

Chapter 6

Authenticity and the Dramaturgical Self

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One morning my wife and I walked away from our four-year-old daughter's kindergarten, having just dropped her off at the front door. Her classmates were already outside on the playground for morning exercise. She hesitated to go to her friends as she was absorbed in watching us walk away. My wife told me that, on the days she dropped her off, our daughter acted needy at the door, calling "bye" repeatedly and waiting until my wife disappeared from sight before going into her classroom. "But," she added, "I think it's a show rather than genuine." Her comment is a mundane, yet common example of everyday concerns about authenticity and the dramaturgical self. One question the example begs asking is *what is the difference between performing a self and being oneself?* Other questions include *what kinds of meanings does one attach to another's behaviors?* And *what are the consequences of those meanings?* In this case, we see a four-year-old acting in a way that is not seen as authentic. Had my wife defined our daughter as being "genuinely" needy, she would doubtlessly have acted on her concerns. When is a child (or an adult for that matter) needy versus just acting needy (and what does my use of "just" imply)? Ought we assume some qualitative distinction and assume, as Shakespeare's (1623) famous quote might lead us to, that "all the world's a stage, and all men and women merely players?" Or are performances better understood as dramaturgical expressions of a self that is more or less authentic, the two being separable only analytically?

In this chapter I will discuss the relationship between authenticity and dramaturgical performance as sociological concepts. Given the larger scope of this volume, I need not go into any lengthy discussion of dramaturgy or performance. The concept of authenticity, however, needs to be mapped out in some detail before suggesting the extent to which it may be gainfully employed in a dramaturgical framework. My goal is to illustrate how theories of authenticity function for people in everyday life. Such a line of inquiry is important, not least because our definitions of people's performances of self affect how we feel about them, think about them, and act toward them.

Conceiving Authenticity

I will begin very basically with dictionary definitions of authenticity in order to highlight the extent to which authenticity is treated as an objectively real metaphysical state in everyday culture and discourse. One typical definition of authenticity focuses on something being in accordance with fact or being *true in substance*. This implies that authenticity really does exist; that it is out there waiting to be discovered or uncovered. Not everything will be authentic, but those things that are may have their true nature known. This calls attention to a second meaning of authenticity, which has to do with the *genuineness* of the thing in question (as in the opening vignette). Search online for the cover image of Arthur Lyman's (1979) LP entitled, *Authentic Hawaiian Favorites* [images.google.com, search term = "Lyman Authentic Hawaiian Favorites"]. The title tells us (literally) that the music recorded on the album is authentic. The cover image supports this claim by providing relevant, and implicitly *genuine*, props: water, sand, jungle; a pagan statue; a demure woman wearing a lei; and of course Hawaiian-print shirts for the group of non-white men.¹ For a very different image of authenticity, take a look at the cover image of Tupac Shakur's album, *Authentic*, produced after his death by DJ Fain [images.google.com, search term = "DJ Fain authentic"]. Shakur, a famous rapper who was shot to death in 1996, has been loudly praised as an authentic hip-hop artist for "keeping it real." In the image we see Shakur in a reflective disposition; he seems to contemplate his own sense of self vis-à-vis an American society that will not leave him alone. I interpret this picture as being chosen to represent the *Authentic* album because it gets at a final aspect of authenticity that has to do with the *realness* of the thing in question. Realist and existentialist philosophies support the idea of "real" individuals trapped inside bodies, cultures, and societies. The quest for authenticity is one way in which the self acts and changes in response to these external social pressures. This antagonism between an authentic self trapped in an inauthentic world has been around since at least the time of classic Greek society, as we see in Socrates' remark following his conviction for corrupting young people's minds with his philosophical teachings: "The unexamined life is not worth living."

A self-reflexive interest in the realness of human experience can be deeply personal—moral, but neither narcissistic nor rooted in civic disengagement *per se* (Taylor 1992). Rather, authenticity is characterized by the idea that humans have inner depths that are realized as people commit to being themselves, even when doing so puts them at odds with the norms and values of society. This idea

¹ Ironically, the Wikipedia entry for Arthur Lyman describes him as having "popularized a style of faux-Polynesian music during the 1950s and 1960s which later became known as exotica."

can rest upon one of two ontologies. The first is psychological, where it can be interpreted as suggesting that human beings have within them an essential self, or an essential self-feeling, that is "real," but may perhaps be unknown, buried, or otherwise in need of (re)discovery. The second ontology is sociological. Here, the self is not an *essential thing* that is discovered, but rather a *reflexive process* that develops through interaction. Such work draws upon the self-concept, a process of internal dialogue between the "I" and the "me" (Mead 1934) that has distinctly social roots. As people grow, they develop an overarching image of themselves as physical, social, and moral beings. Self-conceptions shift across the life course as people gain experience. One's self-concept is thus "a vague but vitally felt idea of what I am like in my best moments, of what I am striving toward and have some encouragement to believe I can achieve" (R. Turner 1968:98).

An important shift occurred in industrial societies during the latter 20th century, however, in how people articulated a sense of who they "really" are. People's sense of self shifted away from traditional "institutional" identities grounded in demographic characteristics, occupation, and other social relationships toward something grounded in what Turner called "deep unsocialized inner-impulses" and emotions (1976:992). By the end of the 1960s, increasing numbers of people had reached "a point of insight at which we become disgustedly aware of how we stage ourselves, play games, and ingratiate others...and we want to enrich life by finding honest, deeply felt, loving interactions with others" (White 1972:387). The struggle between an authentic, reflexive self and the implicitly inauthentic, possibly demeaning behaviors toward which we feel obliged to orient ourselves, has psychoanalytic roots but nevertheless has been a significant topic of research among symbolic interactionists and sociologists (see Erickson 1995; Waskul 2009).

Yet this type of research has a certain limiting quality to it. Focusing on authenticity's "roots"—its emotional core or self-reflexive experiences—obscures the interactional "routes" through which things come to be defined as authentic. The dramaturgical perspective (Edgley 2003; Goffman 1959) offers an analytic framework that brackets the experiential and focuses explicitly on the situational and behavioral elements and processes through which the achievement of authenticity may be exposed. The study of authenticity becomes the study of "authenticity work" (Peterson 2005) and is more about performances and audiences as it is about subjective experiences. Thinking about authenticity in terms of dramaturgy draws attention away from its introspective aspects and refocuses instead on how authentic selves are expressed and negotiated in situations.

Dramatic Realizations of Authenticity

I now turn to a meta-analysis of two studies based on interview data. The emphasis will be on authenticity work rather than on feelings of authenticity. I frame the first study in terms of interviews as interactional moments with rather clear scenes and actors (Burke 1945) and the second study in terms of interviewees' talk as narratives that reference dislocated audiences. In distinguishing between talk and narrative, I draw on a point made by Gubrium and Holstein (2009:123): "Everyday authenticity relates to the audiences and circumstances of the work involved. If authenticity is interactionally produced, it materializes under particular *auspices*—the interpretive expectancies, resources, and preferences that surround authenticity work." In short, the emphasis I place on data excerpted from these two studies will be in terms of (a) how collectively-defined conceptions of authenticity are expressed in situations and (b) the significance of situations for understanding presentations of self.

Study 1: Style and the Subcultural Self

Despite a wealth of research on subcultures by Chicago School sociologists in the 1920s and 1930s, many scholars consider *Resistance through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson 1976) and *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (Hebdige 1979) as *de facto* sources of subcultural theory. Both texts make reference to a variety of post-war youth subcultures and build their analyses on a combination of neo-Marxist and post-structuralist theories (Williams 2011). The theorized role of style in mediating relations among youth, class, and ideology has predisposed subsequent scholars to view style a predominant manifestation of subculture, yet these texts received their fair share of criticism. Among the criticisms levied was the absence of members' accounts of their own subcultural experiences. While purporting to study "the meaning" of subcultures, very little data are derived directly from individuals who self-identified as members of the subcultures being reported on. Subsequent generations of scholars have attempted to fill this gap in the subcultures literature.

Sue Widdicombe published a series of discourse-analytic studies based on impromptu interview data from public settings with individuals who dressed in ways that allegedly marked them as members of youth subcultures such as punk, skinhead, or Goth. Her theoretical interest lay in social identity theory (Tajfel 1978), a perspective that argues that the way in which people affiliate as members of groups shapes their subsequent interactions with others based on cognitive categories such as "in group" and "out group." As such, both how she chose her interviewees and the questions she asked were loaded with certain assumptions about people's subcultural affiliations based on sartorial characteristics; she approached people that appeared to her to *be* subcultural

and attempted to solicit proof of their subcultural identities by questioning how they thought about members of their own group and other groups.

Unanticipated patterns quickly emerged in interviewees' responses. Namely, there were few instances of people explicitly claiming a subcultural identity. In those few instances, people would present their subcultural selves not in terms of group membership, but by comparing their own (authentic) reasons for being subcultural with other people's (inauthentic) reasons.

There doesn't seem to be a lot of thought in gothics. They just seem to be like the front—it's a pose isn't it? [...] Like, they'll probably be something else in another couple of months. There's nothing behind it. (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1990:262)

People who are not "really" subcultural present a "front" or a "pose" that is inauthentic because "there's nothing behind it." Others might participate in subcultures for an excuse to dress or behave differently, but Widdicombe's interviewees reported doing so because they were qualitatively different. This should not suggest the belief that sartorial conformity is automatically inauthentic. Many subculturalists are able to explain their own cliché behaviors as part of an authentic subcultural self that is grounded in their natural uniqueness. Lewin and Williams (2009), for example, recorded a punk who made fun of individuals who adorned themselves in stereotypical punk style while wearing his own hair in a Mohawk. When asked to describe his style and its similarity to the styles of other punks, he noted that his hairstyle, unlike those of some others, reflected a "real," internalized self (see also Muggleton 2000):

you can tell when people just don't care from when they're trying, and I think that people who are trying to be something need to stop trying and just be whoever they are. Maybe it's a confidence thing in the way you show yourself to people. Like, I definitely don't think I'm trying to do anything with my haircut right now, and every single person that I talk to who sees it is just like "oh." You know, they're not like, "Oh wow! That's crazy! Absurd!" [...] It's new for me, but then they're like "yeah, it looks right." You know, it fits me. (Lewin and Williams 2009:74)

Such talk fits well with everyday conceptions of authenticity: one is motivated to behave in a certain way for internal, rather than external, reasons. Therefore how one appears or acts in public is to be defined as a reflection of the authentic self and not as an attempt to fit into a social category. More often, respondents in Widdicombe's research would simply describe themselves in terms of distinctiveness from an imagined reference group (Shibutani 1955). Their style did not need a subcultural label; it was simply "different:"

I: Right, how would you describe your style?

R: How would I describe the style?

I: Yea...

R: Well... it's different. (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995:96)²

Studying naturally occurring talk, Widdicombe found that subculturalists used words to characterize their "authentic" selves in specific ways, which often did not involve explicating their relationship to a subcultural group. According to discourse analysts, talk is not representative of internal attitudes or thoughts; i.e., talk is not subsequent to self (Potter and Weatherell 1987). Rather, social selves are constituted in and through everyday talk. Authenticity is therefore something that is dramaturgically achieved, not some internal essence that guides behavior. Goffman's ideas on the presentation of self in everyday life come to the same conclusion—when in the presence of others, we use words and gestures, along with clothing, demeanor, and other aspects of appearance, to communicate who we are to others, as well as to communicate information about who we think others are (see also Stone 1981). To the extent that people attach similar meanings to such communications and expressions, they are able to share a definition of what it means to be punk, Goth, or whatever. This "shared definition of the situation...involves...agreement[s] as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored." Goffman called this a "working consensus" (Goffman 1959:9-10). Subcultures are particularly interesting here inasmuch as participants often behave in paradoxical ways, claiming on the one hand to be unique individuals, but following rather strict norms of behavior on the other. As such, the meaning "given" through individuals' talk does not always match the paralinguistic meanings "given off" by their appearance. This is particularly the case when dealing with unknown others, who may not interact with the same working consensus in mind:

I: Can you tell me something about your style and the way you look?

How would you describe yourselves?

R1: I dunno, I hate those sorts of questions.

R2: Yea horrible isn't it? (Widdicombe and Wooffitt 1995:96-97)

In this extract, we see two people who are dressed unconventionally rebuffing Widdicombe's questions about their appearance. They likely recognize both outsider as well as insider meanings of subcultural appearance and therefore likely perceive her questions as an overt challenge to their subcultural authenticity. The ascription of a social identity can function as a type of social

² "P" marks the interviewer, while R marks the respondent. Multiple respondents are numbered as R1, R2, and so on. The excerpts have been reformatted for readability.

control and in this way their response "displays a sensitivity to...problems of category affiliation: implied conformity [equates to] a loss of individuality" (Widdicombe 1998:52). Approached unexpectedly in a public setting by a stranger, the respondents work together as a team, simultaneously defending and protecting the authenticity of their own performance (which her questions implicitly call into question) by discrediting Widdicombe's opening questions.

The linguistic performances of those whom Widdicombe assumed to be subcultural highlight multiple strategies that people use to authenticate themselves. Here I will briefly mention two that are closely related: limiting the perceived influence of others, and demonstrating that appearance is an expression of the true self. No one is born with a sense of self; it is learned over the life course and is intimately tied to our interactions and relationships with others. But because authenticity is something that most people assume to be internal and essential, the authentic self must be unique to each person. To the extent that one admits to following trends or acting in some way because others expect it, she risks losing her individuality. As mentioned previously, subcultural participation is contradictory to the extent that unconventional forms of dress become rather normative within a subcultural scene. Participants must therefore constantly engage in dramatic realizations of unconventionality while not appearing to have simply mimicked current subcultural trends. This is often accomplished through mundane detailing of one's past and present behaviors:

I: Was there a time when you wore conventional clothing or high street fashion?

R1: [...] up till about the age of fifteen I just wore conventional clothes but I didn't listen to conventional music.

R2: [...] I sort of started wearing like unconventional clothes when I was about thirteen.... I didn't know anybody else dressed in black or anything, I just did it purely for myself. (Widdicombe 1993:98-99)

Here, a male and a female who both appear to be Goth talk to Widdicombe about when they started performing a subcultural self. The interviewees both offer similar narratives of having begun during adolescence, but each offers a unique biographical detail that emphasizes how the change in appearance reflected a pre-existing (i.e., authentic) subcultural self. Respondent 1 proves his authenticity by noting that, even when he wore conventional clothes, his musical interests were unconventional, while Respondent 2 highlights how her shift to black clothing was an idiosyncratic choice. Both go on to describe how they later discovered that their interests and behaviors were reflected in Goth subculture. Similar to the previous example of Widdicombe interviewing two people at once, we may interpret the subcultural pair working as a team to support each other's presentation of self. We may also, however, interpret it as an interactional moment within which each respondent takes the opportunity to

provide a mundane detail to the other co-present subculturalist that underscores their autonomous and internally motivated decisions. This information may be carried forward and diffused among scene members, thereby ratifying the authenticity of each individual.

The authentic self:

is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it. The self, as a performed character... is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited. (Goffman 1959:252-53)

Widdicombe's research on youth subcultural appearance is significant in detailing how actors' performances of authentic selfhood are achieved situationally through face-to-face interaction, and specifically through talk. It also provides examples of the relevance of teams and audiences in setting the scene and then supporting or demanding, respectively, the dramatic realization of the authentic self.

Study 2: Hustlers, Violence, and Street Codes

Selves are dramatically realized in social situations and those realizations are consequential in the ongoing flow of interpersonal interaction and, in due course, the social order. Dramatic realizations are conceptualized social psychologically as identities, yet identities are not necessarily straightforward expressions of self, as Goffman (1959) emphasized in distinguishing "giving" versus "giving off" meanings. One may present herself as a certain type of person, but that type is not filled up with self-evident characteristics. Rather, identities are constituted by a range of positive and negative traits that are attributed by audiences and, in turn, act back on the self and self-representations via reflected appraisals (Cooley 1922). The presentation of self may be simultaneously credible to one audience and discreditable to another. Selves and identities are not only realized dramatically *in situ*; people also engage in narrative work that supports and/or challenges, extends and/or limits the realization of themselves and others as authentic. In their discussion of the auspices of authenticity, Gubrium and Holstein (2009) refer to Clifford Shaw's (1930) study of Stanley, a "petty thief" whose

authenticity as a consequential member of his peer group was constantly in question. Under the auspices of the reformatory or the street corner, Stanley's identity lacked the mark of authenticity expected in these settings. No amount of authenticity work on Stanley's part readily moved him into the big leagues. [...] Stanley may have literally been a street criminal and convict, but his "street cred" was minimal in the haunts of "real" criminals. (Gubrium and Holstein 2009:132)

What are the boundaries between authentic and inauthentic members of street culture, and what processes support methods of authentication? Part of a narrative-oriented answer is that individuals rely on "formula stories" that are spread throughout (sub)cultural networks and that describe "typical" people doing "typical" kinds of things with "expectable" outcomes (Loseke 2007:664). Narratives function as authenticity work and are "a matter of everyday practice, not essentially self-conscious... seen but unnoticed" (Gubrium and Holstein 2009:132). The dramaturgical concept of audience is key in framing the narrative realization of authentic selves, as is recognition of the importance of the situations or auspices (a) within which the narratives are presented and (b) to which the narratives refer. Each auspice may entail a different set of imagined others, which can result in people telling complex stories with seemingly contradictory presentations of self.

This was the case in a series of interviews by Copes, Hochstetler and Williams (2010) with prison inmates from poor urban environments who had been convicted of violent crimes and who also admitted to being chronic drug users. In the interview settings—private rooms located in the administrative wings of prisons—inmates' narratives functioned simultaneously as idealizations of selves replete with "street cred" and as selves that were relatively untainted by the stigma of street life. Interviewees juggled two contradictory identities, each with its own socially-constructed basis for authenticity: the hustler and the authentically violent self. The stories they told illuminated how they, alone or in teams, dramatically realized one or both of these identities in concrete situations on the streets. But the stories themselves were articulated within the confines of a prison. Thus formal and informal institutions, along with the past and the present, contextualized their narratives and structured what were likely to be (in)authentic ways of describing the self. As Brookman observes:

Narratives must be somewhat believable and contextually appropriate. Not only must the plot be sensible to listeners but so too must the role speakers assign to themselves. One's social position dictates which stories are sufficiently authentic and believable to tell and for this reason the type, frequency, and content of them will vary by the social location and characteristics of narrators. (Brookman et al. 2011:399)

Participation in the street culture of America's urban landscape often involves using, or working in close proximity to those who use crack cocaine, methamphetamines, and other addictive substances. For outsiders, users are easily categorized as "crack heads" or "meth heads" and thereby lumped into a single class of "discredited" persons (Goffman 1963:4). But for insiders, there exist a hierarchy of status identities that shape interpersonal interactions. Members of street culture must constantly negotiate how they present

themselves—sometimes as unassuming, non-threatening people; other times as (at least potentially) violent people who ought not to be crossed (Anderson 1999). The nuances of these identities are not easily understood by outsiders and therefore interviewees talked about themselves in ways that managed their involvement in street culture and the drug economy. Instead of admitting to the stigma of junkie, they described themselves as “real” street criminals or “hustlers” who used drugs but were not debilitated by them. Three attributes, all of which the respondents claimed to possess, distinguished the authentic street hustler from the debased crackhead. First, interviewees talked about themselves as “clean” people who maintained a tidy, if not professional, presentation of self at all times. Being clean was contrasted with crackheads’ unkempt and tainted appearance. Maintaining cleanliness meant not only dressing in flashy, fashionable clothing, but avoiding contact with drug addicts except when conducting business. Being seen with junkies in inappropriate contexts could tarnish the hustlers’ credibility. Second, interviewees referred to material goods—money, clothing, cars—and women as proof that they were “real” hustlers.

You catch us with like five hundred dollars worth of clothes riding around in stolen luxury vehicles, man. [We had] beaucoup money.... You gotta be presentable. You gotta come with some valued gifts.... If you going after all this money to get this dope, believe one thing, you done got the money to keep yourself up too. (Copes, Hochstetler and Williams 2008:261)

Hustlers recognized the value of props for presenting an authentic identity on the streets. Crackheads, on the other hand, were incapable of managing their self-image, belongings, or affairs more generally. They would steal from anyone and sell anything they could to support their habit, so long as they could do so without immediate risk to themselves. Interviewees, on the other hand, portrayed themselves as individuals with “heart,” or the willingness to face confrontations. The everyday life of street crime is dangerous, and most (especially junkies) would flee risky situations: “The drugs done took their heart and courage and just make them feel like they ain’t even nothin’, so they don’t even try to fight or nothin’” (ibid:264). The hustler, in contrast, was somebody to be respected, even feared. Through narratives that displayed these attributes, hustlers portrayed themselves as being in command of their own destinies,³ controlled by neither the drugs they used nor mainstream conceptions of acceptability (despite their orientation toward dominant cultural goals of financial success).

3 As Trilling (1971:122) notes, authenticity derives from the Greek word *authentēos*, meaning “to have full power over...”

The men interviewed had all engaged in many violent acts. This was evident in their “rap” (Record of Arrest and Prosecution) sheets and through their own admission. In no small way, their authenticity was maintained through management of the “hustler” identity and the violence that it encapsulated. Finding themselves in prison rehabilitation programs however, most of these men found it necessary to reconcile their violent behaviors vis-à-vis their sense of who they “really” were. Goffman (1959) suggested a tension between a person’s desire to be true to himself and the need for social approval. In total institutions, social approval is often dictated through official discourse and further entrenched by the very limited scenes in which self-presentations are permissible. Institutional definitions of who inmates “really” are overwhelmingly locate the causes of problem behaviors and feelings within the individual. The term violent “communicates presumptions that those assigned the label are *essentially* malicious, dangerous and harmful to the public, more deserving of punishment, and the most difficult offenders to manage and reform” (Hochstetler, Copes and Williams 2010:493, emphasis added). Being labeled violent was both a blessing and a curse: on the streets, being known as a violent person could provide a defensive front; in prison, it meant being seen as a hard case, potentially incorrigible. Reform, or at least the physical manifestation of having been reformed, is one way to secure release from prison. Inmates’ self-narratives therefore had to balance the cool hustler with being someone who was remorseful.

When conveying stories about themselves that highlighted the authenticity of their street credibility, the inmates risked giving off the impression that they were inherently violent people. This “virtual social identity,” made with “certain assumptions as to what the individual before us ought to be” (Goffman 1963:2), had to be mitigated by managing the impression that others (e.g., rehabilitation staff) had of them. To achieve this transformation, interviewees created another social category against which they could present themselves—the authentically violent other. Their own violent behaviors were described as being contextually determined. While authentically violent criminals sought out violence and were indiscriminate about their victims. Inmates regularly used past partners as exemplars of who and what they were *not* like.

He wouldn’t stop—that’s just the way he was. He didn’t care if he hurt somebody or not. We robbed an old couple in California [...] and he was going to kill them. If I hadn’t pushed him out of the way when I did he’d a killed them. (Hochstetler, et al. 2010:506)

“Really” violent offenders engaged in “senseless” violence, enjoyed hurting people, and were likely to use unnecessary force to achieve their goals. Interviewees described themselves as incapable of “true” violence and instead

drew on instances where they showed moderation or constraint as proof that their violence was contextual rather than an essential part of who they are.

I know that I ain't going really hurt you, but I can punch you a couple [times] or hit you in your stomach to knock your wind out. That way you see, just that little time, that's enough time for me to get in the car ... What I'm saying is just so you know, but I never was a violent person. Still to this day, I have a lot of compassion for people. You know, that's just me. (Hochstetler, et. al., 2010:504)

Hustlers may engage in violent behavior routinely to achieve situationally-appropriate goals, including succeeding in a robbery or maintaining face in front of significant others, but they talked about themselves as being fundamentally different from authentically violent others, who hurt people for the “wrong” reasons.

Some might argue that the narratives of incarcerated criminals are designed primarily to manage the impressions that outsiders take away from interviews and that their self-presentations in that context may differ significantly from presentations of self on the streets. However, “the concern with stories as inauthentic reflects a conception of narrative as data on human experience—as valid or invalid only insofar as the stories equate to what *really* happened (Presser 2009:181). Interview data are not about representing “truth,” but rather highlight how people negotiate the boundaries of authenticity to manage the self that others behold. In the case of stigmatized persons, the authentic self is not something simply to be desired (as much of the experiential literature suggests), for being a certain kind of person down to one's bones could create as many (or more) problems than it might solve. Instead individuals strategically craft narratives that cast themselves in the best possible light given the audience(s) they have in mind. Those audiences may be present in the spatial and temporal senses (e.g., the interviewers), nearby (e.g., prison staff, rehabilitation staff), or dislocated (e.g., peers on the street, former customers, and/or colleagues). Accounts of authenticity need to be interpreted in terms of the various auspices/contexts within which they unfold rather than in terms of fixed criteria.

Conclusion

I have not been concerned in this chapter with the psychological, introspective, emotional, or experiential dimensions of authenticity. Such work is already well represented in the sociological and social-psychological literature (see Vannini and Williams 2009). Nor have I focused on “how cunning or naïve [an actor] may be about the nature of his or her performance, [for] this understanding is simply not essential to an understanding of dramaturgy” (Edgley 2003:147).

Instead, my goal has been to explore the relevance of the dramaturgical principle in the study of authenticity. I do not mean to frame the dramaturgical study of authenticity as existing in contrast to more experiential studies, but rather as a complement to them. Many experiential studies of authenticity highlight the nature of people's self-feelings (or lack thereof) in contemporary societies. Elsewhere, I have focused on how young people celebrate the authenticity of unconventional conceptions of self as they attempt to balance disjunctures in everyday life (Williams 2006a; Williams 2006b; Lewin and Williams 2009). Other scholars have similarly characterized these disjunctures as the “postmodern condition,” where traditional concepts of self, community and space have collapsed. Many people find themselves unsure of themselves and their place in the world and the quest for authenticity may be seen as an attempt to bring stability to their sense of who they are and how they belong.

Nevertheless (and ironically), authenticity is not objectively real. It is a fluid set of cultural ideals that people in different situations and groups construct through interaction. Fine's (2004) research on naïve artists demonstrates how art's authenticity is not so much about its quality, but rather about how affected the artist is by art world influences, education, and so on. The less mainstream, or poor, or unskilled an artist, the more her work is seen as authentic, and the more valuable it becomes. In a sense, authentic art represents authentic selves whose creations are impulsive rather than institutional (Turner 1976). Fine never attends to the presentation of authenticity in art in dramaturgical terms, but it is no stretch at all to conceive of artists as actors, while dealers, gallery-owners and others in the scene serve as team members in, or audiences to, their performances. Like art, authenticity could be called a product, but product is not the best term for either because it suggests something that is finished, easily packaged and presented. Like art, authenticity is rather a process based on negotiations among people who wish to see some people, objects, or events as more or less “real” than others.

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