Received: 20 October 2021 | Revised: 12 June 2022 | Accepted: 30 June 2022

DOI: 10.1111/jopy.12753

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

Authenticity, meaning in life, and life satisfaction: A multicomponent investigation of relationships at the trait and state levels

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Abstract

Objective: The present study sought to examine: (1) how the components of authenticity (i.e., authentic living, self-alienation, accepting external influence) relate to one another at between- and within-person levels of analysis; (2) how the authenticity facets relate to meaning in life (i.e., purpose, comprehension, mattering) and life satisfaction at these levels of analysis; and (3) whether these relationships persist when controlling for affect and self-esteem.

Method: Canadian undergraduates ($N = 203$) completed a trait questionnaire and end-of-day reports on these constructs for two weeks ($n = 2335$).

Results: At between- and within-person levels, authentic living was negatively associated with self-alienation and accepting external influence, while the latter two facets were positively associated. Authentic living was positively related to well-being and predicted greater well-being the following day. Alternatively, self-alienation and accepting external influence were negatively related to well-being, and self-alienation predicted lower well-being the following day. Relationships involving authentic living and self-alienation were more robust than those involving accepting external influence.

Conclusion: Extending research on authenticity beyond between-person relationships, our findings show that daily states of authenticity predict well-being in nuanced ways, depending on the facet of authenticity. This highlights the importance of distinguishing levels of analyses and facets of authenticity.

KEYWORDS

authenticity, daily diary, life satisfaction, meaning in life, well-being

1 | INTRODUCTION

Authenticity refers to people's subjective feelings of knowing and expressing their true selves (i.e., who they believe they *really* are; Rivera et al., 2019; Schlegel, Smith, et al., 2013). Authenticity is a common experience that most people are strongly motivated to achieve (Lenton et al., 2013). The cultural value ascribed to authenticity seems warranted, as varied perspectives from psychology and philosophy converge on the idea that feeling in touch with one's true self is important to optimal human functioning (e.g., Kierkegaard, 1983; Rogers, 1959). Lending credence to this proposition, a recent meta-analysis reported a medium to large effect size of $r = .40$ between authenticity and well-being (Sutton, 2020), an estimate nearly double the average effect size observed in the

broader social psychology literature (r = .21; Richard et al., 2003). Although authenticity has attracted considerable research attention in recent years, the empirical study of this construct is still relatively young, and several issues warrant further investigation.

The present study sought to glean insight into three such issues using daily diary methodology. The first issue concerns how authenticity operates at different levels of analysis, that is, at the trait (or between-person) and state (or within-person) levels. While authenticity has typically been conceived of—and studied as—a dimension of individual differences (e.g., Wood et al., 2008), state approaches are receiving increasing attention (for a review, see Sedikides et al., 2019). We thus sought to examine whether the different components of authenticity established at the between-person level relate to each other in the same ways at the within-person level. Second, we examined how considering these levels of analysis might enrich our understanding of the relationship between authenticity and well-being, with a particular focus on meaning in life and satisfaction with life. In examining this second issue, we also sought to interrogate the nuance in the relationship between authenticity and meaning in life by considering different facets of meaning in life. Third, there is growing concern about whether perceived authenticity can be distinguished from constructs such as positive affect and self-esteem (Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019; Rivera et al., 2019)—as such, we also explored whether relationships between authenticity and well-being persisted after accounting for these variables.

1.1 | The authenticity facets at different levels of analysis

One of the most popular trait conceptualizations of the construct is Wood et al.'s (2008) person-centered model, which consists of three components: authentic living (behaving in ways that are consistent with one's values and beliefs), self-alienation (feeling disconnected from one's true self), and accepting external influence (adhering to others' expectations). Various studies have supported the structural and criterion validity of this tripartite view, demonstrating that these facets are distinct and have nuanced relationships with well-being indicators (e.g., Lopez et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2008). While researchers have fruitfully used Wood et al.'s (2008) model to study authenticity as a stable trait, an emerging line of work has begun to examine authenticity as a fluctuating state (Sedikides et al., 2019). These efforts raise questions about whether Wood et al.'s tripartite trait model maps well onto state authenticity. This is important, as between-person relationships are statistically orthogonal to and represent distinct psychological processes from within-person relationships (Affleck et al., 1999; Nezlek, 2001). It is not uncommon for constructs to exhibit differential effects when studied as a trait rather than a state or vice versa (e.g., Yeo & Neal, 2006). Such a phenomenon was reported by Lenton et al. (2016) who report the only published work on the person-centered conception of authenticity at both the trait and state levels using day reconstruction and experience sampling methods. As predicted by Wood et al.'s model, the authors found that at the trait level, authentic living was negatively associated with self-alienation and accepting external influence, while the latter two facets where positively associated. However, a different pattern of relations emerged at the state level. Authentic living was still negatively associated with self-alienation but was instead *positively* associated with accepting external influence and there was no association between accepting external influence and self-alienation. The authors argued that as opposed to chronically conforming to others' expectations, doing so on a situational basis need not be inauthentic. Indeed, there may be contexts in which one may accept another's influence for autonomous reasons such as to facilitate successful goal pursuit. Given this, they suggested that accepting external influence is not a critical feature of state authenticity and that the construct is better characterized by only authentic living and self-alienation. We were curious to discover how the authenticity facets functioned under a daily diary approach, which is also well suited to study within-person variation but inquires about participants' states at the end of the day instead of multiple times a day, as was the case for the methods employed by Lenton and colleagues. This is also important because additional research is needed to conceptually replicate their findings, as their article appears to be the only attempt to clarify the components of state authenticity. Further investigating how authenticity can be best conceptualized at different levels of analysis may also provide a more nuanced understanding of its relations with other constructs.

1.2 | Authenticity and the experiences of meaning in life and satisfaction

Considerable research suggests there is a relationship between authenticity and meaning in life and satisfaction (e.g., Boyraz et al., 2014; Lopez et al., 2015; Rivera et al., 2019; Schlegel et al., 2009, 2011; Schlegel, Hicks, et al., 2013; Wood et al., 2008). Although this work has greatly advanced our understanding of these relationships, it can be extended in several ways. With respect to meaning, prior investigations have tended to adopt a unidimensional conceptualization of the construct (Lenton

et al., 2016; Lopez et al., 2015; Schlegel et al., 2009, 2011). In recent years, several scholars (George & Park, 2016; Martela & Steger, 2016) have proposed a multidimensional view of meaning in life that is comprised of three distinct facets: purpose (perceiving that one has valued goals and a clear direction in life), comprehension (or coherence; perceiving that one's life and experiences make sense), and mattering (or significance; perceiving that one's existence is valuable, important, and unique). Unidimensional approaches that do not differentiate between these three subconstructs struggle to capitalize on the theoretical and empirical nuances that the tripartite model of meaning has to offer (George & Park, 2016). With respect to satisfaction, researchers have either analyzed authenticity as an omnibus construct (Boyraz et al., 2014), studied relatively narrow aspects of satisfaction (e.g., with decisions; Schlegel, Hicks, et al., 2013), or viewed authenticity as a trait (Wood et al., 2008). Accordingly, examining how the authenticity facets relate to overall evaluations of people's satisfaction with their lives as a whole (i.e., life satisfaction) at both levels of analysis is an important avenue to explore. Below we outline several lines of research that offer both direct and indirect support for relationships between the three facets of authenticity and the three facets of meaning in life, as well as life satisfaction at both levels of analysis. In all cases, the research on authentic living and self-alienation tends to be clearer than the research on accepting external influence.

1.2.1 | Purpose

True self-concepts help specify which goals are worth working toward (Schlegel & Hicks, 2011). Perceptions of living in accordance with one's true self may contribute to a sense of purpose because behaving in such a manner is likely to facilitate the achievement of goals outlined by one's inner guide (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Alternatively, if people feel disconnected from their true selves, they may have difficulty following their perceived internal compass and could experience a sense of aimlessness, as they struggle to set and pursue worthwhile goals. Conforming to others' expectations (at least chronically) may entail shifting valuable attention and effort away from the pursuit one's own goals. Supportive of these ideas, authentic living, self-alienation, and accepting external influence are linked to purpose in expected directions at the trait level (Wood et al., 2008). Personal projects that align with one's true self are associated with greater meaning in life (McGregor & Little, 1998), while self-alienation predicts academic amotivation (i.e., diminished pursuit of academic goals; Kim et al., 2018). However, it is worth noting that, at the state level, Lenton et al. (2016) note that there may be situations in which adhering to another's influence is advantageous because it can lead to desired ends.

1.2.2 | Coherence

True selves also play a critical role in helping people comprehend and organize their experiences (cf. Christy et al., 2017; Newman et al., 2014). Indeed, they can assist individuals in navigating their lives by identifying which relationships, goals, and modes of conduct are worthwhile (Schlegel & Hicks, 2011). These perspectives converge with the notion that perceived authenticity facilitates self-coherence (Lenton et al., 2013; Sheldon et al., 1997). In fact, perceptions of behaving in accord with one's values and beliefs likely indicate that one is integrated (Sheldon et al., 1997). Feeling uncertain about who you are would seem to have the opposite effect, ultimately undermining perceptions of coherence (George & Park, 2016). Chronically accepting the influence of others may feel disingenuous, potentially detracting from perceived coherence. However, there may be situations in which following the demands of others actually feels 'real,' contributing to a sense of understanding regarding one's life.

1.2.3 | Mattering

True selves also appear to contribute to our sense of mattering. Schlegel, Smith, et al. (2013) suggest that one reason why people assign considerable importance to their true selves is because they make us feel unique as a person, that deep down we each have an underlying true nature or essence (see Christy et al., 2019). Therefore, living in an authentic manner could indicate that one is acting in alignment with an important source of uniqueness, potentially increasing feelings of mattering. Conversely, feeling alienated from one's true self may be existentially threatening because it indicates that one is detached from something that makes one feel as though their life is special and significant. Consistent with these ideas, Koydemir et al. (2020) demonstrated that at the trait level, authentic living is positively associated with a personal sense of uniqueness (PSU), whereas self-alienation is negatively associated with PSU. However, Koydemir et al. (2020) reported that trait accepting external influence did not correlate with trait PSU. The authors reasoned that feeling a sense of existential uniqueness entails neither adhering to nor opposing other's expectations, but rather following one's own trajectory. They also note that uniqueness is rooted in an internal locus of control; therefore, the influence of others is not a particularly potent determinant of one's behavior.

1.2.4 | Life satisfaction

Perceived authenticity is posited to facilitate feelings of satisfaction (Rivera et al., 2019). Indeed, authenticity has been positively linked to satisfaction in particular domains, including satisfaction with one's decisions (Schlegel, Hicks, et al., 2013), job (Van den Bosch & Taris, 2014), and relationships (English & John, 2013). At the trait level, authentic living has been shown to be positively associated with life satisfaction, whereas self-alienation and accepting external influence have been shown to be negatively associated with life satisfaction (Wood et al., 2008). We are not aware of any work that has examined these relationships at the within-person level.

1.3 | Distinguishing authenticity from positivity

A key criticism of the perceived authenticity construct is that self-reports of authenticity are contaminated by aspects of positivity, such as positive affect and self-esteem (for a review, see Rivera et al., 2019). One way to provide evidence that authenticity can be distinguished from these variables is to demonstrate that it can continue to predict outcomes such as meaning and life satisfaction after these other positively valanced constructs have been controlled for, as has been previously shown (e.g., Kim et al., 2018; Schlegel et al., 2009, 2011). Such an approach is adopted in the present study to further investigate this issue.

1.4 | The present study

Using a 14-day daily diary study, we aimed to: (1) examine how the authenticity facets relate to one another at the between- and within-person levels of analysis; (2) systematically examine how the facets of authenticity relate to the three facets of meaning in life, as well as life satisfaction at these levels of analysis, including exploratory lagged analyses from one day to the next; and (3) examine the aforementioned relationships with and without controlling for important covariates (i.e., positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem; Rivera et al., 2019). Measures, data, scripts, and Supporting Information for the present study are publicly available on the open science framework: https://osf.io/3pd6k/.[1]

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Participants and procedure

Our goal was to collect data from as many participants as possible within the constraints of the subject pool. We initially collected data from 215 undergraduate students enrolled at a western Canadian university. After applying data screening procedures described below, our final sample consisted of 203 students (79.3% female, 19.2% male, 1.5% another gender identity; 59.6% Caucasian, 14.3% South Asian, 10.8% East Asian, 4.9% other, 2.5% Southeast Asian, 2.0%, African American, 2.0% Middle Eastern, 1.5% Métis, 1.0% Hispanic, 1.0% First Nations, 0.5% Pacific Islander). Their ages ranged from 17 to 35 (M = 19.89, SD = 3.04). Students received course credit in exchange for their participation.

Small groups of participants attended an initial orientation session where they received information regarding the study procedures and completed informed consent. Next, participants completed a survey containing trait and demographic measures. Beginning the day after the lab session, participants were emailed a link to a daily survey every evening at 6:00 p.m. for 14 consecutive nights. Participants were asked to complete their daily questionnaires before going to sleep, and we accepted entries until 10:00 a.m. the following morning. Entries completed after 10:00 a.m. the next day were considered to be invalid (e.g., Machell et al., 2015).

2.2 | Trait measures

Trait measures were administered during the in-person session. Participants were instructed to "answer how you would generally respond." Variables were created by averaging the respective items. Descriptive statistics and alphas are reported in Table 1.

2.2.1 | Authenticity

The Authenticity Scale (AS; Wood et al., 2008) is a 12-item measure designed to assess a tripartite conception of authenticity. The measure consists of three 4-item subscales: Authentic Living (e.g., "I always stand by what I believe in"), Self-Alienation (e.g., "I feel alienated from myself"), and Accepting External Influence (e.g., "Other people influence me greatly"). Items were rated on a 7-point scale with end points of 1 (*does not describe me at all*) and 7 (*describes me very well*).

2.2.2 | Meaning in life

The Multidimensional Existential Meaning Scale (MEMS; George & Park, 2017) is a 15-item instrument consisting of three 5-item subscales that capture a tripartite view of meaning in life: Purpose (e.g., "I have overarching goals that guide my life"), Comprehension (e.g., "My life makes sense"), and Mattering (e.g., "I am certain that my life

TABLE 1 Descriptive statistics and correlations between trait measures

	M	*SD*	*α*	AL	SA	AEI	Pur	Comp	Mat	LS	PA	NA	SE
Authentic living	5.56	.74	.62	–									
Self-alienation	3.16	1.39	.90	−.41	–								
Accepting external influence	4.03	1.25	.83	−.30	.38	–							
Purpose	5.60	.94	.91	.44	−.48	−.22	–						
Comprehension	4.57	1.01	.88	.39	−.68	−.28	.62	–					
Mattering	4.30	1.33	.91	.32	−.49	−.30	.54	.63	–				
Life satisfaction	4.77	1.16	.81	.30	−.48	−.27	.37	.57	.49	–			
Positive affect	3.74	.60	.86	.24	−.55	−.25	.40	.57	.50	.64	–		
Negative affect	2.85	.64	.79	−.19	.48	.27	−.27	−.55	−.31	−.54	−.63	–	
Self-esteem	2.78	.54	.89	.30	−.62	−.41	.46	.69	.60	.63	.65	−.65	–

Note. All correlations were significant at $p < .01$.

is of importance"). Items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *very strongly disagree*, 7 = *very strongly agree*).

2.2.3 | Life satisfaction

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) is 5-item measure of global life satisfaction. Items (e.g., "I am satisfied with my life") were rated on a 7-point scale with end points labeled 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*).

2.2.4 | Positive and negative affect

The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE; Diener et al., 2010) contains 12 items that assess respondents' positive ("positive," "good," "pleasant," "happy," "joyful," "contented") and negative ("negative," "bad," "unpleasant," "sad," "afraid," "angry") feelings. Items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very rarely or never*) to 5 (*very often or always*).

2.2.5 | Self-esteem

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) is composed of 10 items (e.g., "I feel that I have a number of good qualities") that provide an overall assessment of an individual's self-esteem. Respondents rated each item on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).

2.3 | Daily measures

Daily items were either selected from their corresponding trait scales used in the intake survey based on a consideration of factor loadings and suitability for daily administration (Nezlek, 2012) or from prior research. For all daily questionnaires, participants were instructed to "pick the number which best describes you today." Variables were created by averaging their respective items.

2.3.1 | Authenticity

Daily authenticity was measured using items adapted from the AS. The authentic living items were "Today, I stood by what I believe in," and "Today, I was true to myself in most situations." The self-alienation items were "Today, I felt as if I didn't know myself very well" and "Today, I felt out of touch with the 'real me'." The accepting external influence items were "Today, I did what other people told me to do" and "Today, other people influenced me greatly." Each item was rated on a 7-point scale with end points labeled 1 (*very strongly disagree*) and 7 (*very strongly agree*).

2.3.2 | Meaning in life

Daily meaning in life was measured using items adapted from the MEMS. The purpose items were "Today, I had goals that were very important to me" and "Today, I had aims that were worth striving for." The comprehension items were "Looking at my day as a whole, things seem clear to me" and "Today, I knew what my life is about." The mattering items were "Even considering how big the universe is, today I can say that my life matters" and "Today, I am certain that my life is of importance." Each item was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 7 (*very strongly agree*).

2.3.3 | Life satisfaction

Two items taken from Oishi et al. (2007) were used to assess daily life satisfaction. Respondents rated the first item, "How was today?" on a 7-point scale (1 = *terrible*, 7 = *excellent*), and they rated the second item, "How satisfied were you with your life today?" on a 7-point scale (1 = *very dissatisfied*, 7 = *very satisfied*). These items have evidenced good reliability and validity in previous daily diary studies (e.g., Newman et al., 2018).

2.3.4 | Positive and negative affect

Participants rated their daily positive and negative affect using the 12 items of the SPANE. They were instructed to report how much they experienced each of the 12 affect adjectives that day. Responses were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*very rarely or never*) to 5 (*very often or always*). The SPANE has been used successfully to measure daily affective states in previous diary studies (e.g., Hill et al., 2018).

2.3.5 | Self-esteem

Following prior research (e.g., Newman et al., 2018), four items adapted from the RSES were used to measure daily self-esteem: "Today, I felt like a failure," "Today, I felt that I had many good qualities," "Today, I thought I was no good at all," and "Today, on the whole, I was satisfied with myself." Responses were made on 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*very uncharacteristic of me today*) to 7 (*very characteristic of me today*). Prior research supports the reliability and validity of these items (e.g., Newman et al., 2018).

2.4 | Compliance and data cleaning procedures

Two participants only completed the trait questionnaires and did not complete any of the daily questionnaires. As a result, their data were not used for analyses. Of the initial 2613 daily reports collected from 213 participants, we removed 251 entries from analyses that were either completed after the two-week period had ended, completed after 10:00 a.m. the following morning, were duplicate entries, or were completed in less than one minute. Additionally, participants who provided fewer than five valid entries were removed. This resulted in a final sample of 203 participants (95.31%) who provided 2335 daily entries (89.36%), a rate of compliance that is similar to most daily diary studies (Nezlek, 2012, pp. 45–49). Participants completed an average of 11.93 of the possible 14 daily reports (SD = 2.00; median = 12, minimum = 5).

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Relationships among trait measures

In Table 1, we present correlations between all trait measures. In line with previous research (Lenton et al., 2016; Lopez et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2008), authentic living was negatively related to self-alienation and accepting external influence. The latter two were positively related. Authentic living was positively related to the positively-valent well-being measures (e.g., meaning in life, positive affect) and was negatively related to negative affect. In the exact opposite manner, self-alienation and accepting external influence were negatively related to the positively-valent well-being measures and were positively related to negative affect. These results are consistent with theoretical and empirical work indicating that authenticity is positively linked to well-being (e.g., Rivera et al., 2019; Sutton, 2020; Wood et al., 2008).

Next, we ran a series of multiple regression analyses to further examine trait relationships between the authenticity facets and meaning and satisfaction. In the first set of these models, each primary measure of trait well-being (purpose, comprehension, mattering, life satisfaction) was separately regressed onto each trait authenticity facet. We then ran the same analyses, controlling for trait positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2. As anticipated, authentic living predicted greater well-being and self-alienation predicted lower well-being. Following the addition of the covariates, all relationships remained significant except the relationship between authentic living and life satisfaction, which remained marginally significant, as well as the relationship between self-alienation and life satisfaction, which was no longer significant. Accepting external influence's relationships appeared to be more tenuous. Indeed, although this facet predicted lower well-being when entered as the sole predictor, these relationships did not remain significant upon controlling for positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem.

3.2 | Daily measures: Descriptive statistics, reliability, and validity

Our primary analyses concerned the within-person relationships between the facets of authenticity and well-being. Before running these analyses, we first examined the descriptive statistics, reliability, and validity of the

TABLE 2 Trait relationships between authenticity and well-being measures with and without controlling for positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem

	Purpose			Comprehension			Mattering			Life satisfaction		
	b **[95% CI] (*β*)**	***t***	***p***	***b*** **[95% CI] (*β*)**	***t***	***p***	***b*** **[95% CI] (*β*)**	***t***	***p***	***b*** **[95% CI] (*β*)**	***t***	***p***
Authentic living as predictor												
Without covariates	.56 [.40, .72] (.44)	6.93	<.001	.52 [.35, .70] (.39)	5.91	<.001	.57 [.33, .80] (.32)	4.72	<.001	.46 [.26, .67] (.30)	4.43	<.001
With covariates	.41 [.25, .56] (.32)	5.24	<.001	.26 [.12, .39] (.19)	3.70	<.001	.24 [.04, .44] (.13)	2.36	.019	.16 [−.00, .32] (.10)	1.94	.053
Self-alienation as predictor												
Without covariates	−.33 [−.41, −.24] (−.48)	−7.76	<.001	−.49 [−.57, −.42] (−.68)	−12.98	<.001	−.47 [−.59, −.35] (−.49)	−7.98	<.001	−.40 [−.50, −.30] (−.48)	−7.80	<.001
With covariates	−.20 [−.31, −.10] (−.30)	−3.82	<.001	−.27 [−.36, −.19] (−.37)	−6.21	<.001	−.17 [−.30, −.03] (−.17)	−2.44	.016	−.04 [−.15, .06] (−.05)	−.80	.42
AEI as predictor												
Without covariates	−.16 [−.27, −.06] (−.22)	−3.15	.002	−.23 [−.33, −.12] (−.28)	−4.09	<.001	−.33 [−.47, −.18] (−.30)	−4.53	<.001	−.25 [−.37, −.12] (−.27)	−3.94	<.001
With covariates	−.03 [−.13, .07] (−.04)	−.59	.56	.00 [−.09, .09] (.00)	.04	.97	−.08 [−.21, .04] (−.08)	−1.31	.19	−.02 [−.12, .09] (−.02)	−.32	.75

Note. *b* = unstandardized coefficient; *β* = standardized coefficient; CI = confidence interval; AEI = accepting external influence.

daily measures. Unless specified, we used the program SPSS version 25 to conduct multilevel models. Null or unconditional models provide estimates of the means and variances. In these two-level models, each variable was entered at the outcome variable with no predictors. These models showed that all daily measures exhibited considerable within- and between-person variability (see Table 3). Similar to Lenton et al. (2016), we found that the authenticity facets varied more within- than between-persons.

Reliability can be calculated from three-level unconditional models in which items of a scale are nested within days, and days are nested within persons (Nezlek, 2017). As shown in Table 3, these analyses revealed that the scales of accepting external influence, comprehension, and mattering had reliabilities that were not as high as we had hoped (.50, .51, and .42, respectively). We could not remove items to improve the reliabilities of these measures, as they each consisted of only two items. Although some of these reliabilities seem low in comparison to the comparable trait measures, the daily reliabilities were similar to daily measures from prior diary studies (e.g., Krejtz et al., 2016; Nezlek et al., 2019). Moreover, the bayes estimates from the multilevel models compensates for these low reliabilities to some extent when the parameter estimates are calculated (see Nezlek, 2012, for a discussion).

Construct validity of daily measures can be, in part, assessed with the correlation between daily averages and the corresponding trait measures. To calculate the correlation, we created a two-level (days nested within persons) null model and a model that included the corresponding trait measure as a predictor at level 2. We calculated the square root of the percentage the level 2 variance of the null model was reduced after adding the trait measure at level 2. These models indicated that the correlations were reasonably high (between .50 and .82; see Table 3).

3.3 | Within-person relationships among authenticity facets

To address one of our primary research questions, we used the program Mplus Version 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2017) to examine the within-person correlations between each of the authenticity facets based on a maximum-likelihood estimation of the within-person covariance matrix. Authentic living was negatively related to self-alienation, $r = -.49$, $p < .001$, and accepting external influence, $r = -.23$, $p < .001$. The latter two were positively related, $r = .22$, $p < .001$. These associations mirror those found at the between-person level discussed above and are consistent with Wood et al.'s (2008) trait model of authenticity but are inconsistent with Lenton et al.'s (2016) findings concerning the pattern of relations among the authenticity facets at the within-person level.

3.4 | Within-person relationships between authenticity and well-being

To examine same-day relationships between the authenticity facets and meaning and satisfaction, we first specified a series of multilevel models in which each daily authenticity facet was entered as the sole predictor of each of our primary measures of daily well-being (meaning in life and life satisfaction). The predictors were group-mean centered, that is, centered around each individual's mean (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). The intercepts and slopes were allowed to vary randomly, and we trimmed error terms whose *p*-values exceeded .15 as recommended by Nezlek (2012). Following the recommendations of Rights and Sterba (2019), we report model

TABLE 3 Descriptive statistics of daily measures

		Variance				
Variable	**Mean**	**Within**	**Between**	**ICC**	**Reliability**	**Validity**
Authentic living	5.16	.56	.46	.45	.61	.51
Self-alienation	3.11	.97	.75	.43	.60	.73
Accepting external influence	3.62	.75	.73	.49	.50	.50
Purpose	5.05	.61	.65	.52	.69	.63
Comprehension	4.54	.63	.82	.56	.51	.74
Mattering	4.66	.43	1.57	.79	.42	.82
Life satisfaction	4.58	1.24	.73	.37	.77	.58
Positive affect	3.48	.38	.35	.48	.84	.70
Negative affect	2.11	.37	.36	.49	.75	.65
Self-esteem	4.92	.95	.87	.48	.76	.75

Note: ICC = intraclass correlation coefficient; proportion of between-person variance divided by total variance. ICCs calculated using unrounded variances.

$R_w^{2\,(fv)}$ as an index of effect size, which captures "the proportion of within-cluster outcome variance explained by level-1 predictors via fixed slopes and random slope variation/covariation" (p. 315; see also Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). These estimates were obtained using R code provided by Rights and Sterba (2019).[2] The models were as follows:

Day level: y_{ij} (meaning or satisfaction) $= \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}$ (authenticity facet) $+ r_{ij}$

Person level: $\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$

$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + u_{1j}$

The results of these analyses are presented in Table 4. As expected, authentic living and self-alienation on a given day predicted higher purpose, comprehension, mattering, and life satisfaction, and self-alienation predicted lower purpose, comprehension, mattering, and life satisfaction. Accepting external influence also negatively predicted the primary well-being measures.

Next, we examined the same within-person effects after controlling for the effects of positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem. We added positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem as group-mean centered (i.e., centered around each individual's mean) predictors at level 1 to the models above.[3]

As can be seen in Table 4, all of these effects became attenuated but were nevertheless significantly related to meaning and satisfaction in similar ways as before. The exception was the relationship between accepting external influence and purpose.

3.5 | Lagged relationships between authenticity and well-being

The prior models considered within-person relationships between variables measured on the same day. To gain insights into the direction of the relationships between authenticity and meaning and satisfaction, we conducted lagged analyses by creating two sets of models. In the first set of models, meaning in life or satisfaction on a given day (n) was predicted by each authenticity facet on the previous day ($n - 1$) in separate models while controlling for levels of meaning in life or satisfaction on the previous day ($n - 1$), respectively. A series of complementary models were then specified in the reverse direction. That is, each facet of authenticity on a given day (n) was predicted by meaning or satisfaction on the previous day ($n - 1$) while controlling for levels of each respective authenticity facet on the previous day ($n - 1$). All level-1 predictors were group-mean centered. Both sets of models were estimated with and without previous day's ($n - 1$) positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem as additional covariates as follows:

TABLE 4 Same-day within-person relationships between authenticity and well-being measures with and without controlling for positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem

	Purpose				Comprehension				Mattering				Life satisfaction			
	b	*t*	*p*	$R_w^{2\,(fv)}$	*b*	*t*	*p*	$R_w^{2\,(fv)}$	*b*	*t*	*p*	$R_w^{2\,(fv)}$	*b*	*t*	*p*	$R_w^{2\,(fv)}$
Authentic living as predictor																
Without covariates	.37	11.41	<.001	.19	.47	16.05	<.001	.24	.33	11.70	<.001	.22	.66	17.65	<.001	.21
With covariates	.23	7.75	<.001	–	.20	8.07	<.001	–	.13	5.24	<.001	–	.13	4.32	<.001	–
Self-alienation as predictor																
Without covariates	−.2	−8.69	<.001	.11	−.33	−13.93	<.001	.22	−.22	−10.35	<.001	.20	−.49	−16.63	<.001	.22
With covariates	−.07	−3.10	.002	–	−.11	−5.63	<.001	–	−.05	−2.88	.005	–	−.07	−2.99	.004	–
AEI as predictor																
Without covariates	−.07	−2.54	.012	.06	−.12	−4.35	<.001	.07	−.10	−4.08	<.001	.10	−.16	−3.98	<.001	.09
With covariates	−.02	−1.05	.29	–	−.03	−2.06	.039	–	−.04	−2.12	.036	–	−.05	−2.07	.041	–

Note. b = unstandardized coefficient; $R_w^{2\,(fv)}$ = proportion of within-cluster outcome variance explained by level-1 predictors via fixed slopes and random slope variation/covariation (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002; Rights & Sterba, 2019); AEI = accepting external influence.

TABLE 5 Lagged within-person relationships between authenticity and well-being measures with and without controlling for positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem

	Without covariates						With covariates					
	Lag from AL			Lag to AL			Lag from AL			Lag to AL		
Well-Being	*b*	*t*	*p*	*b*	*t*	*p*	*b*	*t*	*p*	*b*	*t*	*p*
Purpose	.08	2.43	.016	.01	.38	.70	.06	1.71	.091	−.01	−.26	.80
Comprehension	.07	2.25	.026	.04	1.80	.072	.06	1.91	.057	.01	.52	.61
Mattering	.05	1.77	.079	−.01	−.33	.75	.03	1.08	.28	−.06	−1.39	.17
Life Satisfaction	.12	2.54	.012	.01	.46	.65	.07	1.25	.21	−.05	−1.98	.048
	Without covariates						**With covariates**					
	Lag from SA			**Lag to SA**			**Lag from SA**			**Lag to SA**		
Well-Being	*b*	*t*	*p*	*b*	*t*	*p*	*b*	*t*	*p*	*b*	*t*	*p*
Purpose	−.05	−2.59	.010	.00	.13	.90	−.05	−1.94	.053	.02	.53	.59
Comprehension	−.07	−3.03	.003	−.09	−2.73	.006	−.07	−2.72	.007	−.06	−1.60	.11
Mattering	−.04	−2.16	.031	−.03	−.55	.58	−.02	−.99	.32	−.00	−.00	.99
Life Satisfaction	−.07	−2.18	.029	−.02	−.83	.41	−.02	−.55	.58	.04	1.34	.18
	Without covariates						**With covariates**					
	Lag from AEI			**Lag to AEI**			**Lag from AEI**			**Lag to AEI**		
Well-Being	*b*	*t*	*p*	*b*	*t*	*p*	*b*	*t*	*p*	*b*	*t*	*p*
Purpose	−.05	−2.01	.047	.03	1.17	.24	−.05	−2.03	.044	.03	1.01	.32
Comprehension	.01	.59	.55	.02	.83	.41	.02	.73	.47	.02	.41	.69
Mattering	−.00	−.16	.87	.02	.44	.66	.01	.32	.75	.00	.11	.91
Life Satisfaction	.00	.03	.98	.02	1.33	.19	.01	.24	.81	.03	1.11	.27

Note. *b* = unstandardized coefficient; AL = authentic living; SA = self-alienation; AEI = accepting external influence.

Lagged model from authenticity:

Day level: y_{ij} (meaning or satisfaction day n) = $\beta_{0j}+\beta_{1j}$ (authenticity facet day $n-1$)+β_{2j} (meaning or satisfaction day $n-1$)+r_{ij}

Lagged model to authenticity:

Day level: y_{ij} (authenticity facet day n) = $\beta_{0j}+\beta_{1j}$ (meaning or satisfaction day $n-1$)+β_{2j} (authenticity day $n-1$)+r_{ij}

As shown in Table 5, authentic living positively predicted next day purpose, comprehension, mattering (marginally), and life satisfaction. When the additional covariates were included in the models, authentic living continued to predict both next day purpose and comprehension marginally. When considering the reverse direction, there was a marginally significant positive lagged effect from comprehension to authentic living that did not persist following the addition of the covariates.

Self-alienation predicted significant decreases in next day purpose, comprehension, mattering, and life satisfaction; however, only lagged effects to purpose and comprehension remained marginally significant and significant, respectively, after the additional covariates were entered as predictors. The series of reverse sequence models revealed the presence of a significant negative lagged effect from comprehension to self-alienation that did not persist following the inclusion of the additional covariates. All other reverse lagged effects from our primary well-being measures to self-alienation were nonsignificant.

Results indicated that there were few lagged effects for accepting external influence. Specifically, only adhering to other people's influence on a given day predicted lower purpose the following day. This relationship remained significant after the inclusion of the additional covariates. All other effects involving accepting external influence were nonsignificant.

Taken together, these results provide more consistent evidence in favor of authenticity leading to well-being than vice-versa.

4 | DISCUSSION

Authenticity is a multifaceted construct that has garnered considerable scholarly attention in recent years. Numerous empirical studies have supported its theorized role as an important facilitator of human flourishing. Most of this work has focused on authenticity as a trait (Wood et al., 2008); however, interest in authenticity as a state is growing (Sedikides et al., 2019). This work aimed to examine several questions that have emerged as important in terms of integrating both trait and state perspectives. Specifically, we aimed to examine how the facets of Wood et al.'s (2008) influential model of authenticity relate to one another at both the between- and within-person levels of analysis, how these facets relate to meaning in life (i.e., purpose, comprehension, mattering) and life satisfaction at both of these levels of analysis, and whether these relationships persist after accounting for other positively valent constructs. The purpose of the present study was to employ daily diary methodology to help address these issues.

4.1 | How are the authenticity facets related to each other at different levels of analysis?

In line with Wood et al.'s (2008) trait model of authenticity, at the between-person level, we found that authentic living was negatively associated with self-alienation and accepting external influence, while the latter two facets were positively associated. Notably, the same pattern of relations was observed at the within-person level. These results do not fully align with those reported by Lenton et al. (2016) who found that accepting external influence was positively correlated with authentic living at the state level and unrelated to state self-alienation. We suspect this discrepancy may be the result of differences in methods across the studies. More specifically, the day reconstruction and experience sampling techniques employed by Lenton et al. took repeated assessments of participants' states of authenticity throughout the day, thus, capturing within-person within-day relationships. By contrast, the daily diary technique employed here took a single assessment of participants' daily states of authenticity at the end of the day, thus, capturing within-person between-day relationships. Just as between-person and within-person relationships are distinct, so too are within-person within-day relationships and within-person between-day relationships. With this finer distinction in mind, it is possible that accepting the influence of others in a particular moment or situation may not threaten authenticity and could lead to desired ends as per Lenton et al.'s contention. However, when reflecting on daily experiences at the end of the day, instances of adhering to others' expectations and demands may start to feel inauthentic. This potentially points to interesting qualitative differences between the experience of authenticity in the moment versus judgments of authenticity upon reflection. Future research should continue to interrogate this important issue.

4.2 | How are the authenticity facets linked to well-being indicators?

Next, we turned our attention to the relationships between the authenticity facets and our primary well-being

measures of interest (i.e., meaning in life and satisfaction with life). Although much research has linked authenticity to these outcomes, this area of study has tended to either examine authenticity or meaning as omnibus constructs (e.g., Boyraz et al., 2014; Lopez et al., 2015), focused on narrower aspects of satisfaction (e.g., with decisions; Schlegel, Hicks, et al., 2013), or only considered one level of analysis (e.g., Wood et al., 2008). We aimed to extend this work by systemically investigating the relationships between the three facets of authenticity and three theorized facets of meaning (George & Park, 2016; Martela & Steger, 2016), as well as people's satisfaction with their lives at both levels of analysis. We observed that trait and daily judgments of authentic living positively predicted perceptions that one's life is motivated by clear goals (purpose), makes sense (comprehension), is of value (mattering), and that things are going well overall (life satisfaction), whereas judgments of self-alienation and accepting external influence negatively predicted such perceptions. These findings underscore the value of viewing authenticity as a multifaceted construct, as its relationships with well-being differed depending on which subdimension was being evaluated.

Our results are congruent with various sources of theoretical and empirical evidence offering support for relationships between authenticity, especially the authentic living and self-alienation facets, and our primary outcomes of interest (e.g., Koydemir et al., 2020; Schlegel & Hicks, 2011; Sheldon et al., 1997; Wood et al., 2008). They are also in keeping with the true-self-as-guide lay theory, which captures the widely held belief that following one's true self is a path to meaning and satisfaction (Rivera et al., 2019; Schlegel, Hicks, et al., 2013). At first glance these results may seem incongruent with those of Lenton and colleagues who reported that state accepting external influence was generally associated with higher well-being (e.g., global meaning). However, it is again important to consider the level of analysis at which each set of findings was derived. Following their line of reasoning, there may be contexts in which one autonomously chooses to conform to the expectations of others (e.g., to facilitate the pursuit of a valued goal), which may be indicative of authenticity and, therefore, conducive to well-being *in the moment* (a within-person within-day effect). But upon further reflection at the end of the day, the person may instead perceive such conformity as inauthentic, resulting in their daily state of accepting external influence being negatively related to their daily states of well-being (a within-person between-day effect). The discrepancies between our findings stress the importance of considering levels of analysis in the study of authenticity. Different relationships can be uncovered at different levels of analysis for diverse phenomena (Curran & Bauer, 2011), including authenticity.

4.3 | How robust are the relationships between authenticity and well-being?

Authenticity has come under increasing scrutiny in recent years, as some have questioned whether it can be differentiated from other positively valent constructs (e.g., Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019; Rivera et al., 2019). Overall, the results from the present study offer some additional evidence that it can be. After accounting for the contributions of key covariates (i.e., positive affect, negative affect, self-esteem), all aforementioned relationships were attenuated, but those involving authentic living and self-alienation tended to remain significant. The exceptions were the between-person relationship between authentic living and life satisfaction that remained marginally significant, as well as the between-person relationship between self-alienation and life satisfaction that was no longer significant. In combination with prior work (e.g., Kim et al., 2018; Rivera et al., 2019; Schlegel et al., 2009, 2011), these results may give researchers greater confidence that authenticity, particularly the authentic living and self-alienation facets, can be distinguished from other aspects of positivity.

4.4 | Does authenticity lead to well-being and vice-versa?

Although not part of our primary research questions, exploratory lagged analyses allowed us to gain insight into the directionality of our observed relationships. Upon examining lagged effects from one day to the next, we found more consistent support for a unidirectional relationship in which authenticity leads to well-being. That is, authentic living predicted greater well-being the following day, whereas self-alienation predicted lower well-being the following day. Accepting external influence predicted lower purpose the following day, but was not significantly related to any other of our primary well-being measures. When considering the reverse direction, we found a significant negative lagged effect from comprehension to self-alienation on the following day. Of note, many of the lagged relationships did not persist after entering the covariates. This may be because of the loss of statistical power that accompanies lagged analyses or that carryover effects between days are rather weak, an issue we return to below. Longitudinal studies over different timespans have found evidence (to varying degrees) of authenticity leading to increased well-being, well-being leading to increased authenticity, or both (cf. Boyraz et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2018; Knoll et al., 2015). Researchers should continue to investigate the directionality of this association.

4.5 | How should we think about the accepting external influence facet of authenticity?

As described above, Lenton et al. (2016) argued that accepting another's influence in a given moment or situation may represent an authentic course of action. Given that the authors found support for this notion by demonstrating that accepting external influence did not necessarily have negative implications for authentic living and self-alienation and even had positive implications for well-being, they proposed that state authenticity is best characterized by only the authentic living and self-alienation facets of Wood et al.'s (2008) model. Similarly, Knoll et al. (2015) developed a two-factor model and an accompanying individual difference measure of authenticity that only consists of analogous authentic living and self-alienation dimensions also based on the theoretical grounds that conforming to others' expectations is not necessarily incongruent with authenticity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The current investigation demonstrated that feeling as though one accepts external influence both chronically and on a daily basis is predictive of reduced authenticity and well-being. It is important to note, however, that this facet tended to have more tenuous relationships overall than the other two facets. We feel as though it may be worthwhile for more theoretical and empirical work to be done before accepting external influence is excluded from models of authenticity. However, at present, it is difficult to deny that this component seems less crucial than authentic living and self-alienation.

4.6 | Limitations

As with all research, our study had limitations. First, the Canadian undergraduate sample and low reliabilities for some of our daily measures, particularly for the authenticity and meaning facets, may constrain the generalizability of our findings. We encourage future researchers to draw on different samples and use more items if interested in using the above measures.

Second, although our daily diary methodology allowed us to study between-day processes, the fact that participants completed single assessments at the end of each day prohibited us from examining within-day processes. Such variation can only be captured by techniques that collect multiple reports throughout the day (e.g., experience sampling). It is possible that the effects of authenticity on well-being and vice versa are relatively short lived in the context of daily life. This could help explain why the 1-day lagged relationships we observed were notably weak. Same-day lags may illuminate reciprocal relationships between authenticity and well-being that between-day lags may conceal. However, as per our discussions above, each may capture different processes.

Third, it should be noted that while our lagged analyses allowed us to probe potential causal relationships by providing insight into temporal precedence, we recognize that this approach is vulnerable to third variable confounds. In an attempt to remedy this issue, we ran models that controlled for arguably three of the most well-known covariates of authenticity (Rivera et al., 2019); yet, we were still unable to take into account the influence of other variables.

5 | CONCLUSION

The present investigation builds on prior work by helping to address three emerging questions germane to the authenticity-well-being link. First, results revealed that the three facets of authenticity advanced by Wood et al. (2008) were related in similar ways at both the between- and within-person (between-day) levels. Second, authentic living predicted greater purpose, comprehension, mattering, and life satisfaction, whereas self-alienation and accepting external influence predicted lower purpose, comprehension, mattering, and life satisfaction at these levels of analysis. Third, most of the aforementioned relationships (barring those derived from lagged analyses) involving authentic living and self-alienation in particular, largely persisted after controlling for positive affect, negative affect, and self-esteem, providing some additional evidence that authenticity can be distinguished from other aspects of positivity. Taken together, our results help paint a more nuanced picture of authenticity and its relationships with meaning in life and life satisfaction.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

PKL and DW designed the study. PKL collected, cleaned, and analyzed the data and received guidance from DBN. PKL wrote the first draft of the manuscript. DBN, RJS, and DW provided edits.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to extend our sincere appreciation to Holli-Anne Passmore for helping set up the study and to Hanne Davis, Cara Alscher, and Jordyn Cates for their assistance with data collection. Their help made this research possible.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

This study was approved by the behavioural research ethics board at the University of British Columbia under the ID H19-00345.

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ENDNOTES

[1] This study was not preregistered and did not have a preregistered analysis plan.

[2] Error terms were not trimmed for models that were used to obtain effect size estimates, as these calculations require that all random effects be included in the models.

[3] The R code provided by Rights and Sterba (2019) only calculates the entire effect size for all predictors in a model. Given that we were only interested in the effect size of the focal predictor in a given model, effect size estimates were not obtained for models that included covariates.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Lutz, P. K., Newman, D. B., Schlegel, R. J., & Wirtz, D. (2023). Authenticity, meaning in life, and life satisfaction: A multicomponent investigation of relationships at the trait and state levels. *Journal of Personality*, *91*, 541–555. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12753