Perceptions of authenticity (or, inauthenticity) have been shown to affect people’s judgments and behavior across a wide variety of domains. However, there is still ambiguity about how the concept should be defined. This is attributable, at least in part, to a growing list of different “kinds of authenticity” with little discussion of the potential overlaps between them. The goal of this paper is to reduce these various notions of authenticity into a more manageable set of constructs. Building on the work of Newman and Smith (2016a), three broad kinds of authenticity are proposed: Historical, Categorical, and Values authenticity. Two studies then examine the extent to which people’s conceptions of authenticity naturally segment into these three types. Specifically, Study 1 asks participants about the various ways in which they might assess authenticity, whereas Study 2 examines individual differences in sensitivity to different kinds of inauthenticity. The results from both studies indicate a striking degree of convergence in support of these three broad dimensions. Moreover, different populations appear to be differentially concerned about these various ways of evaluating authenticity. The implications of this framework for existing and future work in this area are discussed.

Keywords: authenticity, concepts, essentialism, objects, value

Authenticity is an important dimension that people use to evaluate a vast number of goods and experiences. Even young children are sensitive to notions of authenticity and value originals more than identical duplicates (Frazier & Gelman, 2009; Gelman, Frazier, Noles, Manczak, & Stilwell, 2015; Hood & Bloom, 2008; Olson & Shaw, 2011). Authenticity plays a key role in the pleasure that people derive from a variety of experiences, ranging from dining (Kovács, Carroll, & Lehman, 2014, 2016), to visiting museums (Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Howard, 1992), to watching TV (Rose & Wood, 2005; Vogserau, Wertenbroch, & Carmon, 2006). And, authenticity drives consumer preferences across a number of domains, including art, clothing, luxury goods, collectibles, food and beverage, and everyday household products (e.g., Anthony & Joshi, 2016; Beverland, 2005, 2006; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Botterill, 2007; Bullot & Reber, 2013; Dutton, 2003; Frazier, Gelman, Wilson, & Hood, 2009; Grayson & Shulman, 2000; Kivy, 1995; Kozinets et al., 2002; Newman & Dhar, 2014; Newman, Diesendruck, & Bloom, 2011; Newman & Bloom, 2012; O’Guinn, 1991; Smith, Newman, & Dhar, 2016; Wang, 1999).

The topic of authenticity is also fascinating for reasons that transcend its practical significance. Consider, for example, the difference between an original Picasso painting and a perceptually indistinguishable forgery. Provided that the viewer is unaware of which one is which, both paintings will inspire the same cognitive and affective responses. As such, the value assigned to each painting should (in theory) be the same, corresponding to the utility that the image provides. Yet, learning about a painting’s true history—that is, whether it is an original or a forgery—results in a dramatic difference in how people value the paintings and moreover, a difference in the pleasure that people get when viewing them. For example, subtly manipulating whether a painting is said to be an original Rembrandt versus a forgery changes activation in pleasure centers of the brain (Huang, Bridge, Kemp, & Parker, 2011).

This combination of practical importance and theoretical puzzle has inspired research on the topic of authenticity across a number of disciplines including psychology, philosophy, sociology, management studies, and anthropology. At first, scholars were wrestling with a basic question: Do perceptions of authenticity have consequential effects for individuals, producers, and consumers? Indeed, perceptions of authenticity (or, inauthenticity) have been shown to affect people’s judgments and behavior across a wide range of domains (e.g., Beverland, 2005; Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Castérén & Roederer, 2013; Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Lehman, Kovács, & Carroll, 2014; Kovács et al., 2014, 2016; Newman & Bloom, 2014; Smith, Newman, & Dhar, 2016).

However, scholars in this area are now facing an even more fundamental question: How should authenticity be defined? This lack of definitional clarity is due in part to the diversity of contexts in which authenticity is studied. One common approach has been for researchers to conduct structured interviews, asking people how they define authenticity for a particular domain—for example, for tourist experiences (Cohen, 1988; Wang, 1999), beer (Bever-
tween an across the literature is that authenticity encapsulates what is gen-
pretations applied to authenticity, ultimately what is consistent
Farrelly (2010) write, “despite the multiplicity of terms and inter-
existing literature on authenticity, there seems to be general con-
property or dimension” (Newman & Dhar, 2014). Within the
of whether a good or experience is “true with respect to some
ing dimensions of truth or verification—that is, it is an assessment
approach has certainly yielded important advances (discussed in greater detail below), it
it is unclear whether nonexperts actually see these categories as
in other words, do the different “kinds of
is unclear whether nonexperts actually see these categories as
importantly distinct. In other words, do the different “kinds of
 authenticity” identified by researchers actually reflect differences
in people’s lay psychology?
The goal of this paper, therefore, is to identify a framework that
synthesizes existing research under a common theoretical um-
brella. Building on the work of Newman and Smith (2016a), I propose that evaluations of authenticity tend to fall into one of
three broad dimensions—what I refer to as Historical, Categori-
al, and Values Authenticity. I then report the results of the two
studies that test this classification. Study 1 asks participants about
the various ways in which they might assess authenticity. Study 2
asks about sensitivity to different kinds of inauthenticity and
examines heterogeneity across participants. The results indicate a
high degree of convergence: both studies find evidence for the
same three dimensions of authenticity. Moreover, different groups
of participants appear to be differentially concerned about these
various ways of evaluating authenticity. I conclude by discussing
the implications of this framework for existing and future work in
this area.

Dimensions of Authenticity

At the broadest level, authenticity is a concept aimed at captur-
ing dimensions of truth or verification—that is, it is an assessment
of whether a good or experience is “true with respect to some
property or dimension” (Newman & Dhar, 2014). Within the
existing literature on authenticity, there seems to be general con-
sensus about this broad definition. For example, Beverland and
Farrelly (2010) write, “despite the multiplicity of terms and inter-
pretations applied to authenticity, ultimately what is consistent
across the literature is that authenticity encapsulates what is genu-
ine, real, and/or true (p. 839).”

Reflecting on the concept further, however, reveals the limita-
tions of this very general definition. Consider the difference be-
tween an authentic Picasso versus authentic country music. Even
though people use the same word to describe both of these cases, it
seems that the meaning of the term authenticity and the manner
in which authenticity is evaluated, are very different (Dutton,
2003; Peterson, 1997). In other words, people can evaluate the
authenticity of many different types of goods and experiences, but
the dimensions used for assessing authenticity may vary substan-
tially across these different contexts (Leigh, Peters, & Shelton,
2006). Moreover, even when people have similar beliefs about
which dimensions are relevant for authenticity, they may not place
the same value on those dimensions (Rose & Wood, 2005).

Thus, on the one hand, there is the general sense that the concept of authenticity refers to some evaluation of truth. On the other
hand, this observation seems insufficient to capture the complex
and varied ways in which the concept is often used. This tension
has pushed several researchers to look for instances in which
authenticity is defined or evaluated in similar ways, an approach
which has resulted in a growing list of kinds of authenticity.
However, because researchers working on the topic of authenticity
span several disciplines and have often constructed typologies that
best describe their particular phenomenon of interest, these various
kinds of authenticity are seldom discussed in relation to one
another. This disconnect has even led some researchers to suggest
that the term “authenticity” should be abandoned outright in favor
of more specialized terms corresponding to the particular domain
of interest (Reisinger & Steiner, 2006).

A review by Newman and Smith (2016a) attempted to collapse
designs these different approaches into a more manageable set of
constructs. By noting places of overlap across the existing typologies,
Newman and Smith (2016a) argue that evaluations of authenticity
fall into one of three broad categories: Historical, Categorical,
and Values Authenticity.

Historical Authenticity

One primary way in which people appear to evaluate authentic-
ity is through an object’s history and its connection to a valued
person, place, or event. For example, the notion of indexical
authenticity (Grayson & Martinec, 2004) suggests that people can
conceptualize objects in terms of a spatiotemporal link (or, index)
that connects the object in the present day to some significant point
in time or space in the past. Therefore, people evaluate indexical
authenticity through spatiotemporal cues that verify that the object
is indeed the particular thing in question. For example, an authen-
tic Picasso painting would be considered indexically authentic if it
could be physically traced back to the individual, Pablo Picasso.

Similar notions of authenticity have been discussed in several
other places the literature. For example, Dutton defines nominal
authenticity as “the correct identification of the origin, authorship
or provenance of an object” (p. 259), and Beverland et al. (2008)
identify a construct of pure authenticity, in which observers look
for evidence that the product has “unbroken commitments to
tradition and place of origin.” (Beverland et al., 2008, p. 7). In his
discussion of tourist experiences, Wang (1999) defines a notion of
objective authenticity, which refers to identifying whether an ob-
ject has a particular, verifiable history.

These notions of authenticity are all similar in that they refer to
evaluations of an item’s history; specifically, its spatiotemporal
connection to a given origin. Most commonly, this dimension of
authenticity arises for objects, particularly one-of-a-kind objects,
such as artworks, memorabilia, or historical artifacts. Importantly, such judgments seem to assume that authenticity is something that can be objectively verified (e.g., through notes of provenance, carbon dating, expert evaluation, etc.).

While Historical Authenticity is often evaluated through physical connections and often produces a binary judgment (i.e., did the item have contact with X or not?), a growing literature suggests that people may also be sensitive to gradations of connection that can take more symbolic forms. For example, products are perceived as more valuable if they were manufactured at the company’s original factory (Newman & Dhar, 2014), celebrity memorabilia is valued more if it had more (vs. less) contact with a celebrity (Newman & Bloom, 2014), and, among identical limited edition products, consumers prefer items with earlier serial numbers, because those objects are believed to be temporally closer to the object’s origins (Smith et al., 2016). Thus, many different forms of connection can drive perceptions of Historical authenticity.

**Categorical Authenticity**

The existing literature also converges on a second dimension of Categorical Authenticity. When evaluating Categorical Authenticity, individuals are sensitive to the extent to which an entity conforms to their existing beliefs about a particular category or type. In the literature, this notion of authenticity has been discussed as iconic (Grayson & Martinec, 2004), type (Carroll, 2015), constructed (Wang, 1999), and approximate authenticity (Beverland et al., 2008).

For example, type authenticity involves an assessment of whether an entity is true to its associated type (or category, or genre; Carroll & Wheaton, 2009). Food is particularly susceptible to questions of type authenticity (e.g., What is “real” Mexican food?; Lu & Fine, 1995; Gaytán, 2008). Wang (1999) calls this notion of authenticity, constructed authenticity, and defines it as authenticity that is “projected onto toured objects by tourists or tourism producers in terms of their imagery, expectations, preference, beliefs, powers, etc.” (p. 351). Grayson and Martinec (2004) propose a related concept of iconic authenticity, which refers to whether or not an item fits with an observer’s expectations about how the object should appear. For example, objects used as part of a Civil War reenactment may be perceived as “authentic” if the uniforms and props match observers’ expectations about how items from that time period should appear, even if none of the objects were actually used in the Civil War.

In such cases, the relevant judgment is the extent to which the entity fits with people’s prior expectations about the category. Therefore, unlike Historical authenticity, the criteria for evaluating Categorical Authenticity seem to come from the person (e.g., a person’s subjective beliefs about what Mexican food should be like), rather than from an external source of verification (e.g., historical records, carbon dating, etc.). This notion of authenticity also seems to pertain mostly to objects or physical entities such as food. Importantly, the relevant judgment seems to relate to categories of objects or types (e.g., Victorian furniture, Mexican food, Native American artifacts, brand labels, etc.). The role of observers is therefore to verify the extent to which an entity conforms to their expectations about the category or type that is claimed.

**Values Authenticity**

A third way in which people evaluate authenticity is through an assessment of values—specifically, the consistency between an entity’s internal states and its external expressions. In the existing literature, this kind of authenticity has been referred to as expressive (Dutton, 2003), or moral authenticity (Beverland et al., 2008; Carroll, 2015).

Dutton defines a notion of expressive authenticity as the “true expression of an individual’s or a society’s values and beliefs” (p. 259). If, for example, Picasso created a painting, but he was motivated by money and not by a genuine commitment to his art, then under Dutton’s framework, the painting may be perceived as lacking in expressive authenticity (even though the painting was clearly made by Picasso and therefore, would be nominally authentic). Relatedly, Carroll and Wheaton (2009), define a notion of moral authenticity as the attention to “whether the decisions behind the enactment and operation of an entity reflect sincere choices (i.e., choices true to one’s self) rather than socially scripted responses” (p. 255). When evaluating moral authenticity, individuals are likely to consider whether the individual or organization seems genuinely committed to their craft. Food produced by a chef who cares little about their food and is only trying to maximize profits may be perceived as lacking moral authenticity.

When assessing this notion of values authenticity, observers are less likely to attend to the immediate properties of the object or experience and are more likely to evaluate it in relation to the values and goals of the producer. Therefore, unlike the former two types of authenticity, Values Authenticity often references normative considerations about an entity and their intentions or values (Hahl, 2016; Hahl & Zuckerman, 2014; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Mazutis & Slawinski, 2015).

Compared with the other two types of authenticity, evaluations of Values Authenticity are more likely to arise when evaluating experiences such as performances, religious events, or artistic expressions. However, this type of authenticity may also be relevant when considering the meaning or values associated with a with various goods and experiences. And, notions of consistency in process or certification are also relevant as these concepts reflect the extent to which the good or experience is an “honest” reflection of the entity. Accordingly, the role of observers is to assess whether the entity’s actions align with an implicitly- or explicitly claimed set of values.

**Authenticity Lenses**

It is important to note that these notions of authenticity are not necessarily distinguished by different types of objects or experiences. Rather, they may be best thought of as different dimensions of consideration, or “lenses.” Indeed, each of them seems to focus on a unique aspect of verification: specifically, verifying an object’s history and its connection to certain people, places, or events (Historical Authenticity), verifying that the entity conforms to beliefs and expectations about a particular category or type (Categorical Authenticity), and verifying that the good or experience is consistent with beliefs about the producer’s internal motivations and values (Values Authenticity).

In this sense, the very same object (or, same type of object) could actually be evaluated with respect to all of these dimensions. Consider a painting. An observer could assess the painting...
was in fact, actually created by a particular individual (e.g., Picasso), which would reflect an evaluation of Historical Authenticity (Dutton, 2003). However, the observer could also assess whether the painting itself conformed to a particular artistic genre (e.g., Impressionism, Abstract Expressionism, etc.), or even beliefs about what that particular artist’s works tend to look like—for example, “I realize that painting was created by Picasso, but that’s not a true Picasso.” These would reflect evaluations of Categorical Authenticity (DiMaggio, 1987). Finally, one could assess the values and motivations of the artist. As noted above, observers might focus on information regarding profit-seeking versus a genuine commitment to craft, but could also attend to features that are more specific to the work itself (Fine, 2004). For example, a painting might be judged to be more authentic if the content reflects scenes and environments that are familiar to the artist, rather than those that are merely imagined. For example, Paul Gauguin’s famous paintings of life in the South Pacific might seem much less authentic if Gauguin never actually lived there. According to the framework proposed here, these would reflect evaluations of Values Authenticity.

That said, when individuals consider a particular kind of object, such as a painting, one dimension of authenticity does tend to be more prominent than others. For example, when someone asks, “Is this painting authentic?” that statement is often interpreted as referring to notions of Historical Authenticity. Similarly, if a person asks, “Is this leather jacket authentic?” they are most commonly asking about Categorical authenticity—that is, whether the jacket is made from treated and dyed animal hide.

The present analysis is most concerned with evaluations of objects and experiences that are external to the self. However, there is a growing literature in psychology which suggests that people are highly attuned to whether their behaviors and decisions are in accordance with their true self (e.g., Gino, Norton, & Ariely, 2010; Kraus, Chen, & Keltner, 2011; Newman, Bloom, & Knobe, 2014; Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, & King, 2009; Wood et al., 2008). Such judgments arguably constitute a fourth type of authenticity that is not discussed here. This is the notion of existential authenticity (Wang, 1999) or self-authentication (Arnould & Price, 2000). The basic evaluation seems to involve whether people feel that they are being authentic with respect to their own self-concept. For example, a person seeking self-authenticity may be less concerned about the historical accuracy of an object or experience and may instead attend to the way in which the object or experience makes them feel.

Of course, it may often be difficult to determine whether a person is evaluating the authenticity of the object itself or the object in relation to the self; and, in some cases, the former may inform the latter. For example, owning a counterfeit product might make someone feel less authentic (Gino, Kouchaki, & Galinsky, 2015). That said, there seems to be a very pragmatic sense in which the target of the authenticity judgment is either the self (am I authentic?) or external to the self (is X authentic?). It may be that judgments of existential authenticity reflect a special case of Values Authenticity (for the self). In the current studies, however, I restrict my analysis solely to evaluations of goods and experiences that are external to the self and return to this issue in the General Discussion.

Study 1

For the reasons outlined above, I expected that authenticity judgments may fall into three broad categories: Historical, Categorical, and Values authenticity. To test this, I created a list of 100 goods and experiences that could be rated as “authentic.” I then asked participants to rate each of the items in terms of how relevant a given piece of factual information would be for determining authenticity (i.e., who, what, when, where, why, how). For example, a single participant was asked to consider learning information about who touched or created an item. They then considered a randomly selected subset of the items, and for each one rated how important learning that information would be for evaluating the item’s authenticity. Presumably, in cases such as Jacqueline Onassis sunglasses (one item from the study), who touched would be rated as quite relevant for authenticity, whereas for other items (e.g., eco-friendly soap) that particular information would be seen as less relevant. By iterating this process for all items, across all types of factual considerations, I could then perform a corresponding cluster analysis to determine whether in fact, three categories of authenticity emerge.

Method

Participants were 763 adults (54% male, \( M_{\text{age}} = 33.7 \)) who were recruited on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. With the help of a research assistant, we reviewed the extant literature on authenticity and noted all types of objects or experiences that have been discussed or studied in previous studies of authenticity (both qualitative and quantitative). This generated 46 items. Then, we consulted Google Trends and recorded the most frequently searched terms that fit the criteria of “authentic _____.” Instances of objects or experiences that resulted from this query were added to the stimuli list until we generated a list of 100 objects. There was not an explicit intention to generate a list that neatly segmented into the different hypothesized types of authenticity. However, it is important to note that there were several researcher degrees of freedom in this selection process. Moreover, authentic experiences are relatively understudied in the literature, so there was an explicit intention to ensure that these types of items were adequately represented.

I then randomly divided the items into four sets to reduce attention demands and fatigue. Each participant evaluated items belonging to one of the sets (25 items in total). Thus, participants were randomly assigned to one of 24 between-subjects conditions (six statements; four sets). This resulted in roughly 30 participants per cell (which was the target sample size).

For a given set of items, participants first read the following instructions:

"Imagine that you are trying to figure out whether various things are authentic or not. Suppose that for each of the following things you can learn about [ ]. Please indicate how relevant this information would be to determining the authenticity of the following things."

Each participant was asked to consider a different type of information (which was inserted in the blank space above). Specifically, participants considered one of the following: who created or touched it (a person, group or company); what it is made out of (the specific material or ingredients); when it was created (the specific time); where it came from (the physical place); why it was
created (the values it represents); how it was created (the specific steps or process).

For each of the 25 items, a participant then rated the relevance of that particular piece of factual information (1 = not very relevant to determining its authenticity, 9 = extremely relevant to determining its authenticity).

The data were then compiled by computing the average score for each item across each type of factual information, which resulted in a metadata file containing a total of 600 entries (six scores for each of the 100 items). Analyses were then performed on this metadata file.

Results

A hierarchical cluster analysis was conducted by clustering the 100 items on the six factual dimensions. This analysis was performed using centroid clustering based on squared-Euclidian distance. A range of solutions was specified from two to ten clusters. A second confirmatory cluster analysis was performed using K-means clustering, which produced nearly identical results.

The logic of the primary analysis was as follows: Assuming a null hypothesis (that there are not stable psychological constructs supporting the three clusters), successive iterations in the cluster analysis should “decompose” in relatively haphazard ways, with items that were initially part of one cluster, shifting to another on the next iteration, and so on. If, however, there are stable underlying constructs, then items that are initially assigned to a particular cluster should remain in those clusters even as the cluster analysis forces an increasing number of cluster solutions (i.e., 4, 5, 6, etc.).

As can be observed in Figure 1, there were three relatively stable clusters which remained largely intact across the various cluster solutions. Indeed, Historical and Categorical authenticity appeared to be particularly stable, losing only a few items on successive iterations. In other words, items that were initially part of one of the three clusters remained in those particular clusters even as the number of clusters was increased.

Moreover, looking at the cluster assignments of the individual items indicates that the clusters produced were roughly consistent with the theoretical distinctions of Historical (C = 1), Categorical (C = 2), and Values Authenticity (C = 3; see Table 1). There were some notable deviations which might have resulted from the variance associated with the cluster analysis method itself. For example, the items of French wine, Native American Tapestry, and Norman Rockwell painting would, a priori, seem to more closely align with Categorical (rather than Historical) authenticity. Analogously, the items of Fair trade coffee and eco-friendly soap would, a priori, seem to more closely align with Values (rather than Categorical) authenticity. And, the items of ‘your graduation tassel’ and Brittany Spears’ gum would, a priori, seem to more closely align with Historical (rather than Values) authenticity.

I then examined which types of factual information (e.g., who, what, when, etc.) were associated with each of these clusters. Specifically, I conducted a repeated-measures ANOVA with cluster as a between-subjects factor (3 levels) and information-type as a within-subjects factor (6 levels). This analysis indicated a significant interaction, $F(2, 97) = 30.93, p < .001$. Supporting the theoretical distinctions between Historical, Categorical, and Val-

![Figure 1. The number of items in each cluster assignment (2–10 clusters) in Study 1.](image)
ues Authenticity, each dimension was seen as depending on a different combination of factual information (see Table 2).

**Discussion**

The results of Study 1 suggested three broad kinds of authenticity judgments—Historical, Categorical, and Values Authenticity. These results are notable because this is, to my knowledge, the first empirical study to examine authenticity judgments pertaining to many different types of objects at once. It is also significant because the clusters themselves roughly correspond to the theoretically derived dimensions.

**Study 2**

Study 1 asked about different ways in which one might determine authenticity and looked for relevant clusters at the item-level—that is, instances in which authenticity might be evaluated in similar ways. The approach of Study 2 was to identify different kinds of authenticity at the participant-level using factor analysis. In this case, participants saw a subset of the items from Study 1, and for each item were asked to report how upset they would be if they learned that the item was not authentic. It was hypothesized that the three different types of authenticity—Historical, Categorical, and Values—would emerge as distinct factors such that a person who, for example, concerned about owning an authentic relic from the Titanic would also be concerned about owning an authentic Babe Ruth baseball (both instances of Historical Authenticity).

I then further looked for clusters of participants who selectively valued each type of authenticity and tried to identify important

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### Table 1
**Cluster Assignments for All Items in Study 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cluster 1 (Historical)</th>
<th>Distance from center</th>
<th>Cluster 2 (Categorical)</th>
<th>Distance from center</th>
<th>Cluster 3 (Values)</th>
<th>Distance from center</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td></td>
<td>Item</td>
<td></td>
<td>Item</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The very first lightbulb</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>Organic fruit</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>Buddhist ritual</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olive wreath from first Olympics</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>Mexican food</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>Jazz performance</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warhol lithograph print</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>Handmade candy</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>Latin chant</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chunk of Berlin Wall</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>Microbrew beer</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>Eulogy at funeral</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair pulled from the Titanic</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>Omal earrings</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>Folk music</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil War Uniform</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>Southern cuisine</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td>Tibetan sky burial</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother’s ring</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>Silk pajamas</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>Ballet performance</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French wine</td>
<td>1.74</td>
<td>Hand churned butter</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>Cowboy hat</td>
<td>1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autographed NFL Football</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>Scandinavian food</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>NCAA sweatshirt</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signed movie script</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>Japanese knife</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>Licensed Snoopy sweatshirt</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WW1 Uniform</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td>Grass fed beef</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>Harvard sweatshirt</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball hit by Babe Ruth</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>Juicy Couture bag</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>Book given to you as a prize</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American tapestry</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>UGG boots</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>Bluegrass performance</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persian rug</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>Camelhair coat</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>Christening ceremony</td>
<td>1.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffalo nickel</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>Down blanket</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>Fundraising event</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norman Rockwell Plates</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>Levi’s jeans</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>Country song</td>
<td>1.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Apple computer</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>Mexican cooking utensils</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>Balinese dance</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinosaur bone</td>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>Irish wool sweater</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>Religious song</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kimono from Japan</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>Turkish bathrobe</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>Recipe for bunt cake</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dust from Mars</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>Suede jacket</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>Protest speech</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moon rock</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>Cashmere sweater</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>Handmade candles</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pot from ancient Greece</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>Fairtrade coffee</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>Your favorite item of clothing</td>
<td>2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ancient Egyptian figurine</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>Versace shirt</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>Disney souvenir</td>
<td>2.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tux worn by Pierce Brosnan</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>Deerskin gloves</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>Wedding vows</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatles Lyrics</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>Leather belt</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>Nepali poem</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne Gretzky jersey</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>Leather handbag</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>Licensed NBA jersey</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie O sunglasses</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>Saffron spice</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>Hand knit sweater</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coral from Pacific Ocean</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>Ecofriendly soup</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>Graduation tassel</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A painting by Picasso</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>Mink blanket</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>Batmitzvah ceremony</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s print advertisement</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>Diamond ring</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Improvisational dance</td>
<td>2.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American dance</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>Beeswax candle</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>Corsage from your prom</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wisconsin Cheese</td>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>Toy from when you were a child</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Chair (stainable wood)</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>Event to raise money for charity</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Corduroy jacket</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>Gum chewed by Britney Spears</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Caramel sauce recipe</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

### Table 2
**Mean Rating of Information Relevance Across the Three Authenticity Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Historical</th>
<th>Categorical</th>
<th>Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why</td>
<td>5.75</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>4.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>5.84</td>
<td>4.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>4.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td>5.21</td>
<td>4.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
demographic differences among them. In addition to basic demographic information (age, gender, income), I also examined responses to several commonly used measures of consumer motivations, including the need for belonging (Leary, Kelly, Cottrell, & Schreindorfer, 2013), the need for control (Burger & Cooper, 1979), and the need for uniqueness (Ruvio, Shoham, & Brenčič, 2008). These particular scales were selected because of recent empirical research linking the need for belonging to the valuation of some authentic items (Newman & Smith, 2016b), as well as research (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010) which has suggested authenticity consumption involves three consumer motivations of 

connection, control, and virtue.

Method

Participants were 604 adults (54% male, M_age = 37.2) who were recruited from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. Stimuli consisted of 24 items taken from Study 1. I randomly sampled eight items from each type (Historical, Values and Categorical). However, that sampling was done using an earlier cluster analysis that used a different (less appropriate) method. Therefore, the items were not evenly distributed across the final Study 1 clusters.

The items used in Study 2 were as follows: Civil War Uniform, Egyptian figurine, NFL football, handwritten Beatle’s lyrics, Babe Ruth baseball, movie script signed by Steven Spielberg, Jackie O sunglasses, spoon from the Titanic,1 Native American dance, Buddhist ritual, Balinese dance, folk music, cowboy hat, Fair Trade coffee, Harvard sweatshirt, Japanese kimono, leather belt, UGG boots, Versace shirt, suede jacket, silk pajamas, Levi’s Jeans, sown blanket, and cashmere sweater.

For each item (which was presented in a random order), participants indicated the extent to which they would be upset if they learned the item was not authentic. Participants read, for example:

Imagine that you were given an authentic baseball that was hit by Babe Ruth. How upset would you be if you learned that the baseball was not really hit by Babe Ruth?

Responses were made on a 1 to 9 Likert-type scale, where 1 = not at all upset and 9 = extremely upset.

Participants then responded to a series of scales assessing different consumer motivations. These included the 10-item Need for Belonging scale (Leary et al., 2013), the 10-item Need for Control scale (Burger & Cooper, 1979), and the 12-item Need for Uniqueness scale (Ruvio et al., 2008). Finally, participants provided basic demographic information: gender, age, and income (which was assessed on a six-point scale corresponding to different income brackets).

Results

Factor analysis. I first conducted a principle-component factory analysis (Varimax rotation) with an unspecified number of factors. This analysis identified three factors with Eigenvalues greater than one. As shown in Table 3, these factors corresponded to the same constructs of Historical, Categorical, and Values Authenticity identified in Study 1. The factors scores were saved under the corresponding labels.

Cluster analyses. I then clustered participants on these three factors. To identify the most stable clusters I used both a hierar-

![Table 3: Factor Loadings for Items in Study 2](image-url)

chical cluster analysis (centroid clustering based on Squared-Euclidian distance) as well as a K-means analysis. Both methods converged on four clusters: participants who expressed a greater sensitivity to Historical Authenticity (N = 211), participants who expressed a greater sensitivity to Values Authenticity (N = 202), participants who expressed a greater sensitivity to Categorical Authenticity (N = 104), and participants who were comparatively Low in their sensitivity to all types of authenticity (N = 66). Twenty-one participants did not fit into any of these clusters and formed several disparate clusters of only a few participants each. Confirming these classifications, the mean factor scores associated with each of the participant clusters are reported in Table 4.

Segmentation. Finally, I conducted a series of linear regression analyses with demographics and the consumer motivation scales as independent predictors of each of the authenticity factors. As shown in Table 5, there were interesting differences across the different kinds of authenticity. In terms of basic demographics, male participants seemed more concerned with Historical Authenticity, whereas female participants and older participants were more concerned with Categorical Authenticity; income was positively correlated with concerns about Historical Authenticity, but negatively correlated with concern about Values Authenticity.

To analyze the motivational scales, mean scores were computed across the relevant items to form indices for need for belonging (α = .88), need for uniqueness (α = .94), and need for control (α = .84). In terms of authenticity factors, the need to belong was positively correlated with sensitivity to all types of authenticity. The need for uniqueness positively predicted sensitivity to Values and Categorical Authenticity, and the need for control was positively related to concerns about Historical Authenticity.

1 In Study 1 two of the items were slightly different: a “chair from the Titanic” and “a signed movie script.”
Categorical Authenticity, the typologies arising from previous papers have been also be evaluated according to all three of these dimensions. Considering a particular type of object. However, the same object may produce Values with certain expectations (Values Authenticity); and, verifying that the motivations and values of the beliefs and expectations about a particular category (Categorical Authenticity); verifying that an entity conforms to its history and its connection to certain people, places or events (Historical Authenticity); verifying that an entity conforms to any of the constructs. Together, these data provide strong support for the notion that authenticity judgments can be grouped as falling into one of three broad categories.

Moreover, different segments of participants seemed to be selectively attuned to different types of authenticity. Although the specific demographic and motivational factors associated with each of these segments should be examined in future research, these preliminary findings complement existing findings. Specifically, using established scales, I find support for the relevance of the same three motivational factors identified by Beverland and Farrelly (2010). Moreover, the results suggest some higher-order connection between social belonging needs and sensitivity to authenticity (cf. Newman & Smith, 2016b), as well as some potential differences between desires for control versus desires for uniqueness in motivating different kinds of authenticity.

**General Discussion**

Arguably, one of the primary questions facing researchers working on the topic of authenticity concerns how the concept itself should be defined. To date, researchers have attempted to answer this by constructing various typologies that best explain their domain of interest. From an analysis of the existing literature, three broad kinds of authenticity were hypothesized: Historical, Categorical, and Values authenticity. Using converging methods, empirical support was obtained for the existence of this tripartite classification.

It should be noted, however, that I conceptualize these three kinds of authenticity as different dimensions of consideration, or “lenses,” rather than as exclusive categories. That is, each type of authenticity focuses on a unique aspect of verification: verifying an object’s history and its connection to certain people, places or events (Historical Authenticity); verifying that an entity conforms to beliefs and expectations about a particular category (Categorical Authenticity); and, verifying that the motivations and values of the producer are Values with certain expectations (Values Authenticity). A particular dimension may spontaneously arise when considering a particular type of object. However, the same object may also be evaluated according to all three of these dimensions.

A second main goal was methodological. As noted in the Introduction, the typologies arising from previous papers have been largely been identified using qualitative methods. That is, researchers have often proceeded by identifying similar patterns of reasoning among participants (often via structured interviews) and categorizing them. Although this approach has yielded important advances, it was unclear whether lay participants themselves distinguish between these various kinds authenticity or view them as importantly different from one another. The present studies instead had large numbers of participants provide responses to multiple items (spanning many different types of objects and experiences) and then used various quantitative techniques to identify latent constructs in the data. What is remarkable is that this approach does find evidence for the same basic clusters that were theorized from more qualitative analyses. This is heartening both for establishing the ecological validity of these three kinds of authenticity, as well as more broadly, suggesting important complementarities across different research approaches.

Of the three clusters, Values authenticity seems to be the broadest and, for that reason, perhaps the least defined of the categories. The types goods and experiences captured by this construct seem to include performances, experiences, and products that are manufactured in a particular way, and licensed and brand-name products. The common theme among these various types of items seems to be that to assess authenticity, observers take into account some information about the producer’s intentions. That said, the relevant type of intention may vary widely across different domains, and for that reason, Values authenticity may readily decompose into more nuanced subsets (as was observed in Study 1). For example, one item having to do with licensing (Harvard Sweatshirt) was part of the Values authenticity cluster in Study 1, while it was part of the Categorical cluster in Study 2. This difference could be attributable to different methodologies the two studies. Or, it may be that these the “licensing” items do not neatly conform to any of the constructs.

One interesting avenue for future research may be to explore Values authenticity further to identify how notions of this type of authenticity may change depending on the good or experience that is evaluated. Indeed, Spiggle, Nguyen, and Caravella (2012) found that within considerations of brand extensions, consumers focus on several distinct dimensions including maintaining brand standards and style, honoring brand heritage, preserving brand essence, and avoiding brand exploitation. Several of these would seem to draw on assessments of intentions and the producer’s values and yet, there also seems to be important nuanced differences across them. Therefore, Values Authenticity may be unique in the sense that it may comprise many different but interrelated subtypes of authenticity.

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Historical PC</th>
<th>Values PC</th>
<th>Categorical PC</th>
<th>Low PC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>0.727</td>
<td>-0.110</td>
<td>0.0150</td>
<td>-1.563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values</td>
<td>-0.505</td>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>-0.207</td>
<td>-0.508</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Categorical</td>
<td>-0.179</td>
<td>-0.141</td>
<td>1.105</td>
<td>-0.800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

Using a converging methodology in which participants indicated their sensitivity to the (in)authenticity of an array of items, the same three constructs of Historical, Categorical, and Values authenticity emerged. The convergence across Studies 1 and 2 is notable because the types of judgments were quite different across the two studies. Together, these data provide strong support for the notion that authenticity judgments can be grouped as falling into one of three broad categories.

Moreover, different segments of participants seemed to be selectively attuned to different types of authenticity. Although the specific demographic and motivational factors associated with each of these segments should be examined in future research, these preliminary findings complement existing findings. Specifically, using established scales, I find support for the relevance of the same three motivational factors identified by Beverland and Farrelly (2010). Moreover, the results suggest some higher-order connection between social belonging needs and sensitivity to authenticity (cf. Newman & Smith, 2016b), as well as some potential differences between desires for control versus desires for uniqueness in motivating different kinds of authenticity.

**Table 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Historical</th>
<th>Categorical</th>
<th>Values</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Male)</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uniqueness</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Coefficients in bold are significant $p < .05$. 

---

**Table 4**

**Average Factor Scores Associated With Each of the Participant Clusters (PC) in Study 2**

**Table 5**

**Standardized Beta Coefficients From Linear Regression Analyses Predicting the Historical, Categorical, and Values Authenticity Factors**
Finally, existing research on authenticity has been relatively silent on consumer motivations or antecedent processes. For example, it is unclear whether different individuals are more concerned about one type of authenticity versus another, or whether different motivations may encourage people to focus on different kinds of authenticity. Drawing on the qualitative analysis of Beverland and Farrelly (2010) and Newman and Smith (2016b), I identified the importance of three motivational factors (connection, control, uniqueness), which appear to play different roles in people’s sensitivity to different kinds of authenticity.

One promising avenue for future research may be to examine these antecedent processes further to identify what motivates people to seek out different kinds of authenticity. For example, the motivations examined here were inspired by existing research (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), but perhaps there are additional antecedent processes that enhance sensitivity to authenticity more generally or relate more precisely to the specific subtypes identified here.

One example might include preferences for retro products. Existing research has shown that people have a psychological motivation to view their broader social system as just, fair, and good (i.e., system justification theory; Jost & Banaji, 1994). Moreover, several studies have identified an import causal link between system justifying ideologies and a preference toward “essential” explanations. For example, recent experiments have shown that threats to the social system enhance preferences for products that provide a source of stability, such as brand name products (Cutright, Wu, Banfield, Kay, & Fitzsimons, 2011). Some preliminary evidence suggests that retro products may serve to satisfy system justifying motives because those products are seen as reflecting the core, or essence of the particular product category and therefore, consuming them provides a source of stability when the broader social system is threatened.

Psychological Essentialism: An Overarching Construct

In short, the current studies argue that authenticity is not one construct, but three. However, the question then arises as to whether anything more comprehensive can be said. In other words, is there a deeper way in which these three types of authenticity judgments are similar (besides the fact that they are all described using the same word)?

I suggest that these different dimensions of authenticity can all be characterized as manifestations of psychological essentialism. Psychological essentialism is the tendency to assume that certain kinds of things possess a deep, underlying nature (e.g., Gelman, 2003; Keil, 1989; Medin & Ortony, 1989; Newman & Keil, 2008). In support of the hypothesis that psychological essentialism plays an important role in the concept of authenticity, Newman (2016) examined the extent to which evaluations of authenticity conformed to various “hallmarks” of essentialist reasoning. For example, one experiment found that changing the purity of a product by 1%, or even .001%, led to a disproportionate reduction in perceptions of authenticity, while subsequent (more dramatic) changes had a comparatively minimal effect—a pattern which is predicted from the existing literature on essentialism and the notion of “sharp” category boundaries (see Gelman, 2003; Rozin, 2005).

Conceptualizing authenticity in terms of psychological essentialism has the ability unify the various kinds of authenticity identified here. For example, in the case of Historical authenticity, observers may evaluate whether the item is thought to physically embody the essence of a particular person, place or event. Indeed, what makes the object valuable (and authentic) in the first place, is that it is perceived to possess the essence of a valued source. Likewise, in cases of Categorical authenticity, observers may evaluate whether the object or experience embodies the essence of the type—for example, does this food capture the essence of Mexican food? And, in cases of Values authenticity, observers may evaluate the extent to which the object/experience reflects the essential values of the producer. Indeed, what seems to be discussing about an individual that is “only in it for the money” is that it violates an essential commitment to one’s profession or craft.

Conclusion

This paper proposes and tests a more comprehensive psychological framework for the concept of authenticity. Specifically, psychological essentialism provides an overarching concept to unify judgments of authenticity (cf. Newman, 2016). The present studies then identify three primary ways in which authenticity may be defined and evaluated: whether the item embodies the physical essence of some valued source (Historical authenticity), whether the item/experience conforms to the essential qualities of a particular category or type (Categorical authenticity), and whether the item/experience reflects a deep, essential value (Values authenticity).

I argue that this framework is able to account for existing research in this area by presenting a view of authenticity that is both structured (i.e., in noting the coherence across different types of authenticity judgments) as well as flexible (i.e., in noting the ways in which consumers may define essence differently or may focus on different kinds of authenticity). I also suggest that this framework may help to unify future research in this area as it clearly allows for the identification of additional linkages, additional constructs, and additional antecedent processes.

References


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