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Understanding (in)authenticity in close relationships: Theory and research

Thursday, 12 September 2024 13:30 (50 minutes)

Authenticity has long been associated with a range of psychological benefits for individuals, such as greater mental health and well-being, as well as for their relationships, such as greater satisfaction and commitment. In this lecture, I review theory and research that situate self-authenticity in specific close relationship contexts such as romantic relationships, friendships and family relationships. Close relationships, in which people need to develop ways to relate to each other, represent a context that can give rise to considerations of (in)authenticity. Moreover, these relationships have the capacity to facilitate or inhibit self-authenticity, so its study needs to consider both interpersonal and intrapersonal perspectives. I begin with broad theoretical notions on this topic and present some key empirical evidence from the wider literature, in particular work suggesting a link between felt (in)authenticity and movement toward or away from one's relationship standards for the self. I will then present relevant findings from my own research, including studies examining the relationships of relational self-authenticity with the ideal/actual self discrepancy and perceptions of self-improvement and degradation in the relationship. While the results provide some support for the association with self-concept improvement and movement toward one's ideal relational self, the overall pattern is more complex and will be discussed in terms of conceptual and measurement issues that need more consideration in this area of research. The lecture will conclude by highlighting the contributions of this and other lines of research on relational authenticity to the understanding of subjective authenticity and its psychological benefits.

Are you currently an Early Career Researcher?

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