

Does Authenticity Predict Sense of Community of Turkish University Students?

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The aim of this study is to investigate the predictive role of authenticity on sense of community. The study was conducted with 402 graduate students (237 women, 165 men; M age= 20.6 yr.). Participants completed the Authenticity Scale and the Sense of Community Scale. Sense of community was correlated negatively with two sub-factors of authenticity: accepting external influence and self-alienation and positively with the authentic living factor of authenticity. In regression analysis, self-alienation and accepting external influence predicted negatively and authentic living predicted positively to sense of community, accounting for 14% of the variance collectively.

INTRODUCTION

To be able to behave according to feelings and thoughts and “to be oneself” has been perceived as a social norm in most of the cultures (Bialystok, 2009), which is called often as authenticity. Roots of the concept of the authenticity can be found in the recommendations of the ancient Greek philosophy; such as “Know thyself” and “To thine own self be true” (Harter, 2002). Similarly, from an Anatolian perspective a well-known Islamic scholar Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, has emphasized the importance of to be an authentic individual by his the most eminent words; “Either appear as you are or be as you appear”. Authenticity was defined by various authors in different ways such as “accordance between how someone presents himself and what he actually is” (Bialystok, 2009) and “being emotionally sincere, having self-attunement, and psychological depth, and treating candidly and without having hidden intentions” (Sheldon, 2009). Snyder and Lopez (2007) considered authenticity from a broader point view and described it as expressing one's true beliefs, values, and behaviors to oneself and others sincerely, treating faithfully, and taking responsibility for one's own emotions and actions (Peterson & Park, 2004).

Recently, Wood and his colleagues developed a three-dimensional authenticity model; Self-alienation, authentic living, and accepting external influence. The first dimension contains an inadequate sense of identity because of not knowing oneself accurately and a discrepancy between the conscious awareness and real experience. The second dimension involves being true to oneself and behaving consistent with one's own beliefs and values. And the third dimension, includes a belief that the individual must adjust to the expectations of others. These three components of authenticity have been experienced differently at the phenomenological level, while they interact mutually each other. For example individuals who don't tend to accept external influence are more likely to behave more authentically whereas people who accept external influence are more likely to be self-alienated. In Wood's model authentic living is an indicator of authenticity whereas self-alienation and accepting external influences show inauthenticity (Pinto, Maltby, Wood, & Day, 2012; Wood et al., 2008).

Research on authenticity generally demonstrated that it is a positive indicator of psychological health. In these studies it was found that authenticity is related positively to extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, openness (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997), self-esteem, subjective well-being, psychological well-being (Wood et al., 2008), and well-being at work (Ménard & Brunet, 2011). On the other hand authenticity was found negatively associated with psychological symptoms such as anxiety, stress, depression, and neuroticism (Sheldon et al., 1997; Wood et al., 2008).

Sense of Community

Sense of community was first conceptualized by Sarason (1974) to refer to the crucial role of the belonging to and being an integral part of a larger society. As it reflects interrelationships and membership with a greater range of people (Hombrados-Mendieta, Gomez-Jacinto, Dominguez-Fuentes, & Garcia-Leiva, 2013; Townley, Kloos, & Wright, 2009), Sarason suggested that sense of community is central to well-being. Later Mc Millan and Chavis (1986) have described sense of community as “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9). They proposed a four-dimensional sense of community model: Membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection.

Membership indicates the feeling of belonging and identification with the group (which includes perception of shared boundaries, history and symbols; feeling of emotional safety and personal investment in the community). Influence represents the opportunity of individuals to participate to community life through their own contributions in mutual relationships (perceived effect that a person has over the decisions and actions of the community). Integration and fulfillment of needs places importance on common needs, goals, and beliefs among group members and refers to the benefits that people derive from their membership to a community. And shared emotional connection reflects the sharing of a common history and the bonds developed over time between group members (Albanesi, Cicognani, & Zani, 2007; Elvira, et al., 2008; Townley et al., 2013).

Sense of community is a catalyst for social involvement and participation in the community (Obst et al., 2002; Townley et al., 2009), is an indicative of social engagement and it has also been linked to social attachment, perceptions of belonging, social well-being, civic engagement, community connectedness (Sonn & Fisher, 1996), group membership (Albanesi et al., 2007), and companionship (Oh, Ozkaya, & LaRose, 2014). Studies proved that sense of community is related positively to psychological health indicators such as sense of efficacy, life satisfaction, happiness (Farrell & Coulombe, 2004), subjective well-being (Davidson & Cotter, 1991), social support (Li, Sun, He, & Chan, 2011), positive affect (Kenyon, Jessica, & Carter, 2011; Oh et al., 2014), and quality of life (Gattino, Piccoli, Fassio, & Rollero, 2013). On the contrary feelings of alienation, loneliness (Prezza & Pacilli, 2007), suicide (Farrell & Coulombe, 2004), depressive symptoms (Li et al., 2011), and negative effect (Oh et al., 2014) were inversely related to sense of community.

Present Study

Although research conducted with the authenticity is encouraging, to date, however, no empirical research has examined whether authenticity predicts sense of community. Therefore the goal of the present research is to do this. Authenticity is a basic human property which has important impacts both on psychological and social health. Since authentic people treat honestly, openly, and according to their innate feelings and intentions authenticity is accepted as a key characteristic of healthy functioning and psychological well-being (Harter, 2002; Wood et al., 2008). Also because authenticity provides the feeling of trust to the self and others it may facilitate sense of social self-efficacy and protects individual against social problems. This also may facilitate connection of the people with their community; therefore authenticity appears to enhance interpersonal well-being. In addition individuals who have higher levels of sense of community seem to have more positive thoughts and emotions and quality of life (Gattino et al., 2013). They are also less likely to have psychological symptoms and more likely to have a healthy social life. Moreover previous evidence suggests that both authenticity and sense of community are

strongly and negatively related to negative affect (Li et al., 2011; Oh et al., 2014; Sheldon et al., 1997; Wood et al., 2008) and positively related to positive affect (Chavis & Wandersman, 1990; Davidson & Cotter, 1991; Farrell & Coulombe, 2004; Wood et al., 2008). Therefore there may be a positive association between authenticity and sense of community. Based on the above relationships of authenticity and sense of community, in the current research the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 1. Accepting external influence will be negatively associated with sense of community.

Hypothesis 2. Self-alienation will be negatively associated with sense of community.

Hypothesis 3. Authentic living will be positively associated with sense of community.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 402 graduate students (237 women, 165 men). Of the participants, 87 were first-year students, 96 were second-year students, 106 were third-year students, and 113 were fourth-year student. Their ages ranged from 17 to 29 years old ($M = 20.6$, $SD = 1.02$). Convenience sampling was used for the selection of participants.

Measures

Authenticity Scale. Authenticity was measured using the Authenticity Scale (Wood et al., 2008). This scale is a 12-item self-report inventory. Items were rated on a 7-point scale with anchors 1: Does not describe me at all and 7: Describes me very well. The scale has three sub-dimensions: Accepting external influence (e.g., “Other people influence me greatly”), Self-alienating (e.g., “I don’t know how I really feel inside”), and Authentic living (e.g., “I live in accordance with my values and beliefs”). A Turkish adaptation of this scale by Akin and Dönmezogullari (2010) with 528 Turkish university students (288 women, 242 men), has three factors explaining 57% of the total variance. Internal consistencies were .73, .72, and .75 and three-week test-retest reliability estimates were .89, .86, and .79 for the three factors, respectively.

Sense of Community Scale (Chiessi, Cicognani, & Sonn, 2010). The scale was used to measure sense of community and consists of 20 items 5-point Likert (0= not at all true to 4= completely true). Ratings were summed for a total score (possible range 0 to 80). Turkish adaptation of this scale had been done by Akin, Eroğlu, and Kocaman (2012). The goodness of fit index values of the model were $\chi^2 = 637.53$, $df = 161$, $RMSEA = .087$, $CFI = .91$, $IFI = .91$, $SRMR = .076$. The overall internal consistency reliability coefficient of the scale was .87 and the three-week interval test-retest reliability coefficient was .84. The corrected item-total correlations of the scale ranged from .35 to .62.

Procedure

Permission for participation of students was obtained from related chief departments and students voluntarily participated in research. Completion of the scales was anonymous and there was a guarantee of confidentiality. The scales were administered to the students in groups in the classrooms. The measures were counterbalanced in administration. Prior to administration of measures, all participants were told about purposes of the study.

Statistical Analysis

In this research, multiple linear regression analysis and Pearson correlation coefficient were used to investigate the relationships between authenticity and sense of community. The variables which were entered in multiple regression analysis were measured by summing the items of each scale. These analyses were carried out via SPSS 11.5.

RESULTS

Descriptive Data and Correlations

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and correlations among the variables. Preliminary correlation analysis showed that authentic living ($r = .28$) was related positively to sense of community. Self-alienation ($r = -.13$) and accepting external influence ($r = -.18$) were negatively associated with sense of community. Independent samples t tests indicated no statistically significant sex differences for scores on authenticity and sense of community.

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND PEARSON CORRELATIONS AMONG VARIABLES

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3
1. Sense of community	44.83	12.27			
2. Accepting external influence	14.95	5.98	-.18**		
3. Self-alienation	12.80	5.78	-.13**	.41**	
4. Authentic living	22.44	5.84	.28**	-.12*	-.11*

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Before applying regression, assumptions of multiple regression were checked. The data were examined for normality by the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicated normality of distributions of test scores for all tests in the current study. Outliers are cases that have data values that are very different from the data values for the majority of cases in the data set. Outliers were investigated using Mahalanobis distance. A case is outlier if the probability associated with its D^2 is .001 or less (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). Based on this criterion, thirteen data were labeled as outliers and they were deleted. Multi-collinearity was checked by the variance inflation factors (VIF). All the VIF values were less than 10 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001), which indicated that there was no multi-collinearity.

Multiple regression analysis was performed in which the dependent variable was sense of community and the independent variables were dimensions of authenticity (Table 2). As many of those predictor variables were dependent on each other, forward stepwise procedure, which includes one new explanatory variable at each step, specifically the most associated with the dependent variable while being, at the same time, independent of the explanatory variables already included in the model. The criteria to include the variables from the regression model were: criterion probability-of-F-to enter $\leq .05$.

Three stepwise multiple regression analysis has applied to assess which dimensions of authenticity were the best predictors of sense of community. Table 2 shows the results of multiple regression analysis where the independent variables were authenticity scores and the dependent variable was sense of community. Authentic living entered the equation first, accounting for 08% of the variance in predicting sense of community ($R^2 = .08$, adjusted $R^2 = .08$, $F(1, 400) = 34.060$, $p < .01$). Accepting external influence entered on the second step accounting for an additional 2% of the variance ($R^2 = .10$, $\Delta R^2 = .02$, adjusted $R^2 = .10$, $F(2, 399) = 22.502$, $p < .01$). Self-alienation entered on the third step accounting for an additional 4% of the variance ($R^2 = .14$, $\Delta R^2 = .04$, adjusted $R^2 = .13$, $F(3, 398) = 20.926$, $p < .01$). The standardized beta coefficients indicated the relative influence of the variables in last model with self-alienation ($\beta = -.21$, $p < .01$), accepting external influence ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .01$), and authentic living ($\beta = .23$, $p < .01$) all significantly influencing sense of community and accepting external influence was strongest predictor.

TABLE 2
SUMMARY OF STEPWISE MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR VARIABLE
PREDICTING SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Variables	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE_B</i>	β				
Step 1							
Authentic living	.59	.10	.28	5.84	.28	.08	34.060*
Step 2							
Authentic living	.55	.10	.26	5.47	.32	.10	22.502*
Accepting external influence	-.31	.10	-.15	3.19			
Step 3							
Authentic living	.48	.10	.23	4.81	.37	.14	20.926*
Accepting external influence	-.50	.11	-.24	-4.66			
Self-alienation	-.44	.11	-.21	-4.01			

**p*<.001

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to investigate the predictive role of authenticity on sense of community. To my knowledge, this is the first study investigating these relationships. As predicted, results demonstrated that sense of community related to accepting external influence and self-alienation negatively and to authentic living positively. In interpreting the results of the present findings, several plausible explanations exist. First of all these findings are in line with the research that has shown that authenticity is closely associated with the indices of social adjustment such as extraversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness (Sheldon et al., 1997). Thus authenticity may increase the feeling of sense of community. Second since people with sense of community pay attention to well-being rather than failure and helplessness behaviors, they are more likely to have higher level of social attachment and social well-being (Sonn & Fisher, 1996), life satisfaction (Farrell & Coulombe, 2004), and quality of life (Gattino et al., 2013) which may ultimately provide a sense of extraversion that people experience when they are authentic. Therefore authenticity and sense of community may share the same properties in nature and people who high in sense of community can behave more authentic.

This study has some limitations. Firstly, it was correlational and based on a convenience sample. Secondly, the present sample's results are limited to high school students so generality is restricted and more population-representative samples need to be used in future studies to examine the relationships between authenticity and sense of community. Also explicit investigation of mediating or latent variables is important.

Consequently, the present research provides important information about the predictors of sense of community. The implication is that tendency to accept external influence and self-alienation may indicate a risk for low sense of community. Nonetheless it is important to note that scientific research on authenticity is still in its nascent phases and more research will need to be done before any implications can be drawn. Also there are enough positive indicators to suggest that more research on authenticity would be a worthwhile.

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