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Research Question

Q1: How are themes of authenticity related to themes of Agency and Communion in autobiography?

Q2: Are these themes expressed differently in moments of self-Authenticity Vs. Self-Transformation?

Background and Introduction

- ❖ Participants commonly describe authentic experiences or moments as having a sense of flow, positive affect, engagement with the world, and reduced self-consciousness (Sedikides et al., 2019).
- ❖ Trait levels of authenticity are associated with increased autonomy, meaning in life, and psychological well-being (Sutton et al., 2020).
- ❖ Recent approaches to understanding authenticity have adopted the autobiographical or life narrative approach (Wilt et al., 2019; Sutton, 2018, 2023).
- ❖ While previous research has examined the content of authentic narratives for themes of authenticity, these narratives have not been examined for other themes related to the self and others.
- ❖ The aim of this study was to investigate how themes of Self-authenticity are expressed in narratives of self-transformation and how themes of authenticity might relate to themes of agency and communality.

Method

Participants

- ❖ (N = 148) Undergraduate Students
- ❖ Male (N = 59), Female (N=84), Non-Binary (N = 4)
- ❖ Compensated with course credit.

Deductive Coding

- Themes of authenticity were coded as continuous variables for 5 separate themes (Wilt et al., 2019).
- Themes of Agency and Communion were both coded as present or absent (McAdams, 2002).

Results

- ❖ T-test revealed that the **sum of communion-related themes** was significantly higher in the **authentic narrative** (M = 1.00, SD = .939) than in the **transformative narrative** (M = .52, SD = .757), $t(143) = 5.21, p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.43$, suggesting a **moderate effect size**.

Themes

- ❖ **Caring/Help:** Protagonist provides or receives care
- ❖ **Unity/Togetherness:** Feeling part of a wider group or community
- ❖ **Dialogue:** Reciprocal, non-instrumental communication
- ❖ **Love/Friendship:** Experiences of enhancement of love or friendship
- ❖ **Achievement/Responsibility:** Meets significant challenges, overcomes important obstacles or takes on major responsibilities
- ❖ **Power/Impact:** Asserts himself, making a strong impact on people or the world more generally.
- ❖ **Status/Victory:** Protagonist attains a heightened status or prestige, receiving recognition or winning a competition.
- ❖ **Self-insight:** a transformation in self-awareness or a leap forward in self-understanding, the realization of new goals, plans, or missions
- ❖ **Relational Authenticity:** acting genuine with others, degree of feeling understood by others, and/or revealing true feelings to others.
- ❖ **Resisting External Pressure:** Protagonist defies the influence of social pressures, opposes authority figures, and/or expectations.
- ❖ **Ownership of Actions:** Actions were in accordance with the values of the protagonist
- ❖ **Contentment:** Feeling comfortable, happiness, and relaxation.
- ❖ **Expression of True Self:** Expression of true thoughts, feeling true to oneself, and showing true self.

Procedures

- ❖ Participants composed an Authentic and Transformative narrative through an online platform during class
- ❖ Participants were prompted to write both a moment where they felt most like their true self and a moment where their self-understanding changed
- ❖ Two coders analyzed the narratives using deductive thematic analysis, and a master coder provided the final codes.
- ❖ All coders had trained together for three months before data analysis using practice data sets

Conclusions and Implications

- ❖ These findings indicate that themes of authenticity and communality are more frequently expressed in authentic narratives than in transformative ones.
- ❖ We also see that Self-insight, although expressed in both types of narratives, is far more frequently expressed in the transformative narratives.
- ❖ As authenticity has been shown to predict psychological well-being-related outcomes, understanding that the experience of being authentic may depend on a sense of unity and communality with others may be important for developing interventions.
- ❖ We recommend further investigating how the themes of these narratives are related to self-defining features to understand how they may facilitate self-authenticity

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