Authenticity ‘s Dark Side:

Comments on Presentations

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August 2018

Presented at the annual meetings of the Academy of Management
Dark Side of Authenticity at the AoM meetings

Nine reviewers and nine reviews for a 90 minutes symposium, each of whom wrote about 100 words (or less) but passes judgment.
What is Meant by “Dark Side”?  

- Majken—Risks of authenticity:  
  - Narcissism  
  - Legitimizing “mono-history”  
  - Fake brand promises  

- Kovacs—Self-proclamations and audience heterogeneity  

- Negro—Changes over time in meaning of authenticity  

- Suddaby—When legitimate entities become authentic (e.g., Stonehenge, Great Wall)
What is Meant by “Dark Side”?  

- Symposium proposal: “Understanding when and how the drawbacks and risks of authenticity might be manifest in organizational settings, informing both the organizational construction of authenticity claims as well as audience responses to such claims.

- General interpretation: Anything negative arising from attempts to be authentic or present self as authentic.
What is Meant by “Dark Side”? 

• AoM Reviewers: Anything negative is too general, misses something essential about “dark side”

• Wikipedia: “..the portion of a planetary body, characterized by darkness that faces away and opposite to the direction of sunlight/starlight defined by the terminator line”

• Reviewer: “a dark side is typically an undesirable corollary of a positively evaluated quality. For example, the personal qualities that help managers to succeed in climbing the corporate ladder also make them more likely to manipulate, lie, cheat and steal. As a result, leadership has a dark side -- the things we want (i.e., that contribute to success) are also things we don’t want (e.g., contributing to mistreatment of employees).”
Dark Side Views

• Corollary of a positive thing, inherent in the process or outcome, by-product, unintended, paradoxical

• Negative outcome—failed attempt to be/appear as authentic

• Differences in perception—what is authentic in one person’s eyes is inauthentic to another

• Transformation of entities from authentic to inauthentic (not inherent)
Symposium Ideas by View of Dark Side

• Corollary of a positive thing, inherent in the process or outcome, by-product, unintended, paradoxical
  – Narcissism
• Negative outcome—failed attempt to be/appear as authentic
  – Self-proclamations, Fake promises
• Differences in perception
  – Temporal dynamics, Audience heterogeneity
• Transformation of entities
  – Temporal dynamics, Legitimacy
Dark Side of Authenticity

• Dark side is about a paradox—how when our search for authenticity leads us to something we find unappealing precisely because it is so authentic

• “A bit too authentic” or “more authentic than I wanted”

• Some examples
  – AirBnB
  – Food Swap of homemade products
  – Food items
.."the individualization and personalization of the sharing experience through selected personal artifacts such as pictures, books, or decorative items as well as personal contact with the host – either in person or via written message – may be increasing the perceived overall authenticity of the sharing experience" (quoted from Bucher et al. 2018)
Too authentic?

“Whether or not an experience is perceived as authentic depends on whether it is in line with guests’ expectations about the essence of the experience. These expectations and beliefs are formed not just beforehand but also during an experience. “

“... contamination dimensions have a negative impact on both sharing intention and review behavior” (Quoted from Bucher et al. 2018)
Food Swaps of Homemade Items
Failed Food Swap—Fitzmaurice and Schor (2018, Social Problems)

• “Exchanges failed to materialize...Members rejects food for many reasons; prominent among them were that offerings were taboo or profane, quotidian, or excessively ‘alternative.’” p. 2

• What is real “homemade food”? Not artisanal but hard to articulate
Chinese Dish
Do you know what it is?
More authentic delicacies
Yum Yum
Dark Side Paradox

• Something is authentic in an authoritative or knowledgeable audience’s eyes, but it is also very unappealing to other audiences even though they think they enjoy and want authenticity

• Audience heterogeneity
  – Like expert & novice differences

• “Arm’s race” among audiences & members
  – Who truly “knows”?  
  – Digger deeper to be ahead of others
  – Public displays of esoteric knowledge—status conferral

• Often sought: an idealized version of the authentic