

## Authenticity and Use of Time

Jaime Haines  
Psychology  
University of Wisconsin-River Falls  
410 S. 3rd Street  
River Falls WI 54022 USA  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Richard Seefeldt

### Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between participants' felt authenticity (how close to their "true selves" they felt) and how they spent their time. It was hypothesized that people who spent more time doing activities they enjoy, social activities, and reflective activities would experience more authenticity whereas people who spend high amounts of time using electronics would experience lower authenticity. Participants completed two questionnaires; one measured the participants' time uses and rated each activity along scales of importance to the participant, amount of time spent doing that activity, and desire to do the activity more or less often. The other questionnaire assessed their levels of authenticity. Results indicated that authenticity scores positively correlated with the number of hours spent doing homework and with the number of hours spent with friends, and negatively correlated with time spent playing video games. The level of participants' authenticity and the importance ratings of homework and volunteering also had a positive correlation, and there was a negative correlation between authenticity scores and the rated importance of playing video games. It is important to understand the factors that influence people's levels of authenticity because high levels of authenticity indicate high levels of self-esteem, low levels of depression and stress, protection against mental health problems, and high life satisfaction. By unearthing the factors that affect authenticity levels, such as the way people use their time, psychological well-being can be increased.

**Keywords:** Authenticity, Time, Positive

### 1. Introduction

Authenticity includes both behaviors and internal processes<sup>6</sup>. Authenticity is when behavior is seen as self-authored or internally caused<sup>5</sup> and includes awareness of one's own feelings, motives, and cognitions<sup>3</sup>. Authentic people also use unbiased processing, meaning they can objectively assess their own negative and positive qualities<sup>3</sup>. Authenticity also includes honestly and courageously living in the moment as well as not making excuses or relying on others for meaning<sup>1</sup>. In sum, authenticity is simply being true to oneself<sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup>.

Expressing authenticity is crucial to psychological health<sup>4</sup>. Previous studies found that high levels of dispositional authenticity (a trait-like tendency to behave authentically) were a strong indicator of high levels of self-esteem and low levels of depression in both males and females<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, role-specific authenticity (feeling authentic within each role) significantly predicted positive outcomes such as low stress and high life satisfaction<sup>5</sup>. Individual differences in true self-concept accessibility related to increased perceptions of meaning in life, even if the participants disliked their true self traits. Finally, inauthenticity was defined as being unaware of life's fullness and being trapped in an endless circle of meetings, schedules, and events<sup>1</sup>. These findings show that there is an important correlation between authenticity and well-being.

Of particular interest in this study was a study done using the Sense of Authenticity Scale and free-response descriptions of the participants' important life experiences. Participants with high authenticity scores usually cited extracurricular activities as important experiences, while participants with low authenticity scores cited cramming for examinations as important experiences<sup>2</sup>. Another study indicated that people with high-paced, technology-centered lifestyles found it difficult to experience authenticity. Therefore, people in countries like the United States are at a high risk of experiencing low authenticity since they spend a significant amount of time using electronic

devices and maintain busy schedules<sup>1</sup>. These ideas that spending time on specific activities and that citing those activities as more or less important may affect people's levels of authenticity were examined in this study.

Four hypotheses were examined in this study. Hypothesis 1: People who spend more time doing activities they enjoy experience more authenticity. Hypothesis 2: People who spend more time doing activities with other people experience more authenticity. Hypothesis 3: People who rank reflective activities (like yoga or time outside) as frequent activities experience more authenticity. Hypothesis 4: People who spend high amounts of time using electronics experience lower authenticity.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Participants**

Fifty-one students, male and female, from General Psychology classes at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls participated in this study. They all received extra credit for their participation. Upon arrival at the study site, the subjects completed an informed consent form and were given information about who to contact if any questions or concerns arose regarding the study. The study was determined safe for subjects and approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.

### **2.2 Materials And Procedures**

Participants were first asked to complete a survey inspired by the list compiled by Ito and Kodama of their important life experiences<sup>2</sup>. This survey assessed three elements of time use. The amount of time spent doing various activities was measured by having participants circle which time range represented their typical week (i.e. 1-5 hours, 6-10 hours, etc.). There were twenty-one activities listed (ie. exercise, time with friends, homework, watching TV, religious activities), and the participants were also able to write in any activities that they found very important or that they spent significant time on; this allowed the survey to accurately capture their time use and values. How important the listed activities were to the participants was measured with a 4-point Likert scale ranging from "unimportant" to "important." Finally, participants indicated whether they wanted to spend more, less, or the same amount of time on each activity. These three rankings of the activities allowed the assessment of how the participants spent their time and how they wish they spent it.

In addition to the experiences questionnaire, the participants were given an authenticity scale to complete. The authenticity scale was a 12 item authenticity questionnaire from Wenzel and Lucas-Thompson<sup>6</sup>. The statements were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and included items such as, "For better or for worse I am aware of who I truly am," and, "People close to me would be shocked or surprised if they discovered what I keep inside me," (reverse scored).

### **2.3 Data Analysis**

To assess whether people in the top authenticity quartile spent more time doing activities they ranked as important when compared to the bottom quartile of authenticity, a Chi-Square test was run. The correlation between authenticity scores and number of hours spent doing various activities was assessed using a Spearman correlation. The correlations between authenticity scores and the activity's importance, as well as between authenticity scores and whether participants wanted to spend more, less, or the same amount of time on the activity were analyzed using the Pearson correlation. A one-way ANOVA and a post hoc Tukey HSD test were used to compare the averages of importance rankings among the authenticity quartile groups to assess whether the top and bottom authenticity quartiles valued different time uses.

## **3. Results**

Individuals in the top and bottom quartiles of authenticity showed no difference between the number of times they spent 11 or more hours doing an activity they ranked as "important." Authenticity scores were positively correlated with time spent doing homework ( $r_s(49) = .415, p < .01$ ) and being with friends ( $r_s(49) = .433, p < .01$ ).

Authenticity scores were negatively correlated with time spent playing video games ( $r_s(49) = -.332, p < .05$ ). There were positive correlations between authenticity scores and importance rankings of doing homework ( $r_s(49) = .281, p < .05$ ) and volunteering ( $r_s(49) = .286, p < .05$ ). Importance rankings of playing video games were negatively correlated with authenticity ( $r_s(49) = -.322, p < .05$ ). There were no correlations between authenticity scores and whether people wanted to spend more or less time doing an activity. Finally, when comparing authenticity score quartile groups and how important they rate various activities, there was a difference among the quartile groups regarding how important they rated homework [ $F(3,47) = 3.259, p = .030$ ]. A Tukey HSD post hoc comparison indicated that the mean importance ranking for homework among participants in the third quartile group (the quartile group with the second highest authenticity scores) was higher than the rating participants in the second quartile group (the quartile group with the second lowest authenticity scores) gave to homework importance ( $M = 0.385, SD = 0.237$ ). This indicates that among subjects with medium levels of authenticity, those with slightly higher authenticity ranked homework as more important than subjects with slightly lower authenticity.

## 4. Discussion

Hypothesis 1 was not supported because there were no differences between the number of times people in the top and bottom authenticity score quartile groups spent eleven or more hours doing an activity they considered “important.” The lack of differences between quartile groups could be because people do not need to spend a large amount of time doing activities they view as important in order to feel authentic. Doing these activities for even a small amount of time may be enough to keep authenticity levels high. Future studies should examine participants’ time spent compared to ideal amount of time spent on activities to see if higher hour discrepancies correlate with lower authenticity scores.

Hypothesis 2 was supported by the finding that people who are more authentic spend more time with their friends. This finding was consistent with previous hypotheses that the reason extracurricular activities were correlated with higher authenticity was because participants were spending time with other people<sup>2</sup>. While the correlation between higher authenticity scores and more time spent doing homework, a nonsocial activity, seems to work against this hypothesis, this inconsistency can be explained by the fact that the participants were college students and therefore felt more authentic when spending time working on coursework. To further confirm this idea, participants who had higher authenticity scores also rated homework as more important to them than participants with lower authenticity scores, indicating that college students who feel true to themselves view homework as an important use of time.

Hypothesis 3 was not supported because there were no correlations between authenticity scores and reflective activities such as time outside, journaling or letter writing, and yoga or tai chi. These findings were inconsistent with previous results that indicated that doing reflective activities (specifically, drawing mandalas) help people get in touch with their true selves and increase their authenticity<sup>3</sup>. It is possible that because people and the way they prefer to spend their time is so unique, the participants used activities other than the options provided to reflect.

Hypothesis 4 was supported because people with higher authenticity scores spent less time playing video games and ranked playing video games as less important compared to people with lower authenticity scores. This is consistent with previous findings that Westerners’ busy and technology-laden lifestyle is detrimental to authenticity<sup>1</sup>. However, time watching television and on the computer were not significant indicators of lower authenticity scores. Future studies should examine whether the types of technology and how that technology is used affects authenticity scores.

An unexpected finding was that participants with higher authenticity scores rate volunteering as important, while participants with lower authenticity scores rated volunteering as less important. However, there was no significant difference among authenticity scores and the amount of time spent volunteering. These findings demonstrate that authenticity correlates with valuing volunteer work, but not necessarily with spending time doing it. While the reason behind these somewhat contradicting findings is unclear without an experimental design, it could be that volunteerism falls into one of the previously mentioned categories. Both spending time with people and time reflecting have been found to be important to increasing authenticity<sup>2,3</sup>. While participants are not spending time volunteering, the more authentic participants believe that volunteering is important, which could indicate that they value the sense of community and perspective-gathering that volunteerism often provides.

This study had several limitations that hindered the complexity of correlations that could be examined. This study would have been more precise if the participants were asked to fill in the exact number of hours they spent and would like to spend on various activities, instead of circling a time range. Future studies could expand and improve by adding more activity options, making the activity options more detailed and inclusive, increasing the range of the

Likert scales, and using experimental methods to determine cause and effect. To better understand social role and age effects, a more diversified sample will help make the findings more generalizable.

By examining how participants use their time, this study assesses an understudied area of authenticity. Determining the relationship between how people spend their time and how authentic they feel is essential to being able to implement lifestyle changes and potentially improve authenticity. If psychology can better understand ways to improve authenticity, such as adding or subtracting certain activities from a participants' schedule, the overall psychological and physical well-being of participants can be increased.

## 5. References

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