

AUTHENTICITY AND WELL-BEING AMONG EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN YOUNG ADULTS

Michael J. Stevens *

Illinois State University, USA

Petru-Mădălin Constantinescu **

*Clinical Psychology Individual Praxis, Rm.
Vâlcea, Romania*

Abstract

Although humanistic-existential psychologists have longed stressed the concept of authenticity as important for individual well-being, it was only until recently that an instrument for assessing authenticity with sound psychometric properties has been developed and made possible empirical research on this and related humanistic-existential constructs. However, these research findings have not been replicated cross-nationally. Our study replicated the results of Wood et al. (2008) regarding the relationships between dimensions of authenticity and both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, which were themselves correlated. We extended the analyses to include models in which dimensions of authenticity predicted two forms of individual well-being, hedonia and eudaimonia. However, a fitted model comprising all dimensions of authenticity was abandoned in favor of a more parsimonious model that included only authentic living and self-alienation. This model best explained the variance on each of the measured constructs of individual well-being.

Keywords: authenticity, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, humanistic-existential psychology, self-determination theory

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to:

* Ph.D., DHC, Illinois State University, Illinois, USA and The Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania. Address for correspondence: Michael J. Stevens, Department of Psychology, Illinois State University, Campus Box 4620, Normal, IL 61790-4620, USA. E-mail: mjsteven@ilstu.edu

** M.A., Clinical Psychology Individual Praxis, Rm. Vâlcea, Romania. E-mail: petrumadalin@gmail.com

Authenticity in peoples' lives, that is living according to one's true nature (also called *eudaimonia*; Ryan & Deci, 2001), has been a topic of great interest among humanistic and existential scholars for some time (May, 1981; Rogers, 1959, 1961; Yalom, 1980). The common assertions of these leading figures and their followers have been that the lack of authenticity leads to negative consequences (e.g., psychopathology), whereas the presence of authenticity contributes to individual well-being. For many years, practitioners that worked within the humanistic-existential paradigm took the assumptions regarding the relationship between authenticity and well-being for granted, and it was only recently that hypotheses regarding self - organism congruence have been empirically tested with scientific rigor (see Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). Rogers' person-centered theory proposes that *congruence* (i.e., self-concept in line with values informed by uniquely personal experience) leads to individual well-being, whereas *incongruence* (i.e., a form of alienation of the self in which the self is does not follow from and, therefore, is discrepant from personal experience) results in various forms psychopathology (Boeree, 2006; Rogers, 1959).

Self-determination theory (SDT) makes similar claims, asserting that congruence between self-concept and organismic experience yields the same positive consequences as described above because the favorable conditions of individual growth are met (Patterson & Joseph, 2007). As already noted, these assumptions have been empirically supported. For example, Deci and Ryan (1985) studied causality orientations and found that autonomy orientation was positively correlated with self-esteem, ego development, and self-actualization. Many similar studies have been conducted, and their results can be interpreted as supporting the initial claims made by Rogers and other humanistic-existential psychologists (e.g., Hodgins, Koestner, & Duncan, 1996; Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Koestner, Bernieri, & Holt, 1992). More recently, Stevens, Constantinescu, and Butucescu (2011), like earlier studies (e.g., Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000), found that some of the assumptions of SDT are applicable cross-nationally. This line of research has generally found that aspirations or goals that are more congruent with the self are related to happiness (hedonic well-being) and eudaimonic well-being. These findings also have ties to other multidisciplinary viewpoints in which coherence and meaning are key determinants of health and well-being (e.g., Antonovsky, 1987).

A healthy identity and individual well-being can be favored or hindered by the physical, social, and psychological environments in which we chose to live. Living with and being in accord with one's true nature (e.g., values, goals) has been the focus of humanistic-existential theory, and according to recent research leads to well-being, especially eudaimonic well-being (e.g., Ryff & Keyes, 1995). This perspective holds that 'right living', as defined by personal experience, leads to happiness via meaningful personal fulfillment. This variant of happiness diverges somewhat from more tangible forms of happiness (i.e., hedonic or subjective well-being) (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Although research on goals and aspirations has shown that authenticity is related to individual well-being, for many years a psychometrically sound instrument to assess authenticity was unavailable. Wood, Maltby, Caliousis, Linley, and Joseph (2008) developed the Authenticity Scale based on Carl Rogers' person-centered theory (Rogers, 1961). Unlike goals and aspirations which can be modified by various social influences upon the individual, Wood et al. (2008) stressed that authenticity within an orthodox humanistic-existential paradigm is more personologic, that is it reflects a natural tendency in individuals to express their organismically based selves. Subscales of the Authenticity Scale, which represent distinct dimensions of authenticity (i.e., authentic living, accepting external influence, and self-alienation), have been empirically tied to measures of hedonic well-being. However, the relationship of individual well-being to other constructs proposed by SDT has not been extensively studied, particularly eudaimonic well-being. In addition, individual well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995) as defined and measured in this and other studies may have common as well as unique features (see Ryan & Deci, 2001). Finally, the Authenticity Scale has never been used with East European or Eurasian samples. A replication and extension of earlier research with Authenticity Scale could shed additional light on the properties of the instrument as well the generalizability of claims made about authentic living. We thus predicted that: hedonic and eudaimonic well-being would be related, that the constituent dimensions of authenticity would be associated with eudaimonic and hedonic well-being, and that each dimension of authenticity would contribute to the predication of both eudaimonic and hedonic well-being.

Method

Participants

The sample we recruited had the following demographic characteristics: 21 men (25.3%) and 62 women (74.7%) between 18 and 63 years old ($M=26.36$, $SD=7.84$), with an estimated monthly income between \$0 and \$1,400 USD ($Mdn=\$800$ USD). The nationality of the sample was 67.5% Romanian ($n=56$), 19.3% Turkish ($n=16$), 4.8% German ($n=4$), 3.6% Albanian ($n=3$), 2.4% Polish ($n=2$), 1.2% ($n=1$) Estonian, and 1.2% ($n=1$) Italian. Eighty were postgraduate students (96.4%), with 1 (1.2%) undergraduate and 2 (2.4%) recently graduated students. The range of self-reported proficiency in written English was as follows: moderate 7.2% ($n=6$), good 26.5% ($n=22$), and very good 66.3% ($n=55$).

Research Instruments

Authenticity Scale (AS). The AS (Wood et al., 2008) contains 12 items that are rated with a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*does not describe me at all*) to 7 (*describes me very well*). Prior research has shown the AS to have good reliability and validity. The AS has three subscales that measure key dispositional dimensions of authenticity: authentic living, accepting external influences, and self-alienation. The internal consistency reliability of each of the three subscales in our study ranged from acceptable to good (Authentic Living = .74; Accepting External Influence = .83; Self-alienation = .85).

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). The SWLS (Diener et al., 1985; for a review, see Pavot & Diener, 2003) is a measure of subjective individual well-being, specifically hedonic well-being. The SWLS measures the cognitive evaluation of one's own satisfaction with life by comparing one's current perceived state against an ideal subjective state. The SWLS consists of five items that are rated on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scale has been used extensively (see Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002) and found to have good-to-excellent psychometric properties. The internal consistency reliability of the SWLS in our study was good ($\alpha=.86$).

Subjective Vitality Scale (SVS). The SVS (Ryan & Frederick, 1997) was developed as a measure of eudaimonic well-being in that it was designed to reflect the degree to which respondents experience energy, aliveness, and related states that a fully functioning individual might possess. The SVS has

seven items that are rated with a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*), which represents a continuum of low vitality to high vitality. A sample item reads, “I am true to myself in most situations”. Although the SVS has not been researched extensively, its psychometric properties are promising (see Bostic, Rubio, & Hood, 2000; Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Solberg, Halvari, & Ommundsen, 2013). The internal consistency reliability of the SVS we obtained was acceptable ($\alpha=.68$).

Demographic questionnaire comprised open-ended questions on sex, age, income, nationality, graduation status, and proficiency in written English.

Procedure

All questionnaires were administered online to participants who were recruited through several student-oriented social network forums. We invited only students or recently graduated students to complete the questionnaires. Data gathering complied with national and international ethics standards. Some participants who requested it received feedback about their state of subjective well-being. The period of data collection was approximately 2 months, and the time necessary to complete the questionnaires was 20-30 minutes.

Results and interpretation

With respect to our first hypothesis, we found that scores on measures of hedonia (SWLS) and eudaimonia (SVS) were moderately correlated $r(81)=.47, p<.001$. Furthermore, except for the Accepting External Influence subscale of the AS, we found that scores on both measures of individual well-being were moderately and significantly correlated with AS subscale scores, which confirmed our second hypothesis (see Table 1).

Table 1. Correlation Matrix of AS Subscales with SWLS and SVS

AS Subscale	SWLS	SVS
Authentic Living	.31**	.45**
Accepting External Influence	-.12	-.42**
Self-alienation	-.31**	-.46**

Note: ** $p < .001$, one-tailed

Continuing our analyses, we ran two separate stepwise multiple regression analyses with scores on AS subscales as predictors of either SWLS or SVLS scores, which served as the criterion. Prior to conducting the regression analyses, we determined from the standardized residual scores and standardized predicted values that our data were normally distributed, were linear, and met the assumption of homoscedasticity. SVS scores were best predicted by a parsimonious model that consisted of scores on Authentic Living and Self-alienation subscales, $R^2=.095$, $F(2, 80)=16.72$, $p<.001$, $f^2=0.105$. Authentic Living and Self-alienation subscale scores each contributed significantly and almost equally to the prediction of SVS scores: Authentic Living was a positive predictor, $\beta=.32$, $t(80)=3.10$, $p<.01$, and Self-alienation a negative predictor, $\beta=-.33$, $t(80)=-3.23$, $p<.01$. On the other hand, more of the variance in SWLS scores was predicted, but only by scores on the Authentic Living subscale, $R^2=.28$, $F(1, 81)=8.53$, $p<.05$, $f^2=0.389$. The effect sizes for these regression analyses are large enough to merit interpretation.

Conclusions

Our study replicated and extended the research previously conducted with the recently developed Authenticity Scale. Based on responses by a convenience sample of East European and Eurasian students, we confirmed the well-documented relationship between eudaimonic and hedonic well-being (see Henderson & Knight, 2012). As also found in previous research (Wood et al., 2008), the components of authenticity bore significant relationships with both forms of individual well-being: eudaimonia and hedonia. An exception to this general pattern of results was the non-significant relationship found between scores on the Accepting External Influence subscale of the AS and the SWLS. Overall, the correlations between scores on AS subscales and the SVS were higher than those with the SWLS, which supports a critical proposition of humanistic-existential theory that living in accordance with one's organismic self is not only related, but also possibly conducive to adaptive and healthy functioning (i.e., vitality). Interestingly, the constituent elements of authenticity have more overlap with vitality than with happiness (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Therefore, as originally thought vitality can be construed as a byproduct of 'right living'. Put another way, authenticity is an important ingredient of happiness and can be realized through a life lived with meaning and purpose.

This interpretation appears to be supported by the outcomes predicted by the constituent dimensions of authenticity. Both Authentic Living and Self-alienation subscale scores predicted eudaimonic well-being, accounting for a significant proportion of the variance of SVS scores. This was not the case in the prediction of hedonic well-being, in which only Authentic Living subscale scores predicted SWLS scores. Although our study has several limitations related to sampling and design, it nonetheless showed that in the sociocultural context of East Europe and Eurasia, it is possible to distinguish factors that contribute to eudaimonic versus hedonic well-being, while showing that the two forms of individual well-being share important commonalities. More research is needed to discover the complex relationships of authenticity to individual well-being and more generally to subject humanistic-existential ideas to rigorous scientific examination.

References

- Antonovsky, A. (1987). *Unravelling the mystery of health*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Boeree, C. G. (1998). *Personality theories: Carl Rogers*. Retrieved from <http://www.ship.edu/~cgboeree/rogers.html>
- Bostic, T. J., Rubio, D. M., & Hood, M. (2000). A validation of the subjective vitality scale using structural equation modeling. *Social Indicators Research, 52*, 313-324.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). The General Causality Orientations Scale: Self-determination in personality. *Journal of Research in Personality, 19*, 109-134.
- Diener, E., & Biswas-Diener, R. (2002). Will money increase subjective well-being? A literature review and guide to needed research. *Social Indicators Research, 57*, 119-169.
- Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). Satisfaction with Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 49*, 71-75.
- Henderson, L. W., & Knight, T. (2012). Integrating the hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives to more comprehensively understand wellbeing and pathways to wellbeing. *International Journal of Wellbeing, 2*, 196-221.

- Hodgins, H. S., Koestner, R., & Duncan, N. (1996). On the compatibility of autonomy and relatedness. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22, 227-237.
- Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. M. (1993). A dark side of the American dream: Correlates of financial success as a central life aspiration. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 65, 410-422.
- Koestner, R., Bernieri, F., & Holt, K. (1992). Self-determination and consistency between attitudes, traits and behaviors. *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 18, 52-59.
- May, R. (1981). *Freedom and destiny*. New York: Basic Books.
- Nix, G. A., Ryan, R. M., Manly, J. B., & Deci, E. L. (1999). Revitalization through self-regulation: The effects of autonomous and controlled motivation on happiness and vitality. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 35, 266-284.
- Patterson, P. G., & Joseph, S. (2007). Person-centered personality theory: Support from self-determination theory and positive psychology. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 47, 117-139.
- Pavot, W., & Diener, E. (1993). Review of the Satisfaction With Life Scale. *Personality Assessment*, 5, 164-172.
- Rogers, C. R. (1959). A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationships as developed in the client-centered framework. In S. Koch (Ed.), *Psychology: A study of a science. Vol. 3: Formulations of the person and the social context* (pp. 181-256). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. London: Constable.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2001). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. In S. Fiske (Ed.), *Annual review of psychology* (Vol. 52, pp. 141-166). Palo Alto, CA: Annual Reviews.
- Ryan, R. M., & Frederick, C. M. (1997). On energy, personality and health: Subjective vitality as a dynamic reflection of well-being. *Journal of Personality*, 65, 529-565.
- Ryff, C., & Keyes, C. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 69, 719-727.

- Schmuck, P., Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The relationship of well-being to intrinsic and extrinsic goals in Germany and the U.S. *Social Indicators Research, 50*, 225-241.
- Sheldon, K. M., & Kasser, T. (2001). Goals, congruence, and positive well-being: New empirical validation for humanistic ideas. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology, 41*, 30-50.
- Solberg, P. A., Halvari, H., & Ommundsen, Y. (2013). Linking exercise and causality orientations to change in well-being among older adults: Does change in motivational variables play a role? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 43*, 1259-1272.
- Stevens, M. J., Constantinescu, P-M., & Butucescu, A. (2011). Aspirations and well-being in Romanian and U.S. undergraduates. *International Journal of Psychology, 46*, 436-445.
- Wood, A. M., Maltby, J., Caliousis, M., Linley, P. A., & Joseph S. (2008). The authentic personality: A theoretical and empirical conceptualization and the development of the authenticity scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 55*, 385-399.
- Yalom, I. D. (1980). *Existential psychotherapy*. New York: Basic Books.

Received March 25, 2014
Revision received April 2, 2014
Accepted April 18, 2014