

SPECIAL ISSUE

Understanding the Relationship Between Perceived Authenticity and Well-Being

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A central tenet of many prominent philosophical and psychological traditions is that personal authenticity facilitates psychological well-being. This idea, however, is at odds with numerous perspectives arguing that it is difficult, if not impossible, to really know one's self, or the true self may not even exist. Moreover, empirical findings suggest that reports of authenticity are often contaminated by positively valenced behavior, further potentially undermining the validity of authenticity measures. Despite these concerns, we argue that subjective feelings of authenticity do uniquely contribute to well-being. Specifically, we argue that the relationship between perceived authenticity and well-being may be understood from a social-cognitive lay theory perspective that we label "true-self-as-guide," that suggests people use these feelings of authenticity as a cue to evaluate whether they are living up to a shared cultural value of what it means to live a good life. We end with a call for future research on the antecedents of perceived authenticity, boundary conditions for the consequences of personal authenticity, and discuss cultural differences in true-self-as-guide lay theories.

Keywords: authenticity, true self, lay theory, psychological well-being

A central tenet of many prominent traditions within philosophy and psychology is that personal authenticity facilitates mental health and well-being. For example, Kierkegaard (1843/1954) famously noted, "for to will to be that self which one truly is, is indeed the opposite of despair" (p. 153), a sentiment echoed by many other philosophers and psychologists (e.g., Horney, 1942; Laing, 1960; Miller, 1979; Rogers, 1951; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman, 1993). However, the idea that optimal functioning is contingent upon behaving in a way that is consistent with one's true self is at odds with numerous perspectives and recent empirical findings. Some scholars have claimed that it is difficult, if not impossible, to really know one's self (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977), and others have argued that the self, itself, doesn't even exist (Dennett, 1991; Hood, 2012; Hume, 1740/1978). For example, Baumeister (1995) characterized the true self as "an appealing idea with heuristic or didactic value but, in the final analysis, a falsehood" (p. 60).

Further, a growing area of empirical research has cast doubt on the validity of self-reported authenticity by showing the degree to which those reports are contaminated by positively valenced behavior (Christy, Seto, Schlegel, Vess, & Hicks, 2016; Fleeson & Wilt, 2010; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2016; Zhang, Chen, Schlegel, & Hicks, 2018) and positive mood (Lenton, Bruder, Slabu, & Sedikides, 2013). For instance, Fleeson and Wilt (2010) found that individuals behaving in socially valued ways (e.g., highly extraverted and conscientious) feel more authentic regardless of their underlying individual traits. These results are even more troubling considering evidence for the relationship between what seem to be more "objective" measures of authenticity (e.g., indicators of behavioral consistency across social roles or situations) and well-being is mixed (Baird, Le, & Lucas, 2006; Campbell, Assanand, & Di Paula, 2003; Church et al., 2008; Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993; Human, Biesanz, Finseth, Pierce, & Le, 2014; Magee, Buchtel, Human, Murray, & Biesanz, 2018; Sherman, Nave, & Funder, 2012). How can authenticity be related to positive functioning without empirical evidence of a strong, reliable relationship between these consistency-based measures of authenticity and well-being?

Although these issues might lead some to balk at the idea that authenticity is a construct worthy of scientific inquiry, we argue that *subjective* feelings of authenticity are important to study despite these complexities. Specifically, we argue that perceived authenticity serves an important role in healthy human functioning and that this relationship can be understood from a social-cognitive lay theory perspective. To do this, we first review

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research linking perceived authenticity to well-being. After reviewing the relevant work, we address two key questions that arise from a subjective approach to studying authenticity: (a) Can perceived authenticity be disentangled from other positive self-evaluations? and (b) is it necessary to theorize that there is a “real” true self to make sense of the relationship between subjective reports of authenticity and well-being? We then outline the merits of a lay theory approach that does not necessitate the existence of a literal true self to make sense of the robust relationship between subjective reports of authenticity and well-being. This lay theory approach is rooted in the idea that most people internalize the belief that “true selves” should guide behavior to live a fulfilling life. From this perspective, feelings of authenticity are important because people use them as a cue to evaluate whether they are living up to a shared cultural value of what it means to live a good life. According to this view, feelings of authenticity should matter for well-being even if they are not indicative of any objective truth about a person’s behavior. Finally, we end with a call for future research that may help further the understanding of the importance of feeling authentic.

Perceived Authenticity and Well-Being

Perceived authenticity refers to how authentic someone feels and, by definition, is assessed through self-report measures. Two of the more frequently used measures are the Authenticity Inventory (3rd ed.; AI-3; Kernis & Goldman, 2006) and the Authenticity Scale (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008). These scales include items such as “I think it is better to be yourself than to be popular” (from Wood et al., 2008) and “For better or worse I am aware of who I truly am” (from Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Although there are differences between the two scales and the frameworks that guided their development, both broadly capture feelings of knowing and expressing one’s true self. A growing body of literature has suggested that these types of subjective reports of authenticity consistently predict a variety of well-being indicators (e.g., Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Reinecke & Trepte, 2014; Ryan, LaGuardia, & Rawsthorne, 2005; Sariçam, 2015; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997; Smallenbroek, Zelenki, & Whelan, 2017; Wood et al., 2008). For example, perceived authenticity is positively linked to measures of subjective happiness (Sariçam, 2015), self-esteem (Heppner et al., 2008), and life satisfaction (Goldman & Kernis, 2002). These relationships emerge as early as adolescence, with perceived authenticity mediating the link between needs satisfaction and subjective well-being in adolescent samples (Thomaes, Sedikides, van den Bos, Hutteman, & Reijntjes, 2017). Moreover, perceived authenticity also negatively predicts measures of psychological dysfunction such as negative affect (Goldman & Kernis, 2002) and anxiety and depressive symptoms (Sheldon et al., 1997). Perceptions of authenticity are also linked to more specific outcomes, such as decision satisfaction (Schlegel, Hicks, Davis, Hirsch, & Smith, 2013), that contribute to happiness and well-being. Perceived authenticity is also linked to increased motivation to pursue one’s goals (Goldman & Kernis, 2002; Kim, Christy, Schlegel, Donnellan, & Hicks, 2017) and higher levels of intrinsic motivation (Emmerich & Rigotti, 2017).

Feelings of authenticity are also related to positive social interactions and satisfaction with personal relationships (e.g., Baker, Tou, Bryan, & Knee, 2017). In fact, researchers have suggested

one reason that interactions with close others (relative to distant others) promote well-being is because those types of interactions more easily facilitate the experience of authenticity (Venaglia & Lemay, 2017). Within close romantic relationships, the perception that one’s partner is authentic is also linked to greater relationship satisfaction (Wickham, 2013), as are perceptions that one’s partner knows his or her true self (Rivera, Smith, & Schlegel, 2018). Additionally, work by Kernis and Goldman (2006) has demonstrated that those who value authenticity in their relationships tend to report more satisfying relationships and engage in healthier relationship behaviors.

The importance of perceived authenticity for relational functioning and well-being is particularly salient among individuals with concealable stigmatized identities such as lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals. The decision to “come out” is a difficult one due to the tension created by concerns about being stigmatized by others and a desire to express one’s identity (i.e., be authentic). The literature on outness has tended to report positive relationships between outness, perceived authenticity, and well-being (e.g., King, Mohr, Peddie, Jones, & Kendra, 2017; Kosciw, Greytak, Bartkiewicz, Boesen, & Palmer, 2012; Riggle, Rostosky, Black, & Rosenkrantz, 2017). Further, the stress associated with concealment has been linked to a variety of negative relational and psychological outcomes (e.g., Newheiser & Barreto, 2014; Sabat, Lindsey, & King, 2014). Recent work has also suggested that feelings of LGB-specific authenticity positively predict well-being and negatively predict depressive symptoms over and above self-reported outness and concealment (Riggle et al., 2017). Whereas other work has highlighted the potential costs of disclosure and outness (e.g., Badgett, Lau, Sears, & Ho, 2007), this research clearly speaks to the importance of feeling authentic.

Finally, feelings of authenticity may foster psychological resilience in the face of stress and adversity (Wickham, Williamson, Beard, Kobayashi, & Hirst, 2016). For example, perceived authenticity attenuates the negative impact of loneliness on depressive symptoms, anxiety, physical symptoms, and alcohol consumption (Bryan, Baker, & Tou, 2017). Perceived authenticity similarly moderates the relationship between limited time perspective and goal pursuits (Davis & Hicks, 2013). Specifically, Davis and Hicks (2013) found that individuals high in perceived authenticity reported increased desire to achieve their goals regardless of how much time they perceived they had left to achieve their goals. Perceived authenticity may foster resilience by making setbacks seem less burdensome (Zhang, Chen, & Schlegel, 2018). This is consistent with the identity-based motivation model (Oyserman, 2007, 2009), which posits that people are motivated to engage in goal-relevant behavior in the face of difficulty if a currently activated identity is considered a core (i.e., authentic) part of the self (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). For example, when situations cue a certain identity (e.g., an “A student”) reflective of one’s true self (e.g., I am a truly academic person), feelings of difficulty and poor performances are more likely to be interpreted as a challenge and opportunity to grow, helping maintain efficacious goal pursuit (e.g., becoming a scientist). Consistent with this perspective, research has shown that perceived authenticity elicits an affective response to personal shortcomings that typically instills efforts to improve (Vess, Schlegel, Hicks, & Arndt, 2014).

Although not an exhaustive review, research within the past decade has clearly shown a strong connection between perceptions

of authenticity and well-being. Feelings of authenticity are strongly associated with many facets of well-being and negatively associated with depression and anxiety. Further, feelings of authenticity are linked to goal progress, decision satisfaction, and positive relationships and buffer against factors that undermine personal well-being.

Of course, there are a variety of other positive self-evaluations that are posited to function similarly (e.g., self-esteem). Is perceived authenticity distinguishable from other types of self-evaluations, or are researchers who study authenticity simply “re-inventing the wheel,” so to speak?

Distinguishing Perceived Authenticity From Other Positive Self-Evaluations

The idea that authenticity may be another name for simply feeling good about one’s self is a legitimate concern. Indeed, some findings have suggested that self-reports of authenticity are contaminated with valence. For example, recent research has shown that feelings of authenticity can be elicited not only by upholding personal values (Smallenbroek et al., 2017) and behaving morally (Christy et al., 2016) but also by acting in ways that are socially valued (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2016). As previously mentioned, socially valued behaviors (e.g., acting extraverted and conscientious) feel authentic regardless of one’s personality traits (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010). That is, both introverts and extraverts feel more authentic when acting extraverted (vs. introverted). Simply being in a good mood has also been found to inflate self-reported authenticity (Lenton et al., 2013). Lenton and colleagues (2013) found that participants felt more authentic when in a relatively positive mood (vs. negative mood). This link was not moderated by a participant’s dispositional mood or ability to regulate emotion, nor was it explained by a variety of other state variables (e.g., state self-esteem, state public or private self-consciousness).

If positive mood and behaving in socially valued, positive ways can reliably influence perceptions of authenticity, regardless of trait variations, then the validity of self-reports of authenticity may be called into question. Are self-reports so confounded with valence that they are empirically indistinguishable from other valenced global self-evaluations, such as self-esteem? Additionally, given the link between positive mood and authenticity, is subjective authenticity anything other than “mood as information” (e.g., Schwarz & Clore, 2003, p. 296)? If either of these is the case, then there is little need to study perceived authenticity. Indeed, this would provide a potentially more parsimonious explanation for the literature on the relationship between perceived authenticity and well-being; namely, that these two ostensibly different constructs are essentially identical. Although measures of perceived authenticity are often correlated with other such judgments, we maintain they are distinguishable from these other constructs conceptually and empirically. This discussion focuses primarily on self-esteem, because there are the most data to speak to this issue.

First, it is important to note that measures of perceived authenticity do correlate with evaluations such as self-esteem and mood. As one prototypical example, we found a significant positive correlation ($r = .28$) between the AI-3 (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) and positive affect in one of our studies (Davis, Hicks, Schlegel, Smith, & Vess, 2015). The correlation with the Rosenberg Self-

Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was notably larger ($r = .64$) in that same study, suggesting that the two constructs share about 41% of their variance. Although this is certainly a high degree of correlation, it is also clear that they are not exactly the same thing. In a conceptual 2×2 matrix that crosses high–low levels of self-esteem with high–low levels of perceived authenticity, it is possible to imagine someone in each quadrant. The two concordant quadrants (high–high and low–low) are particularly easy to imagine given the high positive correlation between the two. But the other two quadrants also seem quite possible (if less frequent). For example, those with low self-esteem might feel like they are living a life that is true to a self they do not hold in high regard (low self-esteem, high perceived authenticity; see Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989), and vice versa.

Second, perceived authenticity would appear to be distinguishable from other positive evaluations to the extent that the perceived authenticity predicts positive outcomes over and above these variables. There is at least some research that speaks to this issue. For example, the AI-3 (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) predicts a variety of adaptive coping strategies over and above self-esteem. The relationship between perceived authenticity and self-esteem also persists when mood is controlled (Davis et al., 2015; Heppner et al., 2008). The relationship between self-alienation and mind wandering cannot be explained by self-esteem (Vess, Leal, Hoeldtke, Schlegel, & Hicks, 2016). Most directly speaking to this issue, work has also shown that the relationship between perceived authenticity and meaning in life persists over and above both mood and self-esteem (Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009, 2011), as does the relationship between self-alienation (i.e., opposite to authentic self-awareness) and academic amotivation (Kim et al., 2017). These works suggest that feelings of authenticity are not mere placeholders for feeling good about oneself (or good more generally).

Similarly, research on the antecedents of perceived authenticity has suggested that reflecting on moral (vs. immoral) past experiences increases feelings of authenticity (Christy et al., 2016). Despite a strong correlation between perceived authenticity and self-esteem, reflecting on moral experiences predicts perceived authenticity over and above self-esteem. Put another way, reflecting on one’s own morality promotes feelings of authenticity through more than just making people feel good about themselves. This finding is in line with research suggesting that true selves are perceived as particularly moral in nature (Strohinger, Knobe, & Newman, 2017) and suggests that another way perceptions of authenticity can be distinguished from other positive self-evaluations is through their strong and unique relation to moral intuitions.

Third, researchers have explicitly addressed how different forms of self-esteem have different relationships with perceptions of authenticity. Much of this work is rooted in self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2011). For example, Kernis (2003) described secure self-esteem as a form of self-esteem that is anchored in positive self-perceptions that arise naturally from the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, whereas fragile self-esteem is built on loosely held positive self-perceptions that are subject to fluctuations and are in need of continuous external validation (see also Kernis & Paradise, 2002). Kernis argued that these different forms may be overlooked when examining individuals’ scores on classical measures of self-esteem (i.e., both fragile

and secure self-esteem can manifest in high scores) but have meaningful implications for individual well-being. In this model, the relationship between perceived authenticity and self-esteem is better understood when considering these different types of esteem; feelings of authenticity underlie and contribute to a secure form of self-esteem, whereas defensiveness and self-enhancement motivations underlie fragile self-esteem (Kernis, 2003). Operating from the same approach, Ryan and Brown (2003) have similarly argued that “ongoing concern with the worth of the self is a byproduct of need deprivation or conflict” (p. 71). The self-esteem that emerges from authenticity is more secure and alleviates such concerns. This model provides a useful strategy for conceptualizing and untangling perceived authenticity and self-esteem.

Providing a similar relevant perspective, Schimel, Arndt, Banko, and Cook (2004) investigated how engagement with different bases of self-worth might differently predict achievement outcomes in responses to threat. Across several studies, asking participants to affirm more authentic aspects of their self-concepts (compared to extrinsic aspects) decreased defensive responses to threat and improved performance on academic tasks (Arndt, Schimel, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2002; Schimel et al., 2004) but did not influence self-esteem (Schimel et al., 2004).

Taken together, this work suggests that perceived authenticity can be distinguished from other positive self-evaluations and positive mood. If authenticity judgments are meaningfully distinct from these other constructs, how does one understand the relationship between perceived authenticity and self-esteem? Does one need to posit the existence of a “real” true self to understand the importance of perceived authenticity to well-being? In the next section, we outline perspectives that take a realist approach to the true self and introduce a “true-self-as-guide” (TSAG) lay theory approach that does not necessarily rely on a real true self.

Subjective Authenticity and the Ontological Status of True Selves

It is possible that the relationship between perceived authenticity and well-being exists because there actually is such a thing as a true self and following it has important consequences for well-being. This account would suggest that measures of perceived authenticity are doing a better job at capturing objective authenticity than are consistency-based measures and that consistency-based measures are missing the mark of what it means to truly be authentic (it is worth noting that neither of the most commonly used self-report authenticity measures makes reference to behavioral consistency with traits, making this possibility all the more plausible). We refer to such a realist account as a *veridical account* (i.e., the view that true selves really exist). Such accounts can be distinguished from *nonveridical accounts* (i.e., the view that true selves do not really exist and may instead be fictional entities that people believe in).

The notion that people really have a true self that should be followed is implicit in many theories within psychology. For example, in Freud’s (1922/1949) psychoanalytic model, analysts help clients recover from neuroses by leading them to a more accurate understanding of the unconscious conflicts that trouble them, implying that knowledge of one’s underlying true nature is an important prerequisite for healthier functioning. Other theorists, such as Carl Rogers (1951), very directly advocated the impor-

tance of following the true self. In Rogers’ view, people naturally seek growth and fulfillment and have a reliable internal “compass” that guides them in this pursuit. He believed that positive outcomes cascade naturally from reestablishing clients’ relationship with their true self.

As a more contemporary example of a veridical model within social psychology, the self-concordance model of goal pursuit (Sheldon, 2014) suggests that optimal outcomes really do stem from being true to oneself. In terms of the self-concordance model, “being true to oneself” consists of setting goals that “represent that person’s authentic interests and values” (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999, p. 483). According to the model, self-concordant goals (i.e., goals that align with the person’s authentic interests and values) are pursued with greater effort and, when achieved, result in more complete fulfillment of basic psychological needs and consequently greater global well-being than does the pursuit and achievement of non-self-concordant goals. An apt analogy is considering a craving for a hamburger. To satisfy the craving, one must actually eat a hamburger; just thinking about eating a hamburger is not enough. Similarly, to meet one’s goal of being true to oneself, one must actually behave in line with that true self, not merely think that one is in line with the true self. According to the model, certain aspects of the self are more authentic or true than others, and expressing these aspects is a pathway to better life outcomes. Behaving in ways that do not fully draw upon or cohere with these authentic self-aspects is a barrier to well-being and satisfaction. Critically, the model also argues that the true self may typically be outside conscious awareness and that processes that facilitate introspective awareness of these nonconscious aspects of the self should, in turn, yield greater authenticity and the benefits that come with it. Similarly, the self-concordance model’s parent theory, SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000), maintains that intrinsically motivated behavior (i.e., behavior that is engaged in based on personal interest, value, or enjoyment) is central to the satisfaction of basic psychological needs and the achievement of well-being.

These veridical accounts are all entirely consistent with most of the work on the relationship between perceived authenticity and well-being, but there are some recent findings that cannot be explained by veridical accounts. Specifically, our work has found that manipulations of perceived true self-knowledge and perceived reliance on the true self in decision-making have influenced participants’ reported satisfaction with past decisions (Kim, Christy, Rivera, Hicks, & Schlegel, 2018; Schlegel, Hicks, et al., 2013). This suggests authenticity-related constructs can promote decision satisfaction by changing how people *perceive* their decisions and not necessarily by changing how people *actually make* decisions (Kim, Christy, et al., 2018). In these cases, a veridical mechanism is simply unlikely, given that the decisions in question were already made, and as such, a purely perceptual (i.e., nonveridical) mechanism is a more likely possibility. A veridical mechanism requires that the decision actually be in line with the true self, not merely *feel* in line with the true self. Just as thinking about a hamburger will not solve one’s actual hunger, a veridical account would not predict that simply thinking about one’s authenticity would make any decision more satisfying. A nonveridical account that does not require that true selves literally exist to operate is needed to make sense of such findings. According to a nonveridical account, simply feeling authentic may be enough to promote

well-being, even if those feelings do not reflect anything objectively true about the person.

In our work, we have developed such a nonveridical account as to why feelings of subjective authenticity are important. This account revolves around what we have labeled a *true-self-as-guide* (TSAG) lay theory. According to this perspective, feelings of authenticity matter because humans *value* true self expression and widely accept a lay theory that following one's true self is an effective way of navigating uncertain situations and approaching the elusive "good life." It is important to note that we view this nonveridical approach as complementary to the veridical approach and suspect that they operate in tandem; it is entirely plausible that subjective experiences of authenticity are influenced by real mechanisms of authentic self-expression as well as by the kinds of purely perceptual processes that our account focuses on.

TSAG Lay Theory Approach

Lay theories are an important concept in the field of social cognition. Lay theories are the working theories that people hold to help them make sense of the natural and social worlds. People hold lay theories about many topics, including the nature of race (Levy, Chiu, & Hong, 2006; No et al., 2008), intelligence (Dweck, 1999), and personality (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997). These lay theories may or may not map onto a scientific worldview, but they affect how people make sense of their experiences and interact with the social world (Molden & Dweck, 2006). For example, the lay theories people hold about race have downstream consequences for stereotyping, prejudice, and intergroup relations (e.g., Haslam, Bastian, Bain, & Kashima, 2006), and the lay theories people hold about intelligence influence academic achievement and perseverance (e.g., Blackwell, Trzesniewski, & Dweck, 2007).

We suggest that laypeople also hold theories about the best ways to make personal decisions in their life. Given that decision-making has become a personal and idiosyncratic problem in modern times (e.g., Baumeister, 1986, 1991), it makes sense that people would need to form working lay theories about the best way to confront a dizzying array of options in life. For example, children are often told they can be anything they want to be when they grow up. This freedom presents a certain challenge (e.g., Fromm, 1941; Schwartz, 2004). Making a choice from among endless possibilities can be overwhelming and induce anxiety, even resulting in "existential dread" (Waterman, 1984, p. 335). We suggest that one powerful and widely shared lay theory that people use to navigate these waters is that true selves should guide behavior. A TSAG lay theory reflects conventional wisdom that people should "look inside" themselves for guidance (e.g., "follow who you are") and that finding congruence between a choice and the true self will result in personal meaning and satisfaction. For example, in the realm of career selection, a TSAG lay theory suggests finding a career that lets people express who they are is inherently a "good" choice. If becoming an accountant is consistent with who a person is, then that person needs no further justification to choose that career (e.g., Baumeister, 1991; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). Our TSAG lay theory perspective can also be characterized as a lay version of the self concordance model (Sheldon, 2014), whereby people *believe* that it is important to live their lives according to their true selves and

that *perceptions* of living up to this ideal are consequential for well-being.

Lay theories may be understood as "both ontological assumptions (beliefs about what is true in the world) and narrative representations (frameworks that explain and organize the world"; Plaks, Levy, & Dweck, 2009, p. 1069). The TSAG lay theory fits both of these requirements. On the ontological side, TSAG lay theories entail certain assumptions about the nature and structure of personal identity (namely that each person possesses a true self). On the narrative side, TSAG lay theories offer a framework within which people can conceptualize their own and others' decision-making and explain the outcomes of the decision-making process (i.e., true selves may or may not guide personal decisions, and this perception bears on one's satisfaction with the decision; see also Schlegel, Hicks, et al., 2013). We posit that the TSAG view is a lay theory adopted by nonexperts to guide decisions and that the idea that the true self should be source of direction in one's life is culturally pervasive.

Historical Roots and Pervasive Modern Endorsement

The idea that it is important people to understand who they are and live in accordance with their true nature is deeply rooted in Western cultural traditions, evidenced by its treatment in a number of Western philosophies. Plato, through the character of Socrates, discusses the aphorism "know thyself" in six dialogues (Plato, 1892/2018), suggesting that self-knowledge was a central concern in Greek thought. Further, the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia* implies that achieving well-being is contingent on understanding and following one's true nature (Kraut, 2018). Long after the Greeks, the American transcendentalists of the 19th century, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, also espoused the virtues of being true to oneself in their philosophies (Thoreau, 1854/1995). In Emerson's (1841) essay "Self-Reliance," he repeatedly urges the reader to "trust thyself" rather than follow the dictates of society (para. 3). The existential philosophies that emerged in continental Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries make similar arguments. Many existential thinkers, such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre, developed accounts of authenticity (being true to one's self) and underscored its importance to understanding human existence (Varga & Guignon, 2014). The conceptions of authenticity articulated in each of these philosophical traditions adheres to more veridical criteria (i.e., these accounts are all concerned with defining *authenticity* as an objective concept or a moral virtue) than how our nonveridical approach makes sense of perceived authenticity (i.e., as a subjective state that is consequential for well-being). Yet, the long history of philosophical engagement with these issues is testament to their importance in human life and how these ideas have been woven into the cultural milieu and established as a cultural ideal.

Of course, philosophical theories may be uninformative about what laypeople typically believe. We propose that, although non-expert thinking about the true self may not explicitly follow from classic perspectives in philosophy and psychology, laypeople nevertheless embrace a general notion that the true self should guide their actions. Indeed, messages corresponding to the TSAG lay theory and authenticity (e.g., "just be yourself") can be seen in media including self-help books, TV commercials, and movies. For example, stories based on the protagonists' search for the true

self, such as *The Awakening* (1899) and *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), abound in literature and resonate with readers of all ages. Additionally, popular messages and media campaigns continue to frame and talk about authenticity as a goal to be reached, an optimal way of human functioning. For example, a recent Ted Talk on vulnerability that extolls the value of authenticity has over 33 million views (Brown, 2010). Evidence that people value authenticity in the workplace can also be seen via growing attention placed on “authentic leadership” styles (i.e., leadership that relies on honest relationships with followers, self-awareness, and genuineness for optimal workplace functioning; see Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 316). The prevalence and popularity of such themes suggest that a TSAG lay theory widely resonates with general contemporary audiences.

Recent findings have also directly suggested that people widely endorse a TSAG lay theory of decision-making. Schlegel, Hicks, and colleagues (2013, Study 1) presented participants with various decision-making strategies (e.g., true-self-as-guide, rational deliberation, following religious precepts, seeking advice from others) and asked them to rate each strategy’s likelihood of resulting in satisfying decisions. On an absolute level, participants indicated high levels of agreement with the TSAG lay theory ($M = 5.89$, $SD = .87$, on a 7-point scale), with less than 4% of the sample indicating any level of disagreement. Relative to other decision-making strategies, participants rated following one’s true self as one of the more likely to lead to optimal outcomes. In fact, following one’s true self was one of the two highest rated decision-making strategies, along with engaging in rational deliberation (see Table 1). Cross-cultural data using the same measure in India, Singapore, China, and South Korea (Kim, Rivera, et al., 2018) revealed remarkable similarities. Whereas the relative importance

of some strategies (e.g., considering the effect on others) notably differed across samples, the relative importance of following the true self was consistent. In Singapore, the TSAG lay theory was rated as significantly more important than was any other strategy (which was not even the case in the American samples; Kim, Rivera, et al., 2018). In India, the TSAG lay theory was the third most strongly endorsed strategy, behind only “following one’s future self” and “considering the effect on others” (Kim, Rivera, et al., 2018). In China and South Korea, the TSAG lay theory was held as the second most important decision-making strategy, with the strategy “considering who you ideally want to be” being top-ranked (Kim, Rivera, et al., 2018). Together with Schlegel, Hicks, et al.’s (2013) findings, these data suggest that the TSAG lay theory is widely embraced across diverse cultures.

Clearly, TSAG lay theories are widely endorsed, but how do they help one make sense of the authenticity literature? We suspect that the answer to this question can be found in the meaning-making role of the true self. Indeed, we (along with others) have previously argued that true selves serve as a “wellspring of meaning” (Schlegel, Smith, & Hirsch, 2013, p. 177).

The Meaning-Making Role of True Selves

Selves (true selves, in particular) play an important meaning-making function. Baumeister (1991) argued that the self can “export” meaning and value to other aspects of one’s life without the need to appeal to any higher source of meaning. Similarly, Bellah et al. (1985) found that most people reference the self when asked to justify their life decisions. This is part of why we suspect that perceived authenticity is distinguishable from other self-judgments, such as self-esteem. True selves serve a unique sense-making function that self-esteem cannot match; true selves provide a language for making sense of one’s life. People’s beliefs about who they really are may be the foundation of an overall life philosophy about what they value and want out of life (Schlegel & Hicks, 2011), and appealing to this life philosophy is perceived as valid (Baumeister, 1991; Bellah et al., 1985). When someone says, “I have to do this. It’s who I am,” this is understood and accepted by others as both an explanation and a justification for behavior.

As direct evidence of this meaning-making function, being able to quickly and easily access knowledge about one’s true self is strongly linked to judgments of meaning in life (Schlegel et al., 2009, 2011). Further, the relationship between perceived true self knowledge and meaning in life persists over and above mood and self-esteem (Schlegel et al., 2011). Although this work focuses on global judgments of how meaningful life is overall, similar patterns can be observed in more specific domains. For example, Kim et al. (2017) found that self-alienation (i.e., feeling divorced from one’s true self) and academic amotivation (not knowing *why* one is pursuing academic goals) are strongly linked. Results indicated a robust relationship between self-alienation and amotivation, even after controlling for a host of known predictors of academic motivation, including need satisfaction, self-efficacy, grit, and self-esteem, suggesting that feeling in touch with the true self is uniquely important to seeing the meaning in one’s goals (see also Zhang, Chen, & Schlegel, 2018).

This helps explain why *framing* a decision as emanating from the true self is enough to make a person feel more satisfied with

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Importance Ratings of Various Decision Making Strategies

Decision-making strategy	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
True self as guide	5.89 _a	0.87
Future self as guide	5.88 _a	1.04
Rational processing	5.80 _{a,b}	0.79
Ideal self as guide	5.48 _b	1.28
Everyday self as guide	5.08 _c	1.07
Past self as guide	4.98 _c	1.16
Considering the effect on others	4.94 _c	1.23
Intuition	4.85 _c	1.08
Ought self as guide	4.65 _c	1.58
Information from others	3.56 _d	1.10
Religion	3.47 _d	1.88
Supernatural Sources	2.92 _e	1.58

Note. Means that do not share a subscript are significantly different from each other ($p < .05$). This table illustrates participant ratings of how important a variety of possible strategies are for making satisfying decisions. This suggests true-self-as-guide lay theories are as pervasive as lay-theories about the importance of being rational and considering implications for your future self when making satisfying decisions. Using the true self and future self as guide are both rated as significantly more important than all the other strategies. Reported in Schlegel et al. (2013) From “The Dynamic Interplay Between Perceived True Self-Knowledge and Decision Satisfaction,” by R. J. Schlegel, J. A. Hicks, W. E. Davis, K. A. Hirsch, and C. M. Smith, 2013, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 104, p. 545. Copyright 2013 by the American Psychological Association. Adapted with permission.

that decision. A decision believed to be made from the true self is a meaningful decision simply because it is tied to the true self. In support of this idea, a recent experimental study (Kim, Christy, et al., 2018) showed that people who were instructed to use their true self (vs. rational thinking) to decide how to spend their free time on a particular day were more satisfied with their decision to the extent that they felt they actually followed their true selves. Those instructed to use rational thinking were as satisfied as those in the true self condition, but their satisfaction was explained by the extent to which they felt the activities they engaged in were important. In this way, subjective reports of authenticity may truly be in the eye of the beholder but promote authenticity because they serve as a cue as to whether one is living up to the TSAG lay theory.

Our argument that TSAG lay theories are important to the meaning-making process has clear points of contact with narrative identity theory. Narrative identity theory proposes that individuals form their self-concepts through a constant narrative process in which they “reconstruct the personal past, perceive the present, and anticipate the future” (McAdams, 2001, p. 101). This evolving autobiographical account is used to create a coherent sense of self and imbue life with purpose and unity (McAdams, 1993, 1995; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Singer, 2004). We believe that people heavily rely on TSAG theories as they construct these life stories.

For example, when adolescents begin to develop multiple selves that represent how they behave in different contexts (e.g., self with parents vs. self with friends), concern over which of these selves is “real” emerge (Harter, 2002; Harter, Marold, Whitesell, & Cobbs, 1996; Harter & Monsour, 1992; Rosenberg, 1986) and persist in adulthood (e.g., Harter, 2002; Krause, 2007; Sheldon et al., 1997). People may use the idea of the true self to deal with these concerns and formulate an integrated and coherent self-narrative (see also Chandler, 2000). For instance, in an evolving life story, people believe they are moving toward greater authenticity as they grow and change (Seto & Schlegel, 2017)—who they are now is more authentic than who they used to be, though they also believe they have room to grow. The TSAG lay theory likely undergirds some of these perceptual judgments. When people think about changes that have occurred in their own self-concepts over time, they tend to interpret changes for the better as movements toward the true self and changes for the worse as movements away from the true self (Bench, Schlegel, Davis, & Vess, 2015). This suggests that people believe the arc of their personal history bends toward ever-increasing authenticity and, consistent with the TSAG lay theory, that missteps are explained by detours that occur when one’s true self is no longer the central guide in one’s life.

Why Do People Believe In and Value Authentic Selves?

We now turn our attention to a final question that follows naturally from the adoption of a lay theory approach: How do people come to believe in true selves in the first place, and why is so much value ascribed to a TSAG lay theory? Certainly part of the explanation is simply social learning. As noted earlier, messages about the true self abound in philosophy, psychology, and popular media. However, some recent research has suggested that true-self beliefs may also be rooted in the basic cognitive tendency known as psychological essentialism. Psychological essentialism refers to

the general-level inclination to infer that entities such as individuals and kinds possess underlying essences that, although not directly observable themselves, explain the observable features and behaviors of the objects in question and define their identity (e.g., Gelman, 2003). For example, in the domain of human kinds such as gender and race, essentialism amounts to the view that each gender and racial group is distinct from the others in fundamental, enduring, and naturally occurring (not merely socially constructed) ways.

Evidence has suggested that essentialism is widespread in human cognition, with people holding essentialist understandings of social categories such as race and gender (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2000; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008) and natural categories like animal species (e.g., Atran et al., 2001; Gelman & Wellman, 1991; Rhodes & Gelman, 2009), as well as individual entities including man-made artifacts (Bloom, 1996; Gelman, 2013) and personality traits (Haslam, Bastian, & Bissett, 2004). Belief in a true self may reflect an essentialist understanding of individual personhood; the true self is seen as the distilled essence of a person’s identity. Similar to the case in other essentialist beliefs, the characteristics ascribed to true selves tend to be seen as relatively stable and unchanging; as distinct, individuating, and informative; and as deeply rooted and naturally occurring parts of the person (Christy, Schlegel, & Cimpian, 2017; De Freitas, Cikara, Grossmann, & Schlegel, 2017). These resemblances suggest that true-self beliefs may share a common origin with other essentialist beliefs.

If true-self beliefs are produced by essentialist tendencies that are basic to human cognition, there should be uniformity in these beliefs across people and cultures (given that people tend to essentialize in most cultures; e.g., Atran et al., 2001; Errington, 1989; Gil-White, 2001; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010; Sousa, Atran, & Medin, 2002). To date, no cross-cultural investigations of true-self beliefs have tapped into a truly representative sample of the world’s cultural and linguistic communities. However, the research that does exist provides evidence of at least some cross-cultural uniformity in the folk psychology of personal identity (e.g., Kashima et al., 2004, 2005). These findings imply that there is some cross-cultural uniformity in how representations of personal identity are structured, such that persons are seen as having some fundamental, essential reality (i.e., a true self). This is consistent with the idea that true-self beliefs originate from a basic “essentialism mechanism” (Cimpian & Salomon, 2014) in human cognition (for a discussion of exactly what that mechanism might consist of, see Cimpian & Salomon, 2014, and the associated commentaries).

Although essentialism represents a promising explanation for why people believe in true selves at all, it does not necessarily explain why true selves are valued so highly and seen as reliable guides for behavior. Explaining the emergence of TSAG lay theories will likely require appealing to sociocultural and historical, as well as cognitive, processes. To begin with basic cognitive processes, work by De Freitas, Tobia, Newman, and Knobe (2017) has suggested that people intuitively perceive the true nature of all sorts of entities as normatively good. These findings suggest that people infer that the true versions of entities are normatively good, in much the same way that people view personal true selves as good entities (e.g., Bench et al., 2015; De Freitas, Sarkissian, et al., 2018; Lockhart, Nakashima, Inagaki, & Keil, 2008; Newman,

Bloom, & Knobe, 2014; Nichols, Strohminger, Rai, & Garfield, 2018; Strohminger et al., 2017). There may thus be a basic cognitive tendency to identify “the true” with “the good,” and this could partially explain the value ascribed to true selves (also see work on *is-ought* inferences by Tworek & Cimpian, 2016).

Although basic cognitive mechanisms may contribute to the valuing of true selves and their enshrinement as guides to optimal living, it is clear that historical and cultural forces also play a role. Indeed, the popularity of the TSAG lay theory has surged, especially in modern society, as people have become freer to decide how to live, whereas traditional external sources of guidance (e.g., religion, clearly defined kinship, and community roles) may have lost their authority (Baumeister, 1987). Although people may always have believed in and valued true selves (in the sense of viewing them as fundamentally good), the emergence of a full-blown TSAG lay theory may be a relatively recent phenomenon. At the cultural level, one might see conceptions of true selves as a particular feature of individualistic societies, given their emphasis on autonomous actions originating from intrinsic motivations within independent entities (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). This implies that a TSAG lay theory may be less prominent in other societies that do not embrace individualistic values as staunchly (Triandis, 1995; but see earlier discussion regarding Kim, Rivera, et al., 2018). Consistent with this, Chandler (2000) has argued and found evidence that an essentialist approach to personal identity emphasizing a temporally stable true self is particularly pronounced among Canadians of European descent compared to First Nations individuals (see also Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, Hallett, & Marcia, 2003).

Future Directions

There is clearly a resurgent empirical interest in understanding the concept of personal authenticity. It is an exciting time to be doing work on this issue. However, the somewhat fragmented state of the literature can also be frustrating. Indeed, Harter’s (2002) lamentation that “there is no single coherent body of literature on authentic self-behavior, no bedrock of knowledge” (p. 382) still rings true (though see Schmader & Sedikides, 2018, for a promising start specific to the concept of state authenticity). In the next sections, we outline several future directions for this area of research and also call for more integrative theorizing to bring the existing work together. These suggestions fall in two broad categories (a) understanding where feelings of authenticity come from and (b) examining boundary conditions of the relationship between subjective authenticity and well-being. Shedding light on both of these questions should yield further insight to help create a “bedrock of knowledge.”

Antecedents of Subjective Authenticity

As noted throughout the article, there is some concern that subjective reports of authenticity lack validity to the extent that they fail to correlate with consistency-based indicators of authenticity (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010) and are contaminated by valence (Christy et al., 2016; Fleeson & Wilt, 2010; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2016; Zhang et al., 2018) and positive mood (Lenton et al., 2013). Further empirical investigations are clearly needed to more fully flesh out the nature of subjective authenticity and where it comes from.

For example, it is important to integrate emerging findings examining various elicitors of perceived authenticity. Recent experimental findings have demonstrated that moral behaviors (Christy et al., 2016), a sense of personal agency (e.g., believing in free will; Seto & Hicks, 2016), and perceptions of power (Kraus, Chen, & Keltner, 2011) increase reports of state authenticity. Moreover, recent empirical studies and theoretical perspectives have suggested that state positive affect (Lenton, Slabu, Sedikides, & Power, 2013) and approach motivation (Kim, Chen, Davis, Hicks, & Schlegel, 2018; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018) also covary with the experience of authenticity. Theoretical perspectives integrating these findings will help to better understand how feelings of authenticity emerge, as well as how these feelings contribute to health and well-being.

In a related vein, new ideas are needed to more thoroughly examine to what extent behavioral consistency bears on perceived authenticity and well-being. Although various approaches to operationalizing behavioral consistency have inconsistently predicted well-being (e.g., Magee et al., 2018; Sherman et al., 2012), most of the work on consistency has focused specifically on traits (e.g., Baird et al., 2006; Church et al., 2008; Furr, 2008; Sherman et al., 2012). Traits may not be the most salient aspects of the true self for people. Thus, these findings do not rule out the possibility that people do in fact possess a “real” core self that, when followed, contributes to psychological flourishing. A first step in accomplishing this goal is to delineate the variables best relate to people’s conceptions of the true self. For example, the work suggesting the central relevance of morality to true self-concepts (Strohminger & Nichols, 2014, 2015) directly informed work establishing the importance of moral behavior to the experience of authenticity (Christy et al., 2016). Future work might consider other personality variables, such as one’s core values (Smallenbroek et al., 2017), central motivations (Adler, Lodi-Smith, Philippe, & Houle, 2016), life stories (McAdams, 1993, 1995; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Singer, 2004), or salient identities (Markus, 1977; Markus & Nurius, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987), that might more reliably be associated with the true self-concept and thus subjective authenticity. Future work could also be informed by more closely examining the differences between the types of consistency-based measures that fail to reliably predict well-being (e.g., intraindividual personality variability: Baird et al., 2006; Magee et al., 2018; congruence: Sherman et al., 2012; but see Human et al., 2014) and those that do (e.g., cross-role consistency: Donahue et al., 1993; self-concept clarity: Campbell et al., 2003). This could shed further light on how people think about the true self and what types of experiences are likely to promote the experience of authenticity.

Moreover, future research might also benefit from additional theorizing about what the nature of the true self might be. Prototypical descriptions of the true self have tended to emphasize a “self-as-object” approach that specifies certain characteristics, beliefs, and values as indicative of a person’s true self. More recent theorizing, however, has begun to consider the possibility that the true self may be more closely tethered to present-moment phenomenological experiences (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018) and the ongoing stream of consciousness (Vess et al., 2016). If one thinks of perceived authenticity as a phenomenological experience, rather than as merely the outcome of an evaluation of some behavior against a specific criterion, then a veridical account may be com-

patible with the TSAG lay theory concept, at least to the extent that invoking the lay theory influences phenomenological experiences. In addition to considering perceived authenticity as a phenomenological experience, the true self concept itself may be a dynamic rather than static construct (Markus & Wurf, 1987). For example, people may not carry around a fixed conception of their true self but rather operate with a “working” true self concept that is continuously being updated in response to changing circumstances. Future research that seeks to better understand the nature of the true self, and ventures away from the self-as-object approach, could be helpful for understanding the relationship between feelings of authenticity and well-being.

Finally, more large-sample studies controlling for known covariates of well-being (e.g., positive affect, self-esteem) are needed to adequately test the assumption that subjective authenticity is uniquely associated with happiness and well-being. These findings will help rule out (or support) the claim that self-reports of authenticity may simply reflect general positive evaluations of one’s self.

Boundary Conditions

Illuminating potential boundary conditions could also help further theorizing on authenticity, including the veridical versus nonveridical nature of the relationship between authenticity and well-being. For example, we have argued that TSAG lay beliefs contribute to the feeling of satisfaction and meaning in daily life, but the role of individual differences in these beliefs is currently unclear. For instance, is the relationship between subjective authenticity and well-being contingent upon the endorsement of this lay theory? Perhaps these individual differences might even account for some of the discrepant findings relating self or behavioral consistency to well-being? Objective consistency might matter less to those with lower endorsement of TSAG lay theory, or perhaps consistency might relate to well-being via indirect pathways of perceived authenticity for those who highly endorse the lay theory. If these individual differences matter, this would be evidence in favor of a nonveridical mechanism.

Additionally, it will be important for future research to consider how the TSAG lay theory might operate in clinical contexts, for those with severely negative self-views that they may apply to their true selves. Some theorists have suggested that clients’ reluctance to seek treatment could be due to perceptions that the disorder is an emotional expression of their true self (Strohming et al., 2017). Indeed, research has suggested that although people are fine with using psychopharmaceuticals to enhance self-aspects that they see as peripheral to their identity (e.g., concentration), they are hesitant to use drugs to enhance core aspects of the self (e.g., empathy, mood; Riis, Simmons, & Goodwin, 2008). This raises the question, If anxious or depressed individuals, for example, think that parts of their true selves are inherently bad or flawed, do perceptions of authenticity still contribute to well-being for these individuals? It is possible that ascribing negative content to the true self might hamper subjective authenticity’s ability to promote well-being. However, given the pervasiveness of the TSAG lay theory, we would predict that feelings of authenticity might still promote well-being despite holding these views. Furthermore, because people are motivated to both self-verify (i.e., acquire feedback that aligns with how they see themselves) and

self-enhance (receive positive feedback about themselves; Swann et al., 1989), perceptions of authenticity might lead people to feel they are fulfilling both motivations by helping them (a) feel connected to a part of themselves that is believed to be essentially good (Strohming et al., 2017) and (b) perceive that they are acting in a way that will elicit subjectively accurate feedback. In this way, feelings of authenticity could promote well-being even among those who hold negative self-views. In line with this, recent research has suggested that clients with social anxiety disorder whose perceived authenticity was bolstered prior to a social interaction showed improved cognitive, affective, and relational outcomes in that interaction (Plasencia, Taylor, & Alden, 2016). Future research should continue to examine the role of subjective authenticity in clinical contexts.

Finally, the role of culture is clearly important to examine. To the extent that the relationship between subjective authenticity and well-being differs across cultures, a nonveridical explanation is needed. However, a lack of cultural variation is consistent with both veridical and nonveridical mechanisms. For example, it is possible that there is cultural variation in the content of TSAG lay theories but cultural invariance in the application of these culture-specific TSAG lay theories. In other words, valuing authenticity may be a cultural universal, but within different cultures people may have distinct understandings of what the authentic self is and what it means to be authentic. Empirical evidence partially has supported such a view. For instance, there is cross-cultural invariance in the link between feelings of authenticity and psychological well-being (Akin & Akin, 2014; Ito, Horikoshi, & Kodama, 2009; Ito & Kodama, 2007; Tekin, 2014). Although this suggests that authenticity is valued across many cultures, there is also evidence that authenticity is conceptualized differently in different cultures (e.g., Kashima et al., 2004, 2005; Park, Haslam, & Kashima, 2012; Slabu, Lenton, Sedikides, & Bruder, 2014). For example, Kashima and colleagues (2004) found that “the Japanese conception of the person may be that there is a true self in every context” (p. 129). Thus, individuals from cultures that are higher in interdependence and/or dialectical thinking may believe situation-specific behavior can still reflect the true self, regardless of the consistency of that behavior across situations (see also Chen, 2018; Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003; English & Chen, 2007). Even if authenticity is valued cross-culturally, the exact conceptions of authenticity (e.g., authenticity as being true to a decontextualized self vs. being true to the self-in-context) may differ across cultures.

Concluding Thoughts

The study of subjective authenticity is a valuable pursuit, given its unique association with many measures of well-being. We argue that the relationship between subjective authenticity and well-being can be understood by a widely endorsed lay theory that suggests it is important for people to know and express their true selves and that they should use their true selves as a guide while navigating a life full of unexpected choices and challenges. This lay theory helps people make sense of their experiences and has important downstream psychological, motivational, and social consequences. From a TSAG lay theory perspective, feelings of authenticity are important because people use them as a cue to whether they are living up to this shared view of what it means to live a good life. This lay theory approach explains findings that

cannot be explained from a purely veridical approach to true selves (e.g., Kim, Christy, et al., 2018) and as such complements existing theoretical perspectives on authenticity (e.g., self-concordance; Sheldon, 2014).

The research discussed in this article suggests individuals use feelings of authenticity as a resource across a variety of domains. In this way, studying perceived authenticity through the lens of true-self lay beliefs may be similar to the study of free will (Vohs & Schooler, 2008; Wegner, 2002) or religious beliefs (e.g., Emons, 2005) in that it is the perception of reality that matters more than the actual reality. Individuals' experiencing connection with their true selves, regardless of whether true selves exist or whether individuals actually follow them, has consequential impacts on decision satisfaction, psychological well-being, motivation and goal pursuit, social relationships, and many other aspects of "the good life."

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