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From Thought and Experience to Behavior and Interpersonal Relationships: A Multicomponent Conceptualization of Authenticity

MICHAEL H. KERNIS AND BRIAN M. GOLDMAN

We want our chocolate to be authentic ("made with real milk chocolate"). We want our pasta to be authentic ("authentic Italian recipe"). We want our leather to be authentic ("100% cowhide leather"). But, do we want our "selves" to be authentic? On the one hand, a vast literature documents people's willingness to profess opinions, modulate their emotional expressions, and tailor their behaviors to audiences, seemingly with little regard for the truth (Schlenker, 2002). The more skillful the portrayal, the more interpersonally successful the messenger is said to be (Snyder, 1987). Those most skillful at strategic fabrications of the truth are likely to be revered as television or film celebrities, or perhaps reviled as con or scam artists. On the other hand, many philosophers and psychologists place great value on acting in accord with one's true inclinations and place this type of congruence at the core of an individual's well-being and interpersonal functioning (Rogers, 1961). From this perspective, actions that do not resonate with one's true self, no matter how skillfully they are performed, will undermine one's well-being and erode one's interpersonal relationships over time. How can we account for these seemingly disparate views? We believe that one factor that may contribute to ambivalence about the value of authenticity is that it has both costs and benefits. Depending upon one's vantage point, the costs may appear to outweigh the benefits, or vice versa.

In this chapter we articulate some of these costs and benefits within a multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity that incorporates (a) self-awareness and understanding, (b) the processing of self-relevant evaluative information, (c) behavior, and (d) relationship functioning. We argue that each component of authenticity comes with costs and benefits and is associated with its own barriers to fruition. We begin by presenting our conceptualization (see also Goldman

0-415-93379-X/04/$0.00+$1.50
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& Kernis, 2002; Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, in press) and then report data obtained from several recent studies that focus on the relationship of authenticity to various aspects of psychological and interpersonal functioning. These data suggest that, on average, authentic functioning confers many benefits toward individuals' psychological and interpersonal well-being. Following this, we consider the psychological and interpersonal costs and benefits associated with each component of authenticity and some factors that may inhibit authenticity. We close by examining the relationship between self-esteem and authenticity.

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A MULTICOMPONENT CONCEPTUALIZATION OF AUTHENTICITY

Most perspectives of authenticity stress the extent to which one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors reflect one's true or core self (for a brief history of these perspectives, see Kernis & Goldman, in press). Accordingly, we (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, in press) define authenticity as the unobstructed operation of one's true or core self in one's daily enterprise. Rather than viewing this as a single unitary process, however, we assert that authenticity can be broken down into four discriminable components. Specifically, we suggest that authenticity involves *awareness*, *unbiased processing*, *behavior*, and *relational orientation*. As we describe in this chapter, each of these components focuses on an aspect of authenticity that, while related to each of the others, can operate independently.

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Awareness

The awareness component refers to possessing, and being motivated to increase, one's knowledge of and trust in one's motives, feelings, desires, and self-relevant cognitions. It includes, for example, understanding one's likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses, goals and aspirations, dispositional characteristics, and emotional states. We believe that having awareness of one's true self promotes the integration of one's inherent polarities into a coherent multifaceted self-representation. As Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951) suggested, people are not either masculine or feminine, either introverted or extroverted, either emotional or stoic, and so forth. Instead, although one aspect of these dualities (*figure*) generally predominates over the other (*ground*), individuals invariably possess both aspects to some degree. As people function with greater authenticity, they become more aware of the fact that they possess these multifaceted self-aspects and they strive to integrate them into a cohesive self-structure.

This view differs from the prevailing conceptualization of self-concept *clarity* (Campbell, 1990; Campbell et al., 1996) that holds that endorsing as self-descriptive adjectives that reflect both endpoints of bipolar trait dimensions (e.g., introversion, extraversion) reflects self-concept *confusion*. An assumption underlying this view of confusion, to which we take exception, is that these so-called endpoint traits are in fact mutually exclusive. In fact, data we collected (Kernis, Whitaker,

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& Davies, 1997) indicate that laypeople view many of the trait pairs used by Campbell in her research as not mutually exclusive. In this research, we presented undergraduate respondents with each trait pair and asked, "If a person is *X*, to what extent can that person also be *Y*?" Ratings were made on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). Mean ratings for the pairs ranged from a low of 2.8 to a high of 5.8.[1] Although multiple interpretations of these data admittedly are viable, they suggest to us that laypeople have a view of self-characteristics that is multifaceted rather than simple (see also Sande, Goethals, & Radloff, 1988). One focus of future research should be to develop techniques that offer sophisticated assessments of the *figure* and *ground* in personality and relate them to authenticity. Later in this chapter, we present our initial attempt to do so, utilizing Paulhus and Martin's (1988) operationalization of the construct of functional flexibility.

Unbiased Processing

The second component of authenticity involves the unbiased processing of self-relevant information. This component involves objectivity with respect to one's positive and negative self-aspects, emotions, and other internal experiences, information, and private knowledge. In addition, it involves not denying, distorting, or exaggerating externally based evaluative information. In short, unbiased processing reflects the relative absence of interpretive distortions (e.g., defensiveness and self-aggrandizement) in the processing of self-relevant information. It follows, then, that variables conceptually related to authenticity would predict the relative absence of self-serving biases and illusions. In fact, research has demonstrated that dispositionally autonomous and self-determining individuals (whom we expect to be relatively high in authenticity) do not engage in self-serving biases following success or failure (Knee & Zuckerman, 1996).

Our characterization of the unbiased-processing component of authenticity is consistent with recent conceptualizations of ego-defense mechanisms. Interest in defense mechanisms has been bolstered by findings linking them to a wide range of important outcomes. For example, Vaillant's longitudinal research has revealed that adaptive defense mechanism styles involving minimal reality distortions predict psychological and physical well-being many years into the future (see, e.g., Vaillant, 1992). In contrast, maladaptive or immature defenses, involving considerable reality distortion and/or failure to acknowledge and resolve distressing emotions, predict psychological and interpersonal difficulties, including poor marital adjustment (Ungerer, Waters, Barnett, & Dolby, 1997).

Behavior

The third component of authenticity involves behaving in accord with one's values, preferences, and needs as opposed to acting "falsely" merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishments. This component can be thought of as the behavioral output of the awareness and unbiased-processing components. We acknowledge that instances exist in which the unadulterated expression of one's

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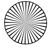
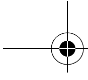
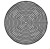
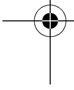
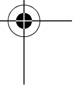
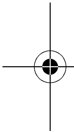
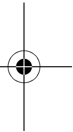


true self may result in severe social sanctions. In such instances, we expect authenticity to reflect sensitivity to the fit (or lack thereof) between one's true self and the dictates of the environment, and a heightened awareness of the potential implications of one's behavioral choices. In contrast, blind obedience to environmental forces typically reflects the absence of authenticity (cf. Deci & Ryan, 2000). Importantly, authenticity is reflected not in a compulsion to be one's true self but rather in the free and natural expression of core feelings, motives, and inclinations. When this expression stands at odds with immediate environmental contingencies, we expect that authenticity will be reflected in short-term conflict. How this conflict is resolved can have considerable implications for one's felt integrity and authenticity. This line of reasoning implies that it is not sufficient to focus exclusively on whether authenticity is or is not reflected in one's actions per se. Instead, it is important to focus also on the manner in which processes associated with the other authenticity components inform one's behavioral selection. For example, when a person reacts to pressure by acting in accord with prevailing social norms that stand in contrast with his or her true self, authenticity may still be operating at the awareness and processing levels. Understanding how people resolve these sorts of conflicts is likely to provide important keys to their functioning and well-being. In any event, sometimes the needs and values of the self are incompatible with those of the larger society (e.g., when an artist focuses on a highly controversial subject matter). We believe that in these instances, authenticity may be reflected in awareness of one's needs and motives and an unbiased assessment of relevant evaluative information. Sometimes the resulting behavior may also reflect authenticity, but sometimes it may not (as when the aforementioned artist "sells out"). Consequently, although the awareness, unbiased processing, and behavior components of authenticity are related to each other, they clearly are separable. We return to this issue shortly.

Relational Orientation

The fourth component of authenticity is relational in nature, in that it involves valuing and striving for openness and truthfulness in one's close relationships. Relational authenticity involves endorsing the importance of close others seeing the "real" you and relating to them in ways that facilitate their being able to do so. Authentic relationships involve a reciprocal process of self-disclosure and the development of mutual intimacy and trust (Reis & Patrick, 1996). In essence, relational authenticity means being genuine rather than fake in one's relationships with close others. Overall, we expect that people high in relational authenticity would be involved in healthier and more satisfying relationships than people low in relational authenticity. Later in the chapter, we report data linking relational authenticity to more secure and less insecure attachment styles.

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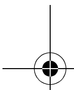
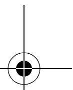
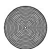

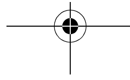
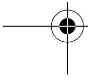
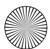

More on the Separateness of These Components

We view these multiple components of authenticity as related to, but separable from, each other. For instance, situations invariably exist in which environmental pressures may inhibit the expression of one's true self (e.g., a person may not express his true opinion to a close friend who is highly depressed). Although behavioral (and perhaps relational) authenticity may be thwarted in such instances, authenticity at the levels of awareness and unbiased processing may be operative. Specifically, awareness may involve active attempts to resolve conflicting motives and desires involved in knowing one's true opinion and the implications expressing it may have for one's friendship and the well-being of one's friend. Unbiased processing may involve acknowledgment of the fragile underpinnings of one's attitude. In contrast, inauthenticity may involve actively ignoring or denying one's opinion or emphasizing the superiority of one's judgmental abilities. In short, it is possible for a person to be operating authentically at some levels but not at others. Therefore, it is important to examine the processes associated with each component of authenticity (for a more extended discussion of this issue, see Kernis, 2003).

In fact, each of these aspects of authenticity has received some attention in the past, although not usually with explicit reference to the construct of authenticity. For example, aspects of the awareness component have been studied in research on public and private self-consciousness (e.g., Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). Some implications of biased processing of self-relevant information have been examined in research on self-serving biases (e.g., Blaine & Crocker, 1993). Aspects of behavioral authenticity have been examined in research on personality–behavior and attitude–behavior consistency (Koestner, Zuckerman, & Bernieri, 19xx; Snyder, 1987). Finally, aspects of relational authenticity have been studied in research on attachment processes and self-disclosure (Mikiluncer & Shaver, in press). Readers of this chapter undoubtedly will recognize aspects of our theory in this prior work. Importantly, however, our theory has the capacity to integrate these various strands of research to explicate the processes associated with the construct of authenticity in a way not done before.

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OPERATIONALIZING INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS OF AUTHENTICITY

At the outset, we acknowledge the inherent difficulty in assessing individual differences in authenticity. One problem is that people are unlikely to admit to being inauthentic (Weinberger, 2003). Recognizing this, we do not ask them to directly do so ("To what extent do you think you are not authentic in your relationships with important others?"). Instead, we ask people to respond to questions reflecting the degree to which (a) they possess self-knowledge and their motivation to achieve it (awareness), (b) they have difficulty dealing with accurate or negative self-relevant information (unbiased processing), (c) their behavior reflects their own needs and desires (behavior), and (d) they value and engage in self-expression within their close relationships (relational orientation). Questions similar to these

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have previously been incorporated into a number of important self-report measures with great success, including the Self-Consciousness Scale (Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975), and the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1987). Therefore, we have every reason to believe that we can develop a self-report measure of authenticity that, although not perfect, will yield interesting and important findings. Of course, we will continually assess its psychometric properties. For example, we will examine whether the responses our participants give reflect response biases such as social desirability. Moreover, we plan to introduce behavioral and behavioroid measures to demonstrate the scale's validity, as one of the challenges will be to accumulate findings that cannot be interpreted as merely reflecting response biases and the like.

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Recognizing the difficulties inherent in studying authenticity, we have to start somewhere if we are to examine this important phenomenon empirically. Toward that end, for the last several years we have worked on a self-report measure of authenticity (the Authenticity Inventory; AI) and have now completed several iterations of it. In addition, we have collected construct and predictive validity data by correlating this measure with a range of theoretically relevant variables. The first hypothesis we tested was that authenticity scores would relate positively to other general indices of psychological health, well-being, and life satisfaction. Demonstrating these links would provide support for the contention that, in general, authentic functioning is beneficial.

Authenticity, Psychological Health, and Well-Being

We developed the AI to measure each of the four components of authenticity. The first version of the inventory (AI Version 1; Goldman & Kernis, 2001) contained a 15-item awareness subscale (α = .74); a 10-item unbiased processing subscale (α = .51); a 13-item behavior subscale (α = .73); and a 6-item relational orientation subscale (α = .32). The total scale thus contained 44 items (α = .83). Subsequent revisions of the scale have produced different subscale compositions and accompanying changes in their psychometric properties. We discuss these as warranted throughout the chapter. In Table 2.1 we present a brief description of each authenticity component and sample items from the latest version of the AI (Version 2) used in studies discussed in this chapter.

In our first empirical venture using the AI (Version 1; Goldman & Kernis, 2002) we examined the relations between authenticity and various aspects of psychological well-being. The aspects of well-being we included were self-esteem level, contingent self-esteem (feelings of self-worth that are dependent upon the achievement of specific outcomes or evaluations, a form of fragile self-esteem; Deci & Ryan, 1995; Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Paradise, 2002), daily positive and negative affect, and life satisfaction. We expected that greater authenticity would relate to more favorable psychological health and subjective well-being.

Seventy-nine male and female introductory psychology students participated in exchange for credit toward fulfillment of a course research requirement (other options for completing the requirement were available). Participants completed the following measures: (a) Rosenberg's (1965) Self-esteem Scale, a well-validated

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TABLE 2.1. Authenticity Components and Sample Items

Authenticity component	Description	Sample items
Awareness	Awareness and knowledge of, and trust in, one's motives, feelings, desires, and self-relevant cognitions Includes awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, dominant–recessive aspects of personality, powerful emotions, and their roles in behavior	I actively strive to understand who I truly am. I am generally aware of times when my needs and/or motives are in conflict with one another.
Unbiased processing	Minimal, if any, denial, distortion, exaggeration, or ignoring of private knowledge, internal experiences, and externally based self-evaluative information Objectivity and acceptance with respect to one's strengths and weaknesses	I generally am capable of objectively considering my limitations and shortcomings. I do not exaggerate my strengths to myself (reverse scored).
Behavior	Actions congruent with one's values, preferences, and needs Not acting merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishments	I find that my behavior typically expresses my values. I frequently pretend to enjoy something when in actuality I really don't (reverse scored).
Relational orientation	Values and makes efforts to achieve openness and truthfulness in close relationships Important for close others to see "the real you," those deep, dark, or potentially shadowy self-aspects that are not routinely discussed Relational authenticity means being genuine and not "fake" in one's relationships with others	My openness and honesty in close relationships are extremely important to me. I want close others to understand the real me rather than the public persona or "image."

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measure of global self-esteem level; (b) Contingent Self-esteem Scale (CSS; Kernis & Paradise, 2003), a 15-item scale that assesses the extent to which individuals' self-worth depends upon meeting expectations, matching standards, or achieving specific outcomes or evaluations; (c) Life Satisfaction (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), a 7-item measure that assesses how satisfied individuals feel about their lives in general over the past few days; and (d) Positive Affect/Negative Affect Scale (Brunstein, 1993), a 20-item measure that assesses experiences of positive and negative affect over a recent few days. We computed a net negative affect index for the last measure by summing positive affect scores and subtracting that sum from the sum of negative affect scores.

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We computed zero-order correlations between each of the measures of well-being, total AI scores, and subscale AI scores. Importantly, total AI scores significantly related to each of the psychological well-being measures. Specifically, greater self-reported authenticity related to higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction and to less contingent self-esteem and net negative affect.

In terms of the individual subscales, the awareness subscale related to three of the four well-being measures. Specifically, greater self-reported awareness related to higher life satisfaction and self-esteem and to lower net negative affect. The unbiased-processing subscale related only to life satisfaction, such that greater unbiased processing related to greater life satisfaction. The behavior subscale related to two well-being measures; specifically, greater behavioral authenticity related to higher levels of self-esteem and to less contingent self-esteem. Finally, the relational orientation subscale related to two well-being measures; specifically, greater relational authenticity related to higher life satisfaction and to less net negative affect. We present the relevant correlations in Table 2.2.

The findings from this study offer initial support for our conceptualization and assessment of multiple components of authenticity. To reiterate, total authenticity scale scores positively related to self-esteem level and life satisfaction but negatively related to contingent self-esteem and net negative affect. Importantly, these findings suggest that authenticity is related to feelings of self-worth that not only are more positive but that are more secure as well (i.e., less contingent on specific outcomes). Thus, authenticity correlates with markers of *optimal* self-esteem (i.e., high self-esteem that is not contingent; Kernis, 2003); we return to this issue in a later section. Our findings also indicated that greater self-reported authenticity related inversely to the frequency of experiencing unpleasant emotions (i.e., less net negative affect), as well as positively to more global appraisals of individuals' perceived life satisfaction. Taken as a whole, these findings provide initial empirical support for the contention that authenticity relates to healthy psychological functioning and positive subjective well-being.

TABLE 2.2. Zero-Order Correlations of Authenticity Inventory With Psychological Well-Being Measures

Psychological well-being measures	Total (composite)	Awareness	Unbiased processing	Behavior	Relational orientation
Life satisfaction	.40**	.43**	.23*	.15	.41**
Self-esteem	.33**	.28*	.15	.33**	.18
Contingent self-esteem	–.27*	–.16	–.17	–.31**	–.14
Net negative affect	–.31**	–.36**	–.17	–.05	–.36**

Note: Reprinted from Goldman and Kernis (2002) with permission.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

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Two additional findings stand out with respect to the psychometric properties of the scale (AI Version 1) itself—namely, the unacceptably low internal reliabilities obtained for the unbiased processing and relational orientation subscales. We are continuing to rectify these shortcomings through item revisions. In fact, in the next scale version (AI Version 2), items pertaining to relational orientation were rewritten so that they would explicitly refer to relationships with close others rather than to others in general. This change alone produced more than a 100% increase in the obtained alpha coefficient (α = .66). Item revisions to the unbiased-processing subscale yielded an alpha of .60. Although these values reflect substantial improvements, additional room for improvement remains.

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In our next study (Goldman, Kernis, Piasecki, Herrmann, & Foster, 2003), we sought to flesh out the implications of authenticity for a variety of realms of psychological and social functioning. First, we focused on the relation between authenticity and global measures of psychological adjustment. Ryff (1989) presented a multifaceted conceptualization of psychological well-being that has six core components: *self-acceptance*, characterized by holding positive attitudes toward oneself; *positive relations with others*, characterized by the capacity for love, friendship, and identification with others; *autonomy*, characterized by qualities such as self-determination, independence, and regulation of behavior from within; *environmental mastery*, characterized by the ability to choose or create environments suitable to one's characteristics; *purpose in life*, characterized by beliefs that promote the sense that purpose and meaning to life do exist; and *personal growth*, characterized by continued development of one's potential and self-realization. Our findings indicated that scores on the awareness, behavioral, and relational orientation subscales correlated positively and significantly with scores on each of these subscales, with the lone exception of the correlation between behavioral authenticity and Ryff's self-acceptance subscale. In addition, scores on the unbiased-processing subscale correlated positively with autonomy and (marginally) with positive relations with others.

We also measured the hedonic aspects of psychological well-being—specifically, depressive symptoms (Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale; Radloff, 1977), positive and negative affectivity, and general life satisfaction. Awareness correlated positively with positive affectivity and life satisfaction (as did relational orientation) and inversely with negative affectivity (as did behavior) and depression. In addition, we replicated and extended several findings from Goldman and Kernis (2002). For example, the awareness, behavioral, and relational orientation subscales correlated positively with self-esteem level, and all the authenticity subscales negatively correlated with contingent self-esteem, again implying that optimal self-esteem and authenticity are linked.

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AUTHENTICITY AND HEALTHY INTERPERSONAL FUNCTIONING

To examine how authenticity relates to healthy interpersonal functioning, we (Goldman et al., 2003) also had participants complete the Bartholomew and

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Horowitz (1991) attachment measure consisting of 30 items that assess four distinct attachment styles: secure, fearful, dismissive, and preoccupied. Scores on the awareness and relational orientation subscales correlated positively with the secure attachment style and negatively with both the fearful (as did behavior) and preoccupied attachment styles but were unrelated to scores on the dismissive attachment subscale. Why no relationships emerged for the dismissive style is unclear. However, the significant findings that did emerge clearly link overall authenticity and some of its components to healthy interpersonal functioning.

AUTHENTICITY, FUNCTIONAL FLEXIBILITY, AND MINDFULNESS

Paulhus and Martin's (1988) concept of *functional flexibility* is relevant to the construct of *figure–ground* in personality and its relation to authenticity. Specifically, functional flexibility involves having confidence in one's ability to call into play multiple, perhaps contradictory, self-aspects in dealing with life situations. One who is high in functional flexibility believes that he or she would experience little anxiety or difficulty in calling forth these multiple selves, not avoid situations requiring their enactment, and would feel very capable of calling upon these multiple selves, presumably because they are well-defined and can be enacted with confidence. These aspects of multiple selves can be thought of as constituting figure-ground aspects of personality because the "selves" under consideration are arranged around the interpersonal circumplex (Wiggins, 1979). In this circumplex model, 16 interpersonal trait characteristics are arrayed around two orthogonal dimensions (in this case, dominance and warmth). Examples of trait pairs include ambitious–lazy, warm–cold, dominant–submissive, agreeable–quarrelsome, extroverted–introverted, and arrogant–assuming. For each item constituting the eight pairs, respondents indicate the extent to which "they are *capable* of being [insert trait] if the situation requires it," "it is *difficult* for them to behave in a [insert trait] manner," "how *anxious* they are when they behave in a [insert trait] manner," and "the extent to which they attempt to *avoid* situations that require them to behave in a [insert trait] manner." We created summary indexes of *capable*, *difficulty*, *anxiety*, and *avoidance* scores by summing responses to the 16 traits. The instructions, traits, and response stems for the functional flexibility task were taken from Paulhus and Martin (1988).

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In contrast, *situationality* involves the belief that one is not very capable of calling forth well-defined multiple self-aspects; moreover, this belief is accompanied by the sense that one's behaviors are not self-initiated but rather are "pulled out" by situational contexts absent personal control or endorsement. In short, situationality involves one's social behaviors being buffeted around rather haphazardly according to prevailing social winds. Following Paulhus and Martin (1988), to assess *situationality,* we summed the number of *it depends on the situation* responses to the question "Indicate whether each adjective accurately or inaccurately describes you using the following alternatives (*it depends on the situation*, *accurate*, *inaccurate*, *average*, *don't know*, and *don't understand word*). In Paulhus

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and Martin's (1998) research, functional flexibility was tied to a high sense of agency and other indices of adaptive psychological functioning. In contrast, situationality was marked by self-doubt and other manifestations of psychological difficulties. Thus, if grounded in functional flexibility, possessing a multifaceted self is based in strong self-beliefs, self-confidence, self-acceptance, and agency. Conversely, if grounded in situationality, possessing a multifaceted self is reflected in self-doubt, confusion, and conflict.

Kernis, Goldman, Piasecki, and Brunnell (2003) administered the Functional Flexibility Inventory (Paulhus & Martin, 1988) and the AI (Version 2) to a sample of 84 individuals. Total authenticity scale scores correlated positively with *capability*, and negatively with *difficulty*, *anxiety*, *avoidance*, and (marginally) *situationality* scores. The marginal relationship involving situationality may reflect a disconnect between its conceptualization and operationalization. Specifically, a number of assumptions have to be made to characterize a response of *it depends on the situation* as necessarily reflecting passive acceptance of situational dictates. Additional research is needed, therefore, to fully explicate the construct of situationality. Other data obtained by Goldman et al. (2003) indicate that total authenticity scores correlate negatively with self-monitoring (Snyder, 1987) and public self-consciousness (Fenigstein et al., 1975). In sum, although authenticity relates to greater capability and comfortableness enacting various interpersonal behaviors, it is not associated with heightened concern over one's public presentation or with behavioral plasticity reflective of heightened passive responsiveness to situational cues.

We (Kernis et al., 2003) also examined the relation between authenticity and mindfulness, which refers to a state of relaxed, nonevaluative awareness of one's immediate experience (Brown & Ryan, 2003). A number of studies have linked mindfulness with more positive immediate experiences (i.e., eating chocolate; LeBel & Dubé, 2001), as well as greater psychological health and well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Recently, Brown and Ryan developed the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale to measure individual differences in mindfulness. In a series of studies, high mindfulness related to higher psychological well-being and positive affect and to lower stress. Sample items, endorsement of which reflects low mindfulness, include: "I could be experiencing some emotion and not be conscious of it until some time later;" "I do jobs or tasks automatically, without being aware of what I am doing"; "I find myself listening to someone with one ear, doing something else at the same time." The capacity for mindfulness is an aspect of being fully functioning, and we therefore expected that it would be associated with greater authenticity. We found that it correlated significantly with total authenticity scores, as well as scores on each of the subscales.

Two issues deserve comment at this point. The first issue concerns the nature of the "self" that is authentic. We believe that it is multifaceted and complex, evergrowing and developing, yet possessing a core that contains one's basic psychological needs (e.g., autonomy, competence, meaning, self-determination), personality characteristics, relational schemas, and values. This core, albeit open to change, usually changes slowly and over the passage of time. Certain events

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(e.g., traumatic events), however, may be potent enough to instigate more immediate changes in one's core self.

The second issue involves the relative value of accurate versus flattering self-relevant information and the dynamics associated with seeking each type of information. We believe, as many have before us (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2001; Rogers, 1961), that people are oriented toward growing, developing, and increasing in complexity. Importantly, we believe that these processes are inherently geared toward obtaining accurate, not necessarily flattering, information (we discuss this in some detail shortly). An assumption underlying this perspective is that people often seek out self-relevant information when they are feeling good about themselves and confident in their capabilities. Precisely because of their inner strength, they are able to cope with and integrate into their "selves" potentially unflattering information. Of course, people also seek out self-knowledge when they are unsure about themselves and insecure about their abilities. Under these circumstances, we would expect people to shy away from accurate, negative information, and instead focus their efforts on positive, flattering information, even if it is not completely accurate. In essence, we believe that positive self-illusions generally are less healthy than are accurate self-realities (in contrast to Taylor & Brown, 1988), even though the former may confer short-term benefits by helping individuals cope with unpleasant emotions (Crocker, 2002). In the long run, possessing and portraying accurate self-knowledge is more beneficial than is possessing and portraying positive but false self-knowledge (e.g., Crocker, 2002; Robins & Beer, 2001). We consider this issue again the section on costs and benefits associated with unbiased processing.

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BENEFITS, COSTS, AND BARRIERS ASSOCIATED WITH EACH AUTHENTICITY COMPONENT

As noted at the beginning of the chapter, ambivalence over the benefits of authenticity exists. We believe that this is the case because authentic functioning is not always easy and it sometimes has costs that are consequential. The research reviewed so far empirically documents some of the benefits associated with authenticity. In this section, we focus on a conceptual explication of the benefits and costs associated with each authenticity component.

Awareness

A high awareness score signifies interest in, and knowledge of, one's internal states, including self-relevant cognition, affect, motives, goals, and so forth. As much literature on self-schemas has shown, these internalized structures, often activated as aspects of the *working self-concept* (Markus & Kunda, 1986), provide individuals with vital information that informs behavioral choices and reactions to evaluative information. Information in the form of *possible selves* (Markus & Nurius, 1986) provides temporally extended blueprints for goal-directed action. For example, individuals with the possible self of *academic* are likely to plan their activities

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around such things as working with a mentor, conducting research, taking classes, reading relevant material, and writing manuscripts for publication. In addition, quality of performance in these domains is likely to be of greater importance to these individuals than to individuals who have the possible self of landscaper or beautician. In essence, being in touch with oneself provides a wealth of information that helps individuals navigate through the many trials and tribulations associated with everyday life and with development.

What are the potential costs of such self-knowledge? First, it is the case that certain forms of self-knowledge may be painful. Knowing, for example, that one is not very socially skilled may be aversive for individuals who are at an age or in a context in which it is important for them to develop close interpersonal relationships. Second, experiencing powerful emotions per se may be unsettling and even threatening, particularly if they reflect unresolved conflict or if one is not well-versed in display rules. Third, the very act of self-reflection may activate unpleasant affect, depending upon the form it takes (Campbell et al., 1996). Fourth, possessing a multifaceted self-concept that affords awareness of a diverse set of possible selves may itself promote role strain (Thoits, 1986).

One of the premises underlying our conceptualization is that awareness of self is one component of healthy functioning. Awareness is really just a first step, however. Also important is that this awareness fosters self-integration and acceptance of self. An important issue, therefore, is how individuals attain self-knowledge in ways that foster integration and acceptance of self. A number of techniques are available, some of which stem from the Gestalt therapy framework developed by Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951). These techniques emphasize deliberately attending to aspects of self without evaluating their implications. A similar principle underlies the use of techniques or strategies designed to enhance individuals' mindfulness. Through these exercises, people can become aware of currently ignored or unexamined self-aspects with which they often are uncomfortable. Other techniques then can be applied to understand and resolve the basis of the uncomfortableness, thereby fostering self-integration and acceptance.

At many steps along the way toward authenticity, however, obstructions may exist (Kernis, 2003). For instance, blockages may occur in the awareness component, as people may not be attuned to their motives, feelings, and self-relevant cognitions. People low in private self-consciousness (i.e., low in chronic tendencies to focus on one's internal states and other internal self-aspects; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975) may be particularly susceptible to this type of blockage, as may repressors and people with low implicit self-esteem. As these variables suggest, low awareness may reflect a skills deficit (i.e., people low in private self-consciousness may not possess the skills needed to self-reflect in a nonruminative manner), or it may reflect self-protective motivational processes (i.e., repressors or people low in conscious or nonconscious self-esteem may be motivated to avoid what they anticipate will be aversive self-reflection).

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Unbiased Processing

Although related to the awareness component, the unbiased-processing component is more likely to involve the processing of new self-relevant information. This information is evaluative in nature, and it may pertain to performance outcomes, interpersonal interactions or feedback, or self-assessments of one's traits and characteristics. As much research has shown, many people are prone to selectively seek out or distort information so that it only reflects positively on the self and close others. For example, people routinely overemphasize their importance in social interactions and group products (Zuckerman, Kernis, Guarnera, Murphy, & Rapaport, 1983), inflate their contributions to positive outcomes, and minimize their contributions to negative outcomes (Zuckerman, 1979).

Currently, a controversy exists over whether these illusions contribute to healthy psychological functioning (Robins & Beer, 2001; Taylor & Brown, 1988). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address this controversy fully. However, we do want to note that we believe that often these distortions stem from insecurity rather then strength (Kernis, 2000). In support of this contention, research has shown that people who are highly autonomous and self-determining do not show such self-serving distortions (Knee & Zuckerman, 1996). In contrast, and as noted earlier, people who rely on defense mechanisms that involve major distortions of reality have relatively poor interpersonal and psychological outcomes throughout their lifetimes (Vaillant, 1992). As Crocker (2002) and others (e.g., Kernis, 2003; Robins & Beer, 2001) have argued, self-illusions may minimize negative affectivity in the short run and therefore may seem to be adaptive. However, this adaptiveness is itself an illusion, as it does not hold up over time and, in fact, may contribute to poorer outcomes in the end (as shown in Robins & Beer, 2001).

The major benefit of unbiased processing is that it contributes to an accurate sense of self. As we discussed earlier, this accuracy can then be utilized in behavioral choices that have either short- or long-term implications. Accuracy is valued the more one's outcomes depend upon it. Picking the right occupation, investing one's time in developing one's talents, and even asking another out on a date all benefit from accurate or unbiased processing of evaluative information. Conversely, engaging in biased processing may unwittingly limit one's options, as important self-knowledge may be ignored or distorted. As was the case for awareness, blockages to unbiased processing exist as well. These blockages may also reflect either skill deficits or motivational propensities. With respect to skills, people may not have the requisite defense mechanisms in their psychological repertoire. Motivationally, these blockages may be fueled by their short-term payoffs, such as minimizing unpleasant affect (Crocker, 2002). Simultaneously, however, they may close people off to opportunities to grow and develop in ways that will have long-term payoffs (Crocker, 2002). People who possess fragile self-esteem (defensive, contingent, or unstable self-esteem) may be particularly susceptible to a blockage of this authenticity component (Kernis, 2003).

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Behavior

Behaving authentically often takes courage because one's true proclivities may be in conflict with prevailing environmental dictates. This is most likely to be the case in environmental settings or with people who have strong evaluative or controlling tendencies (Deci & Ryan, 1995). As a good deal of research shows, behaving in ways that are at odds with one's true self merely to satisfy controlling pressures often has deleterious effects (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Neighbors, Larimer, Geisner, & Knee, in press). In contrast, behaving in ways that are authentic and self-determining promotes positive affect, well-being, and adjustment (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

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Assessing the costs and benefits of behavioral authenticity is complex. Adding to this complexity is the fact that when people conform to environmental contingencies they are not always behaving in ways that conflict with their true selves. People can, and often do, internalize social contingencies, such that they freely adopt them as self-guides (Ryan & Connell, 1989). In such cases, conflict is minimal or absent and people function authentically.

When people do not behave authentically, distinguishing behavioral authenticity from awareness and unbiased processing takes on greater importance. That is, a person's experience of not behaving authentically is likely to be very different depending on whether authenticity is operative at the other levels. Blind obedience to environmental dictates does not stimulate personal growth; instead, it often stifles it. In contrast, internal conflict among the authenticity components can provide a real impetus for reflection and development. In short, authenticity at the awareness and unbiased-processing levels can promote growth and deepen one's self-knowledge even when authentic behavior is inhibited.

Blockages to behavioral authenticity include variables that are associated with heightened sensitivity to the interpersonal implications of one's behaviors. Some blockages may reflect motivational processes (e.g., contingent and unstable self-esteem, fragile forms of self-esteem), whereas others may reflect the absence of skills (e.g., lack of assertiveness skills). Still others may reflect a particular culturally based value orientation (e.g., the view that disagreements are construed as rudeness can undermine integrity) or personality processes with genetic underpinnings (e.g., self-monitoring; Snyder, 1987).

Relational Orientation

Relational authenticity can provide the foundation for deep, intimate, and fulfilling social interactions and relationships. Consistent with this assertion, earlier we reported findings indicating that authenticity relates positively to secure attachment styles and negatively to insecure attachment styles (fearful and preoccupied, but not dismissive; Goldman et al., 2003). People who are high on relational authenticity want their intimates to know them deeply, and they place a premium on being genuine and not fake in their close relationships. Healthy personal relationships are a very strong predictor of happiness (Diener & Diener, 1995), and this is true across cultures. Thus, the benefits of relational authenticity are

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difficult to ignore. Conversely, the potential costs of confrontations over relational authenticity are many, including self- and partner defensiveness, overreactivity, and lack of intimacy. In turn, these costs contribute to shallow, unsatisfying relationships that are prone to dissolve over time or be continually fraught with problems and challenges (Kernis, Goldman, & Paradise, 2003).

One of the hallmarks of relational authenticity is the desire for partners to see one for "who one really is, warts and all." This desire to be "transparent" makes one potentially vulnerable if one's partner is not in harmony. Relational authenticity thus has some risks, because rather than sweeping differences under the rug, the relationally authentic person seeks to bring differences out into the open so that they can be resolved. For relational authenticity to bring about positive outcomes reliably, one's partner must also be invested in relational authenticity. If not, conflicts may remain unresolved and potentially fester, serving to undermine relationship quality and eventually bring about the relationship's destruction. Thus, relational authenticity also has its costs. As before, blockages to authenticity may occur at the relational stage, perhaps related to such motivational factors as low or fragile self-esteem, fear of rejection (Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998), or high public self-consciousness (Fenigstein et al., 1975) or to a skills deficit such as poor interpersonal skills.

Summary

Authenticity is not without potential costs. Accurate self-knowledge may be painful; acting in accord with one's true self may meet with disfavor; and opening oneself to an intimate may provide the grist for disappointment, scorn, or betrayal. These and other adverse consequences that sometimes are associated with authenticity are likely to undermine individuals' *hedonistic*, or subjective, well-being. In other words, authenticity may not always be pleasurable. Importantly, however, the benefits of authentic functioning to individuals' *eudaemonistic* well-being (i.e., the extent to which they are fully functioning; Ryan & Deci, 2000) are generally sufficient to offset these (often temporary) emotional setbacks. When functioning authentically, people are likely to think, feel, and behave in ways that promote the fulfillment of their needs and the degree to which they are fully functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Rogers, 1961). These considerations suggest that people sometimes are faced with choosing between experiencing pleasure (or avoiding displeasure) and maximizing the extent to which they are fully functioning. How they resolve this dilemma has enormous implications, both short- and long-term.

AUTHENTICITY AND SELF-ESTEEM

The extent to which people function authentically has considerable implications for their self-esteem, and vice versa. Although research has shown that low self-esteem relates to low authenticity (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Goldman et al., 2003), we believe that authenticity and high self-esteem are also related in interesting ways. Does high self-esteem invariably relate to greater overall authenticity,

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or to the individual components of awareness, unbiased processing, behavior, or relational orientation? In this regard, we revisit some relevant findings that we reported earlier. At the outset, however, we want to emphasize that we see the question as far more complex than "Is high self-esteem associated with greater authenticity than low self-esteem?" The reason for this complexity is that high self-esteem has multiple forms, some more closely related to psychological health and well-being (especially eudaemonistic) than are others (Kernis, 2003; Paradise & Kernis, 2002). Consequently, we believe that authenticity will relate more strongly to some forms of high self-esteem than to others.

Some forms of high self-esteem reflect *secure* high self-esteem, whereas other forms reflect *fragile* high self-esteem (Kernis, 2003). Specifically, *secure* high self-esteem involves the following:

- Feeling worthwhile and valuable
- Liking and being satisfied with oneself
- Accepting weaknesses
- Being built upon a solid foundation
- Not requiring continual validation or promotion

In contrast, *fragile* high self-esteem involves the following:

- Feeling very proud and superior to others
- Not liking to see weaknesses in oneself, or for others to see them
- Having exaggerated tendencies to defend against possible threats to self-worth
- Having a strong tendency to engage in self-promoting activities

Existing theory and literature provide four ways to distinguish between secure and fragile forms of high self-esteem. We list the markers reflecting these distinctions in Table 2.3.

Each of these forms has been discussed extensively elsewhere, along with supporting evidence (Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Paradise, 2002), so we only briefly discuss them here. *Unstable* (fragile) self-esteem reflects substantial short-term fluctuations in contextually based immediate feelings of self-worth, whereas *stable* (secure) self-esteem reflects minimal short-term fluctuations. *Contingent* (fragile) self-esteem is dependent upon achieving specific outcomes, meeting expectations,

TABLE 2.3. Markers of Secure and Fragile High Self-Esteem

Fragile High	Secure High
Unstable	Stable
Contingent	True
Low implicit	High implicit
Defensive	Genuine

Note: Kernis (2003).

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matching standards, and so forth, whereas *true* (secure) self-esteem is secure self-worth that arises naturally from satisfaction of basic psychological needs and is not in need of continual validation. A match between individual's *implicit* (nonconscious) and *explicit* (conscious) positive feelings of self-worth reflects secure high self-esteem. In contrast, a mismatch between individual's implicit (nonconscious) and explicit (conscious) feelings of self-worth (i.e., one is negative) reflects fragile high self-esteem. Finally, *defensive* (fragile) high self-esteem involves reporting high self-esteem but harboring negative feelings, to which a person is unwilling to admit. In contrast, *genuine* (secure) high self-esteem involves the accurate reporting of inwardly held positive self-feelings.

Optimal self-esteem reflects the sum total of these secure self-esteem markers (Kernis, 2003). It arises naturally from (a) success in dealing with life challenges; (b) the operation of one's core, true, authentic self as a source of input to behavioral choices; and (c) relationships in which one is valued for whom one is, and not for what one achieves. We believe that authenticity and each aspect of secure (vs. fragile) high self-esteem likely are reciprocally related to each other. That is, authenticity may provide both the foundation for achieving secure (and ultimately optimal) high self-esteem and the processes through which secure (and optimal) high self-esteem relates to psychological and interpersonal adjustment. Recall that *self-esteem* refers to global feelings of self-worth and acceptance, whereas *authenticity* refers to the operation of one's true self in one's daily enterprise. Thus, self-esteem and authenticity are likely to feed off each other in ways that can either strengthen or weaken them. When breakdowns in authenticity occur, they are likely to reverberate through the self system and cause decreased or more fragile self-esteem. Conversely, possessing fragile self-esteem may undermine or interfere with various processes associated with authenticity. For example, to ease the sting associated with failure, people with fragile self-esteem may be more likely to engage in biased than unbiased processing or to modify their behavior merely to please a potential evaluator. Recall also that in two separate studies (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Goldman et al., 2003), we found positive correlations between authenticity and self-esteem level and negative correlations between authenticity and contingent self-esteem. Taken together, these two correlations indicate that authenticity is more strongly related to secure than to fragile high self-esteem (based on the marker of contingent self-esteem). A number of other relations are likely to exist between authenticity and self-esteem processes. An important agenda for the future is to examine these relations.

An additional type of evidence (albeit indirect) supporting the link between authenticity and optimal self-esteem is research that has shown authenticity to be related to engaging in goal pursuits that provide opportunities for (a) self-determination, (b) expression of one's true self, (c) positive self-feelings, and (d) competence. In our view, engaging in goal pursuits that provide these opportunities provides the psychological nourishment that promotes the development of optimal self-esteem.

We (Goldman et al., 2003) examined how authenticity relates to the meanings people ascribe to their personal projects, defined as the "activities and concerns that people have in their lives." Respondents were given time to generate a list

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of personal projects that they were engaging in or intended to begin over the next month or so. Next, participants selected the eight projects that "together provide the most complete and informative overview of your life" and rated each on a total of 31 characteristics or dimensions. We took many of these dimensions from McGregor and Little (1998) and generated a few specifically for this study. Multiple items tapping into the same meaning dimension were combined to form categories that were deemed relevant to authenticity and optimal self-esteem. We now name these categories and provide sample items:

- *Opportunities for positive self-feelings (three items):* To what extend do you feel that being engaged in this project contributes to your sense of self-worth? How important or significant does this project make you feel when engaged in it?
- *Efficacy (six items):* How competent are you to complete this project? How much do you feel that you are in control of this project?
- *Fun– enjoyment (three items):* Some projects are intrinsically fun, whimsical, or delightful. How much fun is this project for you?
- *Commitment (two items):* How committed are you to the completion of this project? How important is this project to you at the present time?
- *Goal authenticity (four items):* Most of us have some projects that are "really us" and some others that we don't really feel "ourselves" when doing. To what extent does this project reflect who you really are? How much do you feel that it was your decision to take on this project?
- *Absorption (one item):* To what extent do you become engrossed or deeply involved in this project?

As noted earlier, we anticipated that participants high in authenticity would engage in projects where they felt competent and autonomous and that contributed to their sense of self-worth. The findings that emerged are reported in detail elsewhere (Goldman et al., 2003), so we focus here only on relations involving the awareness subscale. The sample consisted of 111 undergraduate students. First, scores on the awareness subscale correlated positively with goal authenticity ($r = .23$, $p < .02$). Thus, the higher individuals' awareness scores, the more individuals characterized their goal pursuits in terms of a composite consisting of reflecting their true selves, autonomy, personal meaning, and consistency with broad values. Second, awareness subscale scores correlated, though not significantly, with a higher amount of striving commitment ($r = .17$, $p < .08$). Third, awareness scores correlated positively with efficacy ($r = .27$, $p < .01$). Fourth, the higher individuals' awareness scores, the higher their goals' self-worth benefit to them ($r = .21$, $p < .05$). Finally, higher awareness scores related to higher ratings of project fun ($r = .20$, $p < .04$) and absorption ($r = .20$, $p < .04$). Taken as a whole, these correlations support the view that how individuals' construe their goal pursuits provides a way to link processes associated with authenticity with those associated with optimal self-esteem.

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this chapter, we presented a multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity. In our view, authenticity involves an awareness of one's self; unbiased processing of self-relevant information; behaving in accord with one's core values, inclinations, needs, and so forth; and relating to close others in genuine, trustworthy, and honest ways. On average, we expect that each authenticity component will be associated with a range of positive outcomes, both intrapersonal and interpersonal. At the same time, we acknowledge that authenticity often comes at a cost. Fortunately, these costs are not so powerful that they inevitably dampen people's investments in becoming more authentic. Moreover, as more people work to enhance their authenticity, many of these costs will diminish even further.

NOTE

1. Participants also made ratings for the adjectives used by Sande, Goethals, and Radloff (1988) in their investigation of self-concept complexity. The values reported here incorporate these ratings as well.

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