice or interpersonal style, and more of a performance requirement. Just as strongly encouraging fun (Mollick & Rothbard, 2014) or friendship (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018) may be viewed as having only positive consequences by organizational leaders, this research illuminates the possibility for unintended downsides of admonishments to be authentic. As such, leaders should exercise caution when encouraging employees to reveal their authentic selves, as this can

be challenging for some, and could potentially undermine productivity and performance. Moreover, there may be an important distinction between cultivating authenticity in your ongoing professional relationships, as opposed to brief interactions in which first impressions are paramount. Even when given the advice to “be yourself,” individuals should heed this advice with caution in such contexts.

Moreover, technological advances are rapidly altering the way individuals collaborate and connect at work and influencing the manner in which they are evaluated. For example, organizations such as Goldman Sachs and Unilever and academic institutions such as the University of Chicago now use videos in place of real-life interviews, and algorithms to determine performance instead of human attributions (Feloni, 2017; Kmetz, 2018). In addition, many people are meeting others in non-traditional formats: networking events, co-working spaces, and through virtual means and thereby avoiding in person contact altogether (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017; McFarland & Ployhart, 2015). These advances are touted as saving time, reducing bias, and facilitating connections – and therefore as being advantageous for organizations and individuals. However, these technological changes also raise new issues in terms of how to convey important and complex interpersonal information in brief, unidirectional, and virtual interactions (Leonardi & Vaast, 2017). As such, both individuals and institutions need to be mindful of how the changing nature of work impacts not only the content of tasks, but also how we make attributions and connect to others.

Agenda for future research

There are a number of exciting avenues for future research that explore the perks and perils of cultivating authentic first impressions in professional interactions. To this end, I have several works in progress that explore how individuals feel, perceive, and signal authenticity in their online interactions. Using a random sample of tweets from all CEOs from the Fortune 500, Inc. 500, and Forbes 30 Under 30 with Twitter accounts in 2017, I am examining how individuals signal their authenticity on Twitter, and whether the same signals (and overall perceptions of authenticity) predict performance. In addition, in a mixed method study of cartoonists and web comics on Instagram with large followings (over 100,000), I (along with collaborators Chad Murphy and Spencer Harrison) am examining how individuals manage the tensions between signaling authenticity and incorporating the feedback they receive from their followers to become more effective artists. Additional future work should examine the role of technology and social media in both illuminating and altering the role of authenticity and self-expression in our professional connections.

Future work should continue to examine the relational side of authenticity – especially the power that perceived authenticity holds in initial professional impressions. This dissertation sheds light on how expectations to be authentic may backfire in highly evaluative settings, mainly because some (especially men) may see this as an admonition to reduce their deep acting and increase their script-breaking. However, this work also shows that when people do perceive others as authentic in a field context, and as sharing their backstage, this can be very effective in less formal professional settings. Additional

research is needed to untangle how and when authenticity is valuable in different types of professional settings. Moreover, more work should be done on how authenticity can be effectively signaled at work, as well as how the need to feel and see others as authentic varies by gender and other social categories.

Overall, authenticity is a powerful construct that is pervasive in Western culture. While there are clearly many relational advantages to being oneself, the present study highlights the challenges and complexities inherent in enacting authenticity in professional settings. Expectations to be authentic can be especially challenging and even potentially detrimental to performance in organizational contexts, while authenticity in more naturalistic contexts may be conducive to relationship building (but only when signaled effectively). When it comes to seeming authentic in professional settings, it might be wise to do so in a manner that paradoxically involves some conscious regulation in order to best succeed.

Table 1.**Study 1 Means, SDs, and Correlation Table By Gender**

Mediator		CONDITION							
		Control		DV: Authentic		DV: Professional		DV: Both	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Surface Acting	Men (N = 90)	2.53	1.15	2.22	0.97	3.04	1.64	2.73	1.07
	Women (N = 172)	2.76	1.31	2.71	1.26	3.20	1.46	2.48	1.10
	All (N = 262)	2.67	1.25	2.57	1.20	3.13	1.53	2.55	1.08
Deep Acting	Men (N = 90)	3.71	1.31	3.30	1.61	4.46	1.28	3.33	1.32
	Women (N = 172)	4.13	1.47	4.12	1.32	3.87	1.36	4.11	1.48
	All (N = 262)	3.97	1.42	3.88	1.45	4.12	1.35	3.89	1.46
Performance	Men (N = 90)	4.80	1.09	3.89	1.52	4.50	1.07	4.24	0.73
	Women (N = 172)	4.98	1.03	4.73	0.89	4.41	1.07	4.77	1.01
	All (N = 262)	4.91	1.05	4.49	1.16	4.45	1.06	4.62	0.97

Table 2.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis Loadings for Authenticity Signals Items (Study 2)

ITEM	FACTOR				
	State Nonconformity	Trait Nonconformity	Spontaneity	Transparency	Vulnerability
Deviated typical	0.81				
Did surprising	0.86				
Quirky		0.8			
Eccentric		0.83			
Nonconforming		0.93			
Unconventional		0.93			
Unrehearsed			0.75		
Spontaneous			0.9		
Off the Cuff			0.71		
Shared details				0.77	
Revealed feelings				0.74	
Made vulnerable					0.68
Open mistakes					0.94
Shared Imperfections					0.93

Table 3.
Study 2 Means, SDs, and Correlation Table

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>(n=178)</i>								
1. Self Authenticity	5.62	1.51	--					
2. Other Authenticity	5.92	1.30	.26**	--				
3. Script-breaking	3.78	1.14	.02	.01	--			
4. Backstage-sharing	4.32	1.18	.26**	.41**	.30**	--		
5. Contact (1=N, 2=Y)	1.46	.49	.15*	.26*	.04	.21**	--	
6. Future relationship	3.74	1.70	.22**	.38**	.01	.31**	.48**	--

Table 4.**Other Authenticity, Gender, and Relationship Development**

Variables	M1: Future Relationship	M2: Future Relationship
Intercept	0.98† (0.56)	1.44 † 0.83
Other Authenticity	0.50*** (0.09)	0.28 0.30
Gender (M=0, W=1)	-0.41 (0.21)	-1.25 1.12
Other Authenticity X Gender		0.29 0.37
R squared	0.17	0.17

N = 169. *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, † p < .10. Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 5.**Self Authenticity, Gender, and Relationship Development**

Variables	M1: Future Relationship	M2: Future Relationship
Intercept	2.78*** (0.40)	3.37*** (0.46)
Self Authenticity	0.12† (0.07)	0.01 0.08
Gender (M=0, W=1)	-0.12 (0.20)	-2.23** 0.86
Self Authenticity X Gender		0.38** 0.15
R ²	0.14	0.24

N = 169. *** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05, † p < .10. Standard errors in parentheses.

Figure 1.

Authentic and professional expectations and expert-rated performance (Study 1)

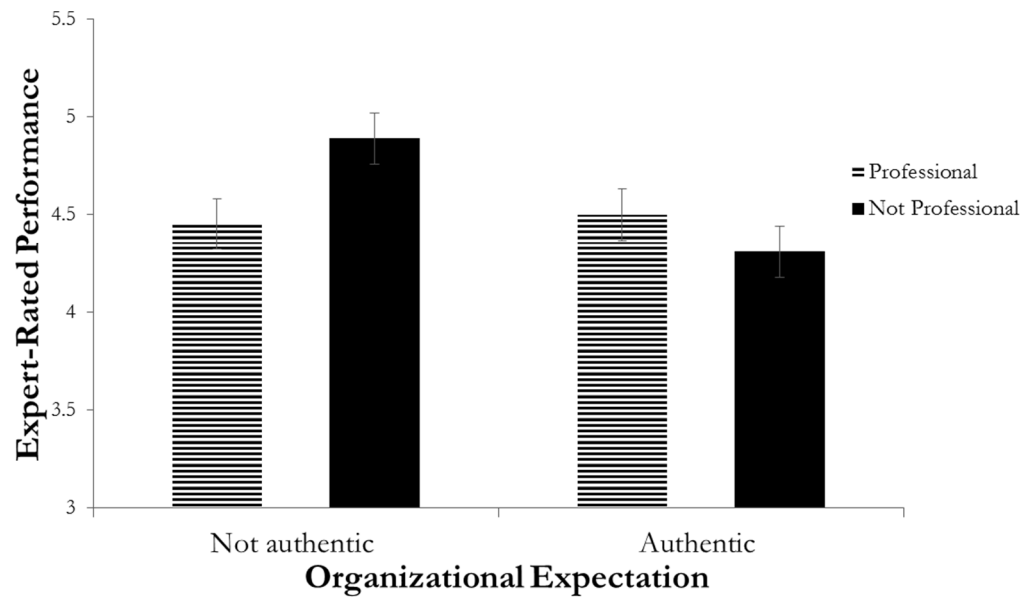


Figure 2.

Authentic expectations, gender, and expert-rated performance (Study 1)

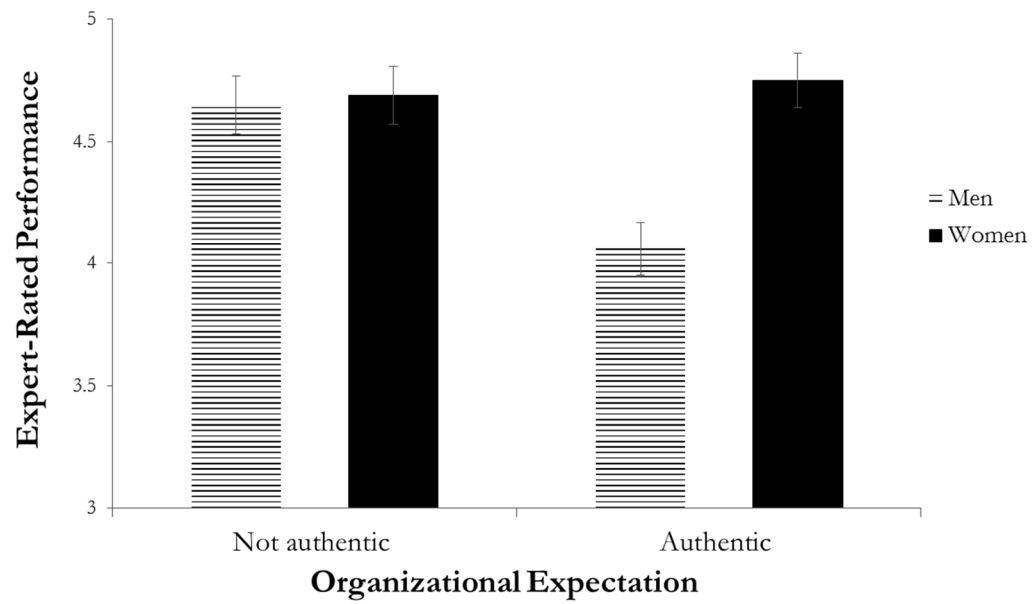


Figure 3.

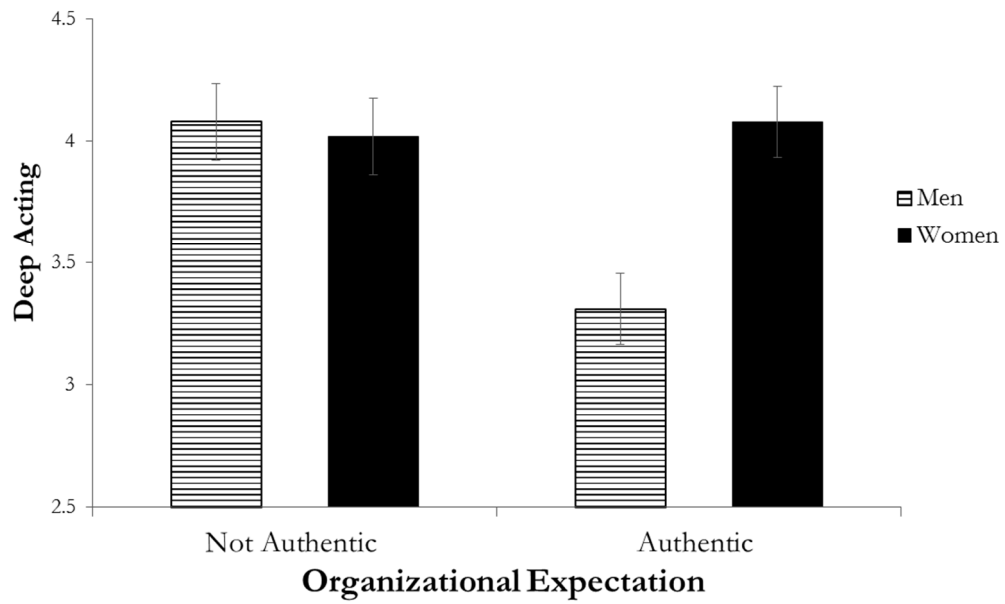
Authentic expectations, gender, and deep acting (Study 1)

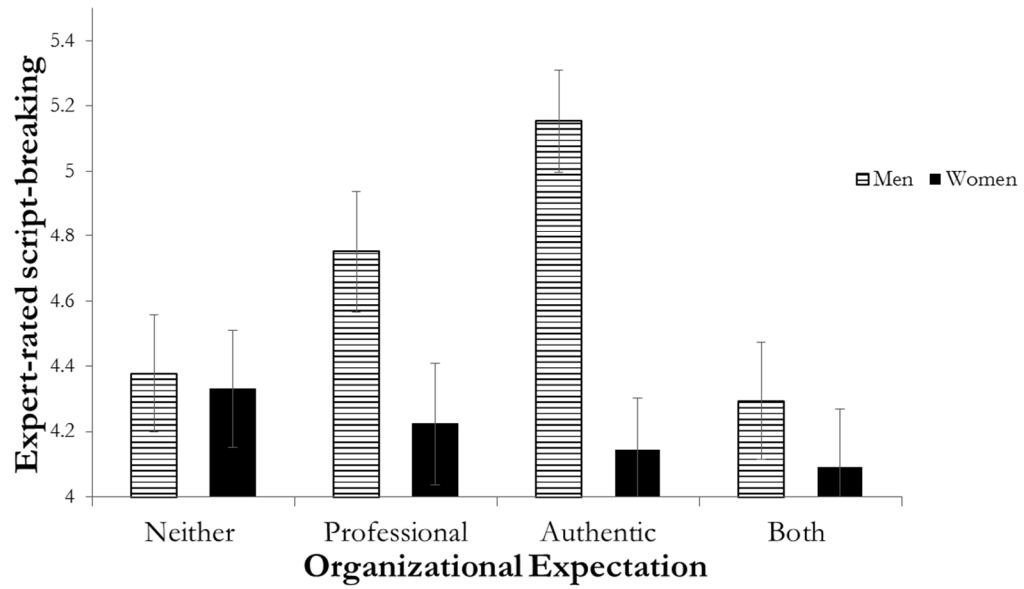
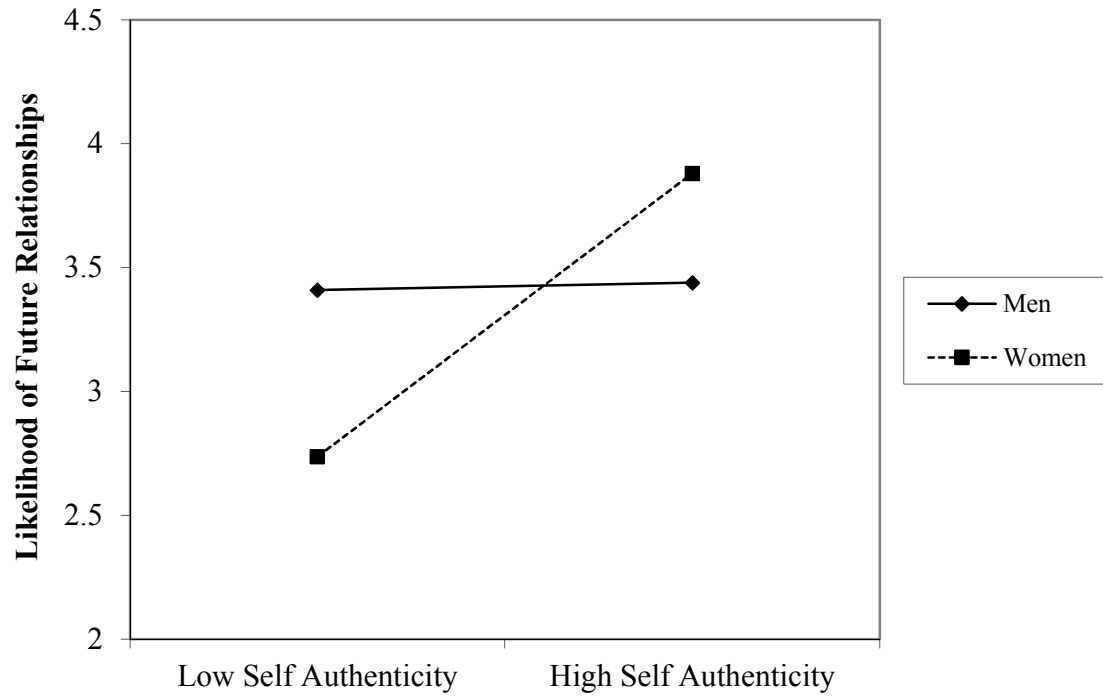
Figure 4.**Authentic and professional expectations, gender, and script-breaking (Study 1)**

Figure 5.

Self authenticity, gender, and relationship predictions across interactions (Study 2)



Appendix A.

Authenticity Signals Survey Items

Participants rated these items on a 7-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”.

(Stem for all questions) “At the event, this person (seemed):”

Script-breaking

Trait non-conformity

Quirky

Eccentric

Non-conforming

Unconventional

State non-conformity

Deviated from what is typical in this situation

Did or said things that were unexpected or surprising

Spontaneity

Unscripted

Spontaneous

Off-the-cuff

Backstage-sharing

Transparency

Shared personal details or experiences

Revealed their true feelings

Vulnerability

Made themselves vulnerable

Was open about their mistakes or flaws

Shared their imperfections

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