

## The Authenticity Gap: When Authentic Individuals are not Regarded as Such and why it Matters

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Individuals feel authentic when they believe they act consistently with their values. However, others do not necessarily see such individuals as authentic. We explore the gap between felt and perceived authenticity and suggest that individuals' prosocial orientation determines, jointly with felt authenticity, the extent to which they are perceived as authentic. We hypothesize that to be seen as authentic, one cannot deviate from universally accepted self-transcendence values by showing little prosocial concern. When that happens, felt authenticity paradoxically reduces the extent to which the individual is perceived as authentic because it signals the deviance from prosocial values is genuine. Consequently, the individual is liked less and, ultimately, seen as less effective at work. The data collected at a large private organization showed that, as we predicted, felt authenticity was detrimental for individuals with low prosocial orientation such that they were perceived as less authentic, liked less, and received lower job performance evaluations. However, felt authenticity did not affect social outcomes for individuals with high prosocial orientation. Our results suggest that universal self-transcendence values play a fundamental role in determining authenticity perceptions. When one's behavior is inconsistent with universally accepted values, individual authenticity becomes a social liability.

Keywords: Authenticity; Prosocial Orientation; Interpersonal Liking; Job Performance Evaluations

Electronic copy available at: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2734779>

We are grateful to Amy Colbert, Alex Haslam, Herminia Ibarra, Willem Saris, and Nik Steffens for their valuable feedback on the earlier versions of this paper.

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### The authenticity gap:

When authentic individuals are not regarded as such and why it matters

Referring to the presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton commented (Miller, 2015):

“It’s not easy. And I couldn’t do it if I just didn’t, you know, passionately believe it was the right thing to do.” This phrase seems to imply felt authenticity, that is, Hillary feels as though she acts consistently with her values. Yet, repeatedly, Mrs. Clinton has been accused of, among other things, being inauthentic, and this “authenticity gap” between felt and perceived has been evoked as major challenge for the candidate (Hobbs, 2015; Miller, 2015). In contrast to Hillary, Sen. Bernie Sanders, has been described as having an “air of authenticity,” emanating from, among other things, “his fiery speeches on inequality and racism,” which has been claimed to help him win voters (Ollstein, 2015; Reardon, 2015).

Being authentic, i.e., being true to one’s self by acting in accordance with one’s values (e.g., Harter, 2002), is a fundamental driver of well-being (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Harter, 2002; Rogers, 1961; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008). In fact, to act consistently with one’s sense of self is a fundamental motivating force (Gecas, 1986, 1991). Motivated by the desire to preserve their self-conceptions (Festinger, 1957), people also prefer others to see their true, authentic self (Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992; Swann, 1983; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). However, as the Mrs. Clinton’s alleged “authenticity gap” suggests, an individual who feels s/he expresses his/her true self (hereafter *felt authenticity*) is not necessarily perceived as authentic by others (hereafter *perceived authenticity*), which may have negative social consequences for the individual such as lower likeability and, in the context of elections, lower voting intentions.

In the current research, we attempt to better understand the authenticity gap by exploring when others do not regard the enactment of one’s true self as authentic and uncovering the consequences of this. We specifically suggest that individuals who feel they

act in accordance with their values are not perceived as authentic when they are not seen as *prosocially oriented*, that is, as being inclined to preserve and enhance others' welfare (for various conceptualizations of prosocial orientation, see Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005; Batson & Shaw, 1991; Côté et al., 2011; Grant & Mayer, 2009; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Our argument builds on the idea that self-transcendence values, such as prosocial concern and respect of others' welfare, have a "moral nature" (Eisenberg, 1986, p. 204) and are universally accepted, despite the between-culture variability of the relative importance of such values (Schwartz, 1992, 2010; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Basic values serve as standards of behavior (Schwartz, 2010); they guide selection of actions and determine socially desirable, ideal behaviors and end-states (Rokeach, 1973). Consequently, this acceptance of prosocial values implies that an ideal, moral human being embodies these values, thus honoring expectations of how people "ought to relate to each other" (Turiel, 1983, p. 3).

Our paper makes three contributions to prior research on authenticity. First, although the benefits of felt authenticity for individual well-being are well-documented (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Wood et al., 2008), much less is known about the social consequences of felt authenticity and in particular when it may become a liability. Our paper responds to the call to better highlight the potential negative consequences of felt authenticity (e.g., Buckman, 2014; Ibarra, 2015; Leroy, Cullen, Gill, & Nguyen, 2016; Pfeffer, 2015; Sparrowe, 2005).

Second, we contribute to previous literature by clarifying the role of moral or, more precisely, self-transcendent values in fostering perceptions of authenticity. There have been debates in prior literature about whether authenticity should include (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003) or exclude (Simons, 2002; Sparrowe, 2005) a moral component. We follow the reasoning of other authors (e.g., Gino, Kouchaki, & Galinsky, 2015) that felt authenticity is distinct from morality but that the latter may have an important impact on how authenticity is perceived by others. Specifically, we argue that

others will have difficulty perceiving someone as authentic when his/her authenticity deviates from universally accepted values such as self-transcendence.

Third, we contribute to prior work that has argued that perceptions of authenticity evaluate more whether an individual conforms to social expectations than whether s/he stays true to his/her “own” values (Eagly, 2005; Simons, 2002; Steffens, Mols, Haslam, & Okimoto, 2015). For instance, Eagly (2005) argued that our preconception of leader authenticity may be influenced by implicit theories around leadership (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004) and/or gender stereotypes (Eagly, Karau, & Makhijani, 1995). Consequently, in evaluating individuals’ authenticity we do not only assess whether they stay true to their own values but also whether they stay true to the implicit theory we have for them in their roles. Similarly, in this paper, we argue that, to be perceived as authentic, individuals need not only stay true to their own values, but also to the idealized notion of what it means to be human(e)<sup>1</sup> and the humanistic values (i.e., self-transcendence) that accompany that notion.

### **Theory and Hypotheses**

Both well-known philosophers from Aristotle and Rousseau to Taylor (1991) and contemporary scholars (Eagly, 2005; Gino et al., 2015; Steffens et al., 2015) have expressed the idea that authenticity, or being true to *oneself*, is closely linked to morality, which is commonly defined in social terms (De Groot & Steg, 2009; Haidt & Kesebir, 2010), e.g., as being true to values that people expect from others or, more simply, true to *others*. Consistent with this idea, experimental evidence shows that after an inauthentic experience, people are motivated to recover their self-image by engaging in a moral action, e.g., in a prosocial act (Gino et al., 2015), which suggests that people perceive authenticity and being prosocial as intertwined.

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<sup>1</sup> In their historical review of authenticity, Kernis and Goldman (2006) note that authenticity has co-evolved with what it means to be human. For instance that whereas in the Middle Ages authenticity was defined as absolute devotion to religious standards, in the Age of Enlightenment authenticity was only possible for fully rational human beings. Over the ages different implicit theories have been used to define what it means to be “human” and thereby different implicit theories of authenticity have emerged.

In the context of leadership, several scholars linked individual authenticity and interpersonal morality. For instance, Bass and Steidlmeier (1999, p. 191) theorized that an authentic leader is “true to the self and others” in the sense that for such leader, the interests and the welfare of others matter. Eagly (2005) similarly argued that to be seen as authentic, leaders should not only act on their values, but also understand the values of their community to promote them on its behalf and ultimately foster its welfare. Recent experimental evidence in this domain provides support to the idea that perceived authenticity is intertwined with perceived prosocial orientation. In particular, Steffens and colleagues (2015) report that leaders described as advancing the collective interests of a group are perceived as more authentic than leaders who appear to advance their personal interests only.

Building on this research, we suggest that because authenticity is so intertwined in people’s minds with prosocial concern and because prosocial concern is a universal human value, feeling that one acts authentically, that is, in accordance with one’s personal values, will not necessarily lead to being regarded as authentic by others and, consequently, to positive social outcomes. Individuals who feel authentic are more likely to self-disclose their true selves to others (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Not only do authentic individuals self-disclose their personal values, they will attempt to align their actual behavior with their values (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Consequently, others are likely to have more information about the values of individuals who feel authentic than about those of less authentic individuals. However, disclosing information about self through living up to one’s authentic self can backfire. For example, self-disclosure can distance an individual from others if the information the individual self-discloses carries a social stigma (Ragins, 2008). It implies that through self-disclosure, individuals who feel that their behavior is authentic, that is, aligned with their personal values, may face a social backlash if their behavioral consistency signals a genuine, overt deviation from the universal standards of behavior.

In particular, we hypothesize that for individuals low in prosocial concern, felt authenticity decreases the likelihood to be seen as authentic. As noted above, people are universally expected to be concerned for others' welfare (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992, 2010; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Consequently, those who deviate from this expectation by failing to show concern for others will appear to have certain moral defects (Oakley, 1992). Such deviance becomes inexcusable when the low prosocial concern is overt and genuine manifestation of one's true self (i.e., high felt authenticity). In other words, because prosocial concern is a universal human value, being *genuinely not concerned* about others shows misalignment between personal values and the values one *ought to have*. Because morality and authenticity are closely linked in people's minds, such individuals are likely to be seen as deviating from the ideal, authentic human being and thus as less authentic.

Conversely, for individuals high in prosocial orientation, felt authenticity is likely to increase the chances others see them as authentic. In particular, through self-disclosure, individuals whose prosocial concern is authentic, that is, aligned with their personal values, will signal that their values conform to the characteristics of the ideal, moral human being. Consequently, their prosocial concern will appear as genuine, and they will be judged as resembling an ideal, authentic human being more than individuals with low felt authenticity, whose motivation will be more uncertain.

*Hypothesis 1:* The interaction of felt authenticity and prosocial orientation jointly predicts perceived authenticity, such that the association between felt authenticity and perceived authenticity is negative when prosocial orientation is low and positive when prosocial orientation is high.

We further suggest that being perceived as authentic leads to positive social outcomes. First, it makes individuals more likeable. This argument is supported by several previous findings. Research on emotions has shown that people displaying authentic – as opposed to

inauthentic – smiles are judged more positively: more honest, stable, sincere, and likeable (Frank, Ekman, & Friesen, 1993), and interactions with them are experienced as more satisfying (Grandey, Fisk, Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005). Furthermore, individuals seen as authentic are likely to be perceived to act consistently across situations and thus more predictable than people seen as less authentic. Predictability is comforting: people are fundamentally motivated to attain predictably (Berlyne, 1960; Hogg, 2000; Inglis, 2000; Kagan, 1972), and are attracted to those whom they find predictable (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Touhey, 1973). In addition, people feel more comfortable with individuals regarded as authentic because such individuals are seen as more trustworthy (Clapp-Smith, Vogelgesang, & Avey, 2009; Wong, Spence-Laschinger, & Cummings, 2005), possibly because the predictability of one's acts is a strong determinant of trust (Mayer, Davies, & Schoorman, 1995; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985). Taken together, these ideas suggest a positive association between perceived authenticity and interpersonal liking.

*Hypothesis 2:* Perceived authenticity is positively associated with interpersonal liking.

Second, we predict that by making an individual more likeable, being perceived as authentic increases the perception of being effective. Likeable individuals trigger positive affective responses and, consequently, others are likely to see their actions in a positive light. Ultimately, likeable individuals are likely to receive better job performance evaluations than their equally knowledgeable but less likeable peers. Various bodies of literature support this view. For example, leader-member exchange literature suggests that individuals liked by their supervisors are more likely to receive higher performance ratings (e.g., Gerstner & Day, 1997). The idea is also consistent with the similarity attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971), in accordance with which interpersonal liking leads to numerous positive outcomes, including positive judgments of the behavior of liked individuals (e.g., Lott & Lott, 1965).

*Hypothesis 3:* Through interpersonal liking, perceived authenticity positively affects

job performance evaluations.

In sum, we predict that being authentic does not always lead to being perceived as authentic and, consequently, does not always come hand in hand with interpersonal benefits, such as being liked and being seen as effective. We suggest that one's reputation for being prosocial is a key to understand the consequences of felt authenticity. Felt authenticity is likely to positively affect the image of prosocial individuals – because their benevolence is seen as genuine. In contrast, when an individual is not regarded as prosocial, we expect felt authenticity to paradoxically lead to the individual to be perceived as less authentic – because his/her lack of benevolence is seen as a deviation from the authentic, moral human being one ought to be. Fig. 1 shows our hypothesized model, with perceived prosocial orientation moderating the relationship between felt authenticity and perceived authenticity, which ultimately affects interpersonal likability and job performance evaluations.

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## **Method**

### **Sample**

The data to test the hypothesized model were collected at a multinational software development company over two periods of time (with a one-year lag), as part of a larger data collection. Participants were computer engineers from all company offices in one of the countries where the company has presence (employing a total of over 2,500 people). Three hundred fifty-two employees were invited to complete an online survey. At Time 1, we assessed authenticity (felt and perceived), perceived prosocial orientation, and interpersonal liking. We obtained 257 responses at Time 1 (73% response rate). One year after, at Time 2, we measured participants' job performance. Complete data were available at Time 2 for 236 participants out of 257 (92%). This sample, along with the responses from 810 observers



(peers, colleagues, and collaborators) in T1 and participants' direct supervisors in T2, constituted our final dataset. Participants (22% women) were on average 42.18 year old ( $SD = 8.34$ ), and had an average of 14.59 years of work experience ( $SD = 8.75$ ).

### Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, respondents indicated the extent to which they agreed with each item on a 7-point-Likert-type scale anchored at 1 = *not at all* and 7 = *very much so*.

***Felt and perceived authenticity.*** To measure authenticity, we used eight items from the Kernis and Goldman's (2006) authenticity scale which were designed to measure authentic behavior, i.e., the extent to which one is acting in accord with one's values as opposed to acting to please others or attain favorable outcomes at the cost of being "false" to one's true self. We adapted the items to reflect (1) felt authenticity (items phrased in terms of "I," "my," etc.) and (2) perceived authenticity (items phrased in terms of "S/he," "his/her," etc.). *Felt authenticity* was assessed by participants themselves. Sample items include "My behavior at work typically expresses my values" ( $\alpha = .67$ ). *Perceived authenticity* was assessed by observers. Sample items include "His/her behavior at work typically expresses his/her values" ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

***Prosocial orientation.*** Observers rated the extent to which our participants have a tendency to be concerned about others' welfare on four items of Grant's (2008) scale, adapted from Ryan and Connell's (1989) self-regulation scales to measure prosocial motivation at work. Sample items include "Cares about benefiting others through his/her work" and "It is important to him/her to do good for others through his/her work" ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

***Interpersonal liking.*** We used the four-item scale developed by Wayne and Ferris (1990) to measure the extent to which participants were liked. Sample items are "I like working with this person" and "Working with this person is a pleasure" ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

***Job performance evaluations.*** Job performance was assessed through the three-item

scale by Motowidlo & Van Scotter (1994) designed to measure overall job performance. Direct supervisors rated participants on each of these items at Time 2. Sample items are “Performs at high level compared with others of the same rank” and “Exceeds standards for job performance” ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

**Control variables.** We controlled for the effect of technical expertise on job performance evaluations to account for the potential confounding effects of competence on interpersonal liking (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2006). We obtained technical expertise ratings from personnel files. These ratings are consensus evaluations performed by area managers and the HR specialists across a range of technical tasks essential for each individual’s job (ranging from 1 = very unsatisfactory to 7 = very satisfactory).

We also controlled for the effect of age (integers), gender (1 = male, 0 = female), and experience (integers). Analyses revealed that while technical expertise was significant in predicting job performance, none of the other controls (i.e., age, gender, and experience) was significant in predicting any of the variables in our model ( $p > .05$ ). Following Becker’s (2005) recommendations, we dropped the impotent control variables (i.e., age, gender, experience) and retained only technical expertise in subsequent analyses.

### **Analyses**

To test our hypothesized model, we performed *structural equation modeling* (SEM, Bollen, 1989) analyses in STATA. SEM has several advantages over hierarchical regressions to test complex models in general (Hoyle & Smith, 1994; Saris & Gallhofer, 2007; Saris, Satorra, & van der Veld, 2009) and mediation models in particular (Cheung & Lau, 2008). To test our hypotheses, we followed Anderson and Gerbing’s (1988) recommendations and performed a series of nested model comparisons.

Due to repeated observations (i.e., several observers rated the same individual), the observers’ answers were not independent thereby violating the OLS regression assumption.

To account for that, we computed clustered standard errors (Rogers, 1993) that are robust to correlations across observations sharing the same characteristics. With regard to global fit indices of the SEM models, we report the squared root mean of residuals (SRMR) and the coefficient of determination (CD) because these are the only two fit indices available for models with clustered errors in STATA. To detect model misspecifications, we followed Saris, Satorra, and Sörbom's (1987) recommendations. We used Wald tests to assess whether non-hypothesized paths had to be added to the model. While assessing the hypothesized model, because the reliability of some of the measures were moderate (Table 1), we corrected for the measurement error of our variables following the recommendations of Saris, Satorra, and Sörbom (1987) and Moosbrugger, Schermelleh-Engel, Kelava, and Klein (2009).

## Results

### Measurement models

We first assessed the underlying structure of the three measures assessed by observers at Time 1, i.e., perceived authenticity, prosocial orientation, and interpersonal liking, through a confirmatory factor analysis (Bentler & Dudgeon, 1996). The three-factor model demonstrated a good fit with the data ( $\chi^2(98) = 739.13$ , RMSEA = .09, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .05). A one-factor model that included all items as a single underlying dimension provided a significant decrease in fit with respect to the three-factor model ( $\chi^2(101) = 3,605.25$ , RMSEA = .21, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .10;  $\Delta\chi^2 = 2,326.12$ ,  $\Delta df = 3$ ,  $p < .01$ ). We then tested a two-factor model assuming prosocial orientation and liking shared the same underlying factor. The two-factor model also resulted in a significant decrease in fit with respect to the three-factor solution ( $\chi^2(100) = 2,438.47$ , RMSEA = .17, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .07;  $\Delta\chi^2 = 1,699.34$ ,  $\Delta df = 2$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These results indicate the appropriateness of treating prosocial orientation, perceived authenticity, and interpersonal liking as separate constructs.

### Preliminary Analyses

Means, standard deviations, correlations, and measure reliabilities appear in Table 1. The table reveals the following: Felt authenticity is not directly related to perceived authenticity (.03, *ns.*), but is significantly related to interpersonal liking (.10,  $p < .01$ ). At the same time, perceived authenticity is directly positively related to interpersonal liking (.52,  $p < .01$ ) and job performance evaluations (.15,  $p < .01$ ).

### **Model Comparisons and Hypotheses Testing**

Table 2 shows the progression of tests of a series of SEM models. We first tested our hypothesized model (Fig. 1), specifying the effects of felt authenticity, prosocial orientation, and their interaction on perceived authenticity, the effect of perceived authenticity on interpersonal liking and, through the latter, on job performance evaluations. The unstandardized solution is shown in Table 2 (Model 1). We then fit three additional nested models to detect misspecifications and test the hypothesized effects. Model 2 included all paths from the hypothesized model as well as the direct paths from felt authenticity, prosocial orientation, and their interaction to interpersonal liking. As shown in Table 2, only the path from prosocial orientation to interpersonal liking was significant (.66,  $p < .001$ ), and the results of a Wald test implied that this path should be retained ( $\chi^2(1) = 204.62, p < .001$ ). Model 3 included all paths from the hypothesized model, the direct path from prosocial orientation to interpersonal liking, plus an additional direct path from perceived authenticity to job performance evaluations. As shown in Table 2, this additional path was not significant (-.02, *ns.*), and the results of a Wald test suggested it should not be retained in the model ( $\chi^2(1) = .05, ns.$ ). Finally, Model 4 included also the direct paths from felt authenticity, prosocial orientation, and their interaction to job performance evaluations. None of these paths was significant (all  $\chi^2(1) < 2.00, ns.$ ). Based on these results, the best model is the hypothesized model with a direct path from prosocial orientation to interpersonal liking

(Model 5 in Table 2). We used this model for subsequent analyses.<sup>2</sup>

Next, we performed further analyses of the best model to test our hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that prosocial orientation moderated the relationship between felt authenticity and perceived authenticity. As shown in Table 2 (Model 5), the interaction of felt authenticity and prosocial orientation was significant in predicting perceived authenticity ( $.19, p < .05$ ), supporting our predictions. Furthermore, the direct path felt authenticity  $\rightarrow$  perceived authenticity was not significant ( $-.03, ns.$ ), whereas the path prosocial orientation  $\rightarrow$  perceived authenticity was positive and significant ( $.43, p < .001$ ). To interpret these results, we analyzed and plotted the simple slopes (Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2006) at one standard deviation above and below the independent variable (felt authenticity) and the moderator (prosocial orientation) (Fig. 2). When prosocial orientation was low, the simple slope was negative and significant,  $-.25, SE = .11, p < .05$ , in line with our predictions. In contrast, when prosocial orientation was high, the simple slope for the relationship between felt authenticity and perceived authenticity was positive, as predicted, but not significant,  $.19, SE = .11, ns.$

Second, the path from perceived authenticity to interpersonal liking was positive and significant ( $.33, p < .001$ ), consistent with our predictions. We next tested the indirect effects of felt authenticity on interpersonal liking through perceived authenticity. In accordance with our hypothesized model (Fig. 1), we expected the indirect effects to be moderated by prosocial orientation. We used a bootstrap procedure to construct 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CI) for the conditional indirect effects, based on 5,000 random samples with replacement from the full sample (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). For low prosocial orientation, the indirect effect was significant and negative,  $-.08, p < .05, 95\% CI [-.15, -.01]$ . In contrast,

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<sup>2</sup> We conducted additional analyses to verify that a potential endogeneity issue did not bias the estimated coefficients (e.g., Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010). In particular, we tested an alternative model in which the error terms of (1) perceived authenticity and interpersonal liking, and (2) interpersonal liking and job performance evaluations were allowed to correlate. The resulting coefficients for the correlations between the error terms were not significant ( $.03$  and  $.01, ns.$ ), suggesting that these correlations should not be included in the model, and that endogeneity was not an issue in these analyses.

for high prosocial orientation, the indirect effect was not significant,  $.06, p = .10$ , 95% CI  $[-.01, .14]$ . These results provide support to our hypothesized model in what concerns the effects corresponding to individuals with low prosocial orientation.

Third, as predicted, interpersonal liking had a positive and significant effect ( $.23, p < .001$ ) on job performance evaluations. We next analyzed the conditional indirect effects of felt authenticity on job performance evaluations mediated via perceived authenticity and interpersonal liking (i.e., the three-stage mediated effects). We used bootstrapping analysis to assess the conditional indirect effects. Consistent with the results reported above, for low prosocial orientation, the indirect effect was significant and negative,  $-.02, p < .05$ , 95% CI  $[-.07, -.00]$ . In contrast, for high prosocial orientation, the indirect effect was positive but not significant,  $.01, p = .12$ , 95% CI  $[-.00, .03]$ .

To complement the above analyses (Taylor, MacKinnon, & Tein, 2008), we followed Carmeli, Ben-Hador, Waldman, and Rupp's (2009) approach and tested two-stage mediation models nested in our hypothesized model: (1) felt authenticity → perceived authenticity → interpersonal liking, and (2) perceived authenticity → interpersonal liking → job performance evaluations. A path from technical expertise to job performance evaluations was included in the second model. The results are shown in Table 3. As with the full model, we compared the hypothesized effects in each model to those in an alternative model that included in addition direct effects bypassing the mediators (Models 6b and 7b). The direct additional paths were not significant, and the results of these analyses were in accord with our hypotheses.

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### **General Discussion**

We hypothesized that because self-transcendence values are universal (e.g., Schwartz, 1992, 2010) and authenticity and prosocial concern are fundamentally related in people's

minds (e.g., Eagly, 2005; Gino et al., 2015; Steffens et al., 2015), whether felt authenticity, or feeling that one acts in accord with one's values, leads to being perceived as authentic by others (i.e., perceived authenticity) depends on one's prosocial orientation. We expected that when the individual is not seen as prosocial, felt authenticity can paradoxically reduce perceived authenticity, thereby generating the "authenticity gap." We further proposed that being perceived as authentic leads to being liked and, consequently, seen as more effective.

We tested our hypotheses with a sample of 236 individuals working at a large private organization. Consistent with our predictions, we found an interactive effect of felt authenticity and prosocial orientation on whether an individual is perceived as authentic and therefore is liked and receives better job performance evaluations. In particular, being true to self was detrimental for individuals with low prosocial orientation: they were perceived as less authentic and, as a consequence, liked less and seen as less effective at work. In contrast, and contrary to our predictions, felt authenticity had no effect on perceived authenticity for individuals with high prosocial orientation.

By demonstrating that being true to *self* may be detrimental to one's social outcomes when one is not seen as being true to *others*, this research contributes to the literature on the effects of authenticity in general (e.g., Leroy, Anseel, Gardner, & Sels, 2015; Moore, Lee, Kim, & Cable, 2015; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997; Wood et al., 2008) and to the literature exploring the dark side of authenticity in particular. For example, Ibarra (2015) has suggested that expressing one's authentic self might not be the best path to follow to successfully advance one's career. Similarly, felt authenticity has been shown to be a liability for leaders low in political skill (Leroy et al., 2016). Furthermore, being able to adapt one's behavior to others – and thus to deviate, when needed, from one's values – is considered a crucial interpersonal skill (Snyder, 1987). As compared to individuals who remain true to themselves, "social chameleons" have been shown to receive better job performance

evaluations and occupy more central positions in social networks (Day, Schleicher, Unkless, & Hiller, 2002; Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 2001). Our findings suggest that signaling one's prosocial concern might be an effective impression management strategy that increases the chances to be perceived as authentic, liked, and receive better performance evaluations. Our findings also guard against free expression of authenticity when the authentic self deviates from the socially constructed ideal self: being authentic can backfire, harming one's likeability and performance evaluations.

Our finding that, contrary to what we expected, felt authenticity has no effect on perceived authenticity for individuals seen as prosocially oriented emphasizes the fundamental place that self-transcendence values occupy in the hierarchy of human values (e.g., Schwartz, 1992, 2010; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987) and the crucial role they play in determining authenticity perceptions. It suggests that while individuals manifest attitudes or behavior consistent with the universal human values, their personal values – and thus the consistency of their behavior with their personal values – become irrelevant for their reputation. Our results also suggest that “*good* deeds speak louder than words.” People seem to attribute authenticity to individuals displaying prosocial concern regardless of the alignment of their behavior with their personal values, i.e., regardless of how genuine their prosocial concern is.

This research also contributes to improving our understanding of authenticity. Steffens and colleagues (2015) suggest that to understand how one can be true to one's self, the question of “which aspect of self one needs to be true to” (p. 30) should be answered first. They argue that one has to be true to both personal self (e.g., personal values) and collective self (e.g., collective values, norms, and goals). Our findings emphasize the interplay of personal and universal values in shaping people's perceptions of authenticity. On the one hand, displaying behavior consistent with universal self-transcendence values makes one to be



perceived as authentic, regardless of one's personal values. On the other hand, when one's acts deviate from these universal values, e.g., by not showing enough concern for others' welfare, the fact that such deviance is in addition consistent with one's personal values signals that one's personal values also deviate from the universal, "authentic" human values. Consequently, the individual is perceived as less authentic. These results suggest that authenticity may in part be socially constructed as the alignment of one's behavior with ideal, basic human values.

One might think that failing to display prosocial concern is more detrimental for social groups that are expected to be prosocial. For instance, as compared to men, women are expected to be more caring, selfless, and concerned about others (Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000). We conducted additional analyses to understand whether gender moderated the interactive effect of prosocial concern and felt authenticity on perceived authenticity, and found no gender differences. While it remains to be verified by future studies whether perceived prosocial concern is an equally important determinant of perceived authenticity for different social categories, the fact that our results hold for both men and women emphasizes once more how fundamental the self-transcendence values are.

As any study, this study is subject to limitations that should be kept in mind while interpreting the results. First, our sample was computer engineers. It is a task-oriented profession, where authenticity perceptions might be less important than in people-oriented professions such as sales, services, etc. Future studies should try to replicate our results in other professions. On a similar note, prosocial concern might be more important in some organizational cultures than in others. Examining how organizational culture might delimit the role of prosocial orientation in determining authenticity perceptions is another direction for future research. Second, we proposed that perceived authenticity increases likeability, but it is also plausible that a likeable individual is perceived as more authentic. Additional

analyses of our data showed that our hypothesized model with a link from perceived authenticity to likeability was more plausible than an alternative model with the reversed link from likeability to perceived authenticity.<sup>3</sup> However, the causal link between these two variables should be verified in future studies, ideally experimental.

### **Conclusion**

At the outset of the 2016 US presidential campaign, the democratic candidate Hillary Clinton was accused for not appearing authentic to the voters. We found that even when an individual expresses his/her true self, people will not perceive him/her as authentic if s/he is regarded as not taking others' needs and concerns at heart. Our findings offer one explanation for the "authenticity gap" criticism that Mrs. Clinton had to face. The alleged gap might be a consequence of the voters judging the candidate as not being prosocial enough – not caring enough, not empathic enough (Hobbs, 2015; Lightman, 2015). Our results suggest that an advice to "talk-about-what-matters-to-real-people" (Reardon, 2015) might indeed be a wise one to follow if one wants to be seen as authentic – both within and outside politics.

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<sup>3</sup> In the model with the reversed order of perceived authenticity and interpersonal liking (felt authenticity x prosocial orientation → interpersonal liking → perceived authenticity → job performance), the interaction of felt authenticity and prosocial orientation was not significant in predicting interpersonal liking, which suggests that our two mediators (i.e., perceived authenticity and liking) were not interchangeable. Moreover, the modification indices suggested including a direct path from liking to job performance. When this path was added to this reversed model, the direct path from perceived authenticity to job performance became non-significant.

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Table 1

*Descriptive statistics*

| Variable                 | source, time of data collection | Mean  | SD   | Correlations |       |       |       |        |      |       |      |  |  |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|------|-------|------|--|--|
|                          |                                 |       |      | 1            | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5      | 6    | 7     | 8    |  |  |
| 1 Felt Authenticity      | <i>self, T1</i>                 | 5.70  | .69  | (.67)        |       |       |       |        |      |       |      |  |  |
| 2 Prosocial Orientation  | <i>observers, T1</i>            | 5.57  | 1.08 | .10**        | (.94) |       |       |        |      |       |      |  |  |
| 3 Perceived Authenticity | <i>observers, T1</i>            | 5.19  | .88  | .03          | .49** | (.81) |       |        |      |       |      |  |  |
| 4 Interpersonal Liking   | <i>observers, T1</i>            | 5.71  | 1.12 | .10**        | .72** | .52** | (.93) |        |      |       |      |  |  |
| 5 Job Performance        | <i>supervisors, T2</i>          | 4.83  | 1.34 | -.01         | .23** | .15** | .25** | (.96)  |      |       |      |  |  |
| 6 Gender (M=0, F=1)      | <i>personnel data</i>           | .22   | .42  | .11**        | .06   | -.01  | .06   | -.04   | -    |       |      |  |  |
| 7 Age                    | <i>personnel data</i>           | 42.18 | 8.34 | .04          | -.03  | .02   | -.06  | -.11** | -.06 | -     |      |  |  |
| 8 Experience             | <i>personnel data</i>           | 14.59 | 8.75 | .03          | .02   | .06   | -.01  | -.07   | .01  | .75** | -    |  |  |
| 9 Technical Expertise    | <i>personnel data</i>           | 5.10  | 1.11 | -.04         | .31** | .17** | .22** | .37**  | .04  | -.04  | -.03 |  |  |

Note: 236 selves and 801 observers in T1. Reliabilities appear in the parentheses on the diagonal. \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

Table 2

Testing the hypothesized model: Path coefficients of Structural Equation Models

| Model 1: Hypothesized Model   |          |           | Model 2  |          |           |                           | Model 3  |          |           |                           | Model 4  |          |           |                           | Model 5: Best Model |          |           |
|-------------------------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|---------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|---------------------------|----------|----------|-----------|---------------------------|---------------------|----------|-----------|
| Variable                      | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | Variable | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | Wald test<br>( $\chi^2$ ) | Variable | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | Wald test<br>( $\chi^2$ ) | Variable | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> | Wald test<br>( $\chi^2$ ) | Variable            | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i> |
| Perceived Authenticity (PA) ← |          |           | PA ←     |          |           |                           | PA ←     |          |           |                           | PA ←     |          |           |                           | PA ←                |          |           |
| Felt Authenticity (FA)        | -.02     | .06       | FA       | -.03     | .06       |                           | FA       | -.03     | .06       |                           | FA       | -.03     | .06       |                           | FA                  | -.03     | .06       |
| Prosocial Orientation (PO)    | .49***   | .03       | PO       | .43***   | .03       |                           | PO       | .43***   | .03       |                           | PO       | .43***   | .03       |                           | PO                  | .43***   | .03       |
| FAxPO                         | .16*     | .06       | FAxPO    | .19*     | .08       |                           | FAxPO    | .19*     | .08       |                           | FAxPO    | .19*     | .08       |                           | FAxPO               | .19*     | .08       |
| Interpersonal Liking (IL) ←   |          |           | IL ←     |          |           |                           | IL ←     |          |           |                           | IL ←     |          |           |                           | IL ←                |          |           |
| Perceived Authenticity (PA)   | .97***   | .06       | PA       | .33***   | .06       |                           | PA       | .33***   | .05       |                           | PA       | .33***   | .05       |                           | PA                  | .33***   | .05       |
|                               |          |           | FA       | .07      | .05       | 1.08                      | FA       | .07      | .05       | 1.08                      | FA       | .07      | .05       | 1.08                      | FA                  | .07      | .05       |
|                               |          |           | PO       | .66***   | .06       | 204.62***                 | PO       | .66***   | .05       |                           | PO       | .66***   | .05       |                           | PO                  | .66***   | .05       |
|                               |          |           | FAxPO    | 0.03     | .10       | .08                       | FAxPO    | 0.03     | .10       | .08                       | FAxPO    | 0.03     | .10       | .08                       | FAxPO               | 0.03     | .10       |
| Job Performance (JP) ←        |          |           | JP ←     |          |           |                           | JP ←     |          |           |                           | JP ←     |          |           |                           | JP ←                |          |           |
| Interpersonal Liking (IL)     | .23***   | .06       | IL       | .23***   | .06       |                           | IL       | .24**    | .07       |                           | IL       | .24**    | .08       |                           | IL                  | .23***   | .06       |
| Technical Expertise (TE)      | .41***   | .08       | TE       | .40***   | .08       |                           | TE       | .40***   | .08       |                           | TE       | .41***   | .08       |                           | TE                  | .40***   | .08       |
|                               |          |           |          |          |           |                           | PA       | -.02     | .09       | .05                       |          |          |           |                           |                     |          |           |
|                               |          |           |          |          |           |                           |          |          |           |                           | FA       | -.02     | .20       | .01                       |                     |          |           |
|                               |          |           |          |          |           |                           |          |          |           |                           | PO       | -.01     | .08       | .03                       |                     |          |           |
|                               |          |           |          |          |           |                           |          |          |           |                           | FAxPO    | .21      | .15       | 1.88                      |                     |          |           |
| CD                            | .993     |           |          | .992     |           |                           |          | .992     |           |                           |          | .992     |           |                           |                     | .992     |           |
| SRMR                          | .061     |           |          | .011     |           |                           |          | .012     |           |                           |          | .005     |           |                           |                     | .012     |           |

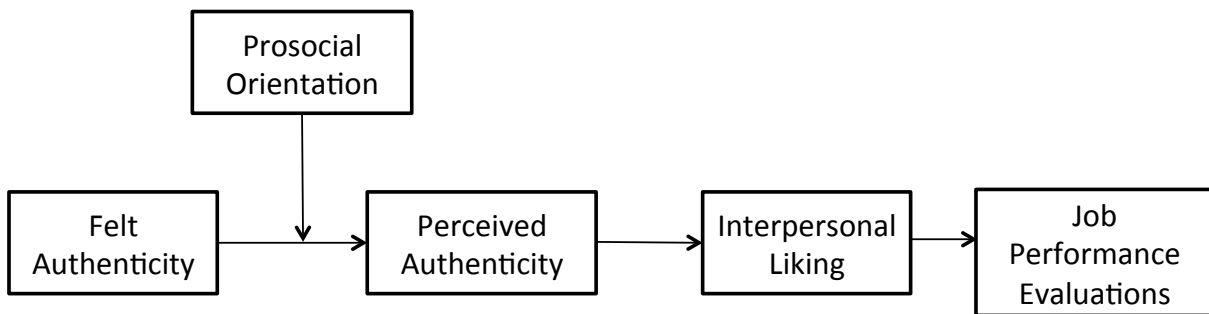
Note: Results of SEM analyses using STATA: controlling for the effect of technical expertise on job performance evaluations, with clustered errors due to repeated observations (multiple observers for each participant), and correcting for measurement errors. CD = coefficient of determination, SRMR = standardized root mean square residual. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .

Table 3

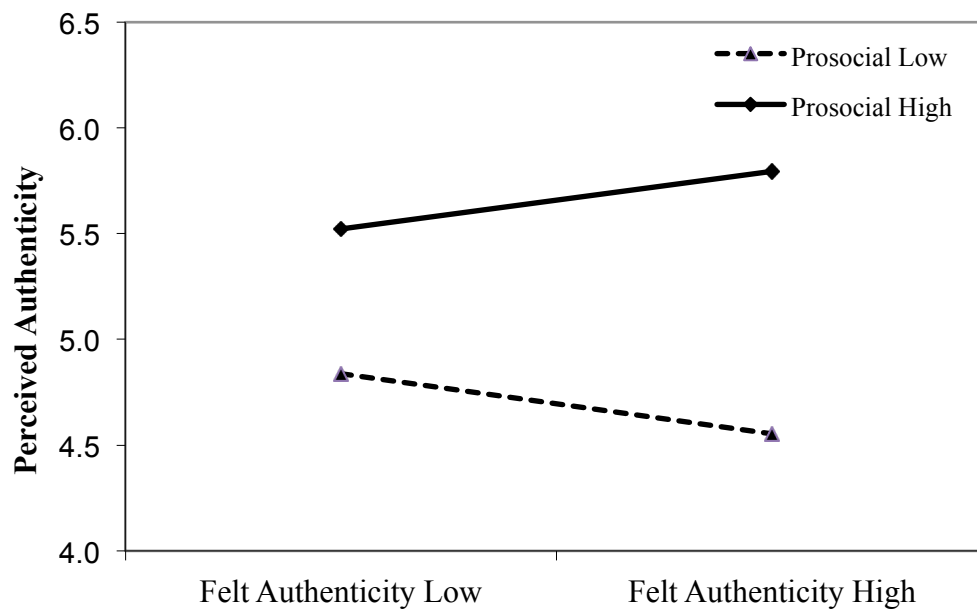
*Testing the two mediating effects separately: Path coefficients of Structural Equation Models*

| Model 6: FAxPO → PA → IL      |          |              |          |              | Model 7: PA → IL → JP     |                          |          |            |                           |            |
|-------------------------------|----------|--------------|----------|--------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------|------------|---------------------------|------------|
|                               | Model 6a |              | Model 6b |              |                           | Model 7a                 |          | Model 7b   |                           |            |
| Variable                      | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i>    | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i>    | Wald test<br>( $\chi^2$ ) | Variable                 | <i>b</i> | <i>SE</i>  | Wald test<br>( $\chi^2$ ) |            |
| Perceived Authenticity (PA) ← |          |              |          |              |                           | IL ←                     |          |            |                           |            |
| Felt Authenticity (FA)        | -.03     | .06          | -.03     | .06          |                           | PA                       | .33***   | .05        | .33***                    |            |
| Prosocial Orientation (PO)    | .43***   | .03          | .43***   | .03          |                           | PO                       | .65***   | .05        | .65***                    |            |
| FAxPO                         | .20*     | .08          | .20*     | .08          |                           | Job Performance (JP) ←   |          |            |                           |            |
| Interpersonal Liking (IL) ←   |          |              |          |              |                           | IL                       | .23***   | .06        | .25***                    |            |
| Perceived Authenticity (PA)   | .33***   | .05          | .33***   | .05          |                           | Technical Expertise (TE) | .40***   | .08        | .40***                    |            |
| Prosocial Orientation (PO)    | .66***   | .05          | .65***   | .05          |                           | PA                       |          |            | -.03                      |            |
| Felt Authenticity (FA)        |          |              | .06      | .07          | .91                       |                          |          |            | .09                       |            |
| <i>Indirect Effects:</i>      | <i>b</i> | 95% CI       | <i>b</i> | 95% CI       |                           | <i>Indirect Effects:</i> | <i>b</i> | 95% CI     | <i>b</i>                  | 95% CI     |
| FA → PA → IL                  |          |              |          |              |                           | FA → PA → IL             | .08***   | [.03, .12] | .08***                    | [.03, .14] |
| Low PO                        | -.08*    | [-.15, -.01] | -.08*    | [-.15, -.01] |                           |                          |          |            |                           |            |
| High PO                       | .06      | [-.01, .14]  | .06      | [-.01, .14]  |                           |                          |          |            |                           |            |
| CD                            | .991     |              | .991     |              |                           | CD                       | .988     |            | .988                      |            |
| SRMR                          | .005     |              | .002     |              |                           | SRMR                     | .003     |            | .003                      |            |

*Note:* Results of SEM analyses using STATA: controlling for the effect of technical expertise on job performance evaluations, with clustered errors due to repeated observations (multiple observers for each participant), and correcting for measurement errors. CD = coefficient of determination, SRMR = standardized root mean square residual. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ .



*Figure 1.* Theoretical model for the link between felt authenticity, perceived authenticity, interpersonal liking, and job performance evaluations.



*Figure 2.* Simple slopes of the effect of felt authenticity on perceived authenticity, moderated by prosocial orientation.