Further Validation of the Realness Scale: Are Celebrity Worshipers Unreal?

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Abstract

We administered the *Realness Scale* (*RS*)*, Celebrity Attitude Scale* (*CAS*), and the modified *Authentic Living Subscale* (*ALS*) from the *Authenticity Scale* (*AS*) to undergraduate students from four American institutions of higher learning. We sought to further validate the *RS* by showing that it correlated positively with the *ALS* and negatively with the *CAS*. We also hypothesized that African Americans would score lower than Whites on the *RS*. Our results supported the first hypothesis, but we found only weak or non-existent support for the other two hypotheses. Discussion focused on reasons why our latter two hypotheses yielded mostly negative results and suggested improvements for future research.

Keywords: authenticity, realness, celebrity attitude, authentic living, celebrity worship

1. Introduction

Authenticity can be conceived as a sense that one is acting in accord with one's true self with others (Boucher, 2011), or behaving in a way that is consistent with one's true self (Rivera & et al., 2019). It consists of being genuine and "true to oneself" or "real" in relationships with other people (Tolmacz & et al., 2022). The importance of authenticity seems to stem from the observation that it is often lacking in our own lives and in the world around us (Lehman & et al., 2019). The idea of so-called "fake news" has been widely circulated by politicians seeking to deny their misdeeds (Hopwood & et al., 2021). Unfortunately, research has found that fake news is difficult to correct (Pennycook & Rand, 2021), thus the further understanding and promotion of authenticity and its components seems to be a worthwhile goal.

While definitions of authenticity seem to be largely consistent with each other, and the importance of the concept is well established, it has not been without criticism. Some have pointed out that the nature of the true self is less than clear and may change from time to time and from one situation to another (Hicks & et al., 2019; Lopez & Rice, 2006; Ryan & Ryan, 2019; Sedikides & et al., 2019). However, there is general agreement that authenticity refers to that which is real (Lehman & et al., 2019).

In the present study we viewed authenticity through the trait approach adopted by Wood et al. (2008), Nartova-Bochaver et al. (2021), and Hopwood et al. (2021). They viewed authenticity as a relatively stable characteristic of humans, conceding that there are circumstances under which persons who are generally authentic might engage in some fake or inauthentic behavior.

Fleeson and Wilt (2010) found that authenticity was consistently linked with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability. Kernis and Goldman (2005) found that authenticity correlated with self-reported scores on life satisfaction, self-esteem, and autonomy. Borawski (2019) and Hicks et al. (2019) found that well-being was positively predicted by authenticity while anxious attachment was negatively correlated with authenticity (Tolmacz & et al., 2022). Both Harter (2002) and Impett et al. (2008) linked authenticity to the willingness to express true feelings in adolescent girls. Baker et al. (2017) found that authenticity was linked to satisfaction with personal relationships. Nartova-Bochaver et al. (2021) found that well-being correlated significantly with authentic living. Inauthenticity has been linked to anxious and avoidant attachment (Gillath & et al., 2010), depression, anxiety, and other physical symptoms (Ryan & et al., 2005; Sheldon & et al., 1997), reduced well-being, and job satisfaction, and increased stress (Martinez & et al., 2017). See Rivera et al. (2019) for a review.

Hopwood et al. (2021) argued that the core component of authenticity is realness, the tendency to behave on the outside the way one feels on the inside, regardless of the personal or social consequences. They pointed out that a "real" person would generally be valued by society, but would not always be popular, since being real might sometimes bring conflict with societal values. Martin Luther King, Jr. might serve as an exemplar of realness, since his behavior was often disagreeable to large segments of the public and brought him into conflict with the attitudes of authority figures. Since realness is a part of authenticity, we might expect a measure of realness to correlate moderately with measures of authenticity. In fact, that has been shown to be the case (Hopwood & et al., 2021). On the other hand, a measure of realness, such as their *Realness Scale* (RS) might be expected not to correlate significantly with a big five measure of agreeableness, and this was found to be mostly true. They speculated that further research should compare groups with different backgrounds on their scale. Specifically, they suggested that groups with more historical or personal privilege might experience less social risk in being real than groups who historically had been underprivileged. In the current study, we tested this idea by comparing *RS* scores of individuals who identified as African American with those who identified as White. In addition, because their measure of realness is relatively new, we felt that additional validation would help to further establish the utility of the *RS*.

Over the course of several years, McCutcheon and colleagues (Ashe & McCutcheon, 2001; Griffith & et al., 2013; Hitlan & et al., 2021; Maltby & et al., 2002; McCutcheon & et al., 2002; Zsila & et al., 2018) measured admiration for celebrities, beginning with the underlying notion that admiration could be best studied by conceptualizing it in terms of degrees of admiration for a favorite celebrity. They created scale items to measure the *extent* to which individuals admired their favorite celebrities. To date, more than 90 published articles have used the *Celebrity Attitude Scale* (CAS) in one form or another and several studies have shown it to have both internal and test-retest reliability (Griffith & et al., 2013; McCutcheon & et al., 2004; Zsila & et al., 2018). Also, it has been shown to be relatively free of social desirability bias (Hitlan & et al., 2021) and several studies have revealed its convergent and external validities (see Brooks, 2018, for a review).

There is some reason to think that persons who score "high" on the *CAS* (i.e., celebrity worshipers) are not likely to be "real" or authentic in their relationships with others. In sharp contrast to the typical correlates of authenticity, those who score high on the *CAS* tend to score low on various measures of well-being. For example, Maltby and colleagues found that high scores on the *CAS* correlated with poor well-being, neuroticism, and poor mental health, as well as anxiety and depression, respectively (Maltby & et al., 2001, 2003, 2004, 2011). Reeves et al. (2012) found that high *CAS* scores correlated positively with low well-being. Aruguete et al. (2019) found that life satisfaction scores were negatively related to *CAS* scores. Zsila et al. (2020) found that incidents of self-injury and suicide attempts were higher among high scorers on the *CAS*. There are at least four studies showing a positive relationship between *CAS* scores and a desire for fame (Greenwood & et al., 2018; Reeves & et al., 2013; Vally & et al., 2020; Zsila & et al., 2018), suggesting that individuals who desire fame tend to be unhappy with being who they are.

Based on the previous literature we hypothesized that:

(1) Scores on a measure of realness (RS) would correlate positively with a measure of authentic living (ALS), a part of authenticity that appears to closely capture the meaning of realness.

(2) African Americans would score lower (less real) than White Americans on the measure of realness (RS).

(3) Scores on a measure of realness (RS) would correlate negatively with scores on a measure of admiration for one's favorite celebrity (CAS).

2. Method

2.1 Participants

An a priori power analysis using G*Power (Erdfelder & et al., 1996) indicated that a total sample size of 128 (assuming equal group sample sizes) would be needed to detect a medium effect size of $d = 0.5$ (Cohen, 1988)

with 80% power using an independent *t*-test with α = .05 and two tails.

We recruited 283 participants from four universities located in the continental United States, of which 106 had to be excluded from analyses due to incongruent responses to two catcher questions and/or scale validity checks (*n* = 16) or missing responses on any of the scales (*n* = 90). The final sample included 177 individuals (M_{age} = 20.10 years, SD_{age} = 3.79) from Georgia (*n* = 37), Minnesota (*n* = 51), North Carolina (*n* = 51), and South Carolina (*n* = 38). There were 130 respondents who identified as female (74.3%), 44 as male (25.1%), with three individuals who preferred not to answer the biological sex question. In terms of race and ethnicity, 2 (1.1%) identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 6 (3.4%) as Asian, 38 (21.5%) as Black or African American, 12 (6.8%) as Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin, 2 (1.1%) as Middle Eastern or North African, 1 (0.6%) as Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 129 (72.9%) as White, 1 (0.6%) as other (specification: White, half Asian), and 2 (1.1%) preferred not to answer.[1]

2.2 Measures

Realness Scale: The *Realness Scale* (*RS*) measures the extent to which one behaves on the outside the way one feels on the inside, without regard for social or personal consequences (Hopwood & et al., 2021). It consists of 12 items, with a scale of false = 1, slightly true = 2, mainly true = 3, and very true = 4. Six items are reverse scored; for example, "Others might see me as fake." An example of an item that is not reverse scored is "I share my feelings with others even if it upsets them." High scores are construed to indicate that a person is real in relationships. Cronbach's alpha values for the *RS* typically range from .79 to .90 and the alpha in the current study was .82. Test-retest with a five-month interval was .74. Across nine related studies, the authors validated their scale by showing that it correlated moderately with existing measures of authenticity, moderately with big five measures of extraversion, openness, and conscientiousness, but was unrelated to agreeableness.

Authentic Living Subscale: The *Authenticity Scale* measures a person's self-reported sense of authenticity that consists of three subscales: *Authentic Living, Accepting External Influence,* and *Self-Alienation* (Wood & et al., 2008). The *Authenticity Scale* consists of 12 items describing each of the three aspects (four items per subscale), with which participants indicate their agreement on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me at all) to 7 (describes me very well). By inspection, the four items that comprise the *Authentic Living Subscale* (*ALS*) are very close to the concept of realness as described by Hopwood et al. (2021). In the original version by Wood et al. (2008) the ceiling was too low, possibly because of social desirability, so Nartova-Bochaver et al. (2021) reversed the scoring on some items. In the present study we followed suit. For example, "I think it is better to be popular than to be yourself," and "I do not always succeed in upholding what I believe in" (both reverse scored). Wood et al. (2008) found Cronbach's alphas of .69 and .82 for *Authentic Living,* and Nartova-Bochaver et al. (2021) found a Cronbach's alpha of .64 and reliability of .78 measured by McDonald's Omega. The Cronbach's alpha of the modified version in the present study was .55. Wood et al. (2008) obtained a test-retest stability score of .79 with a four-week interval, and a correlation of .34 between *ALS* scores and scores on a measure of positive relations with others. High scores suggest a person who is being "real" in relationships.

The *Celebrity Attitude Scale* (*CAS*) consists of 23 items, and has been shown to have good psychometric properties over the course of several studies (Griffith & et al., 2013; Maltby & et al., 2002; McCutcheon & et al., 2020; McCutcheon & et al., 2002; Zsila & et al., 2018). Sample items include "I love to talk with others who admire my favorite celebrity" and "I am obsessed with details of my favorite celebrity's life." The response format for the *CAS* is a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). High scores indicate a strong attachment to one's favorite celebrity. The *CAS* also measures three aspects of celebrity worship with three specific subscales (McCutcheon & et al., 2004). The first subscale, *Entertainment-Social* (*ES*), consists of 10 items structured to determine if individuals have an affinity for their favorite celebrity mainly due to the celebrity providing entertainment or as a mechanism for making contact with friends. The second subscale, *Intense-Personal* (*IP*) consists of nine items and can indicate a more problematic level of celebrity admiration (Maltby & et al., 2003). Specifically, the items help identify individuals who have an intense, potentially unhealthy attraction to their favorite celebrity. The third subscale, *Borderline Pathological* (*BP*) consists of four items aimed at detecting pathological attitudes or behaviors as a result of celebrity admiration. Across several studies total scale Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .84 to .94 (McCutcheon & et al., 2004). Cronbach's alpha for the total *CAS* in the current study was .89. In the current study we used a version of the *CAS* entitled, "*CAS-Disagree*," (*CAS-D*)*,* in which 10 of the 23 items were reverse scored to reduce the likelihood of an acquiescent response bias.

2.3 Procedure

We first obtained permission to conduct this study through Institutional Review Boards at each of the four participating institutions. Students in psychology courses at each university, if interested, could participate in the study for credit toward a class research participation module. Interested students received a link to the online

survey (administered with Qualtrics survey software), which began with the informed consent document. Those who agreed to participate, completed the *RS*, *ALS*, and *CAS-D* in a randomized order to minimize the likelihood of a systematic order bias. After completing the three scales, participants completed a short demographic questionnaire and reviewed a debriefing document.

3. Results

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlations across scales

Scale	**M** (*SD*)	*RS*	*ALS*	*CAS-ES*	*CAS-IP*	*CAS-BP*	*CAS* Total
RS	**31.97** (6.14)	1	.269**	-.141†	-.027	-.051	-.092
ALS	**21.92** (3.52)		1	-.056	-.041	.062	-.032
CAS-ES	**29.56** (6.71)			1	.585**	.616**	.886**
CAS-IP	**17.37** (6.20)				1	.618**	.871**
CAS-BP	**9.58** (3.07)					1	.800**
CAS Total	**56.51** (13.80)						1

Note. **p < .01 (2-tailed), †p = .062 (2-tailed); RS = Realness Scale, ALS = Authentic Living Subscale, CAS = Celebrity Attitude Scale, ES = Entertainment-Social, IP = Intense-Personal, BP = Borderline-Pathological.

Hypothesis 1: Positive Correlation between *RS* and *ALS*

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and Pearson's *r* correlation coefficients for all scales used. Overall, scores on the *Realness Scale* (*RS*) correlated positively, and significantly, with scores on the *Authentic Living Subscale* (*ALS*).

Hypothesis 2: African Americans Score Lower on *RS* than White

To test our second hypothesis, we first diagnosed our data to ensure they met assumptions to run an independent-samples *t*-test. Shapiro-Wilk tests for each group indicated data were approximately normal and Levene's test revealed that variances were equal. We found no significant difference in *RS* scores between participants who identified as Black or African American (*M* = 31.83, *SD* = 5.82) and those who identified as White (*M* = 31.98, *SD* = 6.28, *t*(158) = -0.125, *p* = .901, *d* = -0.02).

Hypothesis 3: Negative Correlation between *RS* and *CAS*

Scores on the *RS* showed slight negative relationships with the *CAS* Total and each subscale, although each correlation was weak and nonsignificant (see *Table 1*). We did discover a marginal, albeit weak, relationship between *RS* and *CAS-ES* scores.

4. Discussion

In this study, we attempted to further examine the relationship between realness and authenticity and extend the work to test new hypotheses. First, as expected, we discovered a significant and positive relationship between realness, as measured by the *Realness Scale* (*RS*), and authentic living, as measured by the *Authentic Living* (*ALS*) subscale of the *Authenticity Scale* (*AS*). Such a relationship is consistent with the Hopwood et al. (2021) suggestion that realness is a core component of authenticity. Specifically, if "realness" refers to overt behavior that is consistent with internal feelings, regardless of social or personal consequences, then it should relate positively to the specific *ALS* portion of the *AS*, as those subscale items address behavior across situations as a function of internalized beliefs and values.

We also explored the proposition from Hopwood et al. (2021) that groups of individuals who historically have experienced greater privilege may demonstrate more realness than historically underprivileged groups. In this

study, we compared scores from the *RS* between individuals who identified as Black or African American (historically underprivileged) with those of individuals who identified as White. The results did not support this hypothesis; *RS* scores from these two groups did not differ significantly. It is possible that these results may have been different if examined before 2020 prior to the emergence of a burgeoning societal emphasis on recognizing and discussing privilege and marginalization in the United States. We speculate that when data were collected for this study in early 2022, the United States may have started to establish a context for what French et al. (2020) referred to as radical healing for People of Color and Indigenous (POCI) individuals. French et al. (2020) proposed that radical healing may begin with raising awareness of oppressive systems. Such awareness may engender hope in POCI individuals. Characteristics such as strength, resistance, and cultural authenticity are key components to maintaining hope amidst oppressions, according to French et al.'s (2020) model. With the increasing awareness of marginalization in the United States that has emerged within the past two years, it may be that African Americans in our study reported higher realness as a function of entering the initial stages of radical healing, of which a proposed key characteristic is cultural authenticity. Had such awareness not emerged realness scores for African Americans may have been lower, but this cannot be ascertained in the current study. This does, however, lay some initial groundwork for future research to examine concepts of authenticity and realness in the context of the French et al. (2020) framework of radical healing for POCI individuals.

We predicted a negative relationship between scores on the *RS* and scores on the *CAS*. The rationale for our prediction derived from prior work that linked *high* authenticity with *high* self-esteem, emotional stability, life satisfaction, and relationship satisfaction (Baker & et al., 2017; Burawski, 2019; Fleeson & Wilt, 2010; Gillath & et al., 2010; Hicks & et al., 2019; Kernis & Goldman, 2005; Martinez & et al., 2017). Whereas *high* celebrity admiration has been linked to *low* well-being, low life satisfaction, poor mental health, and lower happiness with self (Aruguete & et al., 2019; Greenwood & et al., 2018; Maltby & et al., 2001, 2003, 2004, 2011; Reeves & et al., 2012, 2013; Vally & et al., 2020; Zsila & et al., 2018). As can be seen in *Table 1*, we did find negative relationships between *RS* and *CAS* (total scores and three subscales). However, despite patterns in the predicted direction, each relationship was weak, with the relationship between *RS* and the *Entertainment-Social* (*CAS-ES*) subscale the only one to approach statistical significance. As can be noted from prior work, authenticity and celebrity admiration are likely complex constructs, with many contributing factors. Given the multitude of potential contributing factors, it is possible that the relationships we predicted may have been obscured by the simplicity of our correlational design. In other words, including other related measures (e.g., personality variables, self-esteem, etc.) in a more sophisticated regression approach, may allow us to better differentiate real relationships that may be present. The combination of the contributing factors to authenticity and celebrity admiration constructs suggested by previous research and initial patterns in the current study indicate that this may be a fruitful path for future empirical work.

5. Limitations

A first limitation in this study to consider was the sample size. Although we did end with a final sample size that aligned with our a-priori power analysis, we excluded 116 participants for incongruent responses to catcher questions and incomplete surveys, the overwhelming majority of exclusions were on the latter. In the absence of functionality problems with our online survey delivery software, which we checked, it is unclear why we experienced such a high rate of incomplete data (32%). It is possible that this could be a carryover artifact of low interest and engagement in online learning through the Covid-19 pandemic. We know that students during the pandemic reported a preference for in-person instruction and that online learning during the pandemic was unpleasant (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020). Further, student motivation was documented as higher before the transition to online learning during the pandemic than after, which likely led to lowered effort and overall cognitive engagement in online learning during the pandemic (Aguilera-Hermida, 2020; Albelbisi & Yusop, 2019; Sun & et al., 2018). Given that data were being collected in early 2022, still amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, it is possible that conducting such an online study, especially for a very small aspect of credit in particular courses, may not have incited much effort and cognitive engagement in the population from which we sampled. This, however, would be a good avenue for research, especially to determine if there are differences in data collected, both in quantity and quality, between in-person and online studies. Some pre-pandemic research that examined online versus in-person interview data (Shapka & et al., 2016) and focus group data (Woodyatt & et al., 2016) revealed little difference in content across the collection modalities. However, Namey et al. (2020) found that audio-visual modes of data collection (e.g., in-person) resulted in greater amounts of data collected than simple online text data collection, similar to our study.

We also believe a limitation of this study had to do with our decision to only focus on the *Authentic Living Subscale* (*ALS*) of the *Authenticity Scale* (*AS*). The *ALS* only consisted of four items and in our administration of the subscale, internal consistency was low (α = .55). We did not administer the entire *AS*, which consisted of 12 items to measure three distinct subscales: *Authentic Living, Accepting External Influence,* and *Self-Alienation* (Wood & et al., 2008). So, we speculate that one potential issue is that by only asking the four *ALS* items,

independent of the remaining eight, which did not allow for a randomized order of scale items, the reliability of the scale was negatively impacted. Further, with only the *ALS* items, we were limited to exploring only relationships to that aspect of authenticity and thus are unable to discuss any other potential interesting relationships. Future research could administer the entire *AS* to address such problems.

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[1]   Frequencies and percentages may total more than 177 or 100%, respectively, as respondents could select multiple options.