**Liking Predicts Judgments of Authenticity in Real-Time Interactions More Robustly Than Personality States or Affect**

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**Abstract**

We conducted three studies involving small group interactions (*N* = 622) that examined whether Big Five personality states, affect, and/or liking predict judgements of others’ authenticity. Study 1 (*n* = 119) revealed that neither *self*-rated personality states nor affect predicted other-rated authenticity. Instead, other-rated liking was the only predictor of other-rated authenticity. Study 2 (*n* = 281) revealed that *other*-rated personality states and affect were significant predictors of other-rated authenticity, but other-rated liking was a more important factor in predicting other-rated authenticity than specific behaviors or affect. Based on these results, Study 3 (*n* = 222) examined whether an experimental manipulation of likability had a causal effect on other-ratings of authenticity. Likable actors were indeed judged as more authentic. Together, this suggests that we judge people we like as more authentic, and that likability may be more important than the “objective” content of behavior.

*Keywords:*authenticity, other-ratings, liking, personality states, affect

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In modern Western society, it is increasingly important to not just *feel* authentic but to *seem* authentic to others (e.g., Wickham, 2013; Wood et al., 2016). Indeed, examples of the importance of projecting authenticity abound. The artist Beyoncé, for example, was celebrated when she released her 2013 self-titled album, which was described as a glimpse into the “real” her due to its exploration of intimate details of her personal life (Macrossan, 2018). Politicians engage in seemingly spontaneous activities and use two-way mediums (e.g., twitter) to appear more authentic (Wood et al., 2016). On a smaller scale, the presence of leaders who seem authentic predicts better employee performance and increased worker job satisfaction (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Wong & Laschinger, 2013). Even personal relationships are more satisfying when partners are perceived as more authentic (Wickham, 2013). Yet, relatively little is known about what makes people seem authentic to others. Intuitively, the most important predictor of seeming authentic to others may be behaving in ways that feel authentic to the self. However, a recent paper found almost no correlation between self- and other-rated authenticity (Bailey & Levy, 2022). If people do not think we are being authentic when *we* think we are being authentic, what then influences others’ judgments of our authenticity?

The current research examined three candidate predictors of the perception of others’ authenticity: Big Five personality states (Fleeson & Wilt, 2011), affect (Lenton et al., 2013), and liking (Grandey et al., 2002). We selected personality states and affect as candidate predictors because both of these have been shown to predict one’s own self-rated authenticity. This allowed us to ask whether the factors that make people *feel* authentic also make them *seem* authentic to others. We selected liking as an additional candidate predictor because of past research demonstrating a strong link between liking and perceived authenticity (e.g., Liu & Perrewe, 2006). We conducted three interpersonal interaction studies that examined the unique contribution and relative importance of these potential predictors on others’ judgements of authenticity[[1]](#footnote-1).

**Defining Authenticity**

Following Kernis and Goldman (2006), we define authenticity as the extent to which “one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors reflect one’s true‐ or core‐self” (p. 294). Notably, however, we are focused on *perceived* authenticity. That is, we are focused on the *subjective judgments* that someone else’s “thoughts, feelings, and behaviors reflect one’s true‐ or core‐self.” Perceived authenticity is theoretically independent of objective authenticity. Indeed, perceived authenticity might be important even if objective authenticity is impossible to measure or doesn’t exist (Baumeister, 2019; Rivera et al., 2019).

Consistent with the idea that perceived authenticity matters, research suggests that self-rated authenticity is distinguishable from other positive self-evaluations such as self-esteem and social desirability (e.g., Davis et al., 2015) and that self-rated authenticity demonstrates incremental validity in predicting well-being over and above other positive self-evaluations (Schlegel et al., 2009; see Rivera et al., 2019 for a review). While most of the work on perceived authenticity focuses on perceptions of one’s own authenticity, the current work shifts the focus to perceptions of others’ authenticity, which has received notably less attention. Perceptions of others’ authenticity are just as important to our social functioning as perceptions of one’s own authenticity given that perceptions of others authenticity contributes to how we think about other people (e.g., Newman & Smith, 2016).

We will specifically focus on potential predictors of what makes someone seem authentic to others. As noted above, there appears to be almost no correlation between self- and other-rated perceived authenticity (Bailey & Levy, 2022), begging the question: what predicts our perception that someone else is being authentic? The relatively scant literature on this question points to a variety of factors that influence judgments of someone else’s authenticity. For example, some studies point to certain specific behaviors that make people seem more authentic, such as not being overly self-enhancing or self-deprecating (Robinson et al., 1995), behaving in ways that are congruent with cultural norms (e.g., expressing both likes and dislikes in German samples vs. expressing only likes in Chinese samples; Kokkoris & Kuhnen, 2014), and acting on impulse (Garrison et al., 2022). These studies suggest that people may have a set of heuristics about what is (or is not) authentic. Other studies point to an interaction between the perceiver and the target. Specifically, when people behave in ways consistent with their own ideologies, that behavior is seen as more authentic (Newman et al., 2014; Pillow et al., 2017; White II & Crandall, 2023), suggesting people are motivated to view some specific behaviors as more authentic than others based on their own beliefs. Notably, most of these studies have focused on hypothetical scenarios, not real life interactions where judgments of authenticity may play out differently.

Building on this past work, we examined perceptions of unknown others’ authenticity in real-time interactions for the first time. We approached this question in a relatively exploratory way given the lack of work in this area. We chose the first two sets of predictors because of their established relevance to self-perceptions of authenticity: Big Five personality traits and positive/negative affect. In each case, we ask whether the same states that predict the experience of feeling authentic would similarly predict being perceived as authentic by others.

***Big Five Personality States***

Fleeson and Wilt’s (2010) state-content significance hypothesis suggests that certain personality states consistently *feel* more authentic, regardless of the actor’s underlying traits (see also Sheldon et al., 1997). This includes acting in ways that are highly extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, emotionally stable, and open to experience. Notably, the state-content significance hypothesis runs counter to intuition. People report that they think, for example, introverts feel more authentic when they act introverted. Yet, Fleeson and Wilt (2010) revealed no interaction between states and traits. Rather, everyone feels authentic when behaving in a more extraverted manner.

There is debate about why such patterns emerge. According to one account, these ways of behaving support self-expression and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (e.g., autonomy, Sheldon et al., 1997). According to another account, these behaviors are more positively valenced (e.g., Saucier & Goldberg, 2003) and this positivity impacts people’s perceptions of authenticity. Consistent with this, Jongman-Sereno and Leary (2016) found that people judge their own positive behaviors as more authentic than their negative behaviors, even when both are equally consistent with one’s self-concept. Such an interpretation is also consistent with self-discrepancy theory to the extent that self-ratings of authenticity may track with feelings of alignment with one’s ideal self (Cooper et. al., 2018; Gan & Chen, 2017; Higgins, 1987) or one’s desired reputation (Baumeister, 2019). Regardless of why such effects emerge, we examined whether these Big Five personality states project authenticity to others in the same way that they engender authenticity in the self.

***Affect***

Positive affect is also known to promote the subjective experience of authenticity (Cooper et al., 2018; Heppner, et al., 2008; Lenton et al., 201), suggesting that feeling good feels authentic. Perhaps the strongest evidence of this interpretation comes from experiments that demonstrate that affect manipulations causally impact self-ratings of authenticity (Lenton et al., 2013). Thus, we examined whether one’s affect influences how authentic people seem to others. For example, if people associate feeling good with authenticity in their own lives, they may similarly infer that someone else who appears to feel good is likely being authentic. On the other hand, the idea that positive affect would predict authenticity perceptions of others seems somewhat counterintuitive. After all, at least in American culture (where this study was conducted), cultural norms push for displays of positive, but not negative, affect (e.g., Wirtz et al., 2009). As such,someone displaying negative affect may be doing so because they are being authentic, not because of external forces.

***Liking***

Our final candidate predictor is less directly related to the perceived self-authenticity literature, but struck as potentially very important to the study of others’ authenticity: liking. For example, work on lay understandings of authenticity revealed that two words related to liking (i.e., likable, friendly) were frequently nominated as words people associate with authenticity (Kovács, 2019). However, just because people associate the two words, it doesn’t mean that one causally impacts the other. While it is perhaps intuitive to predict that authenticity leads to liking (e.g., Kernis & Goldman, 2005; Liu & Perrewe, 2006), a recent study casts doubt on this possibility (Mignault et al., 2022). In this study, targets were either told “be themselves” (authenticity condition) or received no instructions (control). Others were more accurate at rating targets’ distinct personality profiles in the authenticity condition, yet others did not find the targets in the authenticity condition any more likable than targets in the control condition. We thus sought to test the reverse direction: liking causally impacts perceptions of others’ authenticity .

What do we mean by liking and likability? By liking we are referring to the affective attitude (positive vs. negative) people have about other people. Liking is a function of partner effects (some people are more likable than others), perceiver effects (some people tend to have more positive evaluations of everyone), and relationship effects (idiosyncratic effects from the combinations of specific partners and perceivers; e.g., Back et al., 2011). There are a wide variety of factors that predict liking, including warmth (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007), similarity ( Hogg et al., 1993), physical attractiveness ( Eagly et al., 1991), and ingroup membership (Greenberg et al., 2009). For the purposes of this paper, we operationalize liking using face-valid measures of perceiver ratings of previously unknown partners following brief in-person social interactions. As such, we do not focus on what makes someone seem likable, but rather how other-rated likability might foster perceptions of other-rated authenticity.

**The Current Research**

We conducted three interaction studies to investigate the relative weight of personality states, affect, and/or liking in predicting ratings of a partner’s authenticity. The first two studies (Studies 1 and 2) were relatively exploratory; while we expected all three candidate predictors to be associated with other-rated authenticity, we were uncertain of the relative potential contribution of all three candidate predictors of other-rated authenticity. In Study 1, we examined self-rated personality states and affect as well as other-rated liking as individual, and then simultaneous, predictors of other-rated authenticity. In Study 2, we examined other-rated personality states and affect as well as other-rated liking as individual, and then simultaneous, predictors of other-rated authenticity. This allowed two different tests of whether certain ways of acting (positive personality states and affect) make targets seem more authentic to perceivers.

Study 3 was motivated by the findings of Studies 1 and 2. We predicted that liking would be a causal predictor of perceptions of others’ authenticity. Specifically, the results of Studies 1 and 2 suggest that other-rated liking was a more important factor in predicting other-rated authenticity than specific behaviors or affect. We thus examined whether an experimental manipulation of likability would have a causal effect on ratings of another’s authenticity. No studies in this manuscript were preregistered. We report all manipulations, measures, and exclusions in these studies.

**Study 1**

As an initial investigation of what predicts being perceived as authentic, we had participants engage in a moderated conversation. After the conversation, participants rated their own behavior during the interaction as well as how authentic they thought each of their interaction partners had been, and how much they liked each interaction partner. We then conducted social relation modeling analyses within a multilevel framework to assess whether self-reports of personality states and affect along with other-reports of liking predict other-reports of authenticity.

**Method**

***Participants and Design***

Participants (*n* = 119) were a convenience sample of undergraduate students recruited from introductory psychology courses. Demographic information for this sample and subsequent studies are presented in Table 1. Sample size was not determined a priori; rather we reached this sample size by opening timeslots every 90 minutes during regular business hours for a period of five days. This research (including subsequent studies) was approved by Texas A&M University’s Institutional Review Board.

**Table 1**

*Participant Demographics Across Studies*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Study 1 | Study 2 | Study 3 |
| Variable |  | (*n* = 119) | (*n* = 281) | (*n* = 222) |
| Gender | Female | 43 | 174 | 168 |
| Male | 75 | 101 | 54 |
| Other or Not Reported | 1 | 1 | – |
| Race/Ethnicity | American Indian/Alaskan Native | – | 3 | 1 |
| Asian | 4 | 17 | 23 |
| Indian | 1 | – | 3 |
| White | 98 | 226 | 177 |
| Black / African American | 1 | 11 | 6 |
| Hispanic / Latino | 24 | 71 | 54 |
| Multi-Racial | 8 | 12 | 8 |
| Not Listed | 4 | 7 | 3 |
| Age | *M* (*SD*) | 19.61 (1.95) | 18.9  (0.94) | 18.61 (0.92) |
| Range | 18–33 | 18–23 | 18–24 |

*Note*. Participants were able to indicate more than one race/ethnicity.

***Interaction Task***

Participants were seated at a table in groups of 2–4. Participants were asked to introduce themselves by giving their first names and were then directed to discuss two different topics: an embarrassing moment and a favorite memory (full scripts, materials, data used in analyses, and code available online at <https://osf.io/nu7rt/>).

***Post-Interaction Survey***

All measures were completed on a 7-point scale, with higher numbers indicating greater perceptions of the following constructs.

**Other-Rated Authenticity.**Participants rated each of their interaction partners on three items adapted from Fleeson and Wilt (2010; *M* = 5.93, *SD* = .83, α = .94; e.g., This person seemed authentic in the way they acted during the activity”.

Despite instructions not to, a substantial number of participants rated themselves (*n* = 41), a participant that did not exist (*n* = 1), or both (*n* = 7). We were able to determine this because participants were randomly assigned a color card when they entered the interaction room, which they then used to identify which partner they were rating in the subsequent survey. We treated these erroneous ratings as missing data in subsequent analyses.

**Other-Rated Liking.** Participants also indicated how much they liked each of the other partners using the following two items: “I liked this person” and “I would like to interact with this person again” (*M* = 5.50, *SD* = 1.02, *r* = .81). The first item was adapted from prior research on liking in interpersonal interactions (e.g., Garcia et al., 2017; Pinel & Long, 2012). The second item was adapted from Pinel and Long (2012), whose 5-item composite of liking included items about how people would feel about subsequently meeting the participant they had ostensibly interacted with online.

**Affect.** We asked participants to indicate their current affect by rating how much they felt a series of emotional words (Tsai & Knustson, 2001), with 9 indicating positive affect (e.g., excited, happy, enthusiastic; *M* = 4.65, *SD* = 0.94, α = .85) and 9 indicating negative affect (e.g., sad, unhappy, hostile; *M* = 2.66, *SD* = 0.99, α = .83).

**Personality States**. Finally, participants rated their own Big Five personality states (Goldberg, 1992). The scale included 25 adjectives (5 for each Big Five state), and participants were asked to indicate the extent to which these adjectives described their behavior during the interaction. Descriptive statistics were as follows: Extraversion (e.g., talkative; *M* = 4.52, *SD* = 1.24, α = .78), Agreeableness (e.g., cooperative; *M* = 5.97, *SD* = 0.74, α = .74), Conscientiousness (e.g., organized; *M* = 4.95, *SD* = 0.83, α = .56), Openness (e.g., creative; *M* = 4.56, *SD* = 0.91, α = .62), and Neuroticism (e.g., temperamental; *M* = 1.87, *SD* = 0.93, α = .57). Due to very low reliability for the original 5 items (α = .12), our Neuroticism composite only includes 3 items: touchy, irritable, and temperamental.

Participants also completed several other measures in both the pre- and post-surveys not used in the current analyses (e.g., meaning in life, rumination, approach motivation). Complete study materials can be found on OSF for readers interested in what other variables were measured.

**Results**

Social relations modeling (SRM) within the multilevel framework using the SRM\_R Shiny App (Kenny & Wong, 2016) was used to conduct all primary analyses to account for the nested structure of the dyadic data, in which each person is both a perceiver and a target, nested within dyads, nested within interaction groups. There were 254 observations (2 were dropped for missing data) used in the analysis from 119 individuals who were members of 40 groups. These groups varied in size from 2 to 4 members. Analyses used restricted maximum likelihood (REML) and the “optim” optimizer, and all chi-square tests were deviance difference tests. Random effects were modeled for group, perceiver, target, and dyad. All self-rated correlates (i.e., personality states and affect) were group-mean centered and the other-rated liking was person-mean centered, given there were multiple ratings of liking by the same individuals.

***Other-Reported Authenticity***

First, we estimated an unconditional model in order to obtain the variance in other-rated authenticity that is attributed to group, perceiver, target, and dyad. The amount of variance explained at the group level was not significantly different from zero, χ2(1) = 1.23, *p* = .268. There was a significant amount of variance explained at the perceiver level, χ2(1) = 42.34, *p* < .001, and at the target level, (1) = 5.80, *p* = .016. The test of equal variances between perceiver and target was significantly different from zero, (1) = 11.40, *p* < .001, such that perceiver variance (absolute = .52, relative =.42) was significantly larger than the target variance (absolute =.12, relative =.10).

The generalized reciprocity covariance between perceiver and target effects was not significantly different from zero (absolute = - .03, correlation = - .12), χ2(1) = 0.22, *p* = .641, suggesting that people who generally perceived others as authentic were not necessarily perceived as authentic by others. The dyadic covariance between two relationship effects from the same dyad (dyadic reciprocity) was also not significantly different from zero (absolute = .02, correlation = .04), χ2(1) = 0.06, *p* = .812. This suggests that there was no reciprocal relationship in the perceptions of authenticity between perceivers and targets within each of the unique dyads.

The following analyses explored each of the predictors in single models unless otherwise noted (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Study 1 SRM Predictor Variable Results on Other-Reported Authenticity*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Predictor | Effect | df | p | 95% CI |
| Model 1 |  |  |  |  |
| Extraversion | .10 | 210 | .177 | -.05, .24 |
| Model 2 |  |  |  |  |
| Agreeableness | .18 | 210 | .191 | -.09, .46 |
| Model 3 |  |  |  |  |
| Conscientiousness | .06 | 210 | .657 | -.19, .30 |
| Model 4 |  |  |  |  |
| Neuroticism | -.11 | 210 | .312 | -.32, .10 |
| Model 5 |  |  |  |  |
| Openness | .09 | 210 | .372 | -.11, .29 |
| Model 6 |  |  |  |  |
| PA | -.04 | 210 | .729 | -.26, .18 |
| Model 7 |  |  |  |  |
| NA | -.06 | 210 | .563 | -.26, .14 |
| Model 8 |  |  |  |  |
| Other Liking | .52 | 213 | <.001 | .38, .66 |
| Model 9 |  |  |  |  |
| Extraversion | .11 | 203 | .318 | -.10, .31 |
| Agreeableness | .09 | 203 | .675 | -.33, .50 |
| Conscientiousness | .02 | 203 | .924 | -.29, .32 |
| Neuroticism | -.07 | 203 | .595 | -.35, .20 |
| Openness | -.04 | 203 | .788 | -.34, .26 |
| PA | -.10 | 203 | .443 | -.35, .16 |
| NA | -.02 | 203 | .884 | -.26, .22 |
| Other Liking | .52 | 203 | <.001 | .38, .66 |

*Note*. PA = positive affect; NA = negative affect; CI = confidence intervals. For Models 1-8, each predictor was tested in its own model; Model 9 was a joint model with all 8 predictors entered simultaneously.

**Personality States.** None of the Big Five personality states emerged as significant correlates of other-reported authenticity.

**Affect**. Neither self-reported positive or negative affect were significant predictors of other-reported authenticity.

**Others’ Liking**. Other-reported liking was a significant positive predictor of other-reported authenticity, such that the more a participant was liked, the more authentic they were thought to be.

**Joint Model**. In a joint model with the 5 personality states, affect, and other-rated liking, other-rated liking continued to be the only significant predictor of other-reported authenticity.

**Discussion**

Study 1 revealed self-reported personality states and affect were not related to other-rated authenticity. This suggests that while personality states (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010) and affect (Lenton et al., 2013) engender feelings of authenticity in the self, these same self-reported personality states and affect did not project authenticity to others. This mirrors work which suggests self-reports of authenticity do not predict how authentic others see us (Bailey & Levy, 2022). Study 1 also revealed other-reported liking was a significant predictor of other-rated authenticity. Taken together, Study 1 suggests that while our own personality states and affect do not seem to reliably predict whether others perceive us as authentic, how much we are liked seems to play a strong role in being perceived as authentic by others.

However, it is possible that other-reports of personality states and affect better predict other-reports of authenticity (e.g., when I think someone is acting extraverted, I think they are being authentic) than self-reports of personality states and affect. Further, it is possible that shared method variance between other-reported liking and other-reported authenticity explains the strength of this effect, such that any other-reported positively-valanced evaluation would similarly predict other-reported authenticity. To be viewed as authentic by others, it may matter more that others *perceive* one’s positive personality states and affect than whether someone actually *feels* such states. Study 2 tests these possibilities.

**Study 2**

Study 2 was nearly identical to Study 1, with the primary difference being that we shifted from self-reported personality states and affect to other-reported personality states and affect.

**Method**

***Participants and Design***

Participants (*n* = 301) were again a convenience sample of undergraduate students recruited from introductory psychology courses. 17 participants were excluded due to experimenter/participant errors that led to unusable data. Three participants were also excluded who started but did not complete the survey, leaving a final sample size of 281. Sample size was determined by seeking to get the largest sample we could within the constraints of lab resources.

***Interaction Task***

Participants were brought into the lab in groups of 2–5 to complete the same interaction task as Study 1.

***Post-Interaction Survey***

Participants completed the following measures using 7-point scales. Additional measures were collected for exploratory purposes and were not included in analyses. Complete study materials can be found on OSF for readers interested in what other variables were measured.

**Other-Rated Authenticity.** Participants rated each of their interaction partners on 4 items adapted from Fleeson and Wilt (2010; *M* = 5.59, *SD* = 0.81, α = .73; e.g.“This person seemed authentic during the interaction”).

**Other-Rated Liking.** Participants also indicated how much they liked each of the other participants using 5 items adapted from previous research (e.g., “I enjoyed working with this participant” and “I like this participant”; Garcia et al., 2017; Pinel & Long, 2012; *M* = 5.47, *SD* = 1.08, α = .95).

**Other-Rated Personality States.**Participants rated each of their interaction partners’ personality states using a shortened version of the measure used in Study 1 in order to reduce participant fatigue (instead of completing this measure once as in Study 1 for the self, participants completed it up to 4 times, one for each participant). Descriptive statistics were as follows: Extraversion (*M* = 4.48, *SD* = 1.43, α = .81), Agreeableness (*M* = 5.72, *SD* = 0.89, α = .69), Openness (*M* = 5.11, *SD* = 1.10, α = .71), Conscientiousness (*M* = 5.16, *SD* = 0.90, α = .47), and Neuroticism (*M* = 2.03, *SD* = 1.09, α = .46). Due to negative reliability for the 3 items included (-.15), our Neuroticism composite only included 2 items.

**Other-Rated Affect**. We asked participants how much they thought each interaction partner felt on a series of emotional words (adapted from Larsen & Diener, 1984): five items for positive affect (e.g., happy, joy, satisfied; *M* = 4.71, *SD* = 1.25, α = .94) and five items for negative affect (e.g., unhappy, frustrated, bored; *M* = 1.91, *SD* = 0.87, α = .73).

**Results**

SRM using the SRM\_R Shiny App (Kenny & Wong, 2016) was again used to conduct all primary analyses with the same parameters as described in Study 1. There were 812 observations used in the analysis from 281 individuals who were members of 77 groups. These groups varied in size from 2 to 5 members. All other-rated correlates (i.e., personality states, affect, and liking) were person-mean centered[[2]](#footnote-2).

***Other-Reported Authenticity***

First, we estimated an unconditional model in order to obtain the variance in other-rated authenticity that is attributed to group, perceiver, target, and dyad. The amount of variance explained at the group level was not significantly different from zero, χ2(1) = 0.16, *p* = .688. There was a significant amount of variance explained at the perceiver level, χ2(1) = 68.36, *p* < .001, and at the target level, χ2(1) = 10.43, *p* < .001. The test of equal variances between perceiver and target was significantly different from zero, χ2(1) = 11.77, *p* < .001, such that perceiver variance (absolute = .32, relative = .28) was significantly larger than the target variance (absolute = .09, relative = .08).

The generalized reciprocity covariance between perceiver and target effects was not significantly different from zero (absolute = -.03, correlation = - .16), χ2(1) = 0.44, *p* = .507. However, different from Study 1, the dyadic covariance between two relationship effects from the same dyad (dyadic reciprocity) was significantly different from zero (absolute = .16, correlation = .23), χ2(1) = 9.70, *p* = .002, suggesting that within a specific dyad, if a participant perceived a target as authentic, then the participant was also more likely to be perceived as authentic by that target.

**Table 3**

*Study 2 SRM Predictor Variable Results on Other-Reported Authenticity*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Predictor | Effect | df | p | 95% CI |
| Model 1 |  |  |  |  |
| Extraversion | .24 | 715 | <.001 | .19, .30 |
| Model 2 |  |  |  |  |
| Agreeableness | .54 | 715 | <.001 | .43, .64 |
| Model 3 |  |  |  |  |
| Conscientiousness | .32 | 715 | <.001 | .21, .43 |
| Model 4 |  |  |  |  |
| Neuroticism | -.33 | 734 | <.001 | -.42, -.25 |
| Model 5 |  |  |  |  |
| Openness | .46 | 715 | <.001 | .37, .54 |
| Model 6 |  |  |  |  |
| PA | .52 | 715 | <.001 | .43, .61 |
| Model 7 |  |  |  |  |
| NA | -.55 | 715 | <.001 | -.66, -.43 |
| Model 8 |  |  |  |  |
| Other Liking | .48 | 715 | <.001 | .42, .55 |
| Model 9 |  |  |  |  |
| Extraversion | .09 | 708 | .005 | .03, .15 |
| Agreeableness | .17 | 708 | .004 | .05, .29 |
| Conscientiousness | .11 | 708 | .038 | .01, .22 |
| Neuroticism | .01 | 708 | .797 | -.08, .10 |
| Openness | .11 | 708 | .020 | .02, .20 |
| PA | .12 | 708 | .027 | .01, .24 |
| NA | -.01 | 708 | .833 | -.15, .12 |
| Other Liking | .29 | 708 | <.001 | .21, .36 |

*Note*. PA = positive affect; NA = negative affect; CI = confidence intervals. For Models 1-8, each predictor was tested in its own model; Model 9 was a joint model with all 8 predictors entered simultaneously.

**Personality States**. All five of the other-rated personality states were significant predictors of other-rated authenticity.

**Perceived Affect**. Positive affect predicted higher and negative affect predicted lower perceptions of others’ authenticity, respectively.

**Other-Rated Liking**. Liking positively predicted perceptions of others’ authenticity.

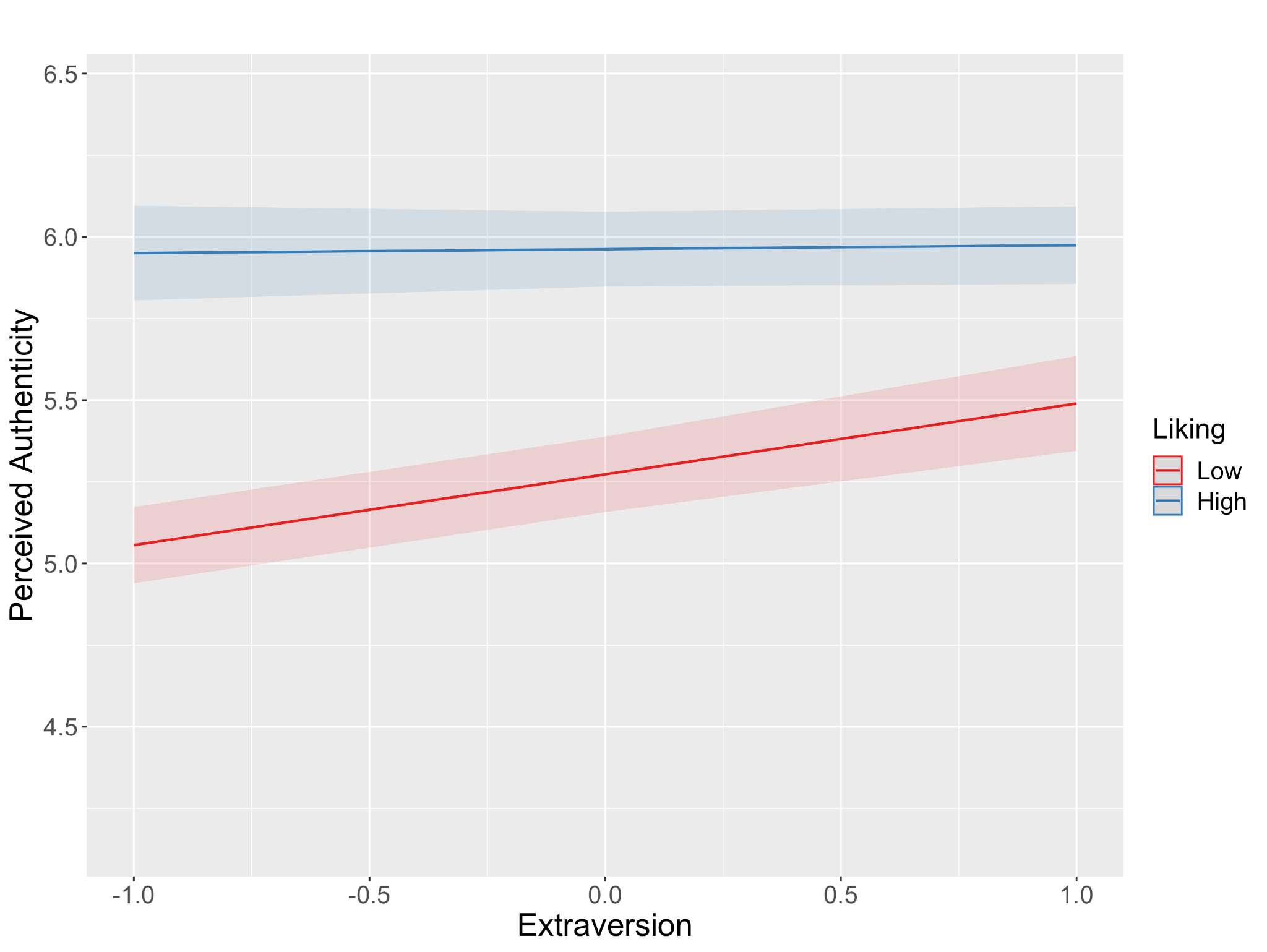
**Joint Model**. We ran a joint model that included all 8 predictors simultaneously, to test which variables might be most important in predicting perceptions of others’ authenticity. Liking emerged as the strongest predictor of others’ authenticity. Positive affect, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness remained significant predictors of others’ authenticity, while Negative affect and Neuroticism no longer were significant predictors.

**Interactions Between Specific Behaviors and Liking**. Finally, given how large the relationship was between liking and authenticity in both Studies 1 and 2, we wondered whether liking might attenuate the relationship between specific behaviors and other-rated authenticity. That is, we suspected that when people see someone as “likable”, they tend to think that person is being authentic regardless of what their specific behaviors are.

We tested a series of interaction models to examine whether there were any interactive effects between liking and any of the five personality states or positive/negative affect. Five of the seven models supported this hypothesis (*p’*s *<* .001); only Agreeableness (*p* = .973) and Conscientiousness (*p* = .077) did not interact with liking to predict others’ authenticity (see supplemental Table S2). The nature of these interactions suggests that behaviors were a stronger predictor of authenticity when liking was low; when liking was high, behaviors no longer significantly predicted other-rated authenticity[[3]](#footnote-3) (see Figure 1 for an illustrative example; all five interactions followed a similar pattern, see supplemental Figures S1–4). However, an important caution is that we may be underpowered to detect some of these interactive effects, as interactions between continuous predictors often require 2–4 times the sample sizes of two by two categorical interactions to achieve the same power(McClelland & Judd, 1993; see also Giner-Sorolla, 2018).

**Figure 1**

*The Interactive Effect of Liking and Extraversion on Other-Rated Authenticity in Study 2*



*Note*. The simple slope of Extraversion was significant at low levels of liking (*t* = 3.80, *p* < .001), but not at high levels of liking (*t* = -0.24, *p* = .812).

**Discussion**

In Study 2, other-rated personality states and affect both predicted other-rated authenticity. Specifically, people thought other people were being more authentic to the extent that they perceived them to act in extraverted, conscientious, emotionally stable, agreeable, and open ways and when they exhibited high levels of positive affect and low levels of negative affect.

Liking, however, seemed to carry more weight than specific behaviors. First, liking was a stronger predictor than any of the states that predicted authenticity. Second, the predictive power of the state predictors of authenticity tended to be attenuated by how much the partner was liked. That is, state extraversion, for example, no longer predicted authenticity when liking was high. This suggests that liking overpowers any of the specific behaviors that were linked to perceptions of authenticity. Again, this is consistent with the emerging conclusion that liking is a stronger predictor of other positive personality states and affect. Even if extraversion is usually a signal of authenticity, it matters less when the person is liked.

**Study 3**

Study 3 aimed to test whether likability causally influences perceived authenticity. Participants interacted with an actor with whom the participant has no prior knowledge, and who were trained to act in either a likable (or dislikable) manner.

**Method**

***Participants and Design***

Participants (*n* = 222) were a convenience sample of undergraduate students recruited from introductory psychology courses. One participant was excluded from main analyses due to data loss.We aimed for a sample of at least 200, so that *n* = 100 per condition. We recruited participants one week at a time until we hit that desired sample size, resulting in a sample size slightly greater than 200. This sample size was chosen because it exceeds the sample size (*n* = 180) needed to detect the mean effect size in social psychology studies (*r* = .21; Richard et al., 2003, as cited in Funder et al., 2004) with power set to .80 and a between-subjects design with two conditions.

***Interaction Task***

In order to manipulate an actor’s likability, we used a procedure adapted from Kieckhaefer and Wright (2015). As a cover story, participants were told that they would be participating in a mock interview in the laboratory, and that we were interested in understanding how people interact in interview settings. Participants were told that they were going to be randomly assigned to be either an interviewer or an interviewee. In actuality, the other “participant” was a trained research assistant actor in the lab (*n* = 6) who was always “randomly” picked to be the interviewer. Each actor was trained and acted in both conditions (see supplemental table S3 for descriptive statistics for each actor by condition). After a participant signed up for a time slot from a weekly schedule, a virtual coin flip randomly assigned the participant to condition, and whichever actor was on the schedule during that time acted in that condition.

In the likable condition (*n* = 116), actors were trained to respond positively to all participant answers, make frequent eye contact, actively listen, take notes, and mirror participant movements. Specific behavioral directions included smiling, head-nodding, and generally acting friendly and interested. In the dislikable condition (*n* = 105), actors were trained to respond negatively to answers, to avoid making much eye contact, to act bored/disinterested, and to write one-word answers if any. Specific behavioral directions included frowning, tapping foot as if bored, and generally acting unfriendly and disinterested.

***Post-Interaction Survey***

After participants were finished with the interviews, they were escorted to private cubicles to answer questions about their experience. We also collected additional measures to be used in a related research project which are not included in the following analyses (Complete study materials can be found on OSF for interested readers).

**Other-Rated Authenticity.** Participants rated the actor on 3 items adapted from Fleeson and Wilt (2010; *M* = 4.75, *SD* = 1.27, α = .77; e.g., “To what extent do you feel like this person was really being their self during the interaction.”)

**Other-Rated Liking.** This measure was used as a manipulation check. Participants indicated how much they liked the other participant, using the same 5 items from Study 2 (*M* = 4.69, *SD* = 1.92, α = .97).

**Results**

***Multilevel Modeling***

Multilevel modeling (MLM) in SPSS was used to conduct all primary analyses to account for the crossed nature of the design, following the recommendations of Judd and colleagues (2012). The multilevel analyses included two levels. Level 1 represented individuals nested within each actor, and Level 2 represented differences between actors. Condition was effects-coded, with -0.5 = dislikable and 0.5 = likable. The condition and actor slopes and intercepts were estimated as random effects, and we specified an unstructured covariance matrix in order to estimate all possible random effect covariances. Following guidelines from Rosenthal et al. (2000; Equation 2.5), we used the obtained t and df to calculate effect size *r* coefficients.

***Manipulation Check***

First, we investigated whether our manipulation influenced liking. An unconditional model was estimated to calculate the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC). This model revealed approximately 90% of the variance in other-reported authenticity was at Level 1 (between individuals) and 10% was at Level 2 (between actors). When condition was added into the model, participants in the likable condition liked their actors more (*M* = 6.09, *SE* = .13) than those in the dislikable condition (*M* = 3.19, *SE* = .42; *b* = 2.90, *SE* = .40, *p* = .001, *r* = .77, 95% CI [1.87, 3.92]. The random effects for the actor intercepts (*p* = .154), for the condition slopes for actors (*p* = .169), and for covariance between the actor intercepts and condition slopes (*p* = .154) were not significant. This model explained 67% of the total Level 1 variance in liking. These results suggest that our manipulation worked as intended and did not depend on specific actors.

***Primary Analyses***

Next, we tested for differences in perceived others’ authenticity as a function of condition. An unconditional model was estimated to calculate the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC). This model revealed approximately 97% of the variance in other-reported authenticity was at Level 1 (between individuals) and 3% was at Level 2 (between actors). Participants in the likable condition rated their actors as more authentic (*M* = 5.24, *SE* = .27) than those in the dislikable condition (*M* = 4.16, *SE* = .15; *b* = 1.08, *SE* = .35, *p* = .029, *r* = .63, 95% CI [0.17, 2.00][[4]](#footnote-4). The random effects for the actor intercepts (*p* = .303), for the condition slopes for actors (*p* = .197), and for the covariance between the actor intercepts and condition slopes (*p* = .287) were not significant. This model explained 29% of the total Level 1 variance in authenticity. These results supported our hypothesis that likability would enhance perceived authenticity.

**Discussion**

The results of Study 3 suggest that likability has a causal effect on perceptions of authenticity. These results are particularly striking given that the lab actors were putting on an act (i.e., being objectively inauthentic) in both the likable and dislikable conditions. It is of course possible that the actors felt more natural in the likable condition and this could partially explain why participants judged them to be more authentic. However, in both conditions, actors had to inhibit natural responses, memorize scripted responses, and behave in ways that were pre-planned. Of course, there are more situations where people push themselves to act likably than situations where people push themselves to act dislikably, so the likable condition may have felt more realistic to actors and that may have come across to participants. However, we offer that it is rare to know that you will have to tell a person that you are acting, regardless of the content of the behavior you are exaggerating. Anecdotally, our lab actors reported that while they were sometimes apprehensive about acting unfriendly in the dislikable condition, they were similarly apprehensive about the likable condition due to their awareness of having to “come clean” to participants during debriefing. Being told that a dislikable person was actually acting the whole time was often received as a relief by participants, while being told a likable person was acting often seemed a bit disconcerting to participants, which was somewhat uncomfortable for the actors to face. As an actor, the knowledge of these reactions might have attenuated both the “naturalness” of acting likably and the “unnaturalness” of acting dislikably, bringing the actor’s comfort within the two conditions closer together.

One limitation of this study is that we did not include a control condition in which participants acted in a more “neutral” manner, so we cannot say for sure whether exaggerated likability boosts perceptions of authenticity (or if exaggerated dislikability weakens perceptions of authenticity) compared to neutral behavior. Future research could replicate this study with a neutral behavior control condition to investigate this question. Another strategy might be taking a more direct approach to manipulating perceptions of likability, perhaps by leading participants to believe they’ll be acting with a likable or dislikable person, or a person about whom no likability information is given, who in actuality is the same person who is blind to condition.

**General Discussion**

Across three studies, we sought to examine what made people seem more authentic to others. Study 1 revealed other-reported liking predicted other-rated authenticity, but self-reported personality states and affect did not. Study 2 revealed that other-reported personality states and affect were significant predictors of other-rated authenticity. However, other-reported liking clearly emerged as a more important factor in other-rated authenticity than specific behaviors. Based on the results of Studies 1 and 2, Study 3 examined whether an experimental manipulation of likability would have a causal effect on other-reports of authenticity. That is exactly what we found. Thus, when considered together, all three studies suggest we judge people we like as more authentic and this factor is more important than the “objective” content of their behavior.

**What explains the causal link between liking and authenticity?**

While the current studies do not examine the potential mechanism that may explain the strong link between liking and authenticity, we see at least a few potential explanations for this pattern.

One possibility is that these patterns are best explained by a positive halo effect (Lachman & Bass, 1986; Thorndike, 1920). The halo effect refers to “the influence of a global evaluation on evaluations of individual attributes of a person” (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977, p. 250). On this view, when we like someone, we are inclined to evaluate this person’s specific characteristics as positive as well (Leising et al., 2010, 2015; Leising et al., 2010; Zimmerman et al., 2018). For example, in a classic study, people who viewed a warm and friendly instructor rated that instructor’s accent as appealing, but when people viewed the same instructor acting in a cold manner, they rated his accent as irritating (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Given that authenticity is highly valued by people (Rivera et al., 2019), it makes sense that a global positive evaluation of a person (as indexed by liking) would then lead to more positive ratings of that person’s authenticity. If authenticity judgments are an example of the halo effect, then these judgments may have little to nothing to do with whether a target is being honest, demonstrating self-awareness, or even thinks they are being authentic themselves (Bailey & Levy, 2022). Judgments of someone else’s authenticity may simply be a function of how we feel about the person.

A second possibility is that people are projecting their own authenticity on other people, particularly those they like. Indeed, Bailey and Levy (2022) found that people were generally biased to rate others’ authenticity in line with their own authenticity. This is consistent with work that shows a general tendency to project our personality onto others, particularly for traits that have a moral/values component such as honesty (Clement & Krueger, 2000; Krueger, 2007; Thielman et al., 2020; Webster & Campbell, 2023). Given that ratings of self-authenticity tend to be quite high (Bailey & Levy, 2022) and that people think likable others are particularly similar to themselves (Collison & Howell, 2014), a projection or presumed similarity explanation would also predict the patterns we found.

A third possibility concerns the “good true self bias” that leads people to believe that that all people have morally good true selves (Bench et al., 2015; Christy et al., 2017; De Freitas et al., 2017a; Newman et al., 2014; Strohminger et al., 2017). The good true self bias is essentially a commonly shared lay belief that deep within every person is some virtuous essence calling them to be “good.” Critically, the definition of “good” depends on the perceiver, suggesting that people attribute what they themselves believe to be good to the true self (Newman et al., 2014). Remarkably, this good true self bias has been observed in multiple cultures and among self-identified misanthropes who otherwise have a rather negative view of other people (De Freitas et al., 2018b). Importantly, all the previous work in this area had been conducted using hypothetical vignettes that almost always involves two pieces of conflicting information. That is, there is always some available information that “hints” at the possibility of a good true self (e.g. the person had changed in some way or had conflicting thoughts/behaviors). Thus, it was not clear how such patterns might operate in real-time interactions with strangers. The current work suggests a similar bias such that people are reluctant to call dislikable people as authentic as likable people. Perhaps we assume (or hope) that there is a better, more likable person under their less likable exterior. This perspective is consistent with the idea that people are motivated to see people who behave in ways congruent with their own ideologies as acting authentically (e.g., Pillow et al., 2017; White II & Crandall, 2023).

While the current work is not able to distinguish between these three potential interpretations of the current data, it is worth noting that they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Future research should further explore the replicability of these patterns and the potential mechanisms behind the causal relationship between liking and authenticity. Further, future research should investigate boundary conditions for the causal relationship between liking and authenticity. For example, we found this effect among participants forming judgments of new acquaintances. However, it is possible that when one considers people they have known for a long time, or people with public-facing positions (e.g., Hahl et al., 2018), this relationship may be weakened (though see Pillow et al., 2017).

**Constraints on Generality**

The current work is limited in several ways, including the relative homogeneity of our samples (e.g., college students in the United States that are mostly White). Future work should aim to obtain more heterogeneous samples, particularly considering the potentially critical role culture might play in these processes (e.g., Kokkoris & Kuhnen, 2014). Our work is also limited in scope in terms of examining first impressions with strangers; patterns may differ for people we know better. Finally, our work is limited in that our three samples were relatively young, with the mean age across samples being around 18 years old. It is possible that liking plays a stronger role in interpersonal interactions for younger adults compared to older adults. These factors are constraints on the generality of the current findings that should be examined in future work.

**Conclusion**

Positive personality states, positive affect, and being liked are all linked to *feeling* authentic. However, liking in particular makes others *seem* authentic. Liking seems to carry more weight in judgments of someone else’s authenticity than the specific content of their behavior. This effect may be driven by halo effects, projection/presumed similarity, the good true self bias, or some combination of all three, and may contribute to important downstream consequences for long-term relationship formation and maintenance. For example, when we like someone and perceive them as more authentic, does that change the way we interact with each other (e.g., prompting greater self-disclosure, lower socially-anxious thoughts, and greater likelihood of future contact)? Future research should test these possible mechanisms, and look at the downstream consequences of the relationship between liking and authenticity.

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1. To clarify terminology throughout the manuscript, we use the term “self-rated” or “self” authenticity to refer to when a person is rating their own authenticity, and “other-rated” or “others’” authenticity to refer to when a person is rating someone else’s authenticity. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bivariate correlations ignoring the nested structure of the data are presented in supplemental table S1 for interested readers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. We also re-analyzed these models with the quadratic terms for each variable alone and simultaneously (e.g., MacCallum & Mar, 1995). All 7 of the models with quadratic effects of liking by linear effects of the alternate predictor, and all 7 models with linear effects of liking by quadratic effects of the alternate predictor, were significant. Only openness and extraversion had significant interaction effects when both liking and the personality state were simultaneously modeled as quadratic. Conceptually, these models revealed similar patterns as the results that are reported here; results of these models can be found on OSF. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ten participants expressed suspicion that the interview was staged in an open-ended response prompt at the end of the survey (one was the participant who was already excluded due to missing condition data, eight were in the dislikable condition, and one was in the likable condition). When we analyzed the data with these participants excluded, results were consistent. Likability condition still had a significant effect on liking (*b* = 2.89, *SE* = .43, *p* = .001, *r* = .76, 95% CI [1.78, 3.99]), and on authenticity, *b* = 1.02, *SE* = .36, *p* = .040, *r* = .61, 95% CI [0.07, 1.97]. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)