


# Authenticity, Social Context, and Well-Being in the United States, England, and Russia: A Three Country Comparative Analysis

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## Abstract

The study investigated interrelationships among trait authenticity, context-specific authenticity, and well-being in three samples drawn from England, the United States, and Russia. Six hundred and twenty-eight adults participated: 196 from the United States, 240 from England, and 192 from Russia. The overall sample consisted of 151 men and 477 women with a mean age of 27 years (range = 18 to 56). Authenticity was rated both as a general trait and specific to four contexts: with partner, parents, friends, and work colleagues. Well-being was measured using a measure of positive mental health. English and American samples showed higher mean authenticity levels than the Russian sample. In all three subsamples, within-subjects differences in the context-specific ratings were in the same ordinal series; authenticity was rated highest with partner, followed by friends and parents, and lowest with work colleagues. Context and country showed an interaction in their effect on authenticity; United States and England were higher than Russia in partner, friend, and parent contexts but not in the work context. Trait and context-specific authenticity measures contributed unique and significant variance to a prediction of well-being in all three subsamples.

## Keywords

authenticity, social relationships, sex differences, well-being, personality

To be nobody-but-yourself—in a world which is doing its best, night and day, to make you somebody else—means to fight the hardest battle which any human being can fight.

E.E. Cummings, 1958

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Authenticity is an ancient idea that has had a recent renaissance. As a concept that relates to optimal human functioning, it can be traced all the way back to Plato (Nehamas, 1998). In modern times, it has reemerged as a prominent concern within a number of approaches to psychology, including humanistic (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961), existential (Yalom, 1980), analytic (Horney, 1950; Mitchell, 1992; Winnicott, 1960), positive psychology (Ryan & Deci, 2004; Seligman, 2000), and personality psychology (Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

Over the past 15 years, a number of psychometric scales for measuring authenticity have been constructed and validated, some of which measure authenticity as a trait-like disposition (e.g., Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008), whereas others assess it in relation to a particular relationship or social context, such as being with a romantic partner or at work (e.g., Erickson & Ritter, 2001; Lopez & Rice, 2006). The current study was designed to expand the existing literature that has evolved from these scales by exploring how trait- and context-specific authenticity measures relate to each other and to well-being in a cross-cultural sample. To achieve this aim, data were gathered from samples in the United States, England, and Russia, using (a) a trait measure of authenticity (Wood et al., 2008); (b) a measure that assesses authenticity in four contexts: at work, with friends, with partner, and with parents (adapted from Lopez & Rice, 2006); and (c) a measure of positive well-being (Tennant et al., 2007). To provide a context and justification for the aims of our particular investigation, we first briefly review findings from the available empirical literature on authenticity and its relation to well-being, social context, and culture.

### *Trait Authenticity*

Authenticity can be operationalized as a trait-like tendency to behave in ways that represent or reflect deeply held feelings, values, aspirations, or opinions, irrespective of context (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Two measures that assess authenticity as a trait are Kernis and Goldman's (2006) multicomponent measure and Wood et al.'s (2008) Authenticity Scale (AS). Being self-report measures, these assess the subjective experience of authenticity rather than authentic expression per se. To the best of our knowledge, more objective methods for assessing authenticity have not yet been developed.

Kernis and Goldman's (2006) multicomponent measure was developed based on a conceptual review of philosophical approaches to the question of authenticity, including those of Aristotle, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Hume, and Sartre. From this philosophical survey, four dimensions of authenticity were derived: (a) an awareness of one's self, attributes, and capacities; (b) an unbiased and accurate self-view; (c) the tendency for honest self-expression to others; and (d) openness within relationships (Kernis & Goldman, 2005). To assess these dimensions, Kernis and Goldman (2006) developed and validated the Authenticity Inventory (AI), a 45-item self-report instrument. Using American samples, AI scores were found to positively predict self-esteem, life satisfaction, and positive affect (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) and negatively predict indicators of defensiveness (Lakey, Kernis, Heppner, & Lance, 2008). AI scores also predict the tendency to avoid destructive behavior in intimate relationships (Brunell et al., 2010).

Wood et al. (2008) developed a shorter trait authenticity measure, the AS, based on Rogers's (1961) humanistic conceptualization of the construct. Rogers conceived of authenticity as the sense of empowerment and freedom to act in a way that is an expression of deeply held values, goals, and feelings, rather than the product of external pressures and expectations. Rogers said that an authentic person would feel consistency between their inner and outer senses of self and correspondingly experience coherence between their thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Based on this Rogerian theoretical foundation, Wood et al. (2008) developed item sets for three components of authenticity: Authentic Living (AL; behaving and expressing emotions in ways that are

coherent with physiological states, emotions, beliefs, and opinions), Accepting External Influence (AEI; the extent to which one acquiesces passively to the influence of other people and conforms to the expectations of others, irrespective of one's own values), and Self-Alienation (S-A; the experience of not knowing oneself and of feeling out of touch with the true self). A three-factor solution was found that supported this three-component model. AS scores are related to lower levels of perceived stress, higher self-esteem, and subjective well-being (Wood et al., 2008) and to a higher propensity for being autonomous and decisive (White & Tracey, 2011). This measure was used as an indicator of trait authenticity in the current study.

### *Authenticity and Social Context*

A number of self-report measures have been developed that assess authenticity in relation to particular contexts and relationships. Research using these instruments indicates that both adolescents and adults significantly vary their authenticity depending on who they are with (Harter, Waters, Whitesell, & Kastelic, 1998; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). This supports theories that view authentic behavior as a property of social interactions and not of persons (Gergen, 1991; Jourard, 1971; Mitchell, 1992). Corresponding to these theories, the subjective experience of authenticity has been found to be strongest within those person-context relational exchanges that promote honest and reciprocal self-disclosure and that confer mutual social support and acceptance (Didonato & Krueger, 2010) and in social environments in which one experiences a degree of power and influence (Kraus, Chen, & Keltner, 2011). Conversely, a sense of authenticity is diminished when role demands and communication patterns in relationships constrain, devalue, or compromise open expression or present the threat of conflict, aggression, or abandonment (Neff & Harter, 2002).

Harter (1995) developed the Teenage Voice Questionnaire (TVQ) to assess adolescents' authentic expression in five social contexts: with mother, father, teacher, classmates, and best friends. She found that teenage participants' self-reported authenticity was highest with close friends and progressively lower with classmates, parents, and teachers. For girls that were in all-girl schools, being with boys was the least conducive context for authentic self-expression (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1997).

Sheldon et al. (1997) also examined multiple contexts by exploring authenticity in five roles: student, employee, child, friend, and romantic partner. These investigators found that authenticity was significantly lower in student and employee roles than the romantic partner and friend roles. However, they also found an alpha coefficient of .71 in authenticity scores across all contexts, suggesting that positive covariation of authenticity ratings across contexts was also present.

Focusing more specifically on authenticity in romantic adult relationships, Lopez and Rice (2006) developed and validated the Authenticity in Relationships Scale (AIRS) to assess participants' perceptions of their own and their romantic partner's attitudes toward authentic self-expression. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses of their item pool identified two factors: Unacceptability of Deception (UOD) and Intimate Risk Taking (IRT). Subscale scores derived from these factors correlated in expected directions with scores on independent measures of self-esteem, depression, adult attachment orientations, and relationship satisfaction. These researchers also found that AIRS scores significantly enhanced the prediction of relationship satisfaction even after gender, self-esteem, attachment security, and relationship commitment scores were controlled.

Authenticity at work has also been explored in empirical studies. Erickson and Ritter (2001) developed the Inauthenticity at Work Scale to assess subjective experiences of authenticity at work over the previous 6 months. Higher scores on this index (indicative of less authenticity) were related to heavier workloads and time-related pressures, higher levels of negative emotions,

and lower levels of decisional control. A subsequent and independent study using this measure demonstrated that inauthenticity was most predictive of negative outcomes among employees who were closely identified with their work roles (Sloan, 2007).

Experience sampling methods have recently been used to assess authenticity during social interactions, and these real-time assessments also predict well-being and self-esteem (Heppner et al., 2008). Fleeson and Wilt (2010) conducted a series of studies during which participants were required to report their sense of authenticity during their engagement in different social activities (e.g., playing Twister, discussing medical ethics). They found that state authenticity was consistently associated with contexts and social interactions that facilitated acting in an extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, emotionally stable, and intellectual manner, regardless of the actor's self-perceived dispositional ratings on these "Big Five" traits. The investigators interpreted this finding as suggesting that characteristics of situational contexts may be more predictive of a person's authenticity than their Big Five traits (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010).

### Gender and Authenticity

Although studies using measures of trait authenticity have found no difference in factor structure or means across male and female groups (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Wood et al., 2008), at the level of particular relationships a more complex picture emerges. In a study of authenticity in romantic relationships, Lopez and Rice (2006) found that women scored significantly higher than men in their self-reported authenticity. Harter et al. (1998) found that in adolescents, girls were more authentic with classmates and best friends, whereas there was no difference with parents. In a more recent study with adolescents, Theran (2011) found that teenage boys were more authentic with their fathers than were girls, whereas girls were more authentic with their best friends than were boys. Another study on college students found that men had higher levels of authenticity with academic staff and male classmates, whereas women had higher levels of authenticity with female classmates (Smolak & Munstertieger, 2002). Erickson and Ritter (2001) found no difference between men and women in terms of their authenticity at work. Using the same measure, Simpson and Stroh (2004) found that whether or not men or women feel authentic at work depends on the type of job they have and whether it values masculine or feminine traits.

### Culture and Authenticity

The aforementioned authenticity-related findings are based on Western adults and may not generalize across cultures and times. Tracing the history of the idea of authenticity, the philosopher Charles Taylor concluded that personal authenticity is a widely held ideal only in those societies where the *values of modernity*, such as autonomy, independence, pluralism, meritocracy, and skepticism of traditions and received dogma, are generally accepted (Taylor, 1992). Cultures that abide by the values of modernity are referred to in the psychology literature as individualistic cultures (Triandis, 1989).

Modern societies can be broadly contrasted with traditionalist or collectivist societies (Taylor, 1992). The values in traditionalist societies emphasize obedience to family and religion, adoption of traditional/typical modes of dress and behavior, and careful adherence to gender roles and other community norms. These values tend to be antithetical to the experience of authentic self-expression across social contexts. For example, Peteet (1994) describes traditionalist values present in adult Palestinian men; young men are encouraged to engage in outward acts of fearlessness and control, even if this is just an act, and to maintain "face" and "honor" through constant vigilance of their own behavior and that of their family, and through willingness to visibly conform to traditions.

Cross-cultural studies on authenticity are rare, but some have compared ethnic groups in U.S.-based college students. One study assessed context-specific authenticity (when with romantic partner) in Mexican and European Americans and found that it was related to well-being in both ethnic groups (Neff & Suizzo, 2006). Another study of Japanese and American college students by Schug, Yuki, and Maddux (2010) found that “relational mobility” (the degree to which individuals perceive opportunities to form new relationships and terminate existing ones) increases self-disclosure with close friends. Furthermore, in a study that compared European American and East Asian American college students, English and Chen (2011) found that inconsistency in trait self-perceptions across different contexts was associated with reports of lower subjective authenticity among European American but not East Asian American students, implying that changing one’s personality according to context was not experienced as inauthentic in the East Asian group.

Although cross-cultural studies of authenticity are sparse in the published literature, the related topic of self-construal has been the focus of a considerable amount of cross-cultural research. Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that members of European or American cultures and East Asian cultures construe their sense of self in typically different ways. European and American culture construes the self as *independent* (autonomous and separate from others), whereas East Asian cultures construe the self as *interdependent* (defined by social group membership and relationships with others). A third form of self-construal is *relational* (defined in terms of close relationships and romantic attachments), which is considered indicative of Western feminine self-construal (Cross, Hardin, & Gercek-Swing, 2011). Markus and Kitayama (1991) described the effects of independent self-construals in ways that are strongly redolent of authenticity; they describe cultures that value independent self-construals as valuing efforts to express internal needs and rights and the capacity to withstand social pressures. On the other hand, interdependent self-construals lead to efforts to restrain inner desires and be receptive or acquiescent to the demands and orders of others. This conceptual overlap between independent self-construal and authenticity provides a tentative theoretical basis for predicting higher levels of authenticity in European and American samples relative to samples drawn from more collectivist cultures.

Self-construal, and therefore arguably authenticity, can be linked to measurable differences in cultures. Hofstede (1980) proposed a model of values specifying five dimensions of cultural difference: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term/short-term orientation. The “individualism vs. collectivism” dimension is of central importance to the issue of authenticity; individualistic cultures promote independent self-construal (Cross et al., 2011), whereas collectivist cultures promote unquestioned loyalty to a group and corresponding interdependent self-construal. Power distance is another dimension that has a clear conceptual link to authenticity at the individual level; high power distance means unequal power distribution and a tendency for individuals to accept their place in the hierarchical order. Higher power distance thus appears inimical to a generalized tendency toward authentic self-expression.

Hofstede et al. scored 93 countries on his five-dimensional model using World Values Survey data (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), including the three countries (United Kingdom, United States, and Russia) that provide the samples for the current study. For the variable of power distance, the United Kingdom and the United States have very low scores, while Russia gains one of the highest power distance scores of all 93 countries. For individualism, the United Kingdom and the United States are in the top few percent of all countries in the world, while Russia is placed between the 40th and 50th percentile. From this cultural survey we may tentatively infer lower average authenticity in Russia than in the England or the United States.

## Aims and Hypotheses

The psychological literature on authenticity is continuing to evolve. To the best of our knowledge, the current study is the first to compare and contrast samples from multiple countries,

including countries with cultures that are measurably different in terms of individualism-collectivism and power distance: England, the United States, and Russia. It is also the first to look at the micro-environment factor of social context as well as the macro-environmental factor of culture and the first to use both a trait measure of authenticity as well as a context-sensitive measure of authenticity.

Based on the existing literature, we advanced a series of hypotheses. First, we predicted that, across all three participant samples, trait authenticity and contextual authenticity ratings would correlate positively with well-being and with each other (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). We also anticipated that, across all three samples, women would report higher authenticity scores than men when with friends and partners but not with parents or within work contexts. All three trait authenticity subscales and all four contextual authenticity levels were predicted to be higher in the United Kingdom and the United States than Russia, based on prior findings of differences between these three countries in individualism and power distance (Hofstede et al., 2010). Next, we predicted that mean levels of self-reported contextual authenticity would show an ordinal pattern of being highest with partners, followed by friends, parents, and work colleagues, across all three countries. Lastly, we hypothesized that, across each of our participant samples, dispositional and contextual authenticity scores would predict unique variance in well-being, supporting the incremental validity of trait-based and context-specific measures. Given the exploratory nature of this analysis, we did not advance any particular hypotheses regarding which specific authenticity predictors would predict unique variance in well-being.

## Method

### Participants

The sample comprised a total of 628 adults (477 women, 151 men) across three subsamples drawn from the United States, England (United Kingdom), and Russia. To qualify for inclusion in the sample, participants were required to be age 18 or older, in a relationship, and in part-time or full-time paid employment. The American subsample comprised 196 undergraduates (171 women, 25 men) from the University of Houston with a mean age of 23 years (range = 18 to 53). The English subsample comprised 240 individuals living in or around London (149 women, 91 men) with a mean age of 31 years (range = 18 to 55) and included both students and nonstudents. The Russian subsample consisted of 192 students from Moscow State University of Psychology and Education (157 women, 35 men) with a mean age of 26 years (range = 18 to 56).

### Measures

**Authenticity Scale (AS).** This is a 12-item instrument that contains three subscales, one of which is a positive indicator of authenticity and two of which are negative indicators of authenticity (Wood et al., 2008). The positive indicator subscale is termed AL (sample items include “I think it is better to be yourself, than to be popular” and “I always stand by what I believe in”). The negative indicator subscales are AEI (sample items include “I am strongly influenced by the opinions of others” and “I always feel I need to do what others expect me to do”), and S-A (sample items include “I feel as if I don’t know myself very well” and “I feel out of touch with the ‘real me’”). Participants provide responses along a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *does not describe me at all* to *describes me very well*. Wood et al. (2008) reported that the AS subscale scores in the expected directions with self-esteem, anxiety, stress, life satisfaction, and both positive and negative affect scores. In the current sample, Cronbach alpha coefficients demonstrated acceptably high internal consistency for the three subscales. In the English sample,  $\alpha$  values ranged from .74 to .85 in the English sample, .80 to .88 in the U.S. sample, and 0.66 to 0.80 in the Russian sample.



**Authenticity in Relationships Scale–Multiple Contexts (AIRS-MC).** This scale measures authentic self-expression across four relational contexts: parents, partner, work colleagues, and friends. It is a modification of the AIRS (Lopez & Rice, 2006). The original 24-item AIRS identified two factors of authentic self-expression in romantic relationships (i.e., UOD and Intimate Risk-Taking [IRT]). As noted earlier, Lopez and Rice found that AIRS factor scores correlated in expected directions with scores on measures of self-esteem, attachment security, and relationship commitment and were uniquely predictive of relationship satisfaction. A reduced set of four UOD and six IRT items were selected for their cross-context construct validity by the researchers, based on their pooled knowledge of authenticity theory and research in different contexts. Participants rated each item with respect to their experiences in each of the four relational contexts using a 9-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not all descriptive* to *very descriptive*. For the full set of AIRS-MC items, see the appendix. All four subscales exhibited moderate to strong Cronbach alpha reliabilities: .82 to .73 in the English sample, .83 to .72 in the U.S. sample, and .79 to .62 in the Russian sample.

**Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS).** This 14-item instrument measures positive mental health and well-being. Tennant et al. (2007) reported that WEMWBS scores evidenced strong internal consistency reliability and test-retest stability and that these scores correlated in expected directions with scores on independent measures of emotional intelligence, positive and negative affect, and life satisfaction. In the current study, Cronbach alpha internal reliability coefficients were found to be satisfactorily high: For the English sample,  $\alpha = .90$ ; for the U.S. sample,  $\alpha = .91$ ; and for the Russian translated version,  $\alpha = .84$ . Participants are instructed to rate responses as they apply to the past 2 weeks, using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) *none of the time* to (5) *all of the time*. Sample items include: “I’ve been feeling optimistic about the future,” “I’ve been feeling relaxed,” and “I’ve been feeling cheerful.”

## Procedure

In England and the United States, questionnaires were administered using an online survey instrument. Participants were provided with the address of the project website. Upon accessing the online survey, they were required to read and accept the informed consent materials before they could access and complete the questionnaire measures. In Russia, participants completed the questionnaires using paper-and-pencil versions, having first given their informed consent. Questionnaires were translated into Russian by a panel of psychologists and then rechecked for reliability (see alpha values above).

Participants in all three countries provided information on their age, gender, and ethnicity prior to completing questionnaires, and all participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any point if they chose to do so. University of Houston participants gained course credit for their research participation. English participants were all volunteers, recruited by a team of 12 who were attending an adult education college in London. Russian participants were university students of varying ages who were asked to participate voluntarily in the research study. They received no course credit for participation.

## Results

### *Intercorrelations of Dispositional Authenticity, Contextual Authenticity and Well-Being Measures*

Zero-order correlations of scores on the authenticity scales and the well-being measure in each of the three participant samples were computed. These correlations are shown in Table 1. Given the large number of tests computed in the analysis, a Bonferroni correction was applied to the

**Table 1.** Zero-Order Correlations Between Variables for U.S. ( $N = 196$ ), English ( $N = 240$ ), and Russian ( $N = 192$ ) Samples.

	Auth-Partner	Auth-Friend	Auth-Parent	Auth-Work	Well-Being
Trait authenticity	<b>U .40**</b> <b>E .39**</b> <b>R .29**</b>	<i>U .27**</i> <i>E .29**</i> <i>R .18</i>	<i>U .25</i> <i>E .36**</i> <i>R .19</i>	<i>U .03</i> <i>E .16</i> <i>R .24</i>	<b>U .54**</b> <b>E .47**</b> <b>R .52**</b>
Auth-partner		<b>U .35**</b> <b>E .50**</b> <b>R .45**</b>	<i>U .36**</i> <i>E .51**</i> <i>R .09</i>	<i>U .01</i> <i>E .11</i> <i>R .18</i>	<b>U .36**</b> <b>E .31**</b> <b>R .28**</b>
Auth-friend			<i>U .28**</i> <i>E .38**</i> <i>R .12</i>	<i>U .20</i> <i>E .33**</i> <i>R .26**</i>	<i>U .31**</i> <i>E .18</i> <i>R .20</i>
Auth-parents				<i>U .20</i> <i>E .31**</i> <i>R .32**</i>	<b>U .35**</b> <b>E .19**</b> <b>R .30**</b>
Auth-work					<i>U .15</i> <i>E .12</i> <i>R .37**</i>

Note: Bold font shows a significant correlation that is replicated in all three samples. *U* = United States; *E* = England; *R* = Russia. Trait Authenticity = Authenticity Scale; Well-Being = Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale, Auth-partner, Auth-friend, Auth-parent, and Auth-work = four subscales of Authenticity in Relationships Scale—Multiple Contexts.

\*\* $p < .001$ .

customary alpha value ( $\alpha = 0.05/45$ ), meaning that correlations were required to exceed an alpha value of  $p < .001$  to be indicated as significant. Correlations that were found to be significant at that level across all three samples are shown in bold.

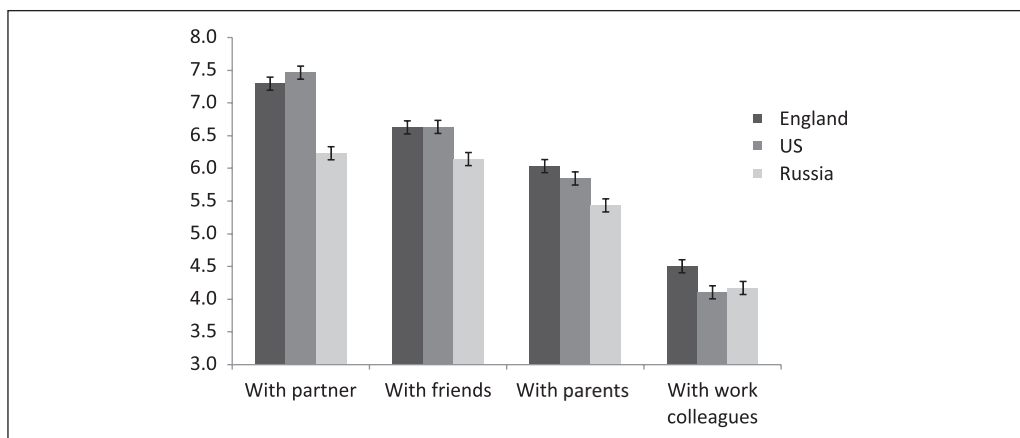
A positive manifold of correlations between the two authenticity measures and the well-being measure is illustrated in Table 1. Trait authenticity scores were significantly correlated with well-being in all three samples, and in the U.S. and Russia samples, these correlations evidenced large effect sizes. Context-specific authenticity scores in partner and parent relationships correlated positively with well-being in all samples. For the U.S. sample, authenticity with friends also correlated significantly with well-being, and for the Russia sample, authenticity at work additionally correlated significantly with well-being.

Of all the contextual authenticity subscales, the partner context scores correlated most strongly with trait authenticity in all three samples. When contextual scales are correlated with each other, only friend and partner contexts show significant intercorrelations across all three samples. Other cross-context correlations were all positive yet inconsistently significant. For example, in the English sample, the “with partner / with parent” correlation shows a large effect size, but in Russia, this correlation was small and nonsignificant.

### Contextual Authenticity: Differences Across Contexts, Countries, and Genders

Means for all four AIRS-MC contexts in the three countries are shown in Figure 1. The same ordinal cross-context difference in authenticity was found for all three samples; the mean was highest in the partner context, followed by friend, parent, and work colleague contexts.





**Figure 1.** Means and Standard Errors for Context-Specific Authenticity Scores in England, United States, and Russia Samples.

*Univariate ANCOVAs.* To test cross-gender and cross-country differences for each of the four contextual scales, four univariate ANCOVAs were conducted with each of the four contextual authenticity scales as dependent variables. Gender and country were entered as between-subjects factors, and age was entered as a covariate into all models to control for the potential confounding effects of this variable in interpreting any observed between-group differences (given that the samples varied in their mean age). Effect sizes are reported using partial eta-squared ( $\eta_p^2$ ). All  $F$  values, significance values, and effect sizes for main effects of country and gender are shown in Table 2.

For authenticity in all four contexts, country exerted a significant effect. Post hoc tests on the partner, friend, and parent context models showed that this was due to the difference between Russia and the other two countries, but there was no difference between England and the United States. In the work context, the effect was due to the difference between England and the other two countries, whereas Russia and the United States were not significantly different. In partner, parent, and friend contexts, gender exerted an effect, and examination of means showed that this was due to higher levels in the female group. No significant main effects for age were found, and neither gender nor age showed a significant interaction in any of the four models.

*Mixed-model ANCOVA: Main effects and interaction effects.* To explore main effects of context and its interactions with country and gender, a mixed model ANCOVA was conducted, with the four different contexts of the AIRS-MC entered as a within-subjects factor (levels: with parents, with friends, with parents, with work colleagues). Interactions between country, gender, and context were entered into the model specifications, and Bonferroni post hoc tests were run to explore the source of between-subjects differences. Effect sizes are reported using partial eta-squared ( $\eta_p^2$ ).

The difference in authentic expression between contexts showed a significant within-subjects effect,  $F(3, 1,772) = 65.5, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$ . Post hoc  $t$  tests of paired contexts conducted to establish the source of this significance found that all paired contexts were significantly different at  $p < .001$ .

Country exerted a significant between-subjects effect,  $F(2, 612) = 20.7, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$ . Bonferroni post hoc tests established that the source of the between-country effect was the

**Table 2.** Means and Standard Deviations for Three Countries on All Authenticity Scales and Main Effects of Country and Gender for Each Scale.

	England		U.S.		Russia		Effect of Country		Effect of Gender	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	$\eta_p^2$	F	$\eta_p^2$
AIRS-MC partner	7.29	1.30	7.46	1.33	6.21	1.47	24.9***	.08	4.3*	.01
AIRS-MC friends	6.67	1.08	6.61	1.25	6.14	1.14	10.8***	.03	8.0***	.01
AIRS-MC parents	5.97	1.39	5.74	1.57	5.44	1.36	7.3***	.02	7.3***	.01
AIRS-MC work	4.46	1.15	4.06	1.22	4.17	0.98	3.3*	.01	.03	.00
AS-Total	2.67	1.72	3.13	1.91	1.79	2.08	36.0***	.05	4.8*	.01
AS-Authentic Living	5.56	0.99	5.90	0.99	4.89	1.27	31.9***	.08	16.8***	.02
AS-Accepting External Influence	3.28	1.27	3.22	1.46	3.58	1.15	6.1**	.02	.06	.00
AS-Self-Alienation	2.49	1.34	2.33	1.47	2.62	1.37	6.2**	.02	.33	.00

Note: AIRS-MC = Authenticity in Relationships Scale–Multiple Contexts; AS = Authenticity Scale.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

difference between Russian participants and those in the other two countries, whereas the U.K. and U.S. participants were not significantly different.

Neither gender nor age showed a significant interaction with context. A significant interaction effect was found between country and context,  $F(6, 1,722) = 5.26$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ . Post hoc tests established the source of this interaction was lower levels of authenticity with partner, parents, and friends in the Russian sample relative to participants in the other two countries, whereas the U.K. and U.S. samples were no different in these three contexts. In the work context, both the American and Russian samples showed significantly lower levels than the English sample. In the English and American samples, post hoc tests showed that differences between all paired contexts were significant at  $p < .001$ . In the Russian sample, the difference between the partner and friend contexts was not significant, but the remaining paired differences were different at  $p < .001$ . The three-way interaction of gender, country, and context was nonsignificant.

### Trait Authenticity: Country and Gender Comparisons

Main effects and interaction effects of country and gender on trait authenticity were examined by way of a series of two-way ANCOVAs, with gender and country entered as fixed factors and AS total and subscales (AL, AEI, and S-A) as dependent variables, and with age again entered into the model as a covariate. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 2 along with  $F$  values, significance, and effect size for each subscale and total trait authenticity.

For the AL subscale, both country,  $F(2, 732) = 31.9$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .08$ , and gender,  $F(1, 732) = 17.8$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ , showed a main effect, but the interaction effect between country and gender was nonsignificant. Age did not show a main effect. Post hoc tests established that paired differences between *all* countries were significant, with the United States highest, followed by the United Kingdom and then Russia.

For the other two subscales (both indicators of *inauthenticity*), country exerted a significant effect: AEI,  $F(2, 732) = 6.1$ ,  $p < .01$ , and S-A,  $F(2, 732) = 6.3$ ,  $p < .01$ . Gender did not have an effect, and no significant interaction between country and gender was found.

**Table 3.** Results of Hierarchical Multiple Regressions Predicting Well-being Using Trait and Contextual Authenticity Scores, for English, U.S., and Russia Subsamples.

	England			United States			Russia		
	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$	B	SE B	$\beta$
Step 1									
Trait Authenticity	.15	.02	.47**	.19	.02	.54**	.13	.02	.52**
Step 2									
Authenticity-Partner	.08	.03	.20*	.05	.04	.09	.04	.02	.11
Authenticity-Parents	-.03	.03	-.07	.08	.03	.17*	.06	.02	.15*
Authenticity-Friend	-.02	.03	-.03	.06	.04	.10	.01	.03	.01
Authenticity-Work	.03	.03	.07	.05	.04	.08	.10	.03	.20*
Step 1 $R^2 = .22$				$R^2 = .29$			$R^2 = .26$		
$\Delta R^2 = .03$				$\Delta R^2 = .08$			$\Delta R^2 = .10$		
Step 2 $F$ change = 3.1, $p < .05$				Step 2 $F$ change = 5.9, $p < .001$			Step 2 $F$ change = 7.0, $p < .001$		

\* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

For total trait authenticity, country showed a main effect,  $F(2, 732) = 36.0, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$ , whereas main and interaction effects involving gender and age were nonsignificant. Post hoc tests of the country effect indicated that total trait authenticity scores were significantly higher among both U.K. and U.S. participants relative to Russian counterparts, whereas the difference between U.K. and U.S. participants was nonsignificant.

### Authenticity Measures as Predictors of Well-Being Across Three Countries

Hierarchical multiple regressions were used to assess the extent to which dispositional and contextual measures of authenticity uniquely and incrementally predicted subjective well-being scores within each of the three samples. Separate regressions were conducted for each of the three subsamples, with total trait authenticity scores entered at Step 1 and the four AIRS-MC scores entered as a block at Step 2 (see Table 3).

For each country, a significant regression model emerged in which both steps added incremental variance to the prediction of well-being: United Kingdom,  $F(5, 232) = 15.6, p < .001$ ; United States,  $F(5, 188) = 21.9, p < .001$ ; Russia,  $F(5, 185) = 21.0, p < .001$ . As shown in Table 3, in all three countries, trait authenticity was a significant predictor of well-being, and contextual authenticity scales added incremental variance, as evidenced by the significant  $F$  change values in this table. The contextual scales that predicted variance in Step 2 were as follows. In England, authenticity with *partner* was a significant predictor; in the United States, authenticity with *parents* was a significant predictor; and in Russia, authenticity with *parents* and authenticity with *work colleagues* were significant predictors of well-being. The context-specific authenticity predictors that emerged as uniquely significant in the models represent those that are the most incrementally predictive of variability in well-being above and beyond that which is explained by trait authenticity scores.

Finally, a regression was conducted for the whole sample, with country entered as a three-level categorical predictor along with dispositional and contextual measures of authenticity, to establish whether significant variance in the authenticity–well-being relationship was

accounted for by differences between the countries. Country emerged as a significant predictor in the resulting model ( $\beta = .29, p < .001$ ) as did trait authenticity ( $\beta = .39, p < .001$ ), authenticity with parents ( $\beta = .11, p < .01$ ), and authenticity at work ( $\beta = .11, p < .01$ ). This suggests that between-countries difference accounts for significant variance in the well-being–authenticity relationship.

## Discussion

Our analysis found that authenticity, social context, and well-being are related in common ways across U.S., English, and Russian samples, while also showing country-specific idiosyncrasies. The findings both support and challenge the existing literature on authenticity. Below we discuss the influence of culture and gender, the moderating role of social context, and the link between authenticity and well-being, before outlining limitations of the study and conclusions.

### *Culture and Authenticity*

The Russian sample showed lower levels of authenticity in trait, partner, parents, and friend measures, compared with the English and U.S. samples. This difference can be interpreted as related to Russia's cultural environment. Authenticity becomes an aspirational virtue in modern, democratic cultures that promote individual self-expression, nonconformity, and personal freedom (Taylor, 1992), and there is evidence to suggest that U.S. and U.K. cultures are currently more conducive to this kind of individualized behavior than is Russian culture (Lucas, 2009). Furthermore, World Values Survey data suggest that power distance and collectivism are higher in Russia than in the United Kingdom and the United States (Hofstede et al., 2010), and a high level of these cultural variables would appear to be contrary to the values of individualized authentic expression. High levels of power distance reflect stronger acceptance of one's social status in a hierarchy, and high collectivism is related to an interdependent self-construal, which involves forgoing personal expression at the expense of maintaining obligations to others and to cultural expectations (Cross et al., 2011). However, our data do show that trait authenticity was positively correlated with well-being among our Russian participants at levels comparable to those observed within our U.S. and U.K. samples, suggesting that although authenticity is subjectively experienced to lower degrees on average in the Russian sample, it is just as predictive of well-being. Therefore, our data tentatively suggest that authenticity is a virtue for positive mental health in both the individualistic / lower power distance cultures of the United Kingdom and the United States and in the more collectivist / high power distance culture of Russia. This conclusion needs to be corroborated on further samples from different demographics within these cultures.

Occupational differences between the three samples may also partially account for the difference in means. The students sampled in the United States and Russia have part-time or temporary jobs in which authenticity may be less of a concern than the full-time career paths of some of the English sample. This difference in authenticity means in part-time and full-time workers would be easily testable in further research.

Gender and authenticity show a significant relation in the AS subscale AL and in three of the contextual scales (with partner, parents, and friends). The consistent pattern in favor of higher means in females across the three samples supports existing findings on gender differences (Lopez & Rice, 2006), but the lack of gender-difference uniformity across samples and measures suggests that the interrelationships among gender, culture, and authenticity require further research and interpretation.

## *Social Context and Authenticity*

As predicted, across the three samples, a within-subjects effect of social context was found on authenticity means: means were highest with partner, followed by friend and parents, and lowest with work colleagues (with exception of the partner–friend difference in the Russian sample). Work is the least conducive environment for authenticity in all three countries, while being with parents is also, on average, a context that leads to less authentic self-disclosure than being with friends or one's partner. In Russia, authenticity with partner was not significantly higher than authenticity with friends, suggesting that, for this sample, being with one's partner does not have the privileged status for authenticity that it apparently does in the U.S. and U.K. samples. Apart from this, all cross-context differences were significant and our hypothesis pertaining to cross-context differences was given strong support.

The cross-context effects found in this study support one existing study that assessed authenticity across multiple contexts in adults. Sheldon et al. (1997) compared authenticity in adults across contexts using single-item measures whose psychometric properties were not validated or reported. They found higher levels of authenticity in friend and partner roles than in student and employee roles. The current study furthers this nascent cross-context authenticity literature through the use of scales assessing authenticity at both the dispositional and context-specific levels and by the addition of a cross-cultural dimension.

The intercorrelations of scores on trait and context-specific measures of authenticity have not been previously reported in the literature. This study established that of the four context-specific subscales used here, authenticity-with-partner is the most strongly associated with trait authenticity in all three countries. In the U.K. and U.S. samples, authenticity-at-work was least related to trait authenticity. In the Russian sample, authenticity-with-friends was the lowest. This finding not only implies that authenticity means are moderated by context, as shown in Figure 1, but that trait authenticity does not equally load onto contextual expressions of authenticity. In line with this observation, recent research has found that in a sample of individuals who were rated high in their proneness to vary their personality according to context, there was a particular tendency to act inauthentically when at work and when with parents (Querstret & Robinson, *in press*).

Scores on the four context-specific measures interrelated to differing degrees. The correlation between partners and friends is noticeable for being positive and significant in all three samples, while the correlation between partners and work is noticeably nonsignificant in all three samples. The differential pattern of correlations between these scales supports the multidimensionality of the AIRS-MC and the utility of a contextually sensitive approach to measuring the subjective experience of authenticity.

Our correlational findings also indicated that, when compared with other contexts, the partner context appears to be a privileged one for manifesting one's true self. This supports research that has found authentic self-expression is predicted by mutuality and intimacy (Neff & Harter, 2002) and strength of attachment (Lopez & Rice, 2006; Robinson, Wright, & Kendall, 2011), which are both typically higher in intimate relationships.

Overall, our findings suggest an interactionist approach to conceiving how person and environments at multiple levels shape authenticity (Reynolds et al., 2010). Trait authenticity is a valid construct and robustly predicts well-being, but macro-environment (national culture) has a significant effect on trait authenticity. An interactionist approach would accept a complementary dynamic between person and environment (at multiple levels) that moderates authentic self-expression at any particular point in time. In our findings, contextual authenticity interacts significantly with country, which suggests that if you want to know how authentic a person is likely

to be, you need to know both his or her immediate social context and his or her wider cultural environment. Trait authenticity is also related to culture and is variably expressed in different contexts. In principle, if the characteristics of a person's culture, immediate social context, and trait authenticity were assessed and known, a reasonably accurate prediction of his or her current authentic self-expression would be possible. Such a comprehensive aetiological model is an ideal toward which the authenticity literature can aspire.

### *Authenticity and Well-Being*

Across the three subsamples, trait authenticity and contextual authenticity both correlated significantly with well-being, and in a regression model, both significantly and uniquely predicted well-being. This suggests that these authenticity scales have incremental predictive validity and potential incremental utility in applied contexts. The measure of well-being used in the current study is a general index of recent positive mental health (Tennant et al., 2007), and thus, the cross-cultural link between the well-being measure and authenticity measures supports the theoretical assertion by humanistic psychologists Rogers (1961) and Maslow (1998) and of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2004) that authenticity is implicated in positive mental health.

Our findings do not suggest that authenticity in *all* social contexts relate to well-being. Instead, the findings suggest that a socially selective strategy of being true to one's authentic self is not problematic for mental health. For English and American participants, authenticity at work did not significantly relate to well-being. We may tentatively infer from this finding that in these two samples, and potentially more generally in the cultures from which they were drawn, the use of a work persona, and the corresponding diminution of authenticity that comes with it, is normal and not necessarily a threat to well-being. Yet in Russia, authenticity at work emerges as a significant predictor and correlate of well-being despite the fact that the Russian participants are, on average, no more authentic in this context than the other two samples.

What is it about the work context in Russia that may help to explain this disparity? One explanation comes from Russia's recent history and culture: The postcommunist culture of Russia views social life as more important than private life (Nartova-Bochaver, 2011). For many years, it was commonplace that social institutes such as the Communist Party Committee controlled the family and personal sphere (e.g., to divorce or not). Thus, it was necessary to keep friendly relationships at work as a refuge for authenticity. This importance of authentic work environments thus may be mediated by a specific historic-cultural mechanism (Nartova-Bochaver, 2011).

### *Limitations and Future Research*

In order to assess authenticity in multiple contexts, we created an instrument that drew selected items from (and modified the instructional format) of the 24-item AIRS, which was originally devised for assessing authenticity in romantic relationships. The 10 AIRS items that were used to form the AIRS-MC were selected based on their cross-contextual construct validity as authenticity indicators, given existing research on adult authenticity in nonpartner contexts (e.g., Erickson & Ritter, 2001). However, in light of their origin, the AIRS-MC items may be conceptually biased towards authenticity indicators in romantic relationships. It would therefore be worthwhile to develop alternative multiple-context measures of authenticity (for example, a contextualized adaptation of the AS) to corroborate the reliability and validity of the cross-context differences elicited in this study.

Several limitations pertaining to the nature of the sample should be considered when interpreting these findings. We gathered data from three countries in order to search for commonalities and differences in how measures of authenticity and well-being interrelated. These



samples were from different nations but were different in other ways as well. The British sample included both students and professional participants, while U.S. and Russian participants were all students. As a result, the U.K. sample mean age (i.e., 31 years) was higher than that of the Russian or U.S. samples (i.e., 26 and 23 years, respectively). This demographic difference between the English sample and the other two enhances the external validity of the findings, for it suggests that the common findings apply across cultures *and* across adult student/nonstudent demographics.

Another limitation that relates to age is that the current sample is predominantly comprised of young adults. Out of the original adult sample ( $N = 628$ ), 561 participants were under the age of 40. Given that authenticity is considered to be an indicator of maturity and a developmental construct (Maslow, 1998), the findings from this study should be cautiously generalized to adults in midlife or older adults. Further research with these older age groups is essential.

An inclusion criterion for the study was that participants were required to be in a romantic relationship and in either part-time or full-time work in order to answer the AIRS-MC in full. Single persons and unemployed individuals are therefore not represented in the sample, and the findings may not generalize to them. For example, it may be that for single adults, authenticity with friends, parents, or work colleagues is more central to well-being than for adults who have a romantic partner. All four social contexts in the study vary in ways that may have salient effects on authenticity. To give several examples, contextual authenticity could be compared by relationship type (e.g., marriage, cohabitation, heterosexual/homosexual), whether or not a person is in an intimate relationship (single/couple), by parent (mother/father, biological parent/step-parent), and by work type (part-time/full-time). These and other intracontext variables could be easily explored in future studies to develop a finer-grained assessment of how social context moderates authenticity.

The single-time-point design employed in the study does not permit cause-effect inferences regarding the relationships among social context, culture, authenticity, and well-being. In order to investigate the causal effect of context and culture on authenticity, quasi-experimental studies are needed that involve longitudinal (multiple time-point) ratings of authenticity and well-being gathered from individuals who are moving between social contexts (e.g., during career change or before/after a divorce) or moving between cultures (e.g., over the course of migration between countries).

## Conclusions

Across three samples drawn from different national cultures, trait authenticity predicted general well-being more strongly than did the four context-specific authenticity scales. Yet when both trait and context-specific measures were included in a regression model, their combined capacity to predict well-being was greater than their independent contributions, suggesting that both types of assessment have incremental value. Context-specific authenticity reflected dispositional authenticity to a varying extent, and being with one's partner was the most correlated context for trait authenticity in all three countries. Russian participants were found to be on average less authentic than the U.S. and U.K. participants, which suggests that national culture moderates authenticity in ways that are reflected in both kinds of measures. Overall, the findings support a view of authenticity that endorses its validity as an individual difference variable and as a construct moderated by culture and immediate social context. This can be accommodated through an "interactionist" model of authenticity, which conceives of it as an emergent property of the interaction between a person's dispositions and the characteristics of the microsocial and macrocultural contexts in which her or she is located.

## Appendix

### AIRS-MC

*Directions:* Below are statements that deal with how persons may experience their relationships with significant people in their lives. Using the scale immediately to the right of each item, circle the number that best indicates the extent to which that statement describes your experience of the relationship with that person or persons.

	<i>Not at all Descriptive</i>	<i>Somewhat Descriptive</i>	<i>Very Descriptive</i>						
1. I am totally myself when I am with ...									
my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. I share my deepest thoughts with ...									
my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. I disclose my deepest feelings to ...									
my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. I openly share my thoughts and feelings about other people to ...									
my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. I avoid raising certain topics for discussion with ...									
my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. I purposefully hide my true feelings about some things in order to avoid upsetting ...									
my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. By sometimes providing false information about myself, I try to impress ...									
my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
8. There are no topics that are "off limits" between me and ...									
my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

# Appendix (continued)

9. I feel free to reveal the most intimate parts of myself to ...									
my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. There are certain things I'd rather not know much about ...									
my partner	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my work colleagues	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
my parents	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Scoring: Reverse score Items 5, 6, 7, and 10, and then calculate four subscale scores for each context by taking mean of all 10 items.

NB. Individual subscales are internally reliable and can be used individually or with other subscales.

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