

The Benefits of Being Yourself:  
An Examination of Authenticity, Uniqueness, and Well-Being

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Abstract

In the United States, many people are instructed about the value of “being yourself” from a young age. However, what evidence is there to support this notion and what happens when “being yourself” causes a person to stand out, or be different, from others? The field of positive psychology, with its focus on the science behind well-being, stands well-positioned to answer these questions. By reviewing the theories, measurements, and research behind the two constructs of authenticity and uniqueness, this paper aims to show how being oneself does relate positively to well-being, even when doing so sets a person apart from others. It shows that humans have a desire to be authentic and doing so correlates with higher levels of life satisfaction and well-being. It also finds that humans have sometimes competing needs to belong and be unique but that these can be jointly fulfilled by joining distinctive groups. Data supports the connection between authenticity and well-being, as well as the human desire to stand out from others. Because of this, it seems that openness and acceptance must be encouraged on a broader scale in order for individuals and societies to flourish.

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## The Benefits of Being Yourself:

### An Examination of Authenticity, Uniqueness, and Well-Being

In the United States, many people are instructed by their parents, teachers, and friends on the importance of “being yourself.” As a common theme in children’s literature, the emphasis on this idea starts at an early age and its importance was acknowledged by the great American writer and presenter, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who is attributed with saying, “To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.” The message imparted by these stories, this historical figure, and one’s close, caring others is that “being yourself” will lead to better outcomes than attempting to become someone or something else. However, what evidence is there to support this notion and what happens when “being yourself” causes a person to stand out, or be different, from others?

The field of positive psychology, with its focus on the science behind well-being, seems well-positioned to answer these questions. However, in order for it to do so scientifically, the notion of “being yourself” needs to be broken into constructs that can be quantified and studied. Two such constructs, authenticity and uniqueness, as well as the theories, measurements, and existing research behind them are explored in this paper in relation to well-being research and applications.

Authenticity, or knowing one’s thoughts and feelings and acting in accordance with them, is virtually synonymous with “being yourself.” Interest in authenticity has existed for centuries but only recently have experiments demonstrated its connection to well-being. Through exploring the origins of theories regarding authenticity, as well as how it has been measured and studied thus far, this paper demonstrates that this concept has tangible links to various aspects of

well-being, thereby making it a deserving area of focus for future positive psychology research and application.

One possible consequence of authenticity or “being yourself” may be standing out from others and being labeled as different. This, in turn, could lead to shame, rejection, and ostracism, having a detrimental impact on well-being due to humans’ innate need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Additionally, Christopher Peterson (2006), one of the founders of positive psychology, concisely summed up the field as “other people matter” (p. 249), further emphasizing the importance of nurturing relationships with others when it comes to well-being. Clearly, even though “being yourself” is culturally valued and has been linked to greater well-being in the form of authenticity, when it leads to isolation, it has the potential to negatively impact well-being, too. However, is it possible that standing out and being different as a result of authenticity has potential positive consequences? Although “being yourself” may lead to negative reactions from others, detrimentally affecting well-being, “being yourself” could also cause people to stand out and be labeled as different in a positive way. Beginning in the 1970s, researchers became interested in the positive side of difference, reframing it as uniqueness or distinctiveness. The theories and measures they developed regarding this concept, as well as the studies investigating it, are summarized in this paper and are shown to be worthy of continued study by positive psychology.

Due to the prevalence of the idea of “being yourself” in American culture and positive psychology’s concern with studying and promoting well-being, this paper aims to show how the two connect using the concepts of authenticity and uniqueness. It reviews the literature regarding the theory, measurement, and research of each and demonstrates that the study of well-being would benefit from incorporating them into future research and application.

### **Positive Psychology**

Positive psychology is a branch of psychology devoted to the scientific study of well-being. As president of the American Psychological Association in 1998, Martin Seligman made the establishment of this social and behavioral science one of his main priorities (Fowler, Seligman, & Koocher, 1999), effectively ushering into existence the field as it stands today. He recognized that the broader field of psychology had focused almost exclusively on the study and investigation of mental illness for the majority of the twentieth century and that, while this had led to many beneficial outcomes in that domain (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), it also provided only a limited view of the content of human experience. Psychology had become solely problem-focused, adopting a disease-model that concentrated on the correction of weakness, the alleviation of symptoms, and the curing of mental illness (Maddux, 2002; Peterson, 2006). Because of this, psychology attended almost exclusively to clinical populations instead of to humans as a whole. Seligman sought to correct this imbalance through the inception of positive psychology. The purpose of this field is not to supersede or replace traditional psychology, or what Peterson terms “business-as-usual psychology” (2006, p. 5). Instead it seeks to rebalance it, providing a complement that defines, investigates, and promotes human flourishing in conjunction with the already well-established study of mental illness. In doing so, positive psychology applies to both clinical and non-clinical populations, broadening its reach in both subject matter and application.

Certain truisms form the basis of positive psychology (Peterson, 2006). First, positive psychology asserts that what is good about life is just as real and genuine and deserving of study as what is bad about it. Second, it claims that the presence of what is good does not simply equate to the absence of what is bad. For instance, feeling happy is not the same as merely



feeling not sad. Finally, based on the first two points, the study of the positive necessitates its own theories separate from those that apply to the negative. In order to adequately explain well-being, positive psychology needs to develop and study its own theories because simply reinterpreting theories of disorder would not fully capture the nature of the positive elements of life. A useful metaphor for this is diet. Telling people to cut out donuts, potato chips, and Twinkies might help them to become healthier than they are, but not necessarily the healthiest they can be. To reach that level, they must also incorporate the appropriate servings of fruits, vegetables, and grains. Healthy nutrition is as much about understanding what foods are beneficial for your body as it is about knowing what foods are detrimental for it. Positive psychology seeks to serve the same purpose in the domain of mental health.

Positive psychology examines well-being at various levels (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). First, it seeks to explore what makes some experiences subjectively better than others. Second, it aims to identify traits that individuals possess that contribute to well-being. For instance, what makes some people more resilient, successful, happy, or optimistic than others? Or, in the case of this paper, what makes people more authentic or unique and when is it beneficial for them and when is it not? Third, it studies those institutions that contribute to human flourishing and how to build thriving communities. Knowing how well-being is impacted at each of these levels can help positive psychology make the most impact on the most people by replicating and teaching its findings in all three areas.

While positive psychology as a formally-established field is still under two decades old, interest in the positive aspects of life has existed for centuries. Philosophers, theologians, politicians, scientists, writers, musicians, and artists have questioned and posited what makes life worth living for thousands of years. In Ancient Greece, Aristotle identified happiness as the

ultimate good, the end goal everyone strives for in life (Melchert, 2002). The forefathers of the United States saw happiness as so essential and important that they included the pursuit of it as an unalienable right in the Declaration of Independence (US, 1776). More recently in human history, Pharrell Williams' song "Happy" (2013) broke records by topping six different Billboard charts (Trust, 2014) and inspiring thousands of parody videos from around the world. With its interest in the best parts of human life, positive psychology clearly did not uncover something new.

Even the history of traditional psychology also includes the study of the positive. Prior to World War II, the field comprised of three main areas of research: curing mental illness, increasing the productivity and fulfillment of people's lives, and discovering and nurturing genius and talent (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). After the war, the latter two aims fell away, due in large part to the founding of two institutions, the Veterans Administration and National Institute of Mental Health, which financially incentivized the treatment and study of mental illness. Several years later, the humanist movement in psychology, led by Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, renewed interest in the positive aspects of human functioning by focusing on theories of self-actualization (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1951). While they conceptualized frameworks for why and how people seek to increase their potential, their work lacked empirical data to support it (Peterson, 2006). Instead, it birthed the self-help movement, which, however popular, lacks the rigor of the scientific method. However, humanism provides the basis for much of what positive psychology studies. Peterson (2006) remarked that humanism and positive psychology are close relatives, but due to its commitment to valid, reliable data and scientific methodology, positive psychology aims to succeed where humanism failed by presenting sound scientific support for its claims and hypotheses.

In order to limit confusion in the course of positive psychology research, Peterson and Seligman (2004) found it necessary to establish a common language that investigators could draw upon. As one of the first major projects undertaken by positive psychology, a group of scholars surveyed literature across disciplines, cultures, and time and then, based on a set of ten criteria, developed a classification of six virtues and twenty-four strengths. *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification (CSV)* (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) is meant to be positive psychology's answer to traditional psychology's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* in that it acts as a source of common knowledge that could be referenced and studied across researchers throughout psychology and other domains. However, unlike the *DSM* that lists mental disorders and describes their symptomology, the *CSV* catalogs character strengths, explaining their expression and associated positive outcomes. This is essential so that there is consistency in researchers' understanding of character strengths and virtues when conducting various studies.

As mentioned previously, a fundamental basis of positive psychology is the development of its own theories that can be tested. Seligman's most recent incarnation of his theory of well-being comes in the form of an acronym: PERMA (Seligman, 2011). Each letter represents an element of the larger construct of well-being. Seligman argues that well-being consists of positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and achievement. By subjectively and objectively measuring and studying each of these elements, positive psychology will come to a better understanding of well-being and how to cultivate and increase it. Another theory of well-being currently being researched also consists of five elements. Originating from data collected from around the world by the Gallup organization, this theory developed by Tom Rath and Jim Harter (2010) suggests that well-being comprises of thriving in five areas: career, social,

financial, physical, and community. While their data show that sixty-six percent of people are thriving in at least one area of well-being, it unfortunately also demonstrates that only seven percent of people indicated they are thriving in all five areas. This highlights the importance of positive psychology to properly assess people's well-being and develop tools, or positive interventions, for them to increase it.

Positive interventions are various strategies that people can employ to increase their well-being. As a starting point, researchers surveyed what people already experiencing high levels of well-being did (Lyubomirsky, 2001) and, based on that information, created different activities they could test in order to evaluate their effectiveness against control groups (Layous & Lyubomirsky, 2012). Examples of interventions that have been empirically proven to significantly increase levels of subjective well-being are writing letters of gratitude and taking time at the end of each day to write down three good things that happened and explaining why they occurred (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Along with creating a common vocabulary of strengths and developing testable theories of well-being, acquiring information on what positive interventions work, and why they do, is another critical element of positive psychology.

As evidenced by this brief survey of the field, positive psychology has already accomplished much towards its goal of investigating well-being. However, many questions remain and the remainder of this paper addresses two specific concepts in relation to well-being: authenticity and uniqueness. While authenticity has been central to psychological theories regarding people's ability to achieve their full potential for several decades, only recently has a body of research begun to emerge suggesting strong ties between it and measures of well-being. While the preliminary evidence is promising, positive psychology stands to gain even greater

insight by examining it further. On the other hand, uniqueness has an even smaller base to draw upon, leaving it open for even greater investigation by positive psychology. Together, these two topics relate to the idea of “being yourself,” a culturally valued idea within the United States. Using the lens of positive psychology, the following sections survey existing theories, measurements and empirical data regarding authenticity and uniqueness and examine how they can aid in an increased understanding of well-being.

### **Authenticity**

Much like the content of positive psychology, interest in authenticity and its perceived importance to well-being has existed for centuries (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008). Currently, in mainstream counseling psychology, authenticity is viewed as the most fundamental aspect of well-being in that it is not just a component or prerequisite to achieve well-being but that it is the very essence of well-being (Wood et al., 2008). It is thought that the lack of authenticity leads to psychopathology and distress because it causes people to engage in forced, unnatural behavior, leaving them feeling unfulfilled or devalued (Leary, 2003). Following from this, it is believed that promoting authenticity may lead to enhanced well-being because it helps people have a clear and consistent sense of self, causing fulfillment (Rogers, 1961; Reich, Kessel, & Bernieri, 2013). But, this belief, as well as many other theories regarding authenticity, has little to no empirical evidence to support it (Wood et al., 2008). However, with the advent of positive psychology, interest in the study of authenticity has been renewed (Wood et al., 2008). More and more ideas from within the humanistic and counseling segments of psychology have started to be tested empirically (Joseph & Linley, 2006; Linley 2006; Patterson & Joseph, 2007), creating the possibility for past claims regarding authenticity’s relationship to well-being to be substantiated with data.

Several obstacles present themselves when studying authenticity. First, while a number of research studies on authenticity have been completed, they lack an established, consistently used definition of authenticity across them (Harter, 2002). The lack of consensus surrounding what authenticity is has led to a variety of definitions, theories, and measurements all purporting to measure the same thing. This causes confusion. Authenticity can refer to a trait or state, with each formulation of it being measured by a different scale and, in some cases, with multiple scales. However, despite these issues, separate studies have found links between their own formulation of authenticity and well-being. The following sections highlight key theories, definitions, and research studies on authenticity and its relationship to well-being.

### **Trait Authenticity**

The majority of theories and empirical studies focus on authenticity as a dispositional trait (Lenton, Bruder, Slabu, & Sedikides, 2013). A trait refers to an individual's tendency to think, feel, or act a certain way across situations (Endler, Parker, Bagby, & Cox, 1991). Several movements and theories have posited that authenticity as a trait relates to enhanced well-being. Brief overviews of the main and most influential definitions of authenticity as a trait are provided below.

**Humanism.** Arguably, the most impactful ideas regarding authenticity come from Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, the main psychologists of the humanist movement. In his definition of a fully functioning human being, Rogers (1961) described an authentic individual as one who can openly receive, interpret and act upon their emotional responses and internal states. He cautioned that those unable to display authenticity, either in their relationship with themselves or others, were at risk of remaining stagnant, unable to become a fully-realized person. In order to experience positive personal growth and change, authenticity was key.

Similarly, Abraham Maslow (1968) categorized authenticity as a higher-order psychological need, which was necessary to fulfill before becoming self-actualized. He defined authenticity as the synchrony between what a person thought about themselves, or their self-concept, and what that person was doing and experiencing. Inauthenticity and maladjustment resulted when one's self-concept and lived experience became incongruent with each other.

As stated previously, while the humanist movement supplied many influential ideas, it did not provide adequate empirical evidence to support them. However, the work of Maslow and Rogers has formed the basis for many modern definitions of authenticity that are starting to be tested and are summarized below.

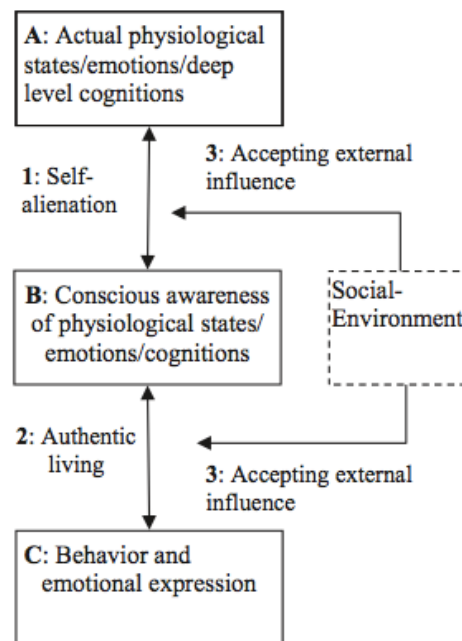
**Self-determination theory.** Key to understanding current definitions and research surrounding authenticity is self-determination theory. Developed by Deci and Ryan (1995), this theory states that humans have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these three needs are satisfied, the internalization of goals occurs, which has been described as a prerequisite for authenticity (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Ryan and Deci (2000) suggested that the two needs of autonomy and competence are especially effective at cultivating authenticity. Again, very little empirical evidence has surfaced thus far supporting these claims. However, a two-week study required participants to answer questions each night regarding how autonomous, competent, related to others, and authentic they were, as well as questions measuring self-esteem and positive and negative affect. It found positive correlations between the satisfaction of autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs and authenticity (Heppner et al., 2008). This provides some empirical backing for a positive relationship between need satisfaction and authenticity; however, further studies need to be conducted to investigate this more fully.

**A multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity.** Drawing heavily on the work outlined above by Deci and Ryan (1995) as well as Carl Rogers (1961), Kernis and Goldman (2006) created the multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity. They define authenticity as “the unobstructed operation of one’s true- or core-self in one’s daily enterprise” (Kernis & Goldman, 2006, p. 294) and state that it comprises of four components: *awareness*, *unbiased processing*, *behavior*, and *relational orientation*. *Awareness* refers to knowing and being aware of all parts of the self – emotions, traits, strengths, weaknesses, desires, motives, etc. – and not just recognizing the parts of the self which reinforce one’s overarching self-concept. For instance, this means being honest with oneself and accepting parts of the self that might conflict and contradict each other. Awareness also encompasses the desire to learn more about oneself in order to increase self-knowledge. *Unbiased processing* refers to objectively evaluating any self-relevant information, whatever the source, be it internal or external. This objectivity leads to an accurate sense of the self due to the lack of distortions, biases, or defense mechanisms. The *behavior* component of authenticity means acting based on one’s internal values, needs, and preferences and not as a consequence of external goals. This aspect of authenticity can be seen as the expression of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and might be what most people mean when they tell someone to “be yourself.” However, it is clear that in order to enact this component of authenticity, one must have the first two components of awareness and unbiased processing solidly established. The last component of authenticity is *relational orientation* or revealing one’s true self in close relationships. This relies on active self-disclosure and openness to conveying both the good and bad parts of oneself to close others. Again, this clearly links to the idea of being oneself but is also dependent on a person’s awareness and ability to evaluate information about oneself.



Based on this definition of authenticity, Kernis and Goldman developed The Authenticity Inventory (AI-3, Goldman & Kernis, 2004) to measure these four components and conduct research studies demonstrating the relationship between authenticity and other constructs, such as those related to well-being. A more detailed description of this scale as well as the studies conducted using it will be presented in the following sections.

**Person-centered model of authenticity.** Another group of researchers (Wood et al., 2008), in an effort to clarify authenticity, presented a three-part model of authenticity heavily influenced by the work of Rogers (1961). In this model, there are three aspects describing the connections between three levels of a person's experience (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* The person-centered model of authenticity. Shows the three levels of experience as well as the three aspects of authenticity between them. From “The Authentic Personality: A Theoretical and Empirical Conceptualization and the Development of the Authenticity Scale,” by A.M. Wood, P.A. Linley, J. Maltby, M. Baliouis, and S. Joseph, 2008, *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 55(3), p. 386. Copyright 2008 by the American Psychological Association.

The first level is referred to as the primary experience, or the most basic, unconscious, or true states, emotions, and thoughts of a person. The second level consists of those states, emotions, and thoughts that a person is consciously aware of, and the third level is the person's lived experience, or their behavior and expressed emotions. The first aspect of authenticity occurs between levels one and two, or between a person's true emotions, states, and thoughts and those available to them consciously. While those two levels can never perfectly align, the greater the disconnect between the two, termed *self-alienation*, the higher the potential for psychopathology. Following from this, the more people are conscious of their underlying states, emotions, and thoughts, perhaps the greater their well-being. Authenticity's second aspect in this model is located between levels two and three, or between a person's conscious awareness of their states, emotions, and thoughts and his/her outward actions. If a person behaves in a way congruent with those parts of his/her conscious self, this is termed *authentic living*. Again, this can be seen as the conceptualization of "being yourself." Finally, the third aspect of authenticity described by this model can take place between levels one and two and/or levels two and three. This is called *accepting external influence* and it describes to what extent the social environment contributes to self-alienation and authentic living. An example of this would be if a person lets external cues, like other people's opinions, cultural traditions, or gender expectations, interfere with how he/she acknowledges and acts upon his/her underlying feelings, thoughts, and states. To summarize, the person-centered model of authenticity's three aspects are *self-alienation*, *authentic living*, and *accepting external influence*. These describe the connections between the three levels of a person's experience.

Wood et al. (2008) also created a scale based on this model, which will be described in greater detail in the discussion of authenticity measurements.

**Character strength.** As mentioned in the description of positive psychology, Peterson and Seligman (2004) compiled a list of twenty-four character strengths in an effort to provide a common language for researchers. Authenticity was included in this list, grouped together with integrity and honesty as one strength under the virtue of courage. As a character strength, authenticity needed to meet a set of ten criteria, one of which was that it is trait-like, meaning it appeared across situations and remained somewhat stable over time (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Inclusion with the other character strengths also meant that it is ubiquitously valued across cultures (Peterson, 2006) and allows a person to ascertain fulfillment, either for his/herself or others. Along with the other strengths of courage, authenticity encompasses the ability to achieve goals even when facing external or internal opposition. Peterson and Seligman (2004) describe authenticity as “emotional genuineness and also psychological depth” (p. 250) and this constitutes the accurate representation of their “internal states, intentions, and commitments” (p. 249) not only to others but also to themselves.

Although not a separate measure of authenticity, when people complete the VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) they answer five to ten questions regarding authenticity, depending on which version of the assessment they complete. At the end, they will receive feedback regarding how much they endorsed that strength relative to the other twenty-three. These results reflect how much people actively use authenticity in their lives, not necessarily how much they value it. Coaches, counselors, and psychologists could use these results to help guide their sessions and recommendations for their clients and patients.

**Summary.** As outlined above, authenticity has been conceptualized in a variety of ways, most of which have been heavily influenced by humanism and self-determination theory. Although conceived differently and parsed into different components, they do contain

similarities. An authentic person must have access to, accept, and act in accordance to their internal states, emotions, and thoughts, even if it goes against outside influences. These theories posit that doing so will lead to fulfillment and heightened states of well-being. In order to test this empirically, accurate assessments of authenticity must exist.

### **Measurement**

Like any construct, in order to accurately study authenticity, it needs to be able to be quantified and measured (Wood et al., 2008). Several measures of authenticity exist that could be and have been used in studies examining the relationship between well-being and authenticity, the majority of which utilize self-report. Self-report measures, where people answer questions about themselves, have a number of issues. First, people might answer inaccurately because they want to appear a certain way (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Specifically in the case of authenticity, people would want to avoid looking fake or phony (Mitchell, 1992; Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Another issue with self-report when it comes to authenticity is knowledge availability. People may lack the insight into whether or not they are authentic. This recalls the ideas of awareness from the multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) and self-alienation from the person-centered model (Wood et al., 2008). If people do not have access to their states, thoughts, and emotions, they cannot report on them effectively. Subsequently, those people would have greater difficulty living authentically, as well. Finally, people might lack the development, intelligence, or education to comprehend questions about authenticity since it is a rather complex topic. Sheldon (2002) suggests a way around these challenges with more objective non-self-report measures like response latency analysis, implicit attitudes assessment, and textual content analysis. However, most measures utilized in current

research are self-report and these measures do attempt to control for the potential challenges described above.

**Perceived locus of causality (PLOC).** A measure developed by Ryan and Connell (1989) asks people what causes them to perform certain behaviors. It provides four possible answers, two expressing internal motivations and two expressing external motivations. When people indicate that they enact behaviors because they have an interest in them or because they express their values, it demonstrates authenticity because they are acting autonomously, or do not feel compelled to do them by outside pressure. Saying they perform behaviors because of the situation or to avoid feelings of guilt shows inauthenticity because people are allowing external influences to guide their actions rather than internal ones. Due to its indirectness, this measure may provide a more valid reading of someone's authenticity as opposed to a more overt one. However, this measure relates only to the outward expressions of authenticity and it fails to assess to what extent people are consciously aware of their own internal states, feelings, and thoughts.

**Experienced authenticity measure.** This measure of authenticity created by Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi (1997) asked people five questions regarding their feelings of authenticity within five different social roles: student, employee, friend, child, and romantic partner. This measure was much more direct than the PLOC as evidenced by the question "I experience this aspect of myself as an authentic part of who I am." In order to circumvent issues of impression management, this scale utilizes reverse scoring so people do not have to directly answer questions regarding inauthenticity. Again, this measure looks at overt expressions of authenticity and does not assess people's access to their internal authentic selves.

**Authenticity inventory (AI).** Based on the multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity, Goldman and Kernis (2004) created the Authenticity Inventory (AI-3). This scale contains forty-five items: twelve measuring the component of awareness, ten measuring unbiased processing, eleven measuring behavior, and twelve measuring relational orientation. The complete scale with administration and scoring instructions can be found in Appendix A. This scale provides a more well-rounded evaluation of authenticity but also is rather lengthy for participants to complete.

**Authentic personality scale (AS).** Based on the person-centered model of authenticity, Wood et al. (2008) developed a short twelve-item scale to measure the three aspects of authenticity: self-alienation, authentic living, and accepting external influences. They purposefully designed the scale to be short so that it could be administered in a counseling setting. The items can be found in Appendix B. As part of a study testing the scale, they also administered the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (Paulhus, 1984), which measures impression management and self-deception. The results showed very low and non-significant correlations with the Authenticity Scale, which indicates that participants were not influenced by socially desirable responding (Wood et al., 2008), which, as stated earlier, is a major concern for self-report scales. During this study, participants also completed measures of the Big Five personality traits (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism), self-esteem, life satisfaction, affect, stress, anxiety, gratitude, and scales of psychological well-being such as autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, personal growth, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Participants completed all of the scales initially and then were contacted two to four weeks later to complete just the AS again. The results showed test-retest reliability, indicating that authenticity remains stable over short periods of time, as a trait

should. It demonstrated that people scoring high on the authenticity scale also scored high on measures of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness, while scoring low on neuroticism. Authenticity as measured by this scale also positively correlated with self-esteem, life satisfaction, positive affect, and measures of psychological well-being. Some of these correlations were very high with a negative correlation between self-alienation and life satisfaction ranging from  $r = -.34$  to  $r = -.50$  (Wood et al., 2008) As a comparison, in a study of character strengths and satisfaction with life (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004), correlations of  $r = \pm .34$  would be higher than the correlations of all but 6 strengths with life satisfaction. Moreover, correlations of  $r = \pm .50$  would be higher than the correlation between life satisfaction and all strengths but hope. This means that participants with greater conscious awareness of their true states, emotions, and thoughts also reported feeling more satisfied with their lives. This demonstrates a strong relationship between authenticity and well-being.

**Summary.** As indicated by the above descriptions, authenticity can be measured in a variety of ways. While the list provided is not conclusive, it does review four of the major self-report scales available to quantify authenticity when conducting research. While the PLOC provides a more covert measure of authenticity that could possibly make it a more valid reading of people's actual authenticity, it also may lack the granularity of the other three scales. The Experienced Authenticity Measure works well for examining people's authenticity within and across their various relationships but may not accurately capture how aware people are of their inner states, emotions, and feelings. Overall, the AI and the AS seem to be the most well-rounded scales of authenticity, since they both include questions regarding people's awareness, actions, and relationships. Ultimately, researchers would need to determine which scale best suits their studies based on the theory of authenticity they are using as a foundation and how much of

a burden they wish to place on their participants, since the AI is almost four times the length of the AS. All in all, having adequate means of measurement is essential in order to accurately assess the construct and its relation to well-being. At the same time, it is just as important to know the differences between the existing measures so that researchers can tailor their examinations of authenticity to their specific purpose and also develop more refined and targeted authenticity measures in the future.

### **Research**

While there remains some confusion on how exactly to define and measure authenticity, several research studies have shown preliminary evidence for the link between authenticity and aspects of well-being. Based on the studies presented below, Peterson and Seligman (2004) seem to have been correct in stating that people displaying authenticity by “owning” (p. 249) their feelings and behaviors reap benefits. The results also support the commonly held notion that “being yourself” leads to positive outcomes.

As mentioned before, Sheldon et al. (1997) used the Experienced Authenticity Measure to measure authenticity across the five social roles of student, employee, friend, child, and romantic partner. They asked participants five questions regarding authenticity and also measured the Big Five personality traits displayed in each role. They also indirectly measured subjective well-being by asking participants how satisfied they were within each of the roles and if they would want to spend more or less time in each. Measures of anxiety, stress, depression, physical symptoms, and self-esteem were also collected. They found that people indicated different levels of the Big Five personality traits in different roles and that the greater the variability between the roles, the less authentic they felt in all of the roles. Additionally, higher scores of felt authenticity significantly correlated with greater role satisfaction for each role. For



all roles but friendship, felt authenticity also correlated with desiring to spend more time in that role. This could perhaps be explained by people's feelings that they already spend a large amount of time in the friend role, maybe more so than any other role, so they do not desire to spend any additional time in it. Greater feelings of authenticity were also shown to positively correlate with self-esteem and negatively correlate with anxiety, stress, and depression. The data from this study suggests that people high in authenticity will display more consistency across their relationships and have better outcomes than those who do not.

Another study examining social roles looked at authenticity indirectly by asking undergraduate students to consider themselves in two different contexts and rate their traits in each (Sheldon, Gunz, & Schachtman, 2012). The first context was meant to measure the "social character" (Sheldon et al., 2012, p. 52) people assume to control for the impression they make on others. In it, students were asked to imagine themselves at a party with a group of familiar and unfamiliar people. Participants also were asked to put themselves in a situation where they were surrounded by close friends and loved ones and were "unguarded," (Sheldon et al., 2012) or felt free to express their inner thoughts and feelings. This scenario was meant as a proxy for the true, authentic self. Participants rated their social character and unguarded self on the Big Five personality traits. They also completed measures of affect and life satisfaction, and the AI. The researchers found that lower discrepancy between the unguarded self and the social character related to higher scores on the subjective well-being measures. This further corroborates the data from Sheldon et al. (1997) that greater well-being is related to the degree people display authenticity in different situations and around different people. A study by Bettencourt & Sheldon (2010) went one step further and found that subjective authenticity in different roles was related to both subjective well-being and group connectedness.

In related research, authenticity was measured as well as self-esteem level, contingent self-esteem, life satisfaction, and positive and negative affect in seventy-nine introductory psychology students (Goldman & Kernis, 2002). Contingent self-esteem describes when people's self-worth is dependent upon meeting certain standards, outcomes, or expectations and is generally thought of as more fragile than global self-esteem. They used an earlier version of the AI to measure authenticity. The results showed that higher self-reported authenticity as calculated by total AI scores was related to higher levels of global self-esteem and life satisfaction and lower self-esteem contingency and net negative affect. This suggests that people with high dispositional authenticity have a greater sense of stable self-worth, independent of measuring up to certain expectations. Since the AI measures each of the individual components of authenticity, Goldman and Kernis (2002) were also able to look specifically at the relationships of awareness, unbiased processing, behavior, and relational authenticity to the other constructs measured. Higher scores on the awareness, unbiased processing, and relational authenticity subscales were all related independently to greater life satisfaction. Greater awareness and relational authenticity related to lower negative affect and higher self-esteem. Finally, behavioral authenticity was the only subscale to relate to lower contingent self-esteem. This might indicate that even if people are aware of their internal states, emotions, and feelings, seeking others' approval or measuring up to external expectations prevents them from behaving authentically. It also suggests that those people who do not tie their self-worth to outside forces have an easier time behaving in accordance with their internal selves. These results demonstrate that the four components of authenticity each contribute to greater scores on measures of subjective well-being but they each do so in subtly different ways.

A recent study found a unidirectional relationship between authenticity and life-satisfaction (Boyratz, Waits, & Felix, 2014). At two separate time points, researchers had groups of undergraduate students fill out the AS, as well as measures of life satisfaction, depression, stress, and anxiety. They found no significant differences between these measures when they were first collected; however, approximately six weeks later, they found that high levels of authenticity at Time 1 were related to higher levels of life satisfaction and lower levels of depression, stress and anxiety at Time 2. The results also showed a non-significant relationship between life satisfaction and distress at Time 1 and authenticity at Time 2. This demonstrates that authenticity can lead to life satisfaction, but that life satisfaction does not lead to authenticity. It also showed that authenticity tends to lead to lower levels of depression, stress and anxiety later on. While this was a short-term longitudinal study, it provides evidence for the humanistic and person-centered theories that “being yourself” by being authentic positively impacts levels of well-being and helps to prevent or alleviate psychopathology.

Additional research examined how individual differences in authenticity related to psychological health and subjective well-being by measuring authenticity in relation to personal goals (Goldman, Kernis, Foster, Hermann, & Piasecki, 2005b). Three weeks after filling out the AI, one hundred and eleven participants identified various goals they were pursuing and rated these goals based on authenticity, efficacy, stress/pressure, and intrinsic motivation. These ratings were taken together to create a “project need fulfillment index” (Kernis & Goldman, 2006), which demonstrated how much the projects provided the participants a sense of authenticity and need-fulfillment. Higher project need fulfillment indices comprised of high ratings of authenticity, efficacy, and intrinsic motivation, as well as low stress and pressure. The participants also filled out measures of satisfaction with life, positive affect, and psychological

well-being. The results indicated that higher scores on the AI correlated with high ratings on the project need fulfillment index and higher scores on all three measures of subjective well-being. These positive correlations demonstrate that those high on trait authenticity also pursue goals that feel authentic and this relates to high reported well-being.

These findings support other research on authenticity, goal pursuit, stress, and subjective well-being. As mentioned previously in the description of the AS, Wood et al. (2008) found that higher levels of authenticity were linked to increased subjective well-being and decreased stress. In another study, which used the method of psychobiological analyses, Gruber and Wallace (1999) found that high achievers stayed true to their interests even when they led unexpected places. This displays authenticity in that those people were aware of their goals, desires, and interests and continued to follow them through their actions despite potentially unexpected or challenging circumstances. It could also demonstrate that these people had others supporting and accepting their authentic pursuits, which allowed them to persevere in the face of difficulty, doubt, or ridicule. In contrast, those people who ignore or deny their internal interests or values tend to have less than ideal well-being outcomes as demonstrated by a longitudinal study conducted by Sheldon and Elliot (1999).

Authenticity has also been linked to mindfulness, which has in turn been shown to relate to immediate positive experiences (LeBel & Dubé, 2001) as well as psychological health and well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness refers to an active state of consciousness where one is fully present and receptive to his/her immediate internal and external experiences (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Kernis and Goldman (2005) measured authenticity with the AI, and mindfulness using the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003). They found significant positive correlations between the subscale and total scores on the AI and the MAAS

scores, showing that mindfulness could be a possible pathway to authenticity and/or vice versa. In another study of mindfulness and authenticity (Lakey, Kernis, Heppner, & Lance, 2008), low ratings of verbal defensiveness related to higher scores on authenticity and mindfulness measures, with mindfulness mediating the relationship between authenticity and verbal defensiveness. This shows that the relaxed open state of mindfulness may be key to people's awareness of their internal states and to conveying honesty through their behaviors and in their relationships.

While many of the research studies described here have been conducted with undergraduate college students, research has also found connections between authenticity and well-being in different settings and among different populations. Ménard and Brunet (2011) had three hundred and sixty managers complete measures of authenticity, meaning of work, life satisfaction, and affect. To measure meaning of work, the investigators took the five Presence items from the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006) and modified them to apply to the workplace. These items, while worded generally, refer more to whether the content of work is seen as generally meaningful instead of whether or not the participants find their work meaningful to their individual lives. They found that high scores of authenticity related to higher subjective well-being at work but that this was also partially mediated by the amount of meaning they found their work to have. This demonstrates an important relationship between these three concepts and suggests that authenticity in the workplace should be promoted so more people enjoy and find their work meaningful. These findings also indicate that if people pursue work that they find to be meaningful, that they will feel more authentic. Having employees complete job crafting exercises (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001) that imbue existing work with more meaning could help employees increase felt levels of authenticity in the workplace, which would boost satisfaction on the job. Furthermore, these

findings connect back to the idea that people who display authenticity across roles also report higher levels of subjective well-being and that authenticity and meaning both connect to people's core values, emotions, thoughts, and states.

Another setting that people find themselves occupying more and more is the internet. It is possible that people who have trouble acting authentically in reality may find it easier to virtually express their authenticity. This in turn could benefit their well-being. A longitudinal study measured authenticity and subjective well-being on social networking sites (SNS), specifically Facebook and StudiVZ, a popular SNS in Germany, where the study was conducted (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). At two different time points, four hundred and fifty-seven participants completed measures of life satisfaction, affect, and authenticity. Authenticity was measured by asking participants to list five traits describing themselves as represented by their SNS profile. Then, the participants rated those traits on a scale from one to five based on how well they described their personas in reality. The results showed that high levels of authenticity, meaning a low discrepancy between a person's online profile and how they felt they actually are, positively correlated with measures of subjective well-being and also had longitudinal effects on measures of subjective well-being over time. This means that the greater the overlap between how a person presents themselves online and how they feel they are in real life, the more the person's feelings of positive emotions and life satisfaction may build over time. However, this did not hold true for everyone in the study, only for those participants that reported high levels of positive affect at Time 1. People with high negative affect at Time 1 showed lower ratings of authenticity at Time 2. This could be due to an online positivity bias where people feel they must present only positive versions of themselves as opposed to negative ones (Antheunis, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2010) so the beneficial effects of online authenticity on well-being may only apply to those

whose authentic selves begin from a positive place. These findings go against the notion that people unable to express authenticity in real life can increase their well-being by doing so online. Future studies will need to further investigate the well-being of people who feel their online identities are more authentic displays of their actual selves than their lived personas and how the two influence each other and their levels of well-being.

Together, these studies show that trait authenticity in relation to goals, a variety of social roles, and settings all relate to various positive outcomes like higher self-esteem, increased positive affect, high satisfaction with life, decreased anxiety and stress, and decreased depression. This empirical evidence highlights that “being yourself” does connect with increased well-being and that authenticity connects to the goals of positive psychology and should be included in further research, theory, and the development of positive interventions.

### **State Authenticity**

Up until this point, the content presented has focused on authenticity as a trait. Most of the theories and empirical evidence relating to authenticity conceptualize it in this way. However, authenticity can also be viewed as a state, or the immediate thoughts, feelings, and behaviors called forth in a situation (Endler, Parker, Bagby, & Cox, 1991). States differ from traits in that they are shorter in duration and less abstract since they are something you feel and can usually be perceived through direct experience. Meanwhile, traits must be inferred. State authenticity refers to the subjective sense of authenticity, or the actual feeling of being whom one truly is, in a certain situation (Lenton et al, 2013), another way of “being yourself.” Feeling authentic sends important feedback to the self, letting it know that its values are being upheld. When a person feels inauthentic, this signals to the self that its values are being undermined, which destabilizes the self and could interfere with a person’s well-being.

State authenticity bears some similarities to trait authenticity in that it involves consistency between the self and behavior, which requires internal awareness and rejection of others' influence when it is incongruent with one's internal self (Lenton et al., 2013). However, emotions play a bigger role in state authenticity than they do in trait authenticity. There is less self-reflection and more feeling in the moment, which some argue is more central to authenticity (Erikson, 1995; Sheldon et al., 1997). However, very little empirical evidence has been collected regarding state authenticity.

**Research.** One study of state authenticity asked college students to write about a situation where they felt they could be their true-selves and another where their behaviors were in conflict with their true-self (Turner & Billings, 1991). Investigators then coded the experiences described in each of these situations and found that most of the true-self situations were characterized by positive emotional ambience, like being on vacation, or being open or accepted by others. Awkwardness and superficiality were more characteristic of the false-self situations.

A more recent set of studies conducted by Lenton et al. (2013) used a similar format by asking participants to describe experiences where they felt most and least like their true-selves. The researchers also collected additional measures to look at whether or not there was a difference between trait and state authenticity as well as an assessment evaluating people's desire to be authentic. To assess trait authenticity, they had participants fill out either the AI or AS and also asked participants how frequently they experience authenticity and inauthenticity, how much desire they have to achieve authenticity or avoid inauthenticity, and how much effort they put into doing so. Their findings suggested that state authenticity and trait authenticity are two separate constructs since most respondents felt they had experienced both authenticity and



inauthenticity. Also, those participants with the lowest levels of trait authenticity reported experiences of authenticity and those participants with the highest levels of trait authenticity stated they had experienced inauthenticity. This indicates the existence of authenticity as a transient state called forth by different situations. Most people surveyed, regardless of level of trait authenticity, also expressed strong desires to feel authentic and to avoid feelings of inauthenticity. These results demonstrated that state authenticity is variable and common and that most people seek out authenticity.

After describing situations in which they felt most or least like themselves, participants and independent coders evaluated those situations for various themes (e.g., fun, helping, isolation, achievement, etc.), emotion clusters (e.g., pride/triumph, fear/alarm, calmness/relaxation/relief, etc.), and need satisfaction (e.g., relatedness, meaning, security, etc.). Their findings confirmed those of Turning and Billing (1991) in that experiences of the true-self had more positive emotional ambience and those of the false-self were more negative. Specifically, they found that low-arousal positive emotions like contentment, calmness, and satisfaction were associated with the true-self narratives and fulfilled needs of self-esteem, autonomy, relatedness and pleasure. False-self narratives were associated with feelings of anxiety, tension, disgust, anger, and loneliness. The study also found that participants felt more positive and nostalgic when reflecting on the experiences of their true-self than they did when recalling experiences of the false-self, demonstrating that even reflecting on a past state of authenticity can affect present levels of positive affect. This could relate back to the existing positive intervention of savoring, especially the reminiscing and basking forms (Bryant & Veroff, 2007; Bryant, Smart, & King, 2005). Asking people to reflect back on a time when they felt most like themselves could serve as a

more targeted and direct way for people to savor than for them to just recall a positive experience from their past.

These studies indicate that authenticity and positive emotional states correlate with each other. However, authenticity does not necessarily cause positive emotional states. It may be possible that increasing positive affect could lead to greater feelings of authenticity. In Fleeson and Wilt's (2010) experiments, they found that participants' reports of high positive affect (ratings of excitement, enthusiasm, happiness) and low negative affect (ratings of nervousness, distress, and irritability) when completing activities, predicted higher levels of reported state authenticity.

Overall, while limited, these studies of state authenticity do confirm the existence of state authenticity separate from trait authenticity. They also show that most people have experienced authenticity, value it, and seek it out, reinforcing the idea that authenticity may not only be a cultural value, but an intrinsic human one. They also provide further evidence for a connection between authenticity and positive affect, although the direction of causality is unclear.

### **Social Connection**

Most of the discussion of authenticity thus far has centered on an individual's relationship to oneself and its rejection of or alignment with external influence. It is, however, necessary and important to consider how authenticity relates to people's experiences with others since humans are social beings. Some psychologists and philosophers, notably symbolic interactionists, go as far as to say that the concept of the self only comes about through interactions with others (Cooley, 1902; Meade, 1934; Tice & Wallace, 2003). The research on state authenticity (Lenton et al., 2013) supports this by demonstrating that the subjective senses

of authenticity and inauthenticity only arise in the presence of others, as evidenced by the narratives participants provided in the study.

While many theories of authenticity relate it back to the autonomy component of self-determination theory, Leary (2003) posits that the satisfaction of relational needs is key to people's feelings of authenticity. Specifically, he mentions that people feel accepted when they act like their true selves, which causes feelings of authenticity. However, if people go against their true selves in order to be accepted, they feel inauthentic. Evidence of this can be found in the experiments on social roles (Sheldon et al., 1997; Sheldon et al., 2012). Because of this, people's needs for autonomy and relatedness must be fulfilled to beget authenticity.

Following from this, where there are strict norms for what qualifies as socially acceptable behavior, more people may feel pressured to repress their true selves in order to gain acceptance so as to fulfill relatedness needs. However, as Leary (2003) stated, acceptance of a false self leads to increased inauthenticity. As evidenced by the preceding research, authenticity, both state and trait, have links to aspects of well-being. So, when people must sacrifice their true-selves in order to fit in with others, it is likely to coincide with decreases in well-being.

This can have reverberations on a larger scale. Lubart (1999) suggested that external contexts that limit self-expression might inhibit people's ability to recognize and communicate their inner states, emotions, and thoughts, which possibly restricts creativity and innovation in those settings. In the extreme cases, stigma, bigotry, and discrimination can prevent entire groups of people from living authentically (Peterson and Seligman, 2004). Promotion of multiculturalism and diversity may be ways to create environments where the most people can feel free to display their authentic selves (Flower & Richardson, 1996). Strategies for

encouraging empathy and tolerance may be indirect ways of promoting authenticity on a larger scale.

### **Drawbacks of Authenticity**

Thus far, research has shown the positive elements of authenticity. However, authenticity has potential drawbacks. Since authenticity requires a person to know their inner states, emotions, and thoughts, both good and bad, this gives them access to negative information about themselves that could potentially be hurtful to acknowledge. For instance, they will be more aware of their limitations and of the dissonance between their actual and ideal selves (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). They also have more access to negative emotions when they occur, and reflecting on those emotions might exacerbate their effects. Behaving authentically, or outwardly conveying one's inner thoughts and feelings, could also incite judgment, disapproval, or ridicule from others (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). This may be particularly true in the case where one's authentic self is different from what is deemed acceptable by the rest of the population, or when a person's authentic self is unique or distinct. This relates to why the character strength of authenticity falls under the virtue of courage. It takes bravery to confront internal incongruences in one's self-concept and to reject external influences despite social pressures in order to remain true to oneself. While these negative consequences exist and contribute to short-term feelings of unpleasantness, evidence of the connection between authenticity and well-being suggests its benefits outweigh its potential risks. However, more research is needed to corroborate this.

### **Future Directions**

The resurgence of interest in authenticity coupled with the development of scales and measures so that it can be quantified and studied have opened up many possibilities to investigate authenticity, especially when it comes to well-being. As stated previously, most of

the empirical evidence showing a connection between authenticity and well-being is correlational. Conducting experimental research to further investigate the causal links between the two concepts could lead to the development of positive interventions that promote one through the other. Additionally, since several theories and scales divide the greater construct of authenticity into multiple components, a greater level of granularity could be achieved in discovering specifically which aspects of authenticity interact with well-being on an individual level. For instance, someone could report high levels of awareness and low levels of relational orientation on the AI. This would indicate that more attention should be spent developing honest relationships with others instead of on self-reflection. Also, up until this point, the majority of the research has focused on authenticity on an individual level. Future studies could also investigate communities where members report high levels of authenticity to see whether or not they experience higher levels of well-being and vice versa. This would be especially insightful within communities with a diverse population of individuals. Measuring well-being, authenticity, and community acceptance would provide further insights into how these three concepts interact with each other on a broader scale. Studying the characteristics of those communities could provide blueprints for other places to imitate.

### **Conclusion**

While interest in and theories regarding authenticity have existed for centuries, only recently has empirical evidence been gathered that shows the link between authenticity and well-being. It is becoming increasingly evident that people's level of authenticity relates to their level of well-being. However, what happens when a person finds that their authentic self makes them different from others? As discussed, this has been linked to negative consequences such as shame, rejection, and ostracism, which conflict with humans' need to belong and interferes with

the establishment of positive relationships, a key component of well-being according to several theories of well-being within positive psychology. However, adopting the lens of positive psychology, is it possible that there are benefits to being different and could there be a way to reconcile the competing demands of being authentic and belonging? These questions will be examined in the next section using the theories and research regarding uniqueness.

### **Uniqueness**

When describing the character strength of authenticity, Peterson and Seligman (2004) indicated that someone high in that strength would strongly concur with the statement “It is more important to be myself than to be popular” (p. 250). This demonstrates the tension that exists between being authentic and being accepted, especially if the internal states, emotions, and thoughts a person wants to convey are outside the bounds of what the majority of people consider normal or acceptable. As outlined previously, acting authentically and not being accepted for it can lead to stigma and isolation. This is especially damaging since humans are social beings that have adapted to live in groups (Brewer, 1991) and have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Frequent positive interactions with familiar, caring others fulfill this need to belong and when this need is not being sufficiently met, levels of stress, anxiety, and loneliness rise (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, alternate theories and research also demonstrate that people desire to set themselves apart from others. Looking at how and why they do that can open up ways for people to engage in authenticity, even if, when they do, it sets them apart from others.

### **Theory**

**Uniqueness theory.** Prior to the 1970s, the study of uniqueness fell under the domain of abnormal psychology. However, similar to Martin Seligman’s observations of traditional

psychology decades later, the study of the abnormality focused almost exclusively on the negative aspects associated with it. During that time, the introduction to an abnormal psychology textbook wrote, “The term ‘abnormal psychology’ has traditionally referred to the study of human failures and inadequacies” (Sarason, 1972, p. 3). To be abnormal meant to differ in a bad way. Two psychologists, Snyder and Fromkin, felt this definition of abnormality was incomplete and wanted to investigate the potential positive aspects of abnormality. Before doing so, they needed a different term that did not carry with it the negative connotations of undesirable otherness, shame, and stigma that abnormality conveyed. They decided on uniqueness.

After choosing the term uniqueness, Snyder and Fromkin (1977) created a measure of uniqueness, which will be discussed later. They also later formed the Uniqueness Theory (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Central to this theory was the idea that everyone has a need or desire to be moderately dissimilar to others. Because people neither want to be too similar or too dissimilar from others, they seek to establish and maintain the sweet spot in-between. This idea was supported by a study where college students were given false feedback that the lifestyles they endorsed on a questionnaire were highly similar, moderately similar, or highly dissimilar to other students (Fromkin, 1972). Those who received the moderately similar feedback reported more positive moods than those in the other two groups. In this way, it shows that people want to be both unique and similar at the same time and skewing too far in either direction results in more intense negative affect. As part of their theory, Snyder and Fromkin (1980) indicated that when people feel too similar to others, they will find cognitive or behavioral ways to separate themselves and become more unique. In order for this theory to become even more strongly tied to well-being, this study could be replicated using a wider array of well-being measures instead of focusing solely on mood.

The Uniqueness Theory also provided several explanations for the origins of uniqueness. First, people actually are different from each other in a variety of ways, and they notice this. Their perceptions of their own difference become built into their self-concept. In order to keep their existing self-concept intact, they are motivated to reassert their uniqueness. In this way, involuntary uniqueness shifts into a choice. This displays itself when people who start out with a higher degree of uniqueness due to an involuntary trait or characteristic then report a higher than usual need for uniqueness. For instance, women with unusual first names (Zweigenhaft, 1981), women whose nearest sibling is a male rather than a female (Chrenka, 1983), and students who are firstborn or only children versus latter born (Fromkin, Williams, & Dipboye, 1973) all report higher uniqueness needs. Because their uniqueness has already been integrated into their self-concept, they have more of a desire to maintain this aspect of themselves.

Snyder and Fromkin (1980) also posited that the environment influences uniqueness needs. Those environments that reward independence and value individual freedom promote higher needs for uniqueness whereas environments where conformity to a group result in lower needs for uniqueness. Some studies have shown differences in need for uniqueness between Eastern and Western cultures (Burns & Brady, 1992; Kim & Markus, 1999; Maslach, Stapp, & Santee, 1985) but more research is needed to test this origin component of the Uniqueness Theory.

Finally, Snyder and Fromkin (1980) see the need for uniqueness as a counterweight for other human needs like approval, validation, and social acceptance. They suspect that those high in those needs would be low in need for uniqueness and vice versa.

Altogether, Snyder and Fromkin (1980) assert that people's different needs for uniqueness can stem from three sources. First, people seek uniqueness to different degrees in



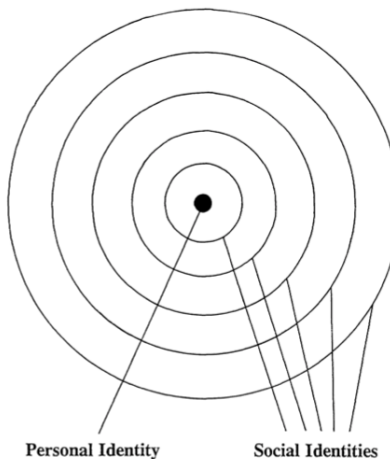
order to maintain involuntary differences that have been integrated into their self-concepts. Second, different types of environments may produce varying needs for uniqueness. Finally, a person's need for uniqueness might be proportional to the expression of their other human needs. Overall, while people may vary on the level of uniqueness they need, most people strive to be moderately dissimilar to others and will adjust their thoughts and actions to become more unique when feeling too similar.

**Optimal distinctiveness theory.** Brewer (1991) defines uniqueness as distinguishing features separating an individual from others in a social context. Similar to Snyder and Fromkin (1980), she states that being too unique or too similar is undesirable. Even if what makes a person unique is positive, it can lead to isolation. At the same time, being too similar to others leaves people lacking a sense of self due to the fact that they cannot compare themselves to others or define themselves relative to others. Again, people must search for the sweet spot of difference, what Snyder and Fromkin (1980) called moderately dissimilar and Brewer (1991) calls optimally distinct.

Brewer's solution to reach the equilibrium between uniqueness and similarity is to activate the social identity associated with a unique group. Brewer (1991) defines social identities differently than most American social psychologists, who see these identities as segments of an individual's self-concept. Instead, she adopts a European perspective and views social identities as an outward extension of a personal identity (see Figure 2). As an example, a person living in New York might activate various social identities to differentiate his/her self from others depending on the context. For instance, when traveling outside of the country, that person might indicate that he/she lives in the United States, activating a national social identity. However, within the country, that identity does not differentiate him/her from other people as

much, so he/she could state that he/she is from New York, turning on another social identity. On an even smaller scale, when meeting a new person within the city, he/she could use the social identity associated with his/her particular borough or neighborhood to separate his/herself from the rest of the New Yorkers. So, while this person has all of these social identities at all times and they are all relevant to their personal identity, each can be called to action depending on how much he/she needs to establish similarity or difference from surrounding others.

In this European view of social identity, everyone is their own Russian doll, with their personal identities being the smallest core doll and their social identities being built on top of each other. Brewer also distinguishes social identities from group membership by highlighting that they are chosen and can be turned on or off, while group membership, like race, is involuntary and cannot be willfully deactivated.



*Figure 2.* Model of social identities as extensions of a personal identity. This model is based on European conceptualizations of identity, which differ from the American conceptualizations that see social identities as different segments within personal identity rather than outward extensions of it. From “The Social Self: On Being the Same and Different at the Same Time,” by M.B. Brewer, 1991, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 17, p. 476. Copyright 1991 by the Society for Personality and Social Psychology, Inc.

Triggering different social identities allows individuals to fulfill needs for both validation and belongingness by allowing them to align with a certain group given their context and situation. Simultaneously, it fulfills their needs for uniqueness because that group differentiates itself from other groups. Due to this dual-need fulfillment, Brewer (1991) indicates that associating with social identities is preferable to associating with individual personal identities. This is the case, except when a group is too large or inclusive, for at that point it does not adequately fulfill the need to be distinctive. This causes people to reassert their uniqueness and separate themselves from the group. When groups are too large, members display less loyalty and break off into smaller splinter groups within the larger group in order to maintain uniqueness (Brewer, 1991). Conversely, when a person feels too individually distinct, they become motivated to fulfill their validation and belongingness needs so they attempt to become part of a group. In this way, people constantly negotiate their social identities in order to maintain the optimal balance between assimilation and distinctiveness.

**Three sources of distinctiveness.** Vignoles (2009) explains that since human beings have needed to see themselves as distinctive across time and cultures, the need for uniqueness can be classified as a fundamental human need similar to belongingness. She describes it as both an existential and evolutionary need. Existentially, humans need to establish their own distinctiveness in order to establish a coherent sense of identity. More precisely, for individuals to know what they are, they must also know what they are not. Distinctiveness is utilized to aid this process of differentiation. Distinctiveness also qualifies as an existential need since it is universal and not biological in nature. Evolutionarily, humans needed distinctiveness in order to provide borders to delineate possession, social boundaries, and the bodily self from outside entities (Burris & Rempel, 2004). For example, distinctiveness helped them to identify what

belonged to them and what did not, who was a threat, and what they could eat. Together, the arguments for the existential and evolutionary need for distinctiveness suggest that it is not just a cultural value.

Vignoles (2009) accounts for possible discrepancies in the degree different cultures need distinctiveness by stating that distinctiveness can come from three different sources. First, distinctiveness can be operationalized as *difference*, in that a person has a different appearance, opinion, personality, or set of abilities than the majority of others. This source of distinctiveness is maintained by deviating from the expectations of one's role. In psychology, this is the source of distinctiveness that is usually studied and most closely relates to the idea of "being yourself." Another way distinctiveness can be conceived is through *separateness*. This source is characterized by feelings of privacy, isolation, or independence and can be thought of as physical or symbolic distance. Separateness is maintained through detachment, either psychological or physical. *Social position* as a source of distinctiveness refers to the place one holds in his/her community or his/her relationship with others. Unlike difference, social position is maintained by conforming to the expectations of one's role. Since these two conceptualizations of uniqueness starkly contrast with each other in the way they are enacted, future research needs to clearly state which type of uniqueness they are studying since their results could differ significantly depending on that distinction.

All three sources of distinctiveness can be found across cultures but they vary in the degree to which they are present. In individualistic cultures, difference and separateness are more apparent while social position is more commonly seen in collectivist cultures. This difference in how distinctiveness is enacted depending on its source can explain why it was previously

mistaken for a cultural value only visible in some societies as opposed to a fundamental and universal human need.

The different ways distinctiveness is maintained could also account for why it is seen as a recent historical development (Triandis, 1995). Vignoles (2009) theorizes a historical shift occurred in the sources of distinctiveness that coincided with the move away from small communities to big cities. As face-to-face contact gave way to anonymity, social position distinctiveness became harder to maintain, so greater emphasis was put on difference and separateness as sources of distinctiveness. Also, in the past, it was more common that rigid social orders ascribed identity so social role distinctiveness was favored. However, when those types of societies fell away, social roles became more flexible so people had to make more of an effort to assert their distinctiveness through other sources. In this way, it is not that distinctiveness is a recent phenomenon. It had existed previously but was construed differently.

**Summary.** Although the three theories outlined above do differ on some points, they all come to a consensus that human beings strive to be unique. This desire sometimes comes into competition with the need to belong but they are not always in opposition and can be fulfilled simultaneously by activating social identities in association with distinct groups. One can expect that adequate fulfillment of these competing needs would result in greater levels of well-being; however, research specifically addressing this has yet to be conducted.

### **Measurement**

As with authenticity, in order to study uniqueness, there must be a valid and reliable measure to quantify it. Several measures have been developed in order to do so, each briefly described below.

**Need for uniqueness scale (NU).** Snyder and Fromkin (1977) created the Need for Uniqueness scale by compiling items they believed reflected what a high-need-for-uniqueness individual would endorse. These questions involved independence, anti-conformity or being less responsive to conformity pressures, inventiveness, achievement, and self-esteem. Four judges evaluated the original three hundred items and narrowed them down to a list of one hundred and seventeen. They then administered this scale along with the Personality Research Form (PRF) (Jackson, 1967) and a measure of social desirability to one hundred and eighty seven college students. They expected to find that those students scoring highly on the NU would also score highly on the PRF subscale for autonomy since they would be less influenced by external pressures and more likely to act out their uniqueness despite potential social disapproval. They also believed that those with high needs for uniqueness as measured by the scale would score low on the subscale of the PRF measuring succorance, or seeking social support from others. Finally, since they did not believe there would be an overlap between need for uniqueness and sensation seeking, they expected no correlation to appear with the sentience subscale. After analyzing the results based on these hypotheses, they maintained the thirty-two items that satisfied their expectations. The final scale can be found in Appendix C. Their results also found no significant correlation between the NU items and the social desirability scale, confirming that participants were not answering in a certain way to maintain a certain image. Snyder and Fromkin (1977) conducted further studies to demonstrate test-retest reliability, which were successful. They performed a study where participants filled out the NU and their close friends evaluated their uniqueness using a modified version of the NU. They found a significant positive correlation between the participants' and their friends' responses showing that the NU accurately captures uniqueness in a way that others can observe and evaluate.

One criticism of the NU is that it measures a specific type of uniqueness that overemphasizes behavior and public enactment. In particular, it concentrates on lack of concern for others, a desire to disobey rules, and publicly defending one's beliefs. These types of behaviors all skew as socially undesirable since they have the possibility of angering and pushing away other people (Lynn & Snyder, 2002). So while the NU does provide one way to measure uniqueness, the kind of uniqueness it reflects is very specific and does not include a more holistic idea of uniqueness. Additionally, only measuring this overt and aggressive form of uniqueness may show a more negative relationship with well-being that might not be entirely accurate.

**Self-attributed need for uniqueness (SANU).** To measure a more socially acceptable and private form of uniqueness, Lynn and Harris (1997b), created the Self-Attributed Need for Uniqueness (SANU) scale. Only four items, it measures people's preferences and desires for uniqueness more so than their deliberate actions to separate themselves from others. While this balances out the NU's overemphasis on public and risky displays of uniqueness, it may swing too far in the other direction, failing to capture more tangible uniqueness behaviors. See Appendix D for the SANU.

**Implicit measure of uniqueness.** Uniqueness as measured by the NU and SANU are explicit self-report measures and Vignoles (2009) states that, because of this, they assess people's beliefs about the value of uniqueness instead of their actual underlying drive or need for it. To create an implicit measure, Vignoles and Moncaster (2007), had participants rate how distinctive, central, and self-defining they felt different aspects of their identity were. Participants who rated those aspects of their identity highly for both distinctiveness and centrality were categorized as having a high need for uniqueness. Their tests of this measure found its results were unrelated to participants' NU and SANU scores, meaning it could be getting at a deeper

human need for uniqueness or that it could be measuring something completely different altogether. More research is needed to provide information about what exactly this measure examines. However, Petavratzi (2004) found that this implicit measure did predict participants' desire for more distinctive romantic partners whereas the SANU did not. While more evidence needs to be gathered regarding this measure, it does present the possibility of the development of implicit measures, which could be more valid ways of measuring uniqueness than the existing explicit self-report methods. These types of measures may provide a more accurate view of people's need for uniqueness while the NU and SANU relate more to how much people value uniqueness. While a subtle distinction, both could be used in conjunction with measures of well-being to investigate how well-being is affected by discrepancies between people's value, behavioral expression, and their need for uniqueness.

**Summary.** While several measures exist that claim to assess uniqueness, none seem to present a full or entirely accurate picture of uniqueness on their own. While the NU favors a more public and possibly offensive form of uniqueness, the SANU may be too simplistic and general to discriminate between people who want to be unique and who actually enact uniqueness. Additionally, the implicit measure of uniqueness needs further evidence to validate that it is actually measuring uniqueness. To obtain the most well-rounded picture of uniqueness and how it relates to well-being, future studies should include all three uniqueness measures. Their combination may present the most accurate representation of this construct and show if any or all relate to people's levels of well-being.

### **Research**

Despite the inconsistencies between the various measures of uniqueness, studies conducted using them have provided interesting data. When conducting cross-validation studies



for the NU, Fromkin and Snyder (1977) found a significant positive correlation between uniqueness and self-esteem. Vignoles (2009) suggests another link between distinctiveness and self-esteem is that people maintain their self-esteem by believing they are better than others, thus engaging in a form of positive distinctiveness. As part of their scale validation, Fromkin and Snyder (1977) also measured the need for uniqueness among members of women's liberation groups, gay liberation groups, and Mensa, finding that their need for uniqueness scores were significantly higher than control groups. While people's motivations for joining these groups may vary, membership to each requires that people meet certain qualifications and criteria, which run against those of the larger population. Because of this, they may attract people with higher needs for uniqueness (Fromkin & Snyder, 1977). This seems to relate to the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory in that one way people can reassert their personal uniqueness is to adopt a social identity that aligns them with a distinctive group.

Research also suggests that people construct and maintain their individual distinctiveness in various ways. For instance, people high in need for uniqueness have larger signatures (Fromkin, 1977). Those scoring higher on the NU also see themselves as more different from others than low scorers (Fromkin, 1977). In general, people better remember information that distinguishes themselves from others (Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Rogier, 1997). People also are more likely to mention their most distinctive features when asked to describe themselves (McGuire & Padawer-Singer, 1976) and see these features as especially self-defining and central to their identities (Miller, Turnbull, & McFarland, 1988; Turnbull, Miller, & McFarland, 1990).

There also is evidence that psychological well-being goes down when distinctiveness is threatened. As mentioned previously in accordance with Uniqueness Theory, people experience more negative emotions when they feel too similar to others (Fromkin, 1972). However, when

they feel too different, their negative emotions also increase. It has also been shown that adolescents in highly integrated or enmeshed families are prone to various problems like anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, and aggressive behavior (Barber & Buehler, 1996). This could stem from their inability to assert their uniqueness within that environment. People high in uniqueness have also been shown to display greater creativity (Dollinger, 2003), a character strength that could boost well-being by providing a source of engagement and flow.

While more research is needed, it does appear from the data that people do seek to distinguish themselves from others and that being unique, in the right dosage, can positively impact well-being. Further studies should continue to investigate the relationship between well-being and uniqueness to clarify their interaction with each other.

### **Drawbacks & Benefits**

Although being unique does seem to come with some benefits, being too unique has its drawbacks. First, as indicated by some of the items on the NU, high levels of uniqueness require a disregard for the feelings of others, which could lead to negative reactions and social isolation. Studies also show that higher scorers on uniqueness scales report greater cultural estrangement (Bernard, Gebauer, & Maio, 2006). Being seen as too different by others could lead to prejudice, discrimination and stigmatization (Lynn & Snyder, 2002). In order to counteract stigmatized personal identities, individuals can seek out groups that allow them to activate a social identity, as described by the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory. In this way, those people have similar others with which to relate while also feeling unique to those outside of the group. This fulfills their need for belongingness and uniqueness at the same time and also helps to protect against external threats to their self-worth (Lynn & Snyder, 2002). In this way, they transform a mark of shame

into a badge of honor. Support groups and fandoms provide good examples of this strategy at work.

While on the individual level there may be negative consequences for too much distinctiveness, Lynn and Snyder (2002) suggest that society can benefit from encouraging more distinctiveness within its members. First, providing an open and accepting environment would allow more people to exercise their distinctiveness and not fear negative consequences, such as prejudice or discrimination. Second, as more people assert their uniqueness, people would engage in a wider range of pursuits and interests, resulting in less competition and conflict over a small number of viable options to succeed. In this way, encouraging distinctiveness makes it more likely for a greater number of people to do well and opens up more avenues for people to express themselves in a socially acceptable manner. Also, as mentioned previously, high levels of uniqueness coincide with greater creativity (Dollinger, 2003). When people feel less pressure to assimilate in order to avoid the negative consequences of uniqueness, they are more likely to share their unique knowledge, ideas, and perspectives. This recalls the positive upward spiral of the Broaden-and-Build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001), which states that positive emotions allow people to expand their thoughts and behaviors leading to them to accrue useful resources. Similarly, the greater diversity that results from people feeling comfortable exhibiting their uniqueness would allow for more strategies and resources to be developed and utilized in solving difficult societal problems, as well as more avenues for people to express their uniqueness.

### **Summary**

While seemingly in direct opposition for the need to belong, theories backed by preliminary research show that humans have a need to be unique. The Optimal Distinctiveness

Theory claims that belonging to a distinct group offers an opportunity to fulfill both needs simultaneously. While more evidence is needed to tie uniqueness to well-being, the existing data suggests that humans have a need to distinguish themselves from others to a certain extent. This information is valuable for positive psychology since it can be taken into account when investigating well-being and designing positive interventions. Further, the literature reviewed suggests that people might feel more comfortable expressing their uniqueness provided society encouraged greater openness and acceptance of diverse viewpoints and behavior. This would benefit society by increasing avenues for success and building a wider range of resources and solutions to problems. At the same time, it would also benefit individuals by allowing them to fulfill their need for uniqueness as well as feel more comfortable living authentically. This opens up greater opportunities for flourishing both on the individual and community levels.

### **Conclusion and Future Directions**

After reviewing the theories, measurements, and research regarding the constructs of authenticity and uniqueness, preliminary evidence suggests that “being yourself” does relate to well-being. High levels of authenticity, either as a state or trait, correlate with satisfaction with life and self-reported measures of subjective and psychological well-being. Furthermore, people express a desire for authenticity, regardless of whether or not they score highly on measures of dispositional authenticity. This reflects the cultural value of this construct. Taken together, the preliminary evidence linking authenticity to well-being, coupled with people’s interest in the pursuit of it, demonstrate its significance and that it warrants positive psychology’s attention.

Although there is a strong connection between belongingness and well-being, it also seems that being authentic to oneself, even when that differentiates a person from others, is not entirely negative given humans’ need to be moderately dissimilar to others. Even when engaging

in authenticity leads one to drastically differ from others, (which could possibly lead to detrimental effects on well-being), this can be remedied by seeking out distinctive groups that simultaneously fulfill the human needs of belongingness and distinctiveness. On a broader level, the development of more open and accepting societies can encourage people to be more authentic and unique, potentially creating well-being on both an individual and community level.

Based on the information collected, both authenticity and uniqueness have the potential to influence the future work of positive psychology. While existing studies and methods provide a basic foundation regarding the study and measure of authenticity and uniqueness, more research is needed to strengthen that base and connect it more powerfully to well-being. Going forward, research should focus on developing more well-rounded and consistent measures of both constructs since the proper tools are necessary to accurately assess any construct. Future studies could also examine whether or not members of distinct groups of people, characterized by moderate to high levels of uniqueness, have higher levels of authenticity and well-being as compared to control groups. To further parse out the relationship between authenticity, uniqueness, and well-being, a study could ask participants to rate their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and relationships using separate scales of authenticity and uniqueness. This would allow researchers to assess whether participants felt that their authentic selves set them apart from others. Measures of well-being would also be collected. The results could be analyzed to see whether or not people with higher levels of well-being had more alignment between how authentic they rated themselves and how unique they rated themselves. Based on the information gathered in this paper, one might expect that the people with the highest levels of well-being would report high authenticity and moderate levels of uniqueness. Those low in authenticity and those ranking the highest and lowest in overt uniqueness would have lower levels of well-being.

The results could also investigate whether there was a positive correlation between levels of authenticity and uniqueness.

Future studies should also examine the relationship between authenticity and uniqueness in relation to other constructs known to be related to well-being, such as self-acceptance, resilience, hope, and optimism. This could help researchers understand more fully how authenticity and uniqueness relate to well-being, as well as how future positive interventions could incorporate multiple constructs. Longitudinal research could also address the short-term versus long-term effects of being unique and authentic on well-being, which could also show how these two constructs interact with and change well-being across the life-span. Building off past research on state authenticity, studies also could investigate which types of settings and contexts allow people to feel most comfortable authentically displaying their uniqueness and whether situations exist where it is beneficial for a person to subvert their true emotions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Doing these types of studies cross-culturally would create a better understanding of how well-being operates around the world and whether or not authenticity and uniqueness are simply values or more inherent needs. Finally, since multiculturalism, diversity, and large-scale societal openness and acceptance were suggested as being conducive to people showcasing both their authenticity and uniqueness, studies could examine levels of authenticity and uniqueness in different cities and regions that have already been established as having high levels of well-being by large-scale reports such as the *State of American Well-being* (Gallup, 2014), the *World Happiness Report 2013* (Eds. Helliwell, Layard, & Sachs, 2013), and the working paper, “Unhappy Cities” (Glaeser, Gottlieb, and Ziv, 2014). Information gained from such studies could help to establish whether or not well-being relates to expressions of authenticity and uniqueness on a broader scale.

Ultimately, the aim of positive psychology research is to gather information that leads to the effective application of tools that can enhance people's well-being. Based on the information regarding people's need for distinctiveness, as well as the data supporting the relationship between authenticity and well-being, existing positive interventions could be updated to include components promoting authenticity and uniqueness, and new positive interventions could be developed. These interventions could help people access their authentic selves through self-reflection, aid in the expression of their authentic selves in their relationships, and give them positive outlets to showcase their uniqueness that would not interfere with their need to belong. Positive interventions could also encourage people to appreciate and accept others' uniqueness, similar to "strengths spotting" exercises used in conjunction with character strengths. A compilation of outstanding examples of authentic and unique individuals could also be created in order for people to draw upon exemplars of people thriving at successfully being themselves.

Overall, positive psychology can use the existing knowledge on authenticity and uniqueness to advance its current understanding of "being yourself" as it relates to well-being, impacting individuals and communities for the better.

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## Appendix A

## AUT3 (AI)

The following measure has a series of statements that involve people's perceptions about themselves. There are not right or wrong responses, so please answer honestly. Respond to each statement by writing the number from the scale below, which you feel most accurately characterizes your response to the statement.

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>

1. I am confused about my feelings.
2. I frequently pretend to enjoy something when in actuality I really don't.
3. For better or for worse I am aware of who I truly am.
4. I understand why I believe the things I do about myself.
5. I want people with whom I am close to understand my strengths.
6. I actively try to understand which of my self-aspects fit together to form my core- or true-self.
7. I am very uncomfortable objectively considering my limitations and shortcomings.
8. I've often used my silence or head-nodding to convey agreement with someone else's statement or position even when I really disagree.
9. I have a very good understanding of why I do the things I do.
10. I am willing to change myself for others if the reward is desirable enough.

11. I find it easy to pretend to be something other than my true-self.
12. I want people with whom I am close to understand my weaknesses.
13. I find it very difficult to critically assess myself.
14. I am not in touch with my deepest thoughts and feelings.
15. I make it a point to express to close others how much I truly care for them.
16. I tend to have difficulty accepting my personal faults, so I try to cast them in a more positive way.
17. I tend to idealize close others rather than objectively see them as they truly are.
18. If asked, people I am close to can accurately describe what kind of person I am.
19. I prefer to ignore my darkest thoughts and feelings.
20. I am aware of when I am not being my true-self.
21. I am able to distinguish those self-aspects that are important to my core- or true-self from those that are unimportant.
22. People close to me would be shocked or surprised if they discovered what I keep inside me.
23. It is important for me to understand my close others' needs and desires.
24. I want close others to understand the real me rather than just my public persona or "image."
25. I try to act in a manner that is consistent with my personally held values, even if others criticize or reject me for doing so.
26. If a close other and I are in disagreement I would rather ignore the issue than constructively work it out.
27. I've often done things that I don't want to do merely not to disappoint people.

28. I find that my behavior typically expresses my values.
29. I actively attempt to understand myself as best as possible.
30. I'd rather feel good about myself than objectively assess my personal limitations and shortcomings.
31. I find that my behavior typically expresses my personal needs and desires.
32. I rarely, if ever, put on a "false face" for others to see.
33. I spend a lot of energy pursuing goals that are very important to other people even though they are unimportant to me.
34. I frequently am not in touch with what's important to me.
35. I try to block out any unpleasant feelings I might have about myself.
36. I often question whether I really know what I want to accomplish in my lifetime.
37. I often find that I am overly critical about myself.
38. I am in touch with my motives and desires.
39. I often deny the validity of any compliments that I receive.
40. In general, I place a good deal of importance on people I am close to understanding who I truly am.
41. I find it difficult to embrace and feel good about the things I have accomplished.
42. If someone points out or focuses on one of my shortcomings I quickly try to block it out of my mind and forget it.
43. The people I am close to can count on me being who I am regardless of what setting we are in.
44. My openness and honesty in close relationships are extremely important to me.
45. I am willing to endure negative consequences by expressing my true beliefs about things.

## THE AUTHENTICITY INVENTORY (AI-3)

The preceding measure is conceptually designed to assess the unimpeded operation of one's true- or core-self in one's daily enterprise. There are four components to how we conceive of authenticity: *awareness*, *unbiased processing*, *behavior*, and *relational orientation*. These components can be measured via content domains that were constructed as subscales in the Authenticity Inventory and are described below:

1. **Awareness:** Awareness of, and trust in, one's motives, feelings, desires, and self-relevant cognitions. Conceptually, this includes awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, figure-ground personality aspects, emotions, and their roles in behavior.
2. **Unbiased Processing:** Not denying, distorting, exaggerating, nor ignoring private knowledge, internal experiences, and externally based self-evaluative information. Conceptually then, this includes objectivity and acceptance of one's positive and negative aspects.
3. **Behavior:** Acting in accord with one's values, preferences, and needs. Conceptually, this contrasts acting merely to please others, or to attain rewards, or avoid punishments even if it means acting "falsely."
4. **Relational Orientation:** Valuing and achieving openness and truthfulness in one's close relationships. Conceptually, the relational component presumes it is important for close others to see the real you, good and bad. Moreover, relational authenticity means being genuine and not "fake" in one's relationships with others.

*Subscales*

*Awareness:* 1R, 3, 4, 6, 9, 14R, 20, 21, 29, 34R, 36R, 38

Alpha = .79

*Unbiased Processing:* 7R, 13R, 16R, 19R, 30R, 35R, 37R, 39R, 41R, 42R

Alpha = .64

*Behavioral:* 2, 8R, 10R, 11R, 25, 27R, 28, 31, 32, 33R, 45

Alpha = .80

*Relational Orientation:* 5, 12, 15, 17R, 18, 22R, 23, 24, 26R, 40, 43, 44

Alpha = .78

*Composite Scale* Alpha = .90

\*\*\*NOTE: R = Reverse Scored Item

*Source:* Goldman, B.M., & Kernis, M.H. (2004). *The development of the authenticity inventory, version 3.* Unpublished data.

## Appendix B

## Items of the Final Authentic Personality Scale (AS)

1. "I think it is better to be yourself, than to be popular."
2. "I don't know how I really feel inside."
3. "I am strongly influenced by the opinions of others."
4. "I usually do what other people tell me to do."
5. "I always feel I need to do what others expect me to do."
6. "Other people influence me greatly."
7. "I feel as if I don't know myself very well."
8. "I always stand by what I believe in."
9. "I am true to myself in most situations."
10. "I feel out of touch with the 'real me.'"
11. "I live in accordance with my values and beliefs."
12. "I feel alienated from myself."

## Scoring Instructions

All items are presented on a 1 (*does not describe me at all*) to 7 (*describes me very well*) scale.

Total Items 1, 8, 9, and 11 for Authentic Living; Items 3, 4, 5, and 6 for Accepting External Influence; and Items 2, 7, 10, and 12 for Self-Alienation.

*Source:* Wood, A.M., Linley, P.A., Maltby, J., Baliouisis, M., & Joseph, S. (2008). The authentic personality: A theoretical and empirical conceptualization and the development of the authenticity scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 55(3), 385-399.

## Appendix C

## The Need for Uniqueness (NU) Scale

Respondents indicate the strength of their agreement or disagreement with each of the following items on a 5-point scale (1=Strongest Disagreement; to 5 = Strongest Agreement)

1. When I am in a group of strangers, I am not reluctant to express my opinion openly.
2. I find criticism affects my self-esteem.
3. I sometimes hesitate to use my own ideas for fear they might be impractical.
4. I think society should let reason lead it to new customs and throw aside old habits or mere traditions.
5. People frequently succeed in changing my mind.
6. I find it sometimes amusing to upset the dignity of teachers, judges, and "cultured" people.
7. I like wearing a uniform because it makes me proud to be a member of the organization it represents.
8. People have sometimes called me "stuck-up."
9. Others' disagreements make me uncomfortable.
10. I do not always live by the standards and rules of society.
11. I am unable to express my feelings if they result in undesirable consequences.
12. Being a success in one's career means making a contribution no one else has made.
13. It bothers me if people think I'm being too conventional.
14. I always try to follow rules.
15. If I disagree with a superior on his or her views, I usually do not keep it to myself.
16. I speak up in meetings in order to oppose those whom I feel are wrong.



17. Feeling "different" in a crowd of people makes me feel uncomfortable.
18. If I must die let it be an unusual death rather than an ordinary death in bed.
19. I would rather be just like everyone else rather than to be called a freak.
20. I must admit I find it hard to work under strict rules and regulations.
21. I would rather be known for always trying new ideas rather than employing well-trusted methods.
22. It is better to always agree with the opinions of others than to be considered a disagreeable person.
23. I do not like to say unusual things to people.
24. I tend to express my opinions publicly, regardless of what others say.
25. As a rule, I strongly defend my own opinions.
26. I do not like to go my own way.
27. When I am with a group of people, I agree with their ideas so that no arguments arise.
28. I tend to keep quiet in the presence of persons of higher rank, experience, etc.
29. I have been quite independent and free from family rule.
30. Whenever I take part in-group activities, I am somewhat of a nonconformist.
31. In most things in life, I believe in playing it safe rather than taking a gamble.
32. It is better to break rules than always conform to an impersonal society.

Reverse each of the scores on items 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 17, 19, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, and 31.

That is, on these items only, perform the following reversals: 1 → 5; 2 → 4; 3 → 3, 4 → 2; 5 →

1. Then add the scores on all 32 items, using the reversed scores for the aforementioned items.

Higher scores reflect a higher need for uniqueness.

*Source:* Snyder, C. R., and H. L. Fromkin (1977). "Abnormality as a positive characteristic: The development and validation of a scale measuring need for uniqueness." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 86, 518-527.

## Appendix D

## The Self Attributed Need for Uniqueness (SANU) Scale

Respondents complete the following sentences with the alternative that best describe them:

1. I prefer being \_\_\_\_\_ different from other people.
  - a) no,
  - b) slightly,
  - c) moderately,
  - d) very,
  - e) extremely
2. Being distinctive is \_\_\_\_\_ important to me.
  - a) not at all,
  - b) slightly,
  - c) moderately,
  - d) very,
  - e) extremely
3. I \_\_\_ intentionally do things to make myself different from those around me.
  - a) never,
  - b) seldom,
  - c) sometimes,
  - d) often,
  - e) always
4. I have a \_\_\_ need for uniqueness.
  - a) weak,

- b) slight,
- c) moderate,
- d) strong,
- e) very strong

For scoring, a = 1, b = 2, c = 3, d = 4, and e = 5. The total score reflects the sum of the responses to the four items. Higher scores reflect a higher need for uniqueness.

*Source:* From M. Lynn & J. Harris. (1997b). Individual differences in the pursuit of self-uniqueness through consumption. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 27, 1861-1883.