

Abstract

A preoccupation with a search for the authentic self has become widespread for individuals living in contemporary Western societies since the 1970s. Because academic consensus had been reached regarding the university student population anchoring their experiences of authenticity in a personal (*impulsive* or *subconsensual*) sense of identity in the last 35 years, the sociological-empirical study of the real self among students has been abandoned as a discipline for about the last 20 years. This paper shows that this should not be the case any longer. I found that students' meanings of authenticity are predominantly constructed within their social (*institutional* or *consensual*) roles. I present data from a survey conducted with 138 respondents from a university in Victoria (Australia) in 2013, and compare it with sociologist Ralph Turner's ground-breaking research on the same topic. I explain these findings through cultural change related to millennials' Web 2.0 technology use.

Keywords: Authenticity, real self, Ralph Turner, social psychology, survey methods, university students

Word count: 8,161

The ‘authentic self’ has become a popular narrative within contemporary Western societies in the last 25 years (Illouz 2007), to the point that Franzese (2020: 5) has referred to a current ‘cultural obsession’ with authenticity in the West. In the present paper, I look at a particular sociological strand that examines the social origins of this narrative among university students. Concretely, I look at Turner’s (1975) ground-breaking research on the topic. My study constitutes a partial replication modelled on Turner’s research and a comparison with his results. I argue that a change has occurred in students’ conceptualisations of their (in)authentic¹ selves in recent years. Exploring the sociological reasons behind this shift, as related to cultural factors, constitutes the purpose of this article. Even though many sociological-empirical (most of them qualitative) studies on authenticity have surfaced in recent years, this is where the empirical study of authenticity started. I present evidence that relates to the meanings that university students associate with their subjective experiences of (in)authenticity today. Although recent research has been conducted about students’ senses of (in)authenticity in connection to their vocational aspirations (James *et al.* 2020), this research explores student identity more broadly conceived, regarding different dimensions of students’ lives.

There is a difference between the subjective experience of being authentic and being perceived as being authentic (Skeggs 2013: 106-7). There is also a difference between a *social* (Williams and Schwarz 2020) and a *personal* sense of authenticity (Vannini and Franzese 2008). Authenticity is not defined here as an essentialist concept, as worked out, for example, in the context of psychological therapy (Illouz 2007: 107). Rather, I explore authenticity as a social psychological process, in connection with an inter-subjective sense of personal identity. I define authenticity in line with Franzese (2009), as living in accordance

¹ Aligned with the sociological literature on the topic, where I use the word ‘(in)authentic’ or ‘(in)authenticity’, I refer to both types of experiences, authenticity and inauthenticity.

with what one values, generally defining what one values as a mixture of experiences, emotions and beliefs. Consequently, acting authentically in this paper means ‘an individual’s subjective sense that their behaviour, appearance, self, reflects their sense of core being. One’s sense of core being is composed of their values, beliefs, feelings, identities, self-meanings, etc.’ (Franzese 2009: 87).

The scientific study of the self

The sociological-empirical study of the self started to develop in the 1950s, when Iowa School sociologists Kuhn and McPartland (1954) designed the Twenty Statements Method to understand the sociological basis of individuals’ processes of self-identification. Aligned with the Iowa School ideals, Kuhn promoted methodological rigor, fostering the study of the self from a ‘scientific’ point of view (Miller 2011: 341). The School emphasised a macro-historical perspective through which cultural shifts would influence individuals’ conceptualisations of themselves.

The Twenty Statement method was first implemented with a sample of 288 undergraduate students from Sociology and Anthropology introductory courses at the State University of Iowa in 1952. The method was designed to ask students to answer the statement ‘who am I?’ in 20 different ways (Kuhn and McPartland 1954: 69). Students’ responses were organised in *consensual* and *subconsensual* categories (Kuhn and McPartland 1954: 69-70). *Consensual* categories are rooted in roles that the individual occupies in society, for example, ‘I am a father’ or ‘a teacher’. Conversely, *subconsensual* ones are related to personal characteristics or choices, for example, ‘I am an impatient driver’ or ‘I like ice cream’. Depending on the majority type of their responses, individuals were ascribed to one or the other category. Kuhn and McPartland’s Twenty Statement Method became more sophisticated later on (Spitzer et al. 1971), with answers classified into four types instead of two (Snow and Phillips 1982: 466). They found most *consensual* types in their sample of

students in 1952 (Kuhn and McPartland 1954: 75). They also found that religious beliefs played a role, making individuals more inclined to the *consensual* pole (Kuhn and McPartland 1954: 73-5).

Turner's (1975) research, which constitutes the basis for the comparison of my study, was rooted in, and came out of, the tradition of the Iowa School; it was defined in contrast to Kuhn and McPartland's study. Updating their research, Turner conducted his own research, but also expanded on their theoretical framework and method, creating a new framework and method, the *institutional/impulsive* framework and the True Self Method (Turner and Schutte 1981). This framework and method consisted of more sophisticated versions of the *consensual/subconsensual* categories and the Twenty Statements Method respectively.

The True Self Method consisted in asking respondents about their experiences of (in)authenticity in a survey questionnaire, both in a closed- and open-ended questions format. Their answers were coded using two main dimensions: *individual/social* and *impulsive/institutional*. The former dimension is the difference between understanding authenticity as other-referential or sincerity (being true to others) versus understanding it as self-referential or authenticity's 'original' meaning (being true to oneself) (Trilling 1972: 9-11). The latter dimension, however, was the one that caught Turner's attention, as it was the most relevant to his sociological analysis. This dimension portrayed a distinction between an understanding of authenticity as emotional self-expression and rooted in a *personal* sense of identity—*impulsive*—versus an understanding of it rooted in emotional self-control and a *role identity* sense—*institutional*. He left a *social-group* identity sense out of his framework. Turner was mainly interested in the *personal* sense of identity, even though this sense could be expressed in both *individual* and *social* ways, according to his first dimension.

Table 1 below shows these two conceptualisations of authenticity, which are described in detail elsewhere (Turner 1976). For an *impulsive* conception, action is rooted in desire and

the real self is something that the individual discovers ‘inside’ oneself. On the contrary, an *institutional* conceptualisation of the self establishes a value, a sense of self, or a moral standard that the individual aims at.

<Table 1 here>

Turner and Schutte (1981) designed their True Self Method to assess their respondents’ meanings associated with their true selves. They asked two main questions about an individuals’ experiences of (in)authenticity. These two questions are described below, in the Methodology section, but they essentially established four types of experiences (codes) of authenticity along the two dimensions mentioned above; equivalent codes were designed for the experience of inauthenticity: *altruism* and *selfishness* (social/institutional); *achievement* and *failure* (individual/institutional); *impulse-release* and *plastic* (individual/impulsive); and *intimacy/sincerity* and *insincerity* (social/impulsive). Each of these codes relate to different definitions that are described in Turner and Schutte’s (1981: 11-15) True Self Method.

In 1973, Turner (1975, 1976) conducted his own sociological-empirical research on university students’ ideas of their real selves at four universities of the English-speaking world: University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), in the US; University of Surrey, in the UK; and Australian National University (ANU) and La Trobe University (LTU), in Australia. Turner (1975) wanted to know if what sociologists at the time called ‘quest for identity’ was a matter only of the university student population, youth or if it constituted a broader trend in society at large. He concluded that this quest was only a matter of the university student population, who were more likely to be concerned with questions of identity (*self-concern*) than the general population (Turner 1975: 150). Turner (1975: 154, 157) also argued that *impulsive* orientations were significantly higher among university students than among the general population of the time, who mostly preferred *institutional* routes to self-discovery. However, more recent studies, using other samples of the general population, have suggested

that the trend towards impulsiveness could also be found among the non-college population in the US (Veroff, Douvan, and Kulka 1981: 25; Wood and Zurcher 1988: 66, 89).

Turner also argued that the student population associated *impulsive* meanings with their experience of their real selves, which constituted a shift from what was reported in Kuhn and McPartland's research. Students shifted towards the more *subconsensual* or *impulsive* pole. Like Kuhn and McPartland, Turner and Schutte (1981: 16) confirmed the relationship between institutionalism and religiosity (although only for the experience of inauthenticity). They found other statistically significant correlations as well, between being a male, married (only for the experience of inauthenticity too), and preferring *institutional* routes to self-discovery. Turner and Schutte (1981: 16-8) also found correlations of psychological variables like *self-concern* and *self-acceptance*, with *impulsive* (only for the experience of authenticity) and *institutional* orientations respectively. The variable *eminence aspiration* was also significantly correlated to an *institutional* orientation (Turner and Gordon 1981: 47).

Turner significantly moved the field forward through research, methodological and theoretical contributions that were applied in his study. However, subsequent studies conducted with university students did not use his True Self Method but continued using the Twenty Statements Method instead (Babbitt and Burbach 1990; Crawford and Novak 2011; Grace and Cramer 2002; Snow and Phillips 1982). Only a few studies have used the True Self Method. These studies have worked with samples of the general population, and for other purposes (McLean 2015; Sloan 2007) or been qualitative (Franzese 2009; Vannini 2006). These latter studies have used the True Self Method because of the stronger qualitative component in it as compared to the Twenty Statement Method.

Despite all the subsequent studies finding evidence that students have *impulsive* orientations to the self, from the time that Turner conducted his study in 1973 up until 2008 (Crawford and Novak 2011: 483, 489-490; Grace and Cramer 2002: 276), my study shows

that students have in fact adopted more *institutional* meanings today. However, and contrary to what Turner found as well, my study also reports more *impulsive* experiences of inauthenticity than Turner's study, which reported more *institutional* ones. The experience of inauthenticity was not studied in the subsequent studies that used the Twenty Statement Method, mainly because this method does not allow for this type of exploration, while the True Self Method does. Nevertheless, as it is shown in the Discussion and Conclusion section, this experience has important implications for identity as well. My study's original contribution to knowledge is to show how students' experiences of (in)authenticity have shifted and to provide a sociological explanation for it. I draw my conclusions from my comparison between Turner's results, obtained in 1973, and my results, obtained forty years after, in 2013. I focused on only one of the universities that he studied, LTU. I surveyed its student population through a web-based questionnaire using the LTU school email, collecting a sample of 138 respondents.

Methodology

The reasons why I chose LTU as a research site have to do with it being the most *self-concerned* and *impulsive* place in 1973, when Turner conducted his study. Turner (1975: 158) found statistically significant differences regarding the variables *self-concern* and *impulse-release* between LTU and the other three universities that he studied. *Self-concern* is sustained among the university student population today—60% of students in Turner's sample and 55% in my sample stated that they often ask themselves the question 'who am I'? Thus, LTU was the paradigmatic example of the trends Turner found in 1973. Consequently, it constitutes an ideal research site for my study, where sharp contrasts with my *institutional shift* argument can be established today.

Initially, 1136 students were selected by using a stratified random sampling method (Bryman 2001: 90-1), and were invited through email to fill in a 20-minute web-based questionnaire during the months of April and May 2013. I aimed for a sample of 1% (n=345) of the student population (N=34,492)—this was LTU's total number of enrolments in 2011 (LTU 2012). This could allow for comparison of a similar sample size with Turner's (1975: 158) original sample at LTU (n=449). However, the response rate turned out to be low, 12% (n=138)—a sample that constitutes .4% of the total student population. Although the sample size is representative in terms of the variables described below, the small sample size compromised statements about the generalisation of the sample's findings to the whole university population. My study had the LTU Human Ethics Committee approval (#1018-12), which was granted in September 2012.

My sample of 138 students is representative of LTU student population in terms of five demographic variables: *gender* (male/female), *faculty of enrolment* (Business, Economics and Law; Education; Health Sciences; Humanities and Social Sciences; Science, Technology and Engineering), *student status* (undergraduate/postgraduate), *student type*

(domestic/international), *campus location* (regional/urban)—LTU is the biggest higher education provider in regional Australia—and *country of birth* (local/overseas-born)—up to 25% of LTU student population are overseas-born (LTU 2012). Table 2 below shows the characteristics of my sample in terms of some of these and other variables, and a comparison with some of LTU’s student population percentages.

<Table 2 here>

The survey included a value question, two closed-ended questions, and two open-ended questions to examine the meanings that students associated with their subjective experiences of (in)authenticity. I chose these questions for the purposes of my comparison with Turner’s original study. In what follows, I describe each of these questions, which constitute the basis for the different subsections of the next Findings section.

The value question below generally asks respondents about their values. Since, as defined above, authenticity refers to acting in accordance with an individual’s values or ‘sense of core being’, I decided to include a question about values in my questionnaire. This question is an adaptation of social psychologist Shalom Schwartz’s (2007: 177-9, 201) original question, which included 21 rather than 15 items of response. I created an abridged version of it that loosely resembles Turner’s framework of *impulsive* and *institutional* experiences of authenticity. I included items of response 10 and 15, which were not in Schwartz’s original question. Each of the 15 items of response represents one value and a variable—these are between brackets below, but they were not visible to the respondents—which was measured using a Likert scale, ranging from 5 to 1: 5, ‘very important’ (VI); 4, ‘important’ (I); 3, ‘neutral’ (N); 2, ‘unimportant’ (U); 1, ‘not important at all’ (NI):

Here we briefly describe some values. Please read each description and think about how important each value is for your life: very important (VI), important (I), neutral (N), unimportant (UI) or not important at all (NI). Please tick into the appropriate box.

	VI	I	N	U	NI
(1) <i>Thinking up new ideas and being creative. Doing things in an original way. (Creativity)</i>					
(2) <i>Being rich. Having a lot of money and expensive things. (Being rich)</i>					
(3) <i>Every person being treated equally. Everyone having equal opportunities. (Equality)</i>					
(4) <i>Showing my own abilities. People being able to admire what I do. (Showing my abilities)</i>					
(5) <i>Looking for adventures and taking risks. Having an exciting life. (Looking for adventures)</i>					
(6) <i>Being humble and modest. Not drawing too much attention to myself. (Humility)</i>					
(7) <i>Having a good time. Doing things that give pleasure to myself. (Having a good time)</i>					
(8) <i>Making my own decisions about what I do. Being free and not depending on others. (Making my own decisions)</i>					
(9) <i>Helping people around me. Caring about other people's wellbeing. (Helping others)</i>					
(10) <i>Speaking my mind. Always saying what I think. (Speaking my mind)</i>					
(11) <i>Behaving properly. Avoiding doing anything people would say is wrong. (Behaving properly)</i>					
(12) <i>Being in charge and telling others what to do. (Being in charge)</i>					
(13) <i>Being loyal to my friends. (Loyalty)</i>					
(14) <i>Tradition is important to me. Following the customs handed down by my religion or family. (Tradition)</i>					
(15) <i>Sharing my feelings with close friends and family. Being open about myself with them. (Sharing my feelings)</i>					

The survey asked another closed-ended question to measure the respondents' meanings of authenticity. This question was in Turner's (1975: 154) original survey and I also included it in my survey—I added the 'neutral' item of response, which was not in Turner's original question, to give the students the option of not having to either agree or disagree with the items of response:

You are going to read four things people sometimes say about discovering who they really are. For each please tell me whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), are neutral (N), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD). Please tick into the appropriate box:

	Level of agreement				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
<i>The way to find out who I really am is...</i>					
(1) <i>To work hard at a difficult and challenging task. (Achievement)</i>					
(2) <i>To help someone who needs my assistance. (Altruism)</i>					
(3) <i>To forget duties and inhibitions and do just whatever I like doing. (Impulse-release)</i>					
(4) <i>To tell my deepest feelings to someone I trust. (Intimacy/Sincerity)</i>					

Similarly to the values question, the concepts between brackets are codes associated with each of the items of response (also variables in the analysis), but they were not visible to the respondents.

Turner created an *Institutional Self index* out of the data from this closed-ended question to evaluate how ‘institutional’ individuals were, combining agreement with the *institutional* items of response and disagreement with the *impulsive* ones. I created the same index for my sample, strictly adhering to Turner’s (1975: 156) directions on how to do it:

An Institutional Self index is computed by assigning weights from 0 to 4 to each answer. A weight of 4 is given for answering “strongly agree” to the achievement and altruism items, and 0 for answering “strongly agree” to the impulse release and intimacy items. A weight of 0 is assigned for checking “strongly disagree” to the achievement and intimacy [altruism] items, and a weight of 4 for answering “strongly disagree” to the impulse release and intimacy items. Intermediate positions are weighted appropriately. All “not answered” are assigned the middle weight of 2. The resulting index ranges from a possible 0 for an extreme and consistent impulse orientation to 16 for an equally consistent and extreme institutional orientation.

Since I included a ‘neutral’ item of response that was not in Turner’s original question, I assigned a ‘neutral’ code of 2 to that response, as if considered ‘not answered’ by Turner.

The survey also asked an open-ended question about an experience of authenticity (Turner and Schutte 1981: 6). Although, as mentioned, the survey sample was 138 students, only 49.2% (n=68) responded to that question. This might have been because students found time-consuming to write 100-500 words and preferred to skip this question. The question

asked them to write about an event that they considered was an experience of authenticity, where their real selves were expressed. The question is also an abridged version of another, including one rather than the two questions that Turner and Schutte originally included:

On some occasions my actions or feelings seem to express my true self much better than at other times. On these occasions the person that I really am shows clearly. I feel genuine and authentic; I feel that I know who I am. Try to recall one such occasion when your true self was expressed. Please describe the occasion and what you did or felt in detail (100-500 words).

I coded students' responses to these open-ended questions into the four codes that I mentioned above, included in Turner's *institutional* and *impulsive* categories: *altruism*, *achievement*, *impulse-release* and *intimacy/sincerity*. I strictly followed Turner and Schutte's (1981: 11-3) guidelines for coding the responses.

The questions that measure the meaning and experience of inauthenticity are like these questions. Turner did not create a closed-ended question to measure the meaning of inauthenticity, so I created one, inspired by his closed-ended question for the meaning of authenticity and the different codes for the experience of inauthenticity in the True Self Method:

You are going to read four things people sometimes say about not being really themselves. For each please tell me whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), are neutral (N), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD). Please tick into the appropriate box:

	Level of agreement				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
<i>The way not to be myself is...</i>					
(1) <i>To fail at a difficult and challenging task. (Failure)</i>					
(2) <i>To ignore other people's needs. (Selfishness)</i>					
(3) <i>To do things that I don't believe in. (Plastic)</i>					

(4) <i>To behave with others in a fashion that is not consistent with my deepest feelings. (Insincerity)</i>					
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As Turner could not elaborate an index for his closed-ended question because he did not ask it, I created one myself. I developed an *Impulsive Self index*, which is a similar measure to Turner’s *Institutional Self index*, but for the meaning of inauthenticity instead of authenticity.

Finally, the open-ended equivalent for the experience of inauthenticity was also asked:

On some other occasions my actions or feelings do not express my true self, and even misrepresent or betray the person that I really am. On these occasions I feel unreal and inauthentic. I sometimes wonder if I really know who I am. Afterwards I am likely to say something like: “I wasn’t really myself when that happened”. Try to recall one such occasion when your actions or feelings contradicted your true self. Please describe the occasion and what you did or felt in detail (100-500 words).

Again, I coded the responses for this question following guidelines from Turner and Schutte’s study (1981: 14-5). Even a lesser percentage of respondents, 42.7% (n=59), than the percentage of respondents that answered the experience of authenticity question, answered this question.

The findings for the closed- and open-ended questions are reported below in two variables named *meaning of authenticity* (closed-ended question) and *experience of authenticity* (open-ended question). I understand that these two concepts can overlap. This distinction is only made for analytical purposes, as they constitute just two different ways to measure one concept, thus increasing the internal validity of my results (Walter 2010).

Finally, a person’s values and their experiences of (in)authenticity can be highly contextual. Individuals can be complex and kaleidoscopic. Zurcher (1977; 1986: 170-1) already pointed this out, presenting an argument about a Mutable self that could naturally go through all the different A-D types of the Twenty Statement Method or the different codes in Turner’s framework. That said, from a quantitative perspective, it is still possible to find

patterns of 'identity-formation' if the experience rather than the individual is considered as the unit of analysis (Hewitt 1994). Turner's and my study stem from this assumption.

Findings

In this section, I present five pieces of evidence that show data about university students' conceptualisations of their (in)authentic selves today and compare these with Turner's results. Data refers to their values, meanings and experiences of (in)authenticity, measured in a closed- and open-ended format. These findings reveal that students prefer altruistic (*institutional*) values, and that this is reflected as well in their meanings and experiences of authenticity, which are largely *institutional*. On the contrary, evidence from the closed- and open-ended questions for the experience of inauthenticity shows that students mainly report *impulsive* experiences. Triangulating the results for the values, closed-ended and open-ended questions supports this hypothesis. In this section, I compare Turner's results with mine.

Values question

Turner never asked this question, but as can be observed in Table 3 below, I found that altruistic values were among the most popular for the whole population of students: *equality* (M= 4.4), *helping others* (M=4.3), and *loyalty* (M=4.2). These post-material values occupy the first three positions (in order of importance) respectively in the table. Values that relate to independence—*making my own decisions* (M=4.2)—or *impulse-release*—*having a good time* (M=4.1)—come later, occupying positions fourth and fifth respectively in the table. Values related to the *intimacy/sincerity* code of Turner's *impulsive* category such as *sharing my feelings* (M=3.6) or *speaking my mind* (M=3.5) occupy positions tenth and eleventh respectively. Values that relate to material attainment—*being rich* (M=2.6)—or power—*being in charge* (M=3.6)—are at the end of the table, being the second last and last positions respectively.

<Table 3 here>

Meaning of authenticity

Table 4 shows that respondents tended to agree with *institutional* rather than *impulsive* meanings of authenticity. Like in the previous question about values, *altruism* was the most frequent meaning of authenticity. While this is not the purpose of this study, it is possible to observe certain correspondence between general values and meanings of authenticity (Erickson 1995), as stated in Franzese's definition of authenticity. Although the variables about the respondents' meanings of authenticity were also measured using a Likert scale, for the purposes of a comparison with Turner's data, I present their percentages instead of their means in Tables 4 and 5 below.

<Table 4 here>

Table 5 shows the differences between Turner's general results and mine. He found an almost equal distribution in terms of agreement with *impulsive* and *institutional* meanings of authenticity in students' responses to his closed-ended question, with students being slightly more *impulsive* than *institutional* (Turner 1975: 159).

<Table 5 here>

As previously stated, Turner (1975: 154) found that the general population preferred *institutional* routes to self-discovery. In his *Institutional Self index*, Turner (1975: 156) obtained a mean score of 9.7 for the sample of the general population. He obtained lower scores for his samples of the student populations: 8.5 at UCLA; 8.0 at Surrey; 8.3 at ANU; and 8.0 at LTU (Turner 1975: 159). He found these differences between the numbers of the general population and the students to be statistically significant. Between his samples of students, Turner discovered that differences were significant only between the sample of UCLA and LTU; students at the latter being more *impulsive*. This confirms LTU's general trends towards *self-concern* and impulsiveness in 1973, referred above in the Methodology section, and reflected in its statistically significant differences with other universities in

relation to these variables. More recently, Sloan (2007: 310), also working with a sample of the general population in the US, obtained a score of 11 (SD=1.9), which indicates an increase in *institutional* meanings of authenticity for the general population. I, like Turner, obtained 9.7 (SD=2.1), but for my sample of students, not for the general population. According to this index, university students today are as *institutional* as Turner's general population in 1973.

I calculated correlations between the *Institutional Self index* and seven other variables that were also measured in my sample (*age, gender, parents' educational background, religion, country of birth, and student status*). Only one variable (*country of birth*) produced low to moderate statistically significant results ($r = .17$; $p < .05$), where overseas-born students are more *institutional* than local ones. Since a qualitative relationship has been found between students from non-Western backgrounds and an *institutional* orientation to the self (Menéndez Domingo, 2015), this result can be due to most of the overseas-born students in my sample being from non-Western backgrounds (China, India and Vietnam), but this finding should be taken cautiously. The subsample of overseas-born students ($n=37$) is too small to produce statistically significant differences between students from Western and non-Western backgrounds.

Experience of authenticity

Table 6 shows that responses to this question were diverse. Respondents reported more *social* and *institutional* experiences of authenticity than *individual* and *impulsive* ones. Most responses were *social*, which combines responses coded as *altruism* and *intimacy/sincerity* for this category. Considering Turner's categories, most responses were *institutional* rather than *impulsive*. *Individual* responses constituted the fewest.

Valid responses constituted 63% (n=87) of the total cases, revealing a high number of missing cases—37% (n=51) of total cases—and responses that fell into one of the categories, which were not suitable for the use of Turner’s framework, ‘other’ and ‘no-code’ responses—22% (n=19) of the valid cases. The number of valid responses that could be included in the analysis was even less, constituting less than half of the total responses—49.2% (n=68)—though these responses constituted the majority—78% (n=68)—of the valid cases. Since most of the valid responses could be classified using Turner’s codes, this constitutes an argument for the reliability of his theoretical framework. More detail about ‘other’ responses can be consulted elsewhere (Menéndez Domingo, 2016).

<Table 6>

Table 7 shows a comparison between Turner’s and my responses. It shows that, strictly adhering to Turner’s framework, he found more *impulsive* experiences of authenticity than *institutional* ones (Turner and Gordon 1981: 44), while I found the contrary, more *institutional* cases than *impulsive* ones at LTU today.

<Table 7>

Meaning of inauthenticity

Table 8 shows that the most frequent meanings of inauthenticity tend to be *impulsive* rather than *institutional*, with *plastic* and *insincerity* codes being the most common meanings, while *failure* and *selfishness* tend to be less preferred routes.

<Table 8 here>

The *Impulsive Self index* also produced a mean score of 9.5 (SD=2.5), which suggests that students’ meanings of inauthenticity tend to be *impulsive* today. Since Turner did not ask this question, these results could not be compared with his results for this concrete question. However, he provided results for the experience of inauthenticity (via an open-ended question),

which are reviewed below. Regarding this index, I calculated correlations with the seven other variables mentioned above (see Meaning of authenticity subsection), but no statistically significant results were produced.

Experience of inauthenticity

Table 9 shows that responses for the experience of inauthenticity were also diverse. The most numerous responses, as for the experience of authenticity, were also *social*, which combines the percentages for *selfishness* and *insincerity*, rather than *individual*, and *impulsive* rather than *institutional*. Finally, the percentage of *individual* experiences, *failure* and *plastic*, was, as for the experience of authenticity, the lowest of all the categories for this variable.

The percentage of missing cases for this open question was extremely high as well, even more than for the same question on the experience of authenticity. The percentage of cases that could be included in the analysis were also fewer, with only 42.7 % (n=59) of the total cases being included in the analysis. Like for the experience of authenticity, there were several responses could not be included in the analysis, ‘other’ and ‘no-code’ responses, whose details are also described elsewhere (Menéndez Domingo, 2016).

<Table 9 here>

Table 10 shows that, in Turner’s results, inauthenticity was mostly experienced through an *institutional* route instead of an *impulsive* one (Turner and Gordon 1981: 44). This is contrary to my findings, where inauthenticity is more commonly lived through *impulsive* compared to *institutional* experiences.

<Table 10 here>

Discussion and conclusion

This paper has presented evidence of a shift in the meanings that university students associate with the subjective experience of being (in)authentic. This main shift relates to the experience of authenticity, the substitution of *impulsive* experiences by the *institutional* pole. Turner and subsequent studies found that students more frequently reported *impulsive* or *subconsensual* experiences, from the time when Turner conducted his study in 1973 up until 2008, spanning a period of 35 years. Although using different methods—the True Self Method and the Twenty Statements Method—and convenience (Donnellan and Trzesniewski 2009), but large samples, the evidence presented in these studies is robust. However, my study, with the limitations of my sample size, but the strength of my representative sample, shows the contrary, that students significantly report more *institutional* experiences of authenticity today as compared to the past. As stated in the Methodology section, this is particularly interesting for LTU, when considering that it was the most *impulsive* of all the universities that Turner studied.

My results obtained should be taken with the limitations of a potential self-selection bias. Since the students that responded to the questionnaire volunteered their time, it is possible that the ones who responded were the altruistic ones, as *altruism* was their most frequent response. However, this was also the most frequent response in Turner's (1975) original study back in 1973, even though he obtained most *impulsive* responses for the experience of authenticity. My sample also was allegedly more culturally diverse and older than Turner's sample, which may have conditioned the results, although, as stated, no statistically significant correlations were found between the different social categories measured and the (in)authenticity variables. That said, the limitations of my sample size can render correlations statistically insignificant, so this could be explored in further quantitative research with larger samples.

Since none of Turner's subsequent studies paid much attention to the experience of inauthenticity, evidence in this regard is not so abundant. This experience has been more studied in connection to the concept of emotional labour and with samples of the general population rather than students (Sloan 2007). Nonetheless, Turner reported more *institutional* experiences of inauthenticity (Turner and Gordon 1981), while I found more *impulsive* ones. Table 11 shows a comparison between Turner's findings and mine in relation to both types of experiences.

<Table 11 here>

Finally, for the open-ended questions, most of the experiences are *social*, for both types of experiences, authenticity and inauthenticity. The social dimension potentially acts as a 'sensitiser' for the experiences of (in)authenticity, making individuals more easily recollect feeling (in)authentic. This is a somewhat tangential finding to my argument, but something that could be worth looking at in further studies.

Turner and Gordon (1981: 55) provided a generational explanation for their findings of more *impulsive* understandings of authenticity and *institutional* conceptualisations of inauthenticity. For Turner (1975: 160) particularly, although students were forming a new and 'distinctive university culture', they still had to overcome the *institutional* models inherited from their parents. These models, although progressively subsiding, were still prevalent in their societies, which in turn generated their *institutional* experiences of inauthenticity, *selfishness* and *failure*. For Turner and Gordon (1981: 56), inauthenticity could be the product of an 'earlier period of socialisation' in one's family, while authenticity could find expression with one's peers.

It is evident that different historical events such as the civil rights, the women and sexual liberation movements, the Vietnam War protests, or the Watergate scandal influenced the counter-cultural student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s in the English-Speaking

countries that Turner studied. These historical events surely shaped students' understandings of authenticity in the 1970s. However, for Turner (1975: 160), impulsiveness was not only the product of the emergence of this new *impulsive* culture but was also due to a 'youthful identity crisis'. He understood impulsiveness as also the product of students' relatively marginal sense of identity in the society of their time, which made them prone to what Keniston (1968: 407-9) or Adler have labelled 'alienated student identity' or 'antinomial personality' (Wood and Zurcher 1988: 20) respectively. In fact, subsequent studies (Snow and Phillips 1982: 473) tried to explain this marginality from the point of view of students' precarious economic situation. Concretely, the negative prospects that they had to find a job upon their graduation, at the time when these studies were conducted (the period between 1975 and 1979); this situation made students even feel more alienated from society and detached from institutions.

Precarious youth conditions are still prevalent or have even worsened today, as compared to the 1970s. For example, the percentage of young adults in Australia aged from 18 to 34 who work full-time was two times higher in 1976 compared to 2011; a third of young adults (31%) were working full-time in 2011, as compared more than half of them (59%) in 1976 (ABS 2013). Following Snow and Phillips (1982), students' even more precarious situation today should have increased their chances of alienation, and shifted their experiences of authenticity toward the *impulsive* pole, not the contrary. However, the most frequent combination in my sample (*institutional-impulsive*) was the least frequent one in Turner and Gordon's (1981: 49, 57), indicating a high degree of *self-acceptance* among my respondents.

Although Crawford and Novak (2011: 483, 489-490) already identified more numerous *institutional* responses in their sample as compared to the immediately previous study (Grace and Cramer 2002), their findings were still aligned with previous studies; their most frequent responses were still *impulsive* in 2008, but there was a significant reduction with the

immediately previous study. It is actually in my sample when a radical shift in students' conceptualisations of authenticity starts to get noticed. It is evident that we are witnessing a progressive shift in students' subjectivity and conceptualisations of their authentic selves. What made students so radically shift their understandings of (in)authenticity? The proliferation of Web 2.0 during those years, which was more interactive than previous iterations of the internet, and the Social Media Sites (SMS) such as Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005) and Twitter (2006) (McHaney 2011) that stem from it, have likely impacted students' subjectivity as an independent (i.e., cultural production) variable in the direction of making them more *institutional*.

It is also highly likely that given these unique cultural changes, and their experiences of inauthenticity, students' *institutional* experiences have a different meaning from what they meant for them in the 1950s, when Kuhn and McPartland conducted their study, being potentially more related to self-expressive outcomes (i.e., post-material values) than the meaning of social control that these types of experiences could have in the conformity-oriented society of the America of the 1950s. In that sense, by looking at both types of experiences, authenticity and inauthenticity, it is also possible to obtain a clearer picture of what these experiences might actually mean for students. Since, as already demonstrated by Turner (1975), experiences of (in)authenticity, both *impulsive* and *institutional*, have the potential of being experiences of social control, it is also possible that these types of experiences turn into forms of agency instead. Only further qualitative studies can explore what experiences of (in)authenticity actually mean for students, and by looking at their sociological conditions, to observe if there is more to these meanings from what we can ascribe to them using Turner's framework of *impulsive* and *institutional* experiences. After all, this was Turner's broader sociological scope and research agenda, to understand 'the hidden constraints that compromise our freedom' (Wexler and Turner 1977: 186).

Turner already theorised experiences of (in)authenticity and was responsible with others (Gordon 1989) for decoupling experiences of (in)authenticity from their cultural meanings, which have associated experiences of authenticity and the real self exclusively with impulsiveness. He empirically demonstrated that authentic self experiences could in fact be sources of social control, not only ‘repressive’ as *institutional* experiences, but also ‘expressive’ via impulsiveness. However, what Turner (1975) and Gordon (1989) did not reveal were the possibilities for the (in)authentic self experiences to be forms of agency as well, in whatever form they may take, *impulsive* or *institutional*, particularly when experiences of inauthenticity can be also decoupled from their role meanings. In conditions of late-modern capitalism, an *impulsive* experience can be informed by a role as much as an *institutional* one; it all depends on the subjective dimension of interpretation, what these experiences mean to the individual and how they link these to their personal identity sense. Further qualitative studies could explore these meanings by moving beyond Turner’s role theory.

Tables

Table 1: Indicators for Turner's theoretical framework of *impulsive* and *institutional* categories

Indicator/category	<i>Impulsive</i>	<i>Institutional</i>
Guidance for action	Desire	Moral standard
Self	Discovered	Attained
Emotion	Impulse-release	Self-control
Inauthenticity	Adhering to imposed standards	Failing to adhere to standards
Artistic performance	Emphasis on sincerity	Emphasis on flawlessness
Time orientation	Present	Future
Drug use	Allow for self-expression	Inhibit self-expression

Table 2: Means of demographic variables for my sample at LTU

Socio-demographic variables	Sample	LTU
Age (standard deviation)	27 (SD=9.5)	-
Gender (percentage of males)	34%	36%
Educational background (percentage of at least one parent having finished university)	42%	-
Country of birth (percentage of overseas-born)	28%	25%
Student status (percentage of postgraduate students)	20%	19%
Religion (percentage of religious individuals)	39%	-
Marital status (percentage of married individuals)	15%	-

Table 3: Mean importance scores of values on a five-point Likert scale

Value	Mean
Equality	4.4
Helping others	4.3
Loyalty	4.2
Making my own decisions	4.2
Having a good time	4.1
Creativity	3.9
Humility	3.8
Looking for adventures	3.7
Showing my abilities	3.6
Sharing my feelings	3.6
Speaking my mind	3.5
Behaving properly	3.2
Tradition	3.0
Being rich	2.6
Being in charge	2.5

Table 4: Percentages of agreement with meaning of authenticity (closed-ended question)

Code	Valid	SA	A	N	D	SD
<i>Altruism</i> ^a	76.3 (135)	22.2 (30)	54.1 (73)	15.6 (21)	6.7 (9)	1.5 (2)
<i>Achievement</i> ^b	72.9 (133)	21.1 (28)	51.9 (69)	20.3 (27)	3.0 (4)	3.8 (5)
<i>Impulse- release</i> ^c	32.3 (133)	6.8 (9)	25.6 (34)	24.1 (32)	30.8 (41)	12.8 (17)
<i>Intimacy/ sincerity</i> ^d	42.1 (133)	14.3 (19)	27.8 (37)	24.1 (32)	24.8 (33)	9.0 (12)

^a $\chi^2 = 115.185$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$

^b $\chi^2 = 104.406$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$

^c $\chi^2 = 26.060$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$

^d $\chi^2 = 16.887$, $df = 4$, $p < .002$

Table 5: Comparison of percentages of agreement with meaning of authenticity between Turner's results and mine

Code	Turner 1973	Menéndez Domingo 2013
<i>Achievement</i>	40.1%	72.9%*
<i>Altruism</i>	38.8%	76.3%*
<i>Impulse-release</i>	40.3%	32.3%
<i>Intimacy/Sincerity</i>	41.6%	42.1%

*Statistically significant differences between Turner's sample and mine for that variable ($p < .01$).

Table 6: Percentages of experiences of authenticity (open-ended question)

Experiences of authenticity	Frequency	Valid percentage
<i>Altruism</i>	27	31.0
<i>Intimacy/sincerity</i> ^a	18	20.7
<i>Achievement</i>	12	13.8
<i>Impulse-release</i>	11	12.6
No-code	10	11.5
Other	9	10.3
Total valid	87	63.0
Missing cases	51	37.0
Total cases	138	100.0

^a 13 responses were pre-coded as *intimacy* and 5 as *sincerity*, but Turner and I make no distinction between these two types of experiences.

Table 7: Comparison of Turner's results and mine for the experience of authenticity

Turner 1973	Menéndez Domingo 2013
Impulsive 60.5%	Impulsive 42.6%
Institutional 39.5%	Institutional 57.4%

Table 8: Percentages of agreement with meaning of inauthenticity (closed-ended question)

Code	Valid	SA	A	N	D	SD
<i>Failure</i> ^a	30.5 (131)	6.1 (8)	24.4 (32)	22.9 (30)	26.7 (35)	19.8 (26)
<i>Selfishness</i> ^b	52.7 (131)	16.0 (21)	36.6 (48)	17.6 (23)	19.1 (25)	10.7 (14)
<i>Plastic</i> ^c	68.2 (132)	37.1 (49)	31.1 (41)	12.9 (17)	12.1 (16)	6.8 (9)
<i>Insincerity</i> ^d	61.8 (131)	33.6 (44)	28.2 (37)	19.8 (26)	9.2 (12)	9.2 (12)

^a $\chi^2 = 17.435$, $df = 4$, $p < .002$

^b $\chi^2 = 25.298$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$

^c $\chi^2 = 46.333$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$

^d $\chi^2 = 31.939$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$

Table 9: Percentages of experiences of inauthenticity (open-ended question)

Experiences of inauthenticity	Frequency	Valid percentage
<i>Failure</i>	11	14.5
<i>Selfishness</i>	14	18.4
<i>Plastic</i>	10	13.2
<i>Insincerity</i>	24	31.6
Other	7	9.2
No-code	10	13.2
Total valid	76	55.1
Missing cases	62	44.9
Total cases	138	100.0

Table 10: Comparison of Turner's results and mine for the experience of inauthenticity

Turner 1973	Menéndez Domingo 2013
Impulsive 35.0%	Impulsive 57.6%
Institutional 65.0%	Institutional 42.4%

Table 11: Comparison of Turner's results and mine for experiences of (in)authenticity

Experiences	Turner 1973	Menéndez Domingo 2013
Authenticity	60.5% Impulsive	57.4% Institutional
Inauthenticity	65.0% Institutional	57.6% Impulsive

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