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Sketching the Contours of State Authenticity

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Abstract

We outline a program of research in which we examined state authenticity, the sense of being one's true self. In particular, we describe its phenomenology (what it feels like to be experience authenticity), its correlates (e.g., emotions, needs), its nomological network (e.g., real-ideal self overlap, public and private self-consciousness), its cultural parameters (Eastern and Western culture), its precursors or determinants (congruency, positivity, hedonism), and its psychological health implications. We conclude by arguing that state authenticity deserves its own conceptual status, distinct from trait authenticity, and by setting an agenda for future research.

Keywords: state authenticity; phenomenology; authenticity; psychological health; true self

“Well I try my best
To be just like I am
But everybody wants you
To be just like them
They sing while you slave and I just get bored”
—Bob Dylan, *Maggie’s Farm* (1965)

Others, Bob Dylan reckons, erode your authenticity. Social influence is damaging to it. But is that so? More generally, what is authenticity and what does it feel to be authentic? What instigates authenticity and what are its implications for psychological health? We address these and other questions by summarizing a program of research on state authenticity.

We begin by defining the construct, drawing a conceptual distinction between state and trait authenticity, and providing a rationale for the study of state authenticity. We then examine state authenticity’s reported frequency and motivations, while documenting its empirical independence from trait authenticity. We also consider what state (in)authenticity feels like, what its precursors or determinants are, whether it varies cross-culturally, and how it contributes to psychological health. We conclude by contextualizing the findings in the broader literature and highlighting promising areas of inquiry. We wish to clarify that we designed our research program to be bottom-up or inductive—an approach that provides the empirical fodder for theory development and testing.

Defining State Authenticity

State authenticity is the experience of being currently in sync with one’s real or genuine self. Put otherwise, it is the subjective perception that one is being the true, unvarnished “me” (Sedikides, Slabu, Lenton, & Thomaes, 2017). To paraphrase Maslow (1971), “[state] authenticity is the reduction of phoniness toward the zero point” (p. 183). State *ina*uthenticity is the converse: It refers to a sense of misalignment with one’s veritable self, of not being the “real me” (Sedikides et al., 2017). Note that, although we often refer to state (in)authenticity as unitary and unidimensional, the construct can manifest as

differentiated classes of (in)authenticity experiences (Lenton, Slabu, Bruder, & Sedikides, 2014; Lenton, Slabu, & Sedikides, 2016).

Distinguishing State Authenticity from Trait Authenticity

Authenticity as a construct dates back to Aristotle (384/322 BC), who linked a life worth living with acting in harmony with one's real self (Harter, 2002; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Authenticity is also contemporaneous with the emergence of psychology as a science (Vannini & Franzese, 2008). Later, the construct was placed at the center of humanistic inquiry with analyses of the fully functioning person and self-actualization (Maslow, 1971; Rogers, 1961), and subsequently became prominent in positive psychology with analyses of human potential and fulfillment (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman, 2002). More recently, authenticity's utility has been highlighted due to its association with psychological health (Lakey, Kernis, Heppner, & Lance, 2008; A. M. Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008) and its designation by counselling psychologists or psychotherapists as a quality worth nurturing (Corey, 2009; Erskine, & Moursund, 2011). Accordingly, the pursuit of authenticity is often described as a key adult project in popular psychology and the self-help literature (Dillard, 2016; Thacker, 2016). Such approaches, however, largely pertain to trait authenticity, a relatively stable characteristic on which individuals vary on a continuum.

This trait or person-centered perspective of authenticity has taken a variety of forms. One form views trait authenticity as the "unobstructed operation of one's true- or core-self in one's daily enterprise" (Goldman & Kernis, 2002, p. 294) or as optimal human being (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). This form comprises four facets, as explicated by the Authenticity Inventory (Kernis & Goldman, 2006): awareness of and motivation to know one's self-beliefs, feelings, and goals even if contradictory; unbiased processing of one's characteristics, knowledge, and emotions; behavioral consistency with one's values, needs, and desires; and relational orientation toward openness so that others can see the real self. Awareness is a prerequisite to behavior or relational orientation. Another form of trait authenticity, the Authentic Personality model (A. M. Wood et al., 2008), proposes that awareness (knowledge of one's attitudes, beliefs, values, or goals) must augur well with one's behavior for authenticity to ensue. If so, the individual will score highly on "authentic living," the first

facet of the model. If not, the discrepancy will likely culminate in “self-alienation,” the second facet. The third facet aligns with the lyrics of *Maggie’s Farm*: The authentic person is impervious to external or social influence. This facet is also consistent with Maslow’s (1971) view that authentic (i.e., self-actualized or fully-functioning) persons, who have already satisfied their lower-order psychological needs (e.g., self-esteem, belongingness), are free of external influence or are autonomous. These persons know and accept themselves, while acting in correspondence with their characteristics or desires. In yet another form, “authentic living” has been labelled “authentic self-expression,” and the absence of self-alienation” has been labelled “authentic self-awareness” (Knoll, Meyer, Kroemer, & Schroeder-Abe, 2015). The fourth and final form regards trait authenticity as truthfulness to one’s core self, and offers a scale to assess the construct (Ito & Kodama, 2005).

Trait perspectives are further entrenched in the literature. Authenticity is linked to dispositions such as mindfulness (Lakey et al., 2008), subjective vitality (i.e., feeling alive and energetic; Ryan, LaGuardia, & Rawsthorne, 2005; Satici & Tekin Gocet, 2014), and self-esteem (Davis, Hicks, Schlegel, Smith, & Vess, 2015; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997), whereas inauthenticity is linked to dispositions such as anxious and avoidant attachment (Gillath, Sesko, Shaver, & Chun, 2010), as well as depression, anxiety, and physical symptomatology (Ryan et al., 2005; Sheldon et al., 1997). Further, authenticity has been considered prototypical of certain roles, such as a good leader (Luthans & Avolio, 2003) or a responsive romantic relationship partner (Lopez & Rice, 2006).

States, however, are distinct from traits. A trait is an individual’s base-rate proclivity toward, or away from, various cognitions, emotions, or actions, whereas a state refers to the cognitions, emotions, or actions in a situation (Endler, Parker, Bagby, & Cox, 1991; Fleeson, 2001). Accordingly, states are shorter-lived than traits, and states are continuous relative to traits, which are less evenly manifested across time (Boyce, Wood, Daly, & Sedikides, 2015; Fridhandler, 1986). Furthermore, states are more discernible and less likely to require inference than traits (Fridhandler, 1986); in fact, traits are often conceptualized as an accumulation of discernible state episodes (Nezlek, 2007).

Why Study State Authenticity

State authenticity, for the most part, has been assumed to be virtually identical to trait authenticity (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Yet, we propose that state and trait authenticity are separable, as the experience of authenticity differs across situations, above and beyond a person's standing on trait authenticity. State authenticity is further worth studying on its own, because it may serve to promote the integration and organization of the self-system (Sheldon et al. 1997); for example, state (in)authenticity may cue a person that their pivotal values are being upheld (or not; Erickson, 1995). State authenticity may also confer psychological health benefits (Sedikides et al., 2017). Further, it is important to know whether individuals can recognize the attainment of state authenticity in order to capitalize on its benefits. According to humanists, authenticity is an idealized state experienceable by all. So, although Maslow (1971) believed that authenticity, as a trait, is chiefly reserved for the few (given that most people are preoccupied with striving to satisfy lower-order needs), he also acknowledged that everyone can experience authenticity at "acute moments" (p. 165).

There is empirical literature relevant to state authenticity, but it is somewhat problematic. To begin, the construct has been operationalized in a top-down and diverse manner. Examples include temporary accessibility of the concept "true self" (Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002; Koole & Kuhl, 2003; Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009), adequate access to the self-system due to lack of self-infiltration of another person's goals (Baumann & Kuhl, 2003), situational expressiveness (Waterman, 1993), compatibility between attitudinal expressions and cultural norms (Kokkoris & Kühnen, 2014), representing oneself sincerely (Snyder & Lopez, 2009), and assuming responsibility for one's emotions and actions (Peterson & Park, 2004). State authenticity also has been considered a side effect of self-regulatory strivings. From the vantage point of self-concordance theory (Sheldon & Elliot, 1998, 1999), state authenticity is inferred (rather than documented) based on the consonance between one's values and situational goals: The more internalized the goal is (i.e., identified, integrated, or intrinsic as opposed to external or introjected), the more authentic the goal-relevant behavior is assumed to be. From the vantage point of Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2017), state authenticity is contingent upon the satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which enable goal

internalization. Somewhat similarly, cognitive evaluation theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) suggests that state authenticity entails the satisfaction of autonomy and competence needs, in combination with an internal locus of causality for competence (i.e., attributing competence to one's self). However, the evidence in support of predictions derived from SDT or cognitive evaluation theory is rather scarce. Taken together, by inferring rather than documenting a view of state authenticity, this diverse literature offers largely unsubstantiated prescriptions for its attainment. We sought to extend the literature by providing description: If authenticity is a desirable state, then how do people conceive of and experience it?

We addressed these questions by implementing an inductive, or bottom-up, approach. We began by asking participants to write about (in)authenticity experiences (Turner, 1976). We concur with the premise that researchers have a lot to gain from a careful inspection and solid understanding of a phenomenon's properties before engaging in hypothesis testing (Rozin, 2009). This is particularly the case for the literature relevant to state authenticity, as it is plagued with inconsistencies in terms of both hypotheses and findings. We provide five examples. *First*, some theoretical positions (as illustrated by Bob Dylan's lyrics) maintain that a social setting is antithetical to state authenticity, due to its potential to elevate public self-awareness (Turner & Billings, 1991) and thus promote behavior consistent with others' expectations (Barrett-Lennard, 1998; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998, 1999; A. M. Wood et al., 2008), whereas an opposing position advocates that having voice and being heard is essential to authenticity (Harter, Stocker, & Robinson, 1996; Lopez & Rice, 2006; Neff & Harter, 2002). *Second*, researchers have hypothesized that heightened private self-consciousness is associated with, or elicits, authenticity (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Koole & Kuhl, 2003; A. M. Wood et al., 2008). Some findings support this hypothesis (i.e., a study of online behavior; Joinson, 2001), but others contradict it, indicating that people feel more like their true self when they experience spontaneous or surprising emotions (Morgan & Averill, 1992; Turner & Billings, 1991). *Third*, theorists have linked concordance of one's values, goals, or attributes and one's behavior with authenticity (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998; A. M. Wood et al., 2008). However, internal qualities do not need to be expressed for individuals to feel

authentic (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010) and, as the emotional labor (e.g., or “service with a smile”) literature indicates, a discrepancy between feeling and behavior is not sufficient for state inauthenticity, given that individuals must also make an external attribution for their emotional expression, crediting their friendliness to job requirement (Wharton, 1999). *Fourth*, although some findings (Morgan & Averill, 1992) suggest that individuals may feel more authentic when faced with tough and painful situations, other findings align with the view that access to the self-concept and, by implication, authenticity is strengthened when individuals report both low negative affect and high positive affect (Heppner et al., 2008; Fleeson & Wilt, 2010; Rice & Pasupathi, 2010). *Finally*, although autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs are accorded special privilege by SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) over other needs, theorizing has been somewhat unspecified, and testing has been scarce; indeed, the proposition that satisfaction of these three needs converges into eliciting state authenticity had been supported in only one study (Heppner et al., 2008) before we initiated our research program. Likewise, there is little evidence to back the contention that the joint satisfaction of the needs for relatedness and autonomy cultivates state authenticity (sociometer theory: Leary, 2003; but see Gebauer et al., 2015). To complicate matters, satisfaction of the autonomy need might imply simultaneous satisfaction of the need for (i.e., boost) self-esteem (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Cai, 2015), thus eliciting state authenticity (Maslow, 1971). Alternatively, satisfaction of another (partially overlapping) need, that of pleasure, may contribute to state authenticity (Heppner et al., 2008; Turner & Billings, 1991). But as yet, evidence for any of these accounts is sparse.

A Phenomenological Account of State Authenticity

We carried out a research program on the phenomenology of state authenticity (summarized partially, briefly, and preliminarily in Sedikides et al., 2017). As Fridhandler (1986) put it: “If a person is in a state he or she must be able to feel it” (p. 170), which implies that states are amenable to conscious introspection. That is, states have a referent and a concomitant “feeling” (see also: Harter, 2002; Schlegel, Hicks, King, & Arndt, 2011). We adopted in particular a lay or folk conception approach (Fletcher, 1995; Rice & Pasupathi,

2010), which is high in ecological validity, to address the relevance of state (in)authenticity in everyday life.

Frequency, Motivations, and the State-Trait Distinction

In an initial and online investigation concerned with the scope (i.e., frequency, motivation, trait correlates) of state authenticity (Lenton, Bruder, Slabu, & Sedikides, 2013, Study 1), community adults read definitions of authenticity (“the sense or feeling that you are in alignment with your *true, genuine* self ... the feeling that you are being your *real self*”) and inauthenticity (“the sense or feeling that you are in alignment with an *untrue, false* self ... the feeling that you are not being your *real self*”). Afterwards, participants responded to 12 items, six of which assessed the frequency of and motivation behind state authenticity, and six the frequency of and motivation behind state inauthenticity. Finally, they completed an assessment of trait authenticity (Authentic Personality Scale; A. M. Wood et al., 2008). This assessment would allow us to test whether predispositions toward authenticity are separable from its situational expression. Does trait authenticity constrain state authenticity? The literature pertinent to this question comprises two studies, neither of which was concerned with the phenomenology of authenticity, and their results were inconsistent. In one study, persons lower on trait authenticity reported stronger state authenticity in non-social situations, whereas those higher on trait authenticity reported stronger state authenticity in social situations; in other words, trait authenticity moderated state authenticity (Ito & Kodama, 2007). A moderation effect, however, did not emerge in the other study (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010).

In Lenton, Bruder, et al. (2013, Study 1), the preponderance of participants reported that they had previously experienced state authenticity (94%) or state inauthenticity (91%), as well as both (88%). Clearly, the experience of state (in)authenticity is widespread. However, participants experienced state authenticity much more frequently (once or twice per week) than state inauthenticity (once in two months). Although state (in)authenticity is not a daily occurrence, it is apparently experienced with a degree of regularity. Further, the two types of experience were relatively independent, given that their frequencies were weakly, and negatively, correlated: Experiencing state authenticity frequently was only slightly associated

with having fewer experiences of state inauthenticity ($r = -.21$). This finding bodes well for conceptualizing (in)authenticity as a state. Moreover, this study indicated that participants were motivated to pursue authenticity and to avoid inauthenticity, though the former motivation was stronger than the latter. Still, the two motivations were substantially, and positively, correlated ($r = .52$): As one motivation (authenticity pursuit) increased, the other (inauthenticity avoidance) also increased. Authenticity is desirable, whereas inauthenticity is undesirable.

Correlations between trait authenticity on the one hand and state (in)authenticity frequencies and motivations on the other, showed that, although trait authenticity emerged as a moderate predictor of state (in)authenticity frequencies, a good deal of variance was unaccounted for. (Trait authenticity did not account for [in]authenticity motivations.) Of note, participants high and low on trait authenticity reported having experienced both states to a virtually identical degree (88.5% and 88%, respectively), very few participants high versus low on trait authenticity reported never having experienced the two states (3.8% vs. 4.0%), and the percentage of high trait authenticity participants who had only experienced authenticity and that of low trait authenticity participants who had only experienced inauthenticity was practically the same (7.7% vs. 8%). Thus, situations are critical to understanding the everyday experience of authenticity.

Experiential Content, Accompanying Emotions or Needs, and the State-Trait Distinction

Having illustrated that state authenticity is frequent and desirable, we aimed to uncover the social parameters that bring about state (in)authenticity and to identify accompanying emotions and met needs (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013, Study 2). We also wanted to know if the experiential content of state authenticity depends on (i.e., is moderated by) trait authenticity. Undergraduate students described either an event in which “you felt *most* like your *true* or *real self*” or an event in which “you felt *least* like your *true* or *real self*.” They also completed a trait authenticity scale (Authentic Inventory—Kernis & Goldman, 2006 or Authentic Personality Scale—A. M. Wood et al., 2008).

Independent judges coded the ensuing narratives on four features. The *first* one referred to themes: Judges indicated the presence of each of 17 themes (see below) developed a priori by the authors. The *second* feature was emotions: Judges stated whether a given narrative evinced each of 11 emotion clusters (see below) preselected by the authors on the basis of literature (Higgins, 1987; Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, & O'Connor, 1987). As Erickson (1995) observed, emotions are vital to the experience of authenticity, given that the self is better conceptualized as a felt experience rather than a cognitive evaluation (Gregg & Sedikides, 2018; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). The *third* feature was needs: Judges were supplied with a list of 10 basic needs (Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001—see below) and were asked to estimate whether the “*average person* put into the ... narrator’s ‘shoes’... would feel that the need had been fulfilled/satisfied.” We looked for empirical validation of an association between (1) satisfaction of the autonomy/competence/relatedness needs and state authenticity, as per SDT (Heppner et al., 2008), (2) satisfaction of the relatedness/autonomy needs and state authenticity, as per Leary (1999), (3) satisfaction of the self-esteem need and state authenticity (Heppner et al., 2008), and (4) satisfaction of the pleasure/stimulation need and state authenticity (Turner & Billings, 1991). The *final* feature was idealistic portrayal: Judges rated the degree to which the narrators portrayed themselves in an idealistic manner. State authenticity is an indicator that one’s real and ideal selves are momentarily in alignment. Research has pointed to the social normativeness of the authenticity-inducing personality profile. For example, based on the finding (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010) that those who report behaving in an extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, emotionally stable, or open manner also report feeling authentic regardless of their chronic standing on those traits, Sherman, Nave, and Funder (2012) concluded that people may feel most authentic “when they manage to act in a normative and [...] psychologically well-adjusted manner” (p. 88). Put otherwise, some of the behaviors that evoke state authenticity may overlap with those that are socially or psychologically ideal (see also W. Wood, Christensen, Hebl, & Rothgerber, 1997). This possibility is consistent with literature reporting a relatively high overlap between actual self (attributes the person believes they possess) and ideal self (attributes the person would ideally like to possess) (Gramzow, Sedikides, Panter, & Insko,

2000; Klohnen & Luo, 2003; Tangney, Niedenthal, Covert, & Barlow, 1998). The relevance of the ideal self for authenticity was documented in research by Gan and Chen (2017).

Relational authenticity (i.e., feeling authentic in a relationship) arose from overlap between ideal self and relational self (i.e., being one's ideal self in the relationship), but not from overlap between actual self and relational self.

The results of this study (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013, Study 2) revealed that state authenticity (i.e., most-me), in comparison to state inauthenticity (i.e., least-me), narratives were more likely to entail: fun or amusement; success; a return to familiar persons or places; spending time with close others; helping another person; and behaving creatively. In contrast, state inauthenticity, compared to state authenticity, narratives were more likely to entail: reacting to a challenging or unfavorable event; feeling evaluated by others; being exposed for lack of social competence; feeling isolated; failing to meet one's or others' standards; behaving in accordance with others' or situational expectations; attempting something new; and feeling ill. In brief, familiarity, fun, achievement, or hanging out were pivotal state authenticity themes, whereas being in socially evaluative settings where one fails to meet one's own or others' standards, feeling socially isolated, or encountering strenuous situations were pivotal state inauthenticity themes.

With respect to their emotional content, state authenticity narratives were more likely to be accompanied by positive emotions (contentment/satisfaction/enjoyment, calmness/relaxation/relief, enthusiasm/excitement/enthrallment, love/compassion/affection, pride/triumph), whereas state inauthenticity narratives were more likely to be accompanied by negative emotions (anxiety/unease/tension/stress, sadness/depression/shame/loneliness, anger/irritation/disgust/envy/frustration, disappointment/dismay/discouragement, fear/alarm). In all, state authenticity was characterized primarily by low arousal positive emotions (in particular, contentment and calmness). Indeed, contentment appeared to be the emotional hallmark of state authenticity. A sample narrative illustrates:

...one day we went down to the mill pond [...] in Cambridge and we rented a punt-boat, and went down the river for a couple of hours and moored up and had a bbq and drinks. I was with my girlfriend and three best friends and we stayed there late

drinking, chilling out, and talking about our lives and childhoods. I was really happy at that moment in life and felt relaxed, honest and that nothing else mattered or would ever change.

State inauthenticity was characterized principally by negative emotions, mostly anxiety but also low arousal ones (e.g., sadness, disappointment). Indeed, anxiety was the emotional hallmark of state inauthenticity. A sample narrative demonstrates:

I was at the company headquarters, waiting in the reception area. I was taken by the receptionist to an upstairs room. I entered the room to find two men sitting behind a table. [...] I felt very nervous, aware that I had to put on a good performance, to exaggerate my skills otherwise I would have no chance of landing the job. The two men took it in turns to ask me questions and I had to think quickly to construct a convincing answer without freezing up completely and my mind going blank due to [...] trying to be someone else [...] super-confident, most unlike the reserved and modest Scot that I was.

The findings concerning need satisfaction, idealistic portrayal, and moderation by trait authenticity were also indicative. State authenticity, compared to state inauthenticity, narratives were regarded as having fulfilled nine of the 10 needs assessed (i.e., autonomy, self-esteem, pleasure/stimulation, relatedness, meaning, competence, physical thriving, popularity/influence, security), with the exception being money/luxury. State authenticity was particularly conducive to the fulfillment of autonomy, self-esteem, and pleasure/stimulation needs. Also, state authenticity, relative to state inauthenticity, narratives were seen as portraying a more idealistic version of the narrator, suggesting, once again, an overlap between real and ideal self. Finally, and in conceptual replication of prior findings (Lenton, Bruder, et al, 2013, Study 1), trait authenticity, by and large, did not qualify the experiential content, concomitant emotions, accompanying needs, or idealistic portrayals of state (in)authenticity. This constitutes additional evidence that state (in)authenticity is experienced similarly among persons higher or lower in trait authenticity and, further, attests to the separability of these constructs.

Experiential Content, Subjectively-Rated Emotions and Needs, and Nomological Network

We (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013, Study 3) tested the replicability of the abovementioned results in a sample of undergraduate students, soliciting *subjective perceptions* (rather than independent ratings) of state (in)authenticity narratives in terms of their accompanying emotions, need satisfaction, and general overlap with the ideal self. In addition, we explored the nomological network of state authenticity as follows. *First*, we assessed the relation between the content (i.e., experiential themes) of (in)authenticity narratives and mood, given that state authenticity comprises such themes as fun or amusement (see also Rice & Pasupathi, 2010). *Second*, we assessed the relation between the content of (in)authenticity narratives and state self-esteem, given self-esteem's observed relation with state authenticity (Heppner et al., 2008). *Third*, we assessed the association between the content of state (in)authenticity narratives and state public as well as private self-consciousness, in light of theorizing regarding the links between authenticity and public (Bargh et al., 2002; Turner & Billings, 1991) or private (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Koole & Kuhl, 2003) self-consciousness. *Finally*, in a conceptual replication attempt, we tested the relation between state (in)authenticity and real-ideal self overlap (Sherman et al., 2012; W. Wood et al., 1997).

An online sample of participants described an event in which “you felt *most* like your *true* or *real self*” (state authenticity narratives) or “you felt *least* like your *true* or *real self*” (state inauthenticity narratives). Subsequently, they completed state measures of the relevant constructs. In particular, they rated their mood (Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule or PANAS; Kercher, 1992), self-esteem (modified after Rosenberg, 1965), as well as state private and public self-consciousness (modified after Fenigstein, Seheier, & Buss, 1975) retrospectively, that is, while reflecting on the event. They also rated whether the event they experienced aligned with their ideal self (Self-Attributes Questionnaire; Pelham & Swann, 1989) and whether each of 10 needs (Sheldon et al., 2001) were satisfied during the event. Independent judges rated each narrative on the same 17 themes as in Study 2 (Lenton,

Bruder, et al., 2013), whereas, in contrast to Study 1 (Lenton, Bruder, et al.), participants rated their own emotions and need satisfaction in conjunction with the narratives.

The key results regarding the content of state (in)authenticity were replicated. Judges' ratings revealed that familiarity (with people, places, or activities), fun or amusement, success or achievement, and hanging out were focal themes of state authenticity, whereas being in an evaluative situation where one was falling short of meeting own or others' standards, feeling isolated, or confronting demanding situations were focal themes of state inauthenticity. State authenticity (vs. inauthenticity) narratives were linked to more positive affect (i.e., inspired, enthusiastic, excited, alert, determined) and less negative affect (i.e., nervous, distressed, upset, scared, afraid). They were also linked to higher self-esteem and reduced public as well as private self-consciousness. Finally, they were linked to stronger overlap with the ideal self (e.g., common sense, intellect, sense of humor, leadership, social competence, emotional stability) and to a greater fulfillment of all 10 basic needs (especially of autonomy, pleasure, and self-esteem), with the exception of money/luxury.

The Role of Culture

In subsequent research, we (Slabu, Lenton, Sedikides, & Bruder, 2014) investigated whether the just-described phenomena are similar across cultures. In particular, we wanted to know whether authenticity is an exclusively Western phenomenon versus something that people across the apparent West-East divide can experience. Participants, both online and undergraduates, from three Eastern cultures (China, India, Singapore) and one Western culture (USA) completed the Authentic Personality Scale (Wood et al., 2008), as in Lenton, Bruder, et al. (Study 3), the Self-Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994) and the Analysis-Holism Scale (Choi, Koo, & Choi, 2007). Then, they wrote state authenticity –or most-me– narratives (an event during which “you felt most like your true or real self”), state inauthenticity –or least-me– narratives (an event during which “you felt least like your true or real self”), or control narratives (what “you did yesterday”). The control condition served as a baseline assessment for how individuals feel on a typical day. Afterward, participants completed measures of mood (International short Positive Affect and Negative Affect Schedule; Thompson, 2007), self-esteem (Rosenberg [1965] Self-Esteem Scale), and private as well as

public self-consciousness (Fenigstein et al., 1975), all with respect to the event they described in their narrative. Finally, participants rated the degree to which state (in)authenticity (vs. control) aligned with their ideal self (Self-Attributes Questionnaire; Pelham & Swann, 1989) and fulfilled the 10 basic needs (Sheldon et al., 2001).

Prior research showed that, in comparison to Eastern culture, Western culture promotes an independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal; that is, the West conceives of the self as distinct from (vs. connected with) others (Triandis, 1995). Also, relative to Eastern culture, Western culture norms encourage an analytic (vs. holistic) style of thinking, that is, perceptions of objects as standing apart from (vs. embedded in) their surrounding environment (Nisbett, 2003). Indeed, in our study (Slabu et al., 2014), Westerners were more independent and analytic than Easterners. More important, due to differences in those dispositional orientations, Westerners reported higher trait authenticity than Easterners (see also Robinson, Lopez, Ramos, & Nartova-Bochaver, 2012).

We then turned to state (in)authenticity narratives and their correlates. We analyzed the narratives with a text analysis program, the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker, Booth, & Francis, 2007). State authenticity (vs. control) narratives revealed more positive and fewer negative emotions, whereas the reverse was evident for state inauthenticity (vs. control) narratives. State (in)authenticity narratives differed from everyday occurrences (i.e., control narratives) in that they contained more cognitive (e.g., insight, causation) and more social (e.g., family, friends) themes, as well as more first-person singular pronouns which reflect higher self-focus (Baddeley, Daniel, & Pennebaker, 2011). In all, the experiential content of state (in)authenticity was similar across cultures, and different from that of mundane occurrences. However, state (in)authenticity appeared to be somewhat dissimilar across cultures in terms of settings; for example, achievement settings were equally conducive to authenticity and inauthenticity in the US, but were more conducive to authenticity in India.

Finally, we examined, mood, self-esteem, ideal-self overlap, self-consciousness, and needs ratings of events associated with state (in)authenticity (vs. control). In regards to *mood*, both Western and Eastern participants linked state inauthenticity with lower positive affect

and higher negative affect relative to control. However, Western (compared to Eastern) participants linked state authenticity (vs. state inauthenticity and control) with higher positive affect and lower negative affect. These findings are consistent with literature showing that positive emotions are more desirable in Western than Eastern cultures (Eid & Diener, 2001; Miyamoto, Uchida, & Ellsworth, 2010). In regards to *self-esteem*, participants from both cultural groups linked state authenticity (vs. control) to higher self-esteem, and state inauthenticity (vs. control) to lower self-esteem. It seems that state authenticity reinforces self-esteem, whereas state inauthenticity undermines it. These findings align with literature depicting self-esteem as equally desirable across cultures (i.e., a cultural universal: Schmitt & Allik, 2005; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Cai, 2015). In regards to *ideal-self overlap*, Western and Eastern participants linked state authenticity to ideal-self overlap to an equivalent degree, although US participants reported lower ideal-self overlap (i.e., they were less ideal when they were not being real) than Singaporeans. This finding may reflect Americans' idealization of the real self (Knobe, 2005) or Singaporeans' relatively greater comfort with self-inconsistencies (Spencer-Rodgers, Boucher, Mori, Wang, & Peng, 2009). In regards to *self-consciousness*, both Eastern (with the exceptions of Chinese) and Western participants associated state inauthenticity with high public self-consciousness, and both (with the exception of Indians) did not associate state inauthenticity with private self-consciousness. In regards to *needs*, state authenticity (vs. control) was associated with higher need satisfaction, although the contrast was only significant among Chinese participants. So, need satisfaction may not strongly facilitate state authenticity, a finding that is at odds with predictions of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2017) or sociometer theory (Leary, 2003). However, state inauthenticity (vs. control) reflected lower need satisfaction across cultures. So, need dissatisfaction may precipitate inauthenticity, a finding consistent with SDT or sociometer predictions.

Taken together, cultural similarities in state (in)authenticity outweighed cultural differences. Put otherwise, the majority of cross-cultural differences in the experience of (in)authenticity (vs. control) were matters of magnitude, not direction. Yet, other research does suggest some cross-cultural differences in direction (English & Chen, 2011): Although East Asians (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean American) and Westerners (European

Americans) reported equivalent levels of authenticity as a function of self-concept inconsistency (i.e., variability in trait self-descriptiveness) within a given relationship, the former reported higher levels of authenticity as a function of self-concept inconsistency across relationships. Cross-relational inconsistency was less influential of authenticity among East-Asian than Western samples, possibly reflecting discrepant cultural norms. This research, however, specifically addressed relational authenticity, which was measured with items such as “I can be myself with others” and “I feel artificial in my interactions with others” (reverse scored). The extent of cross-cultural differences in state authenticity awaits further empirical scrutiny.

State Authenticity In Situ

Up to this point, we have examined whether experiences of state (in)authenticity can be distinguished from base-rate (i.e., trait) authenticity by relying on retrospective reports collected via online or laboratory studies. We supplemented these findings with two studies that addressed the content and correlates of state authenticity in everyday life (Lenton et al., 2016). More specifically, we addressed two issues. The first one was whether the construct of state authenticity consists of the same key facets as trait authenticity (i.e., authentic living, self-alienation, acceptance of external influence). These three facets can be distilled from the various person-centered models that we described earlier (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Knoll et al., 2015; A. M. Wood et al., 2008). The second issue was how mood, the ideal self, self-esteem, need satisfaction, and (for the first time) flow relate to state authenticity. Flow reflects deep absorption in and enjoyment of one’s current activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It is a construct homologous to intrinsic motivation, and indeed is believed to be a benefit of self-determined behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

We used the Day Reconstruction Method (DRM; Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2004) in Study 1 (with community adults evaluating real-life events that occurred the previous day), and experience sampling in Study 2 (with community adults using a smartphone app to evaluate events taking place at the moment). The DRM allowed us to assess how psychological processes unfold over time and in real-life settings, while curtailing the influence of memory biases in self-reports. Such biases may distort the original

experience due to reliance on heuristics, implicit theories or schemas, post-event rehearsal, or goals (Miron-Shatz, Stone, & Kahneman, 2009). Reducing ensuing intrusions would strengthen the validity of results (Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). Prior to our studies, the assessment of state authenticity in real-life settings had been reported in only two articles. However, one (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010) was not concerned with state authenticity as a focal construct, and neither did it address the phenomenology of it, and the other (Heppner et al., 2008) was not concerned with state authenticity as a multifaceted construct, and neither did it address the range of correlates that our research aimed to explore.

Before summarizing the results of these studies (Lenton et al., 2016), we provide more procedural detail. In Study 1, participants completed A. M. Wood et al.'s (2008) trait authenticity scale, assessing authentic living, self-alienation, and accepting external influence. About 14 days later, they received a link to the Day Reconstruction Task (DRT). They were asked to divide their previous day into episodes (up to 10); for each episode, they were charged with answering 26 questions assessing the putative correlates of state authenticity. In Study 2, after having completed the A. M. Wood et al. scale, participants downloaded the relevant mobile phone app, which was programmed to ping them twice across each of eight days. At each ping, participants responded to 19 questions referring to their whereabouts, thoughts, and feeling at the moment. All questions and response-options were the same as in Study 1, with the exception of needs. Here, participants identified the top three needs being currently satisfied. By having participants select only three (of 10) needs, we could gauge the satisfaction of each need relative to others.

The two studies converged in showing that, like trait authenticity, state authenticity consisted of two related, yet distinct, facets: the presence of authentic living and the absence of self-alienation. However, unlike trait authenticity, state authentic living did not require the rejection of external influence neither did state self-alienation involve the acceptance of external influence. If anything, acceptance (vs. rejection) of external influence was more often associated with higher state authenticity. At first glance, these findings appear to be discrepant with the literature (not to mention Bob Dylan's assertion in *Maggie's Farm*), which suggests that real or imagined social influence erodes state authenticity (Barrett-

Lennard, 1998; Bargh et al., 2002; Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013; Slabu et al., 2014; Turner & Billings, 1991). However, the acceptance of social influence in a given situation is not necessarily inauthentic. A person, for example, may accept social influence for autonomous reasons, thus being authentic; conversely, a person may accept social influence for controlled reasons, thus being inauthentic (Koestner & Losier, 1996; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998). Stated otherwise, the acceptance of external influence can be either authentic or inauthentic, depending on degree of overlap between the situation and the person's values or goals. As a case in point, both acceptance of external influence and authentic living are positively associated with work dedication (i.e., "enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge;" Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014, p. 663), presumably because employees accept influence from managers or co-workers as a means for attaining mutually beneficial outcomes. Not only did state authenticity differ from trait authenticity in terms of rejection of external influence, but also within-subjects variability in authenticity was higher than between-subjects variability, further attesting to the value of approaching state authenticity from a state perspective. Although trait authenticity relates to the daily experience of state authenticity, state authenticity is influenced more by the situation than by base-rate tendencies. State and trait authenticity are not isomorphic.

Additionally, the two "in situ" studies (Lenton et al., 2016) yielded results that were mostly, though not perfectly, consistent with those of our cross-sectional studies (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013; Slabu et al., 2014). In particular, state authentic living was linked with increased, and state self-alienation with decreased, positive mood, ideal-self overlap, self-esteem, and flow. However, the association between state authenticity and psychological needs was more intricate. Study 1, which used the Day Recollection Method, largely replicated prior findings. Authentic living was associated with the satisfaction of all 10 needs, whereas self-alienation was associated with the dissatisfaction of five needs, although competence and relatedness were not among them. In Study 2, which used an experience sampling methodology asking participants to trade off needs against each other, higher authentic living was associated with the satisfaction of the need for meaning in life, but lower self-alienation was associated with the satisfaction of the need for pleasure. Lower authentic

living was conducive to the satisfaction of autonomy (more than most other needs), but self-alienation was unrelated to the autonomy need. Moreover, authentic living and self-alienation did not contribute to the satisfaction of the competence and relatedness needs. Yet, greater authentic living was linked to the satisfaction of the needs for meaning/purpose, which is consistent with findings that the experience of being in touch with one's true self facilitates meaning in life (Schlegel et al., 2011). Further, greater self-alienation was associated with satisfaction of the needs for money/materials, corroborating findings that material purchases are not integrated into the real self (Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Lasaleta, Vohs, & Sedikides, 2014). Finally, greater self-alienation was linked with satisfaction of the needs for security/comfort. This result aligns with Maslow's (1971) idea that focusing on lower-order needs (e.g., security/comfort) may interfere with satisfaction of higher-order needs (i.e., self-actualization or authenticity attainment).

Precursors or Determinants of State Authenticity:

Self-Positivity, Self-Congruency, Emotions

We addressed the phenomenology of state authenticity – what it feels like and what its correlates are. We next turn to experimental studies, which are better able to identify its precursors or determinants.

Traditionally, state authenticity is theorized to result from behavior that conforms to internal standards (Barrett-Lennard, 1998; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Harter, 2002; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Maslow, 1971; Rogers, 1964). Internal standards may be self-representations, values, norms, cognitions, or feelings. It is standards-behavior congruency, then, that is thought to foster state authenticity (Kernis, 2003; Sheldon, Gunz, & Schachtman, 2012; Schlegel & Hicks, 2011; Sheldon & Elliot, 1998; M. Wood et al., 2008). We argue, however, for a more expansive consideration of state authenticity's precursors or determinants.

Self-Positivity

One major dimension underlying internal standards is evaluative: Standards can vary in valence from negative to positive (Eysenck, 1960; Osgood & Suci, 1955). At the same time, standards – and self-views – are generally positive (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). The question, then, becomes whether state authenticity is

produced by congruency between standards and behavior and, further, whether that congruency is moderated by the standard's valence (i.e., does congruency only matter for positive standards?). If so, self-positivity would weigh in at least equally as a determinant of state authenticity: A positive standard would also be a congruent standard (Sedikides & Green, 2004; Sedikides, Green, Saunders, Skowronski, & Zengel, 2016).

There is evidence that self-view valence matters. Consider an investigation by Sheldon et al. (1997). Participants rated themselves on the Big Five traits and then designated their level of authenticity, both in conjunction with five roles (i.e., student, friend, romantic partner, employee, child) and in general. Self-consistency was operationalized in terms of within-subjects correlations between role-trait ratings and the corresponding general trait ratings, and state authenticity was assessed both within roles and generally. Participants felt more authentic in roles for which they had rated themselves positively (i.e., as extraverted, agreeable, emotionally stable, conscientious, open), regardless of whether they were dispositionally higher or lower on those traits. (For evidence that these five traits are considered more desirable than their polar opposites, see Rushton & Irwing, 2011). An experience sampling investigation by Fleeson and Wilt (2010) provides another example. When participants' own behaviors exemplified the positive pole of Big Five traits (i.e., extraverted, agreeable, emotionally stable, conscientious, open), they rated themselves as being more authentic, independently of their scores on the general traits. Also, a study by Boucher (2011) yielded a positive correlation between self-consistency (i.e., within-role and cross-role consistency) on the one hand and authenticity on the other. However, the roles (i.e., friend, daughter/son) were positive. A similar misgiving pertains to a study by Cross, Gore, and Morris (2003).

Additional research (Smallenbroek, Zelenski, & Whelan, 2017) examined consistency between one's values and one's behavior in determining state authenticity. Values are desirable, important, and trans-situational goals serving as guiding life principles (Schwartz et al., 2001); by definition, then, values are positive. In Study 2, participants recalled a situation in which they exhibited benevolence (i.e., cared for a friend or family member) or failed to do so. Further, they recalled displaying or failing to display benevolence, such as

caring/failing to care for a friend or family member, either in a pleasant atmosphere (i.e., value-congruent context) or in an unpleasant atmosphere (i.e., value incongruent context). Study 3 followed a similar procedure, but instead featured the value of achievement: Participants described a time in which they demonstrated their talent (in either a pleasant or an unpleasant context) or failed to demonstrate it (again, in a pleasant or an unpleasant context), and then reported their state authenticity. Across studies, behaviors that aligned with the values of benevolence or achievement promoted state authenticity, regardless of the value (in)congruency of the context. This finding reinforces the view that state authenticity is, at least partially, fostered by self-positivity.

Research on psychological needs is also relevant to this view. Needs are conceptually similar to values, as they can be considered high-priority values (Kasser, 2002). As such, needs are also regarded as positive goals. SDT posits that satisfaction of the needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness promotes state authenticity. The Smallenbroek et al. (2017, Study 3) findings suggested that satisfaction of the need for competence (i.e., achievement) boosts state authenticity. Thomaes, Sedikides, Van den Bos, Hutteman, and Reijntjes (2017) tested whether satisfaction of all SDT needs is associated with, or leads to, higher state authenticity in samples of adolescents. In an experience sampling study (Study 2), daily satisfaction of all needs was associated with greater state authenticity. In an experiment (Study 3), however, manipulated need satisfaction (via activation of concomitant experiences; Pavey, Greitemeyer, & Sparks, 2011) led to great authenticity only for autonomy satisfaction. These findings are consonant, albeit partially, with the view that state authenticity is fostered by self-positivity.

This view received additional backing in research by Jongman-Sereno and Leary (2016). In Study 1, participants first listed either a positive or negative self-attribute, after which they described an event in which they manifested a behavior congruent with the listed self-attribute (i.e., a positive or negative event), and then rated the authenticity of that behavior. Behavioral congruency did not play a role in state authenticity, but behavioral positivity did. That is, participants considered behaviors that reflected positive (vs. negative) self-attributes as more authentic. In Study 2, participants imagined that they enacted positive

or negative behaviors that they authentically desired or did not desire to carry out.

Participants reported higher levels of state authenticity (i.e., rated their positive behaviors as more authentic than their negative ones) independent of congruency, that is, even when the behaviors were matched in terms of their desirability.

In all, self-positivity (i.e., having or acting on positive attributes, values, or needs) appears to be a precursor or even determinant of state authenticity. Other streams of evidence also link self-positivity to authenticity. For example, children believe that their positive (vs. negative) traits reflect more faithfully who they truly are (Harter, 2002), whereas adults believe that the authentic self is fundamentally or morally good (Newman, Bloom, & Knobe, 2014), that their authenticity has recently increased and will further increase in the near future (Seto & Schlegel, 2017, Study 1), and that they will be more authentic in the future compared to the past or present (Seto & Schlegel, 2017, Study 2). These beliefs in a positive authenticity trajectory are similar to beliefs in the progression of personally important traits (Wilson & Ross, 2001), reflecting the motive for self-enhancement (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). Further, inauthenticity can be caused by self-threat (e.g., undermining of one's belief in free will; Seto & Hicks, 2016), is linked to immorality (e.g., lying, stealing; Gino, Kouchaki, & Galinsky, 2015), and leads to unethical behavior (e.g., cheating; Gino, Norton, & Ariely, 2010).

Self-Congruency

Yet, some of the abovementioned research also support the idea that congruency matters, at least to some extent. Study 2 of Jongman-Sereno and Leary (2016) indicated that participants took into consideration the self-congruency of their behavior (i.e., the match between behavioral valence and behavioral desirability), when gauging their state authenticity. The construct of self-concept consistency, albeit different from consistency between one's self-views and one's behavior, is also relevant. Self-concept consistency is defined in terms of self-perceived overlap across aspects of one's life (Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993). For example, an individual who views herself similarly (in terms of goals, motives, or traits) across social contexts, will have a relatively high degree of self-concept consistency. Self-consistency has been found to correlate with state authenticity

(Kraus, Chen, & Keltner, 2011), although the valence of self-views was not assessed. The same reservation applies to research by Sheldon et al. (2012).

Emotions

Emotions or affective states may be another set of precursors or determinants of state authenticity. For starters, stronger positive affect and weaker negative affect are correlated with higher levels of state authenticity (Heppner et al., 2008; Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013, Study 3; Turner & Billings, 1991). More to the point, in research by Bargh et al. (2002), participants who expected to interact face-to-face (vs. over the internet) with a stranger reported lower state authenticity (i.e., were less able to express the qualities of their true self), presumably due to evaluation apprehension, a negative state. Also, in research by English and John (2013), participants who engaged in emotional suppression (i.e., inhibition of an emotion's facial, gestural, or verbal expression following its elicitation; Gross, 1998) reported lower authenticity, although, in an experience sampling study by Le and Impett (2013), emotional suppression during relational sacrifice conducted to higher authenticity among interdependent partners. Further, in research by Smallenbroek et al. (2017, Studies 2 and 3), the unpleasant (vs. pleasant) context reduced state authenticity.

Lenton, Slabu, Sedikides, and Power (2013) tested directly the possibility that affect influences state authenticity by inducing a happy (vs. neutral or sad) mood in participants. Experiment 1 employed an explicit mood induction including movie clips (Rottenberg, Ray, & Gross, 2007), as did Experiment 2 which used music (Westerman, Spies, Stahl, & Hesse, 1996), whereas Experiment 3 induced mood implicitly through the facial feedback paradigm (Strack, Martin, & Stepper, 1988). Lenton, Slabu, et al. assessed authenticity in two ways. First, they used a single-item pictorial measure, the Real-Self Overlap Scale (inspired by Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), which gauges the extent to which participants momentarily feel close to their true self. Second, they used a state version of the Authentic Personality Scale (A. M. Wood et al., 2008), the primary adaptation being that each of the 12 items was preceded by the stem "right now." Across experiments, participants reported higher levels of state authenticity when in a positive than negative (and neutral) mood: The effect was small but consistent. The authors interpreted these results in terms of a "mood as an information"

account (e.g., “how do I feel about it?”—Schwarz & Clore, 1988). That is, participants used their mood as an informational source to judge their authenticity (e.g., “I feel good, therefore I must be authentic”). In fact, the authors ruled out several alternative explanations that would directly implicate the self-concept, such as the mood-induced accessibility of positive self-conceptions (Sedikides, 1992, 1995). To be exact, the relation between mood and authenticity was not accounted for by the manipulation increasing the salience of a mood-consistent self-concept, by mood increasing the accessibility of the self-concept, by mood leading to rises in public or private self-consciousness, or by a conceptual confound between state self-esteem and authenticity.

A relevant other emotion is nostalgia; a sentimental longing for one’s personal past. Nostalgia is an ambivalent, but predominantly positive, and self-conscious emotion (Sedikides, Wildschut, et al., 2015; Van Tilburg, Wildschut, & Sedikides, 2017). Stephan, Sedikides, and Wildschut (2012, Study 2) manipulated nostalgia, such that half of participants pondered a nostalgic event from their lives, whereas the other half pondered an ordinary event from their lives. Nostalgic participants reported higher state authenticity than controls. The nostalgic event seemed to have captured their real self more so than an ordinary event. Nostalgia, however, also increased positive affect, compared to control. Yet, positive affect did not mediate nostalgia’s effect on state authenticity (the correlation between positive affect and nostalgia was $r = .041, p = .80$), a finding that is inconsistent with the results of Lenton, Slabu, et al. (2013). Finally, Baldwin, Biernat, and Landau (2015, Study 3) found that nostalgia (vs. control) increased the accessibility of the intrinsic self-concept (i.e., the person one truly is), but not the accessibility of the mundane or everyday self-concept.

State Authenticity and Psychological Health

State authenticity confers psychological health benefits. As we mentioned above, state authenticity is associated with stronger positive affect and weaker negative affect (Heppner et al., 2008; Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013, Study 3; Turner & Billings, 1991), as well as with higher state self-esteem (Heppner et al., 2008; Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013; Lenton et al., 2016). Also, state authenticity mediates the influence of need satisfaction (autonomy, in particular) on increased positive affect and decreased negative affect (Thomaes et al., 2017,

Study 3). In a similar vein, state authenticity mediates the effect of sense of power (i.e., imagining a situation where one controlled [vs. did not control] interpersonal outcomes) on subjective well-being, that is, higher satisfaction with life, elevated positive affect, and deflated negative affect (Kifer, Heller, Qi, Perunovic, & Galinsky, 2013, Study 2a). In contrast, state inauthenticity explains the perilous effects of emotional suppression on social functioning (i.e., decreased relationship satisfaction and social support; English & John, 2013), and it has psychological health costs for employee well-being, as the emotional labor literature illustrates (Grandey & Melloy, 2017), while obstructing the expression of divergent values and perspectives, as the facades of conformity literature indicates (Hewlin, 2003). Indeed, by fostering a climate that values and encourages authenticity in the workplace, one can reduce employee burnout accumulated by emotional labor (Grandey, Goo, Groth, & Goodwin, 2012) or emotional exhaustion (Hewlin, 2009).

Importantly, research has further established a causal relation between state authenticity and psychological health. Schlegel et al. (2009, Study 3) induced authenticity by priming experimental-group participants with concepts reflecting their true (i.e., inner) selves, and control-group participants with concepts reflecting their actual (i.e., public) selves. The primes were based on pretesting. Participants in the experimental (vs. control) group reported higher meaning in life. In a follow-up study, mentioned previously, Schlegel et al. (2009, Study 5) activated the true self (with positive or negative primes) and the actual self (also with positive or negative primes). Activation of the true self (and the positive actual self) increased meaning in life, positive affect, and self-esteem, whereas it decreased negative affect. Finally, Thomaes et al. (2017, Study 4) manipulated (in)authenticity by asking adolescents to write about “a particular incident in which you could [not] be true to yourself, and in which you experienced yourself as [not] behaving in accord with how you really are inside” (p. 1051), and then to relive the event, and compose a brief description of it expressing how they felt during it. Participants in the state authenticity (vs. inauthenticity) condition reported more positive affect, less negative affect, and higher subjective well-being. Note that inductions of state authenticity may help improve psychosocial functioning in

clinical populations, one example being the reduction of social impairments among persons diagnosed with social anxiety disorder (Plasencia, Taylor, & Alden, 2016).

Epilogue

Authenticity is a popular concept in modern culture, with many people believing in its benefits, striving to achieve it, or claiming to have done so (Rosenbloom, 2011). A Google search for the term “authenticity” that produced 87,500,000 results (May 17, 2018) is consistent with this claim, as a burgeoning self-help and popular psychology literature.

What We Know So Far

Our program of research demonstrates the importance of discriminating state from trait authenticity. It also offered profitable ways to assess state authenticity, such as the Real-Self Overlap Scale (after Aron et al., 1992) and adaptation of the Authentic Personality Scale (A. M. Wood et al., 2008). More importantly, our research program mapped out the phenomenology of state authenticity (i.e., the subjective sense of being the real self). State authenticity emerged as a prevalent and frequent experience, as nine out of 10 people report that they have experienced it. It also emerged as a desirable experience, with most people reporting strong motivation to attain it (see also: Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Kim, Seto, Christy, & Hicks, 2016). For the most part, state authenticity narratives (as judged both by participants and independent coders) contained references to familiar persons, events, or places, hanging out with close others, having fun or being amused, and succeeding at the task on hand. In addition, both retrospective reports and experience sampling methodologies indicated that state authenticity chiefly comprises the presence of authentic living and the absence of self-alienation, whereas the experience sampling methodology additionally showed that state authenticity involves the acceptance (rather than rejection) of external influence, which probably reflects autonomous deference to others. For the most part, state inauthenticity narratives (again, as judged by participants and independent coders), contained references to failures to attain own or others’ standards, social isolation, or coping with difficulty. Further, state authenticity narratives entailed mostly positive, low arousal emotions (e.g., contentment, relaxation, pride), whereas state inauthenticity narratives entailed mostly

negative, high (e.g., anxiety, anger) but also low arousal emotions (e.g., sadness, disappointment).

State authenticity, in both narratives and retrospective/experience sampling reports, was associated with more positive and less negative affect, higher self-esteem, decreased public and private self-consciousness, and flow (experience sampling reports only), while depicting a more idealistic portrayal of the self (i.e., higher real-ideal self overlap). Moreover, state authenticity, in narratives and retrospective reports, was associated—to a varying degree—with satisfaction of most of the 10 basic needs (especially the needs for autonomy, self-esteem, and pleasure), with a frequent exception being money/luxury; however, in experience sampling reports that pitted the needs against each other, autonomy, meaning in life, and pleasure emerged as being especially relevant. The above findings largely held across Eastern (China, India, Singapore) and Western (USA) culture. Importantly, state authenticity, as a phenomenon, is relatively independent of trait authenticity in cross-cultural context.

We argued in the beginning of this article that the fledgling state authenticity literature is plagued by inconsistencies. Our inductive approach contributes to the resolution of those inconsistencies. *First*, social settings conduce to, rather than hinder, state authenticity (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013). *Second*, state authenticity was associated with lower (not higher) private self-consciousness (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013). *Third*, the link between concordance of one's values, goals, or attributes and authenticity was intricate. In static (or cross-sectional) assessments, we found that failing to meet one's standards was associated with inauthenticity (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013). However, in daily (or in situ) assessments, we found that acceptance (rather than rejection) of external influence tended to be positively associated with state authenticity (Lenton et al., 2016). We concluded that fit between one's goals or values and situations is most likely to yield state authenticity (Schmader & Sedikides, 2017). *Fourth*, state authenticity is primarily linked to low arousal positive emotions (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013). *Finally*, the results concerning state authenticity and the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness SDT needs were only partially consistent with SDT. Need dissatisfaction appeared to precipitate state inauthenticity, but

need satisfaction was not necessarily related positively to state authenticity (Slabu et al., 2014). Further, although daily need satisfaction was positively linked to state authenticity, experimentally-induced need satisfaction elevated state authenticity only for autonomy (Thomaes et al., 2017).

Challenges

The field of research on state (in)authenticity is relatively young, and many issues remain unresolved. One such issue is definitional. How accurate are “most me” narratives? To what extent are they colored by aspirations (i.e., self-ideals) or positive illusions (Gregg, Sedikides, & Gebauer, 2011; Fleeson & Wilt, 2010)? If aspirations and positive illusions are part of, or can influence, the self-concept (Alicke & Sedikides, 2011), then might “most me” narratives also be partly illusory? This begs the questions of whether accuracy is necessary for the experience of authenticity to arise. We would not think so, based on findings pointing to the role of self-positivity as a partial precursor or determinant of state authenticity (see also Fleeson & Wilt, 2010). Accordingly, a subjective belief in the true self, even if erroneous, may suffice for the correlates or consequences of state authenticity to be observed. Thus, we may have stumbled upon the apparent paradox that the authentic self does not necessarily reflect a true self.

Further research is needed to identify additional precursors or determinants of state authenticity. Some of our findings (Lenton et al., 2016) raise the possibility that the presence of close others is a potent elicitor of state authenticity, either because this presence is associated with positive, low arousal emotions (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013) or because it helps solidify (Wallace & Tice, 2012) or even sculpt positively (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999) the self. Indeed, supportive others are associated with higher levels of authenticity (Didonato & Krueger, 2010), whereas relational misunderstanding and conflict is linked to inauthenticity (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). On the other hand, the way in which one presents the self to a close other may elicit inauthenticity. For example, people who expend great self-presentational effort in interactions with close (vs. distant) others report lower relationship satisfaction (Gosnell, Britt, & McKibben, 2011), perhaps due partly to the inauthenticity they experience. More generally, research could address whether state

authenticity can have undesirable consequences, such as behavioral rigidity and performance decrements (Ibarra, 2015).

Intriguingly, the types of experience that trigger state authenticity and state inauthenticity may not be different sides of the same coin. In discussing the role of culture in state (in)authenticity (Slabu et al., 2014), we reported that although need satisfaction was not significantly associated with state authenticity (with the exception of the Chinese sample), need dissatisfaction was associated with higher inauthenticity across the cultures. This pattern suggests that authenticity and inauthenticity may have independent precursors or determinants. Relatedly, earlier in this article, we referred to an investigation of state authenticity by Lenton et al. (2014), who used latent class analysis, a tool for uncovering hidden data patterns, as it “aim(s) to uncover unobserved heterogeneity in a population and to find substantively meaningful groups [...] that are similar in their responses” (Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthén, 2007, p. 536). This analysis revealed two authenticity classes (labelled “everyday” and “extraordinary”), three inauthenticity classes (labelled “self-conscious,” “deflated,” and “extraordinary”), and a class manifesting synergy between authenticity and inauthenticity. These six classes were phenomenologically distinct in regards to negative affect, self-esteem, public and private self-consciousness. Cultural differences were observed as well: Members of more independent cultures were more likely to report experiences of extraordinary (in)authenticity than those of more interdependent cultures. In all, different experiential classes of (in)authenticity may be subject to different precursors or determinants.

Psychological needs deserve more systematic attention too. Our research produced partially inconsistent findings. Narrative analyses suggested that state authenticity satisfied all of 10 needs, save for money/luxury (Lenton, Bruder, et al., 2013), whereas an experience sampling study, which compelled participants to trade off different needs against one another, showed that state authenticity was most likely to meet autonomy, meaning for life, and pleasure needs (Lenton et al., 2016, Study 2). Our cultural exploration into needs also revealed some small, but interesting discrepancies (Slabu et al., 2014). Researchers will do

well to examine a wide array of psychological needs, across cultures, when assessing the needs-authenticity relation and to employ methods that can mitigate response sets.

State (in)authenticity has implications not only for the personal or individual level of analysis, but also for the group or collective level (cf. Sedikides, Gaertner, Luke, O'Mara, & Gebauer, 2013). Recently, Schmader and Sedikides (2017) proposed a theoretical model, the State Authenticity as Fit to the Environment (SAFE) model, according to which people seek out authenticity in pursuit of three types of person-environment fit, namely, self-concept fit, goal fit, and social fit. These types of fit are likely to foster state authenticity and motivate behavior. However, contextual social identities may interfere with each type of it, yielding state authenticity (and accompanying benefits) for some social groups but not others. According to the SAFE model, disadvantaged groups are less likely to be beneficiaries of fit pursuits than advantaged groups. Although the model needs to be empirically verified, it provides a road map for examining authenticity at different levels of analysis.

Lastly, developmental approaches to authenticity are scarce (Harter, 2002). Systematic research is needed on the origins and developmental experiences and manifestations of state (in)authenticity. This research could provide a window to such topics as when state (in)authenticity may first emerge, what their instigators and psychological health or behavioral consequences are across the life course, and whether state (in)authenticity is more prevalent and impactful in some developmental periods than others. For example, adolescents often experience relational inconsistency, or the sense that they adopt a different persona across contexts and relational roles (e.g., when interacting with parents vs. friends) (Harter, 2015). These experiences may well lead adolescents to experience state inauthenticity more frequently than do individuals of other ages. Furthermore, given that middle-age or older adults become more agreeable, emotionally stable, and assertive with age (Roberts, Wood, & Caspi, 2008), they may report different levels or types (Lenton et al., 2014) of authenticity experiences than younger adults. Indeed, this is what a recent developmental investigation revealed (Seto & Schlegel, 2017).

Coda

The construct of state (in)authenticity merits consideration independent of trait (in)authenticity. Our research aimed to validate this viewpoint by sketching out state authenticity's phenomenology, correlates, nomological network, cultural constraints, determinants, and psychological health implications. We hope that our findings prove generative for future theory and research.

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