



## **Authentic Leadership: A Self, Leader, and Spiritual Identity Perspective**

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In this paper, I introduce a model of authentic leadership that rests on a single explanatory concept—identity—which specifies three interrelated identity systems: the self-identity system, the leader-identity system, and the spiritual-identity system, which, in turn, are comprised of multiple subidentities that include cognitive, affective, and conative elements. I offer a construct definition of authentic leadership that is explicated in a theoretical model which draws from humanistic psychology, existential philosophy, and social identity as well as self-categorization theory, leader prototypicality, and spiritual leadership theory. The fundamental premise of this paper is that spirituality and spiritual identity are at the core of authentic leadership. While much work remains to be done in terms of sharpening construct definitions of authentic leadership and operationalizing it, in the opinion of this author, authentic leadership is an important and provocative concept that holds promise for multiparadigmatic and multimethodological theoretical and empirical research.

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*The authentic self is the soul made visible.*

- Sarah Ban Breathnach

**F**or more than two decades, transactional/transformational leadership (hereafter referred to as TA/TF leadership) has been the poster child of the “new paradigm” theories (Beyer, 1999, p. 308) and has occupied center stage. Transformational leaders exhibit charismatic behaviors, arouse inspirational motivation, provide intellectual stimulation, and treat followers with individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994). They transform their followers’ needs, values, and preferences; nurture aspirations toward reaching their full potential; and generate higher levels of performance compared to their transactional counterparts (Seltzer & Bass, 1990). Moreover, transforming leadership taps into deep levels of meaning as it changes both leaders and followers; it occurs when one or more persons engage with each other in such a way that leader and follower raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality (Burns, 1978).

Some scholars have argued that prior to the emergence of TA/TF leadership theory as the dominant paradigm, there were increasing misgivings about the scholarly study of leadership. Many questioned its viability as a legitimate area of study, pointing out that scholars have expended a vast amount of money and effort on understanding leadership with little payoff. Hunt (1999) posited that the disillusionment with leadership's value added potential provided a strong impetus for the paradigm shift ushered in by TA/TF or "new" leadership theories that surfaced in the mid 1980s. Thus, when TA/TF leadership theory arrived on a barren landscape permeated by doom and gloom, it was widely heralded as a new paradigm. Conger and Hunt (1999) attributed the proliferation of empirical and conceptual work on TA/TF leadership to the fact that the theory attracted new scholars who gave research a boost by providing a fulcrum for the field through improved measurement and analytic techniques, greater use of meta-analyses, increased methodological pluralism, and greater attention to context.

However, the TA/TF paradigm and the Multiple Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ, Bass, 1985) as the primary operational measure, despite continuous refinements and revisions to respond to criticisms that have been raised over the years (e.g., Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003), continue to be challenged on theoretical and psychometric grounds. Several scholars (e.g., Tejada, Scandura, & Pillai, 2001; Tourish & Pinnington, 2002; Yukl, 2002) have asserted that TA/TF theory does not represent a paradigmatic departure from earlier two-factor theories such as initiating structure versus consideration, autocratic versus democratic, task versus people oriented leadership, or leadership versus management. Conger (2004) added that over the last decade, researchers have produced principally normative models of leadership such as transformational, charismatic, and emotional intelligence based models that assume a unitary approach to leadership across levels and situations. Finally, qualitative, feminist, postmodern, critical, and ecological and other theoretical and methodological challenges have called into question some of the fundamental assumptions of TA/TF theory. As Kuhn (1970) noted, data empirically derived from the reigning paradigm are bound temporally and spatially (i.e., TA/TF theory is largely Anglocentric) and are subject to decay as new theories and methodologies challenge the validity and utility of the prevailing paradigm.

Partly in response to these criticisms and partly because of a zeitgeist that is sensitive to a paradigm shift that seems to permeate the field of leadership studies, a wave of new perspectives has emerged including spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003), complex leadership (Knowles, 2001, 2002; Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001; Regine & Lewin, 2000), contextual leadership (Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002), paradoxical leadership (Kark, Shamir, Chen, 2003; Klenke, 2003), servant leadership (e.g., Greenleaf, 1977), stewardship (e.g., Block, 1993), connective leadership (e.g., Lipman-Blumen, 1996), self-sacrificial leadership (e.g. Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1999), shared leadership (e.g., Pearce & Conger, 2003), and authentic leadership (Avolio, Gardner, Walumba, Luthans, & May, 2004; Gardner & Avolio, 2005; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumba, 2005). Many of these approaches are in the early stages of development and/or lack a strong theoretical infrastructure as well as reliable and valid measures of the foundational constructs.

Although there are important differences in terminology and foci that characterize these divergent perspectives, they converge on the acknowledgement that leadership effectiveness depends less on individual, heroic action and more on collaborative processes; distributed, supported, and sustained by a network of individuals, leaders, and followers engaged in collective achievement, teamwork, and shared accountability. These models conceptualize leadership as a shared, relational process distributed across different organizational levels and dependent on social interactions and networks of influence. Fletcher (2004) argued that it is this

focus on fluidity, mutuality, and the two-directional nature of leadership that serves as the connective tissue that provides the common denominator for the perspectives that have recently evolved.

Among the emergent perspectives mentioned, authentic leadership (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner & Avolio, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; May, Chan, Hodges, & Avolio, 2003; Mitchie & Gooty, 2005) is gaining increased attention in the scholarly and practitioner communities. The inaugural 2004 Gallup Leadership Summit held in Omaha, Nebraska; a 2005 special issue of *The Leadership Quarterly*; along with the publications of books and articles on the topic of authentic leadership have provided the impetus for the development of models of authentic leadership and followership and other authentic leadership initiatives such as the development of testable propositions and measures that are building blocks of an emergent theory. Moreover, in an era of corporate malfeasance and scandals and preoccupation with maximizing shareholder value at the expense of other organizational objectives such as employee well-being and low levels of trust in senior leadership, the word *authenticity* has intuitive appeal for scholars and practitioners alike.

The concept of authenticity has been treated extensively in various disciplines including humanistic psychology (Maslow, 1971; Rogers, 1959), developmental psychology (Erickson, 1995), and existential philosophy (Heidegger, 1963/2002; Sartre, 1994). It has been addressed in religious studies and history. Terry (1993) asserted that

authenticity is ubiquitous, calling us to be true to ourselves and true to the world, real in ourselves and real in the world, When authenticity is acknowledged, we admit our foibles, mistakes and protected secrets, the parts of ourselves and society that are fearful and hide in the shadows of existence. (p. 139)

The purpose of this paper is to extend existing conceptualizations and contribute to the emergent formulations of authentic leadership by offering an identity-based model that explores the role of self-identity, leader identity, and spiritual identity in authentic leadership. As such, this work builds on research by Gardner et al. (2005), social identity and self-categorization theory (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1990), leader prototypicality (B. van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005), and spiritual leadership theory (Fry, 2003, 2005). However, it also represents a significant departure from other models in that it intentionally establishes motivational and spiritual bases of authentic leadership.

In this paper, then, I advance a model of authentic leadership that embraces an identity perspective with three specific foci. Moreover, the model posits that each of the three identity systems has one (or more) substratum that contributes to the overall system. Each identity system, in turn, assumes underlying cognitive, affective, and conative components which were explicated in an earlier model of authentic leadership (Klenke, 2005). After reviewing several contemporary conceptualizations of authentic leadership, I lay the foundations for a theoretical framework that not only moves the self to the center but more specifically focuses on the role of the self in authentic leadership through three identity lenses: (a) self-identity, (b) leader identity, and (c) spiritual identity.

### **Authentic Leadership**

“Wanted – Authentic leaders” was a call issued by George (2003), former CEO of a major U.S. corporation, in the aftermath of the corporate scandals and the mania for meeting Wall Street’s numbers. According to George, we need authentic leaders, people of highest

integrity, committed to building enduring organizations. We need leaders who have a deep sense of purpose and are true to their core values. George suggested that corporate boards choose authentic leaders for character, not for charisma but for their values and ability to motivate employees to create genuine value for customers. He argued that public trust will not be restored until we have authentic leaders in both corporations and on Wall Street. These sentiments have been reflected in the academic literature (e.g., Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005; Ilies, Morgeson, & Nahrgang, 2005).

What then is authentic leadership? Most definitions of authentic leadership start with the underlying root construct of authenticity. The construct of authenticity; captured by the injunctions of ancient Greek philosophers to *know thyself*, refers to accepting, being oneself, and remaining true to one's self. Kernis (2003) described,

Behaving authentically means acting in accord with one's values, preferences, and needs as opposed to acting merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishments through acting 'falsely.' . . . Authenticity is not reflected in a compulsion to be one's true self, but rather in the free expression of core feelings, motives and inclinations. (p. 14)

Instead, authenticity is "the unobstructed operation of one's true self or core self in one's daily enterprise" (p. 1). Knowing oneself and being one self, then, are essential qualities of authentic leadership (May et al., 2003).

Avolio et al. (2004) defined authentic leaders as those individuals who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspective, knowledge, and strength; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and high on moral character. Although authentic leadership shows some overlap with other contemporary perspectives such as transformational, charismatic, servant, and spiritual leadership; the construct is gaining legitimacy in its own right as researchers are beginning to differentiate authentic leadership from related constructs by grounding it in theory and seeking support in empirical research. Transformational leaders, for example, like authentic leaders, have been described as being optimistic, hopeful, developmentally oriented and of high moral character (Bass, 1998). Likewise, transformational leadership traces out a complex moral spectrum along which most leaders combine authentic and inauthentic behaviors which led to the distinction between (a) authentic transformational leaders who "as moral agents, expand the domain of effective freedom, the horizon of conscience" (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 211) and whose "actions aim toward noble ends, legitimate means, and fair consequences" (Bass & Steidlmeier, p. 211) and (b) pseudo or inauthentic transformational leaders who fall prey to self-aggrandizement. Bass and Steidlmeier warned of the dark side of charismatic/pseudotransformational leaders who purport to be authentic but instead use their positions to feed their "narcissism, authoritarianism, Machiavellianism, flawed vision, need for power. . ." (p. 182). However, as Avolio and Gardner (2005) pointed out, authentic leaders, unlike transformational leaders, may or may not be actively or proactively focused on developing followers into leaders, even though they have a positive impact on them via role modeling. Similarly, Bass and Steidlmeier noted that like authentic leadership, both servant and spiritual leadership include either explicit or implicit recognition of leader self-awareness and the focus on integrity, trust, courage, and hope. However, in servant and spiritual leadership, these constructs have remained largely atheoretical and have not been supported by empirical research.

Authentic leadership, then, can incorporate transformational, charismatic, servant, spiritual, or other forms of positive leadership. However, authentic leaders are not necessarily

transformational or charismatic; instead, they influence follower awareness from a values/moral perspective and energize followers by creating meaning and positively constructing reality for themselves and followers (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Although further work is needed to validate the construct of authentic leadership, Avolio et al. (2004) argued that the main distinguishing element that differentiates authentic leadership from related forms of leadership is that it is at the very core of what constitutes profoundly positive leadership in whatever form it exists. Avolio et al. (2004) argued that in authentic leadership; the focus on transparency, positivity, and high ethical standards is critical. Moreover, authentic leaders are expected to evoke followers' self-concept, recognizing that they share similar values with the leader. Nevertheless, since the authentic leadership construct is new, establishing discriminant validity that reduces some of the construct redundancy that currently exists is an important issue for future research.

### *Modeling the Authentic Leadership Construct*

As a result of the growing interest in this new construct, several models of authentic leadership have recently appeared in the literature. Avolio et al. (2004) presented the first formal statement of authentic leadership by proposing a theoretical model that draws from positive organizational behavior, trust, recent work on leadership and emotions, and identity theories to describe the processes by which authentic leaders exert their influence on follower attitudes such as job satisfaction and commitment and behaviors such as job performance. Follower outcomes included in the model are performance; extra effort; and withdrawal behaviors such as turnover, absenteeism, and tardiness. This model draws on theories of identification (e.g., Pratt, 1998), emotions (e.g., Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2000), social identity and self-categorization (e.g., Ashforth & Mael, 1989; A. Hogg & Terry, 2000), transformational/charismatic leadership (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1994), and positive psychology and positive organizational behavior (e.g., Cameron, Dutton, & Quinn, 2003).

Gardner et al. (2005) proposed a self-based model of the processes undergirding authentic leadership and followership. The model posits that a key factor contributing to the development of authentic leadership is the self-awareness of the leader which includes his or her values, emotions, identity, and goals. The second theoretical cornerstone of this model is self-regulation including internalized regulation, balanced processing of information referring to the unbiased collection and interpretation of self-related information, authentic behavior, and relational transparency which means that the leader displays high levels of openness, self-disclosure, and trust in close relationships. This model postulates that the leader's personal history (family influences, early challenges, educational and work experiences) and key trigger events (including crises as well as positive trigger events such as a promotion or stretch assignment) serve as antecedents for authentic leadership. As positive role models, authentic leaders demonstrate integrity and a commitment to core ethical values and contribute to a positive organizational climate. Positive outcomes for authentic leader-follower relationships, according to Gardner et al., include heightened levels of follower trust in the leader; workplace well-being; and veritable, sustainable performance.

Ilies et al. (2005) advanced a model of authentic leader and follower development that focuses on the elements of authenticity and the processes whereby authentic leadership contributes to the eudaemonic well-being of leaders and followers. Ilies et al. argued that authenticity as an introspective yet relational concept has substantial implications for leadership processes influencing not only leaders' own well-being but also impacting their followers' well-

being and self-concept. More specifically, Ilies et al. differentiated between hedonic and eudaemonic well-being. The hedonic approach to well-being is based on the motivational principles of seeking pleasure and avoiding pain while the eudaemonic approach is based on “living in a manner that actively expresses excellence of character or virtue” (Haybron, 2001, p. 210). Eudaemonic well-being is reflected in self-realization, personal growth and expressiveness, human flourishing, and the fulfillment of one’s true nature (Waterman, 1993). Ilies et al. pointed out that eudaemonia, described as personal expressiveness which one experiences during intense involvement, is closely related to peak experiences of interest, motivation, and joy or what Csikzentmihalyi (2003) referred to as *flow*.

Applied to authentic leadership, Ilies et al. (2005) suggested that eudaemonic well-being occurs when leaders and followers are true to their selves and fully engaged in realizing their true potential. The Ilies et al. model illustrates the connections between authentic leadership and the leader’s eudaemonic well-being and proposes some mechanisms through which authentic leadership influences followers’ eudaemonic well-being. However, the model does not specify the actual relationships among authentic leadership components and specific outcomes such as self-awareness and expressiveness.

Finally, Klenke (2004, 2005) proposed a model of authentic leadership that integrates contextual, cognitive, affective, conative, and spiritual elements. Like the models discussed previously, this model also treats the self as a critical aspect of authentic leadership. However, in addition to including self-esteem and self-efficacy (Ilies et al., 2005) and self-awareness and self-regulation (i.e., motivation) (Gardner & Avolio, 2005), Klenke’s (2004, 2005) model explicitly incorporates a spiritual component as a determinant of authentic leadership. Whereas Avolio et al. (2004) suggested that authentic leadership may incorporate spiritual and ethical leadership, I hypothesize that spirituality (defined as self-transcendence, self-sacrifice, and a sense of meaning and purpose) actually serves as a precursor of authentic leadership. The proposition that authentic leaders are spiritually more mature than their less authentic counterparts and that a leader’s spirituality contributes over time to greater authenticity is an important question subject to empirical testing.

In addition, more so than other approaches, this model explicitly incorporates organizational context in the form of authentic leadership cultures as potential outcomes of authentic leadership. As asserted elsewhere (Klenke, 1996), leadership is shaped by context; leadership is context dependent and context sensitive with leaders serving as tenants and stewards of context. In all form of leadership, contextual factors set the boundaries within which leaders and followers interact and determine the demands and constraints placed on them as they contextualize their actions, behaviors, attitudes, emotions, and spiritual choice (Klenke, 2005). The integrated model of authentic leadership (Klenke, 2004) is depicted in Figure 1. The context for authentic leadership is the complex organization characterized by uncertainty, turbulence, high velocity, and ambiguity. Additional contextual elements relevant to authentic leadership are organizational cultures characterized by caring, nurturing of the human spirit at the workplace, and providing opportunities for all members of the organization to develop their full potential.

There are notable differences as well as convergent viewpoints found in the approaches to authentic leadership. For example, as has been suggested, the defining characteristic of authentic leadership is that authentic leaders are anchored in their strong sense of self. However, although the self is included as a construct in the four models discussed, it occupies a position ranging from center to periphery. In the Gardner et al. (2005) self-based model of authentic leader and follower development; the self, manifested by two constructs (self-awareness and

self-regulation), is at the core of authentic leadership development and is directly linked to follower outcomes. In the Ilies et al. (2005) conceptualization of authentic leadership, aspects of the self (i.e., self-realization/development, self-esteem, and self-efficacy) are components of the leader’s eudaemonic well-being. Self-awareness is presented as one facet of authentic leadership. Furthermore, the model postulates that characteristics of the self pertaining to the leader’s eudaemonic well-being affect followers’ eudaemonic well-being which is conceptualized as consisting of the same components of self (i.e., self-development, self-efficacy/self-esteem).

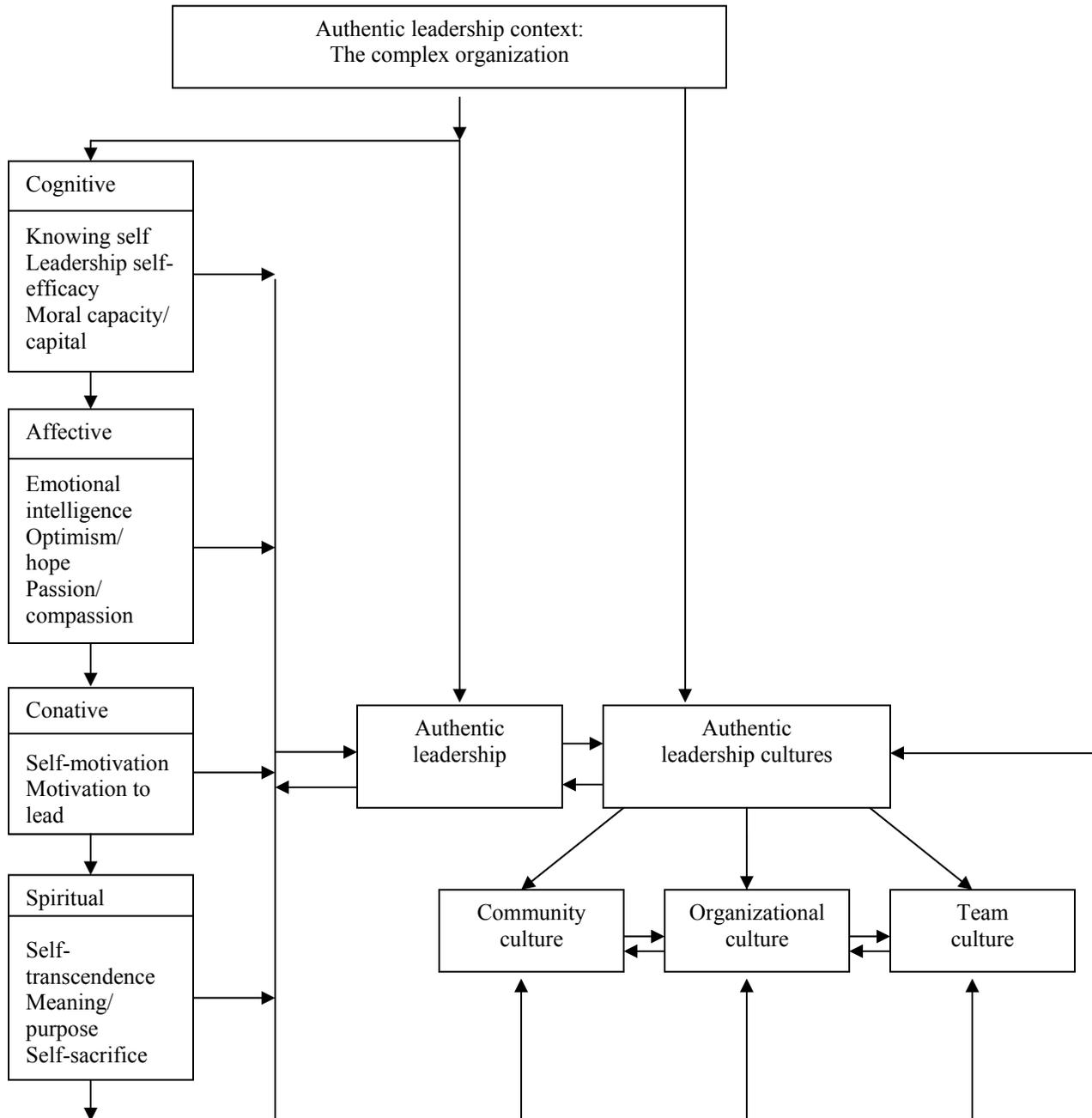


Figure 1. Cognitive, affective, conative, and spiritual antecedents of authentic leadership.

In the remaining two models, the self is operationalized as a facet of personal identification (Avolio et al., 2004) or is treated as a cognitive (self-knowledge), conative (self-motivation, motivation to lead), or spiritual (self-transcendence, self-sacrifice) antecedent of authentic leadership (Klenke, 2005). The role of the self and its various facets that have been incorporated into the theories of authentic leadership discussed here are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: The Self in Selected Models of Authentic Leadership

Facets of self	Gardner et al. (2005)	Avolio et al. (2004)	Ilies et al. (2005)	Klenke (2004)
Self-awareness	■			
Self-knowledge				
Self-regulation	■			
Self-esteem			■	
Self-efficacy			■	■
Self-motivation				■
Self-identity (personal identification)		■		
Self-development			■	
Self-transcendence				■
Self-sacrifice				■

### Toward an Identity Systems Oriented Model of Authentic Leadership

In this section, I offer a construct definition of authentic leadership and delineate the three identity systems that are proposed to play a critical role in authentic leadership. Figure 2 outlines the overall components of the proposed model and serves as a guide in the discussion that follows. In addition, each of these identity systems contains a number of substrata explicated in the sections that follow. For example, Table 1 lists a number of substrata of the self-identity system.

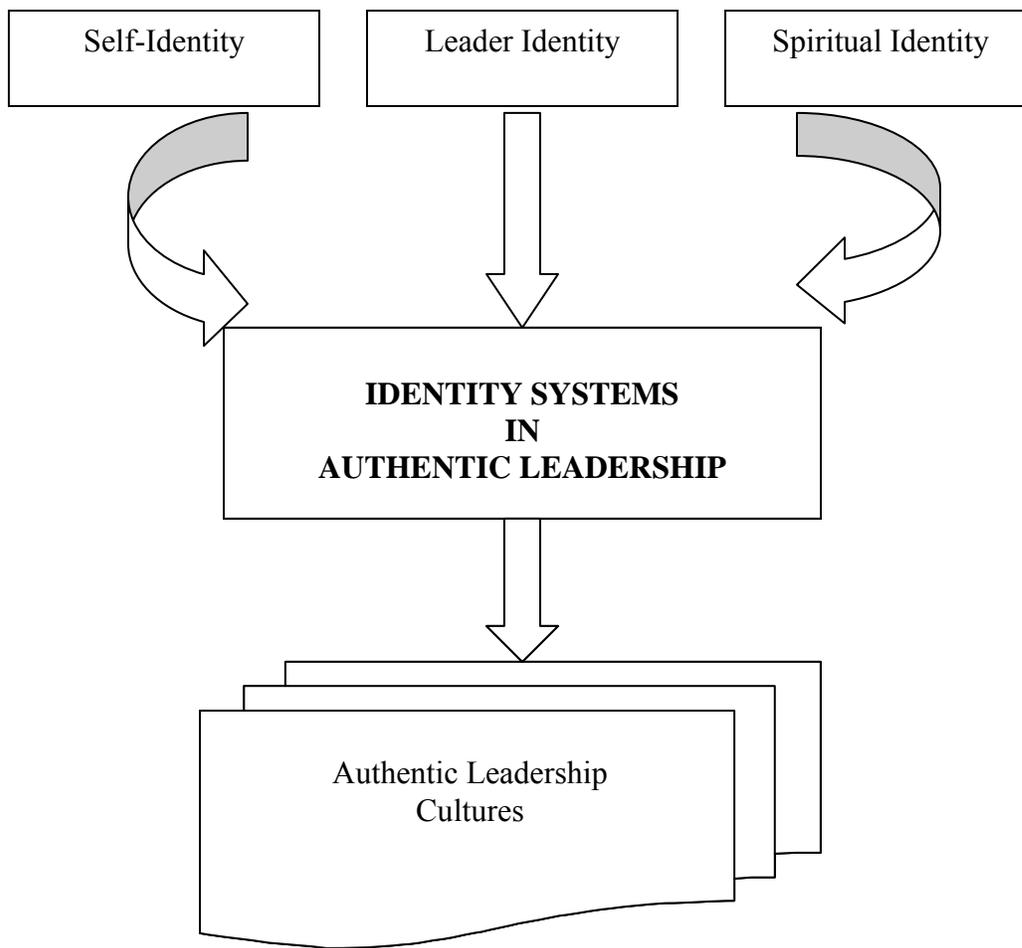


Figure 2. Identity systems in authentic leadership theory.

### The Self-Identity System

Avolio and Gardner (2005) posited that one of the key distinguishing characteristics of authentic leaders is that they are anchored by their own deep sense of self. The self or self-concept can be viewed as the knowledge a person has about him or her self. The self, as a knowledge structure, helps people organize and give meaning to their behavior (Kihlstrom, Beer, & Klein, 2003). Moreover, it is presupposed here that the self is context dependent and variable. Thus, a number of authors (e.g., Markus & Wurf, 1987; Showers & Zeigler Hill, 2003) have asserted that a person's overall self is typically represented as a set of categories, each of which represents a distinct self or identity. For the purposes of this discussion, the terms self and self-concept are used synonymously. Self and identity, as used in the psychological literature, are reflexive concepts, meaning that they refer to the person's image or view of himself or herself (D. Hall, 2004). For the sake of parsimony, like other authors (e.g., D. van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003a), I use the terms self, self-concept, identity, and personal identification (Avolio et al., 2004) interchangeably and employ the term self-identity when referring to these constructs. Moreover, I presuppose that self-identity subsumes a number of substrata or subidentities of

which self-concept is one. In other words, self-identity is multidimensional. While it is beyond the scope of this paper, subidentities relevant to the development of authentic leadership may include self-esteem, self-knowledge, self-efficacy, self-confidence, and self-consistency. For example, one aspect of the self that has received little attention is self-consistency or self-concordance. Buono and Judge (2003) reported that self-concordance mediates the relationship between transformational leadership and leadership effectiveness in a survey of nine organizations and a laboratory experiment. Obviously, we need to learn more about the role of self-consistency in authentic leadership and what specific aspects of authentic leadership moderated by self-consistency affect leadership effectiveness.

Schlenker (1985) defined identity as “a theory (schema) of an individual that describes, interrelates, and explains his or her relevant features, characteristics, and experiences” (p. 68). Self-identification is the process of “fixing and expressing one’s own identity, privately through reflection about oneself and publicly through self-disclosures, self-presentations, and other activities that serve to project one’s identity to audiences” (Schlenker, p. 66). Similarly, Baumeister (1986) defined a person’s identity as a way of seeing self, a personal construction or interpretation of the self. In addition, Markus and Nurius (1986) posited that we have an array of possible selves such as an ideal self (how we would like to be), an ought self (how we think we should be), and the actual self. These possible selves are future-oriented schemata of what we think we could potentially become.

Consequently, many writers have agreed with Kegan (1982) who asserted that identity is a multifaceted and complex construct which relates to the way an individual perceives himself or herself in relation to others. Individual identity images that are particularly valued by leaders in general (Gardner & Avolio, 1998) and authentic leaders in particular include being perceived as trustworthy, credible, and morally worthy. By definition, authentic leaders are perceived as being more true to themselves and display high levels of moral integrity (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). However, as Sparrowe (2005) pointed out, claiming that a particular form of leadership is intrinsically ethical or moral is difficult to falsify empirically but also extremely difficult to argue logically.

### *Self-Awareness*

A related concept is self-awareness, a construct that appears in most conceptualizations of authentic leadership assuming that authenticity and authentic leadership require heightened levels of self-awareness. Avolio and Gardner (2005) identified four elements of self-awareness that they believe are specifically relevant to the development of authentic leadership: values, cognitions regarding identity, emotions, and motives/goals (Gardner et al., 2005). Though a person may not be fully conscious of all the components of his or her identity, self-awareness refers to the extent to which people are aware of various aspects of their identities and the extent to which their self-perceptions are internally integrated and congruent with the ways others perceive them. Thus, the identity is a description of what the sense of self is; whereas self-awareness contains an evaluative component, referring to quality and accuracy (i.e., agreement with others) of those self-perceptions. Self-awareness, then, is a measure of the person’s ability to be truly conscious of the components of the self and to observe it accurately and objectively. According to Silvia and Duval (2001), self-awareness occurs when individuals are cognizant of their own existence and what constitutes that existence within the context within which they operate over time.

The issue of awareness of the self is made explicit in the theory of identity development proposed by Kegan (1982). In Kegan's model, growth of identity involves the person's ability to see the self with some objectivity, take different perspectives of one's self and observe it as from a distance. This is in contrast to the less developed state, where the self is more embedded (i.e., the subject), where the person is the self and is not able to observe and reflect on it. In Kegan's view, development occurs not so much in an age driven manner as from the person's encountering new situations that contain increasingly greater complexity. From Kegan's perspective, the self evolves in a process of increasing maturation and ability to comprehend the complexities of the environment. As a person increases his or her capacity to deal with this complexity, identity grows in its capacity to take in complexity and to integrate it in a way that permits committed action. Influenced by Piaget, the Kegan model proposes a series of identity levels, as the person moves from being very dependent and self-focused to being both autonomous and interdependent and able to comprehend a very complex system of relationships in which he or she operates.

Other theorists (e.g., D. Hall, 2004) have argued that the key to understanding the growth of self-awareness are key experiences (McCall, 1998), critical events that may alter a person's identity or trigger personal exploration which later lead to changes in self-awareness. From development and career literature, for example, we know that there are certain predictable changes in identity that occur as the individual makes certain status or role changes. Levinson (1986, 1997), for example, sees the life course as a series of periods called stages which build the structure of the self separated by structure-changing periods (transitions).

Key events that have been discussed in the context of authentic leadership development have been described as trigger experiences (Gardner et al., 2005). Events that may trigger the development of self-identity or changes in self-identity; redefine the role and salience of specific subidentities; and promote the development of authentic leadership may be sensational or subtle, positive or negative, and located in the personal history of the leader or prompted contemporaneously. Whatever their specific form and timing, trigger events serve as positive forces in developing leader self-awareness and stimulate positive growth and development (Avolio, 2005; Gardner et al., 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

Both negative and positive moments and events can trigger a deep change in an individual's self-identity, bringing into clearer focus alternative possible selves that eventually may replace the individual's actual self (Lord & Brown, 2004). Although trigger events have been traditionally viewed as negative experiences involving crises and negative stressors (e.g., loss of a loved one, health or financial problems), positive events (promotions, significant relationships, mentoring) can likewise trigger leadership development. Both positive and negative events shape the leader's development to the extent that they are reflected upon and interpreted in terms of the self (Gardner et al., 2005). For example, the power of adversity or what Bennis and Thomas (2002a, 2002b) referred to as the leader's crucible in leadership development has been widely established, both anecdotally and in case studies. Yet, crucibles do not need to be horrendous ordeals since leaders have been able to create meaning out of the crucible experiences and have found them a source of strength. Bennis and Thomas (2002a) defined a crucible of leadership as "a transformative experience through which an individual comes to a new or altered sense of identity" (p. 6). Similarly, a leader's response to a calling can be traumatic or it may lead to an experience of the transcendent and, in doing so, provides meaning and purpose in life (Fry, 2003).

The remaining constructs in the self-identity systems (self-knowledge, self-efficacy, self-congruence, and self-liking) have been sufficiently discussed in the literature and, for the sake of parsimony, will not be reviewed here.

### *Self-Identity Versus Social Identity*

Finally, it is important to differentiate between self-identity and social identity. Banaji and Prentice (1994) posited that personal identities involve self-categorization based upon one's unique characteristics, including traits and attributes, which specify how one differs from others. In contrast, social identities are based on the extent to which one sees oneself as being a member of certain social groups, as well as one's assessment of the emotional and value significance of this membership (M. Hogg, 2001). When the self is defined in collective terms; collective interest is experienced as self-interest, meaning individuals are intrinsically motivated to contribute to the collective good (D. van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, & van Gijk, 2000). In this research, however, the focus is on self-identity as it represents a fundamental building block in the development of authentic leadership because empirical evidence for the relationship between leadership to relational self-construal (personal identification or self-identity) is much scarcer compared to evidence for the relationship between social identification and leadership effectiveness (B. van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). D. Van Knippenberg and Hogg (2003a) and M. Hogg (2001) suggested that elements of charismatic and transformational leadership may be primarily associated with personal identification, whereas other elements such as one's identity as an organizational or community member are primarily associated with social identification with these collectivities. However, this position remains to be tested.

There is a substantial body of evidence linking self-identity to leader effectiveness in charismatic and transformational leadership (e.g., De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002). As B. van Knippenberg et al. (2004) noted, core to the self and identity approach to leadership effectiveness is an understanding that the way we perceive ourselves; our self-concept or identity; strongly informs our feelings, beliefs, attitudes, goals, and behavior (Leary & Tangney, 2003). Taken together, research examining the self and collective identity has suggested that leaders construe the self in personal, relational, and collective terms. The salience of these different self-construals varies across situations, relationships, time, and context (Aron, 2003; Brewer, 2003; M. Hogg, 2003).

In sum, the self-identity system of the proposed model assumes that a strong sense of identity is a prerequisite for the development of authentic leadership. If leaders are not clear on their needs, values, motivations, abilities, and other important elements of self-definition; it becomes very difficult for them to know how to develop as a person and as a leader (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005). The self-identity system consists of both cognitive (i.e., self-efficacy) and affective (i.e., self-liking) components. In addition, the system encompasses both multiple self-identities (i.e., self as leader, self as parent) as well as a subset of subidentities such as self-knowledge or self-congruence which may be salient at different times and in different contexts (see Figure 3).

From the research reviewed in this section, the following propositions regarding the self-identity system in authentic leadership are postulated:

- Proposition 1a:* Authentic leaders have a greater sense of self-awareness than inauthentic leaders.
- Proposition 1b:* A leader's healthy and authentic self-identity is one in which the component subidentities are integrated.
- Proposition 1c:* Authentic leaders have a more differentiated self-identity than less authentic leaders.

### **The Leader Identity System**

Leader development is the creation of new aspects of the self that specifically relate to the leader role. I use the construct of leader identity as the bridge between personal and collective identity since it combines unique, individual characteristics of self-identity along with group-oriented aspects of collective identity. This system acknowledges that the individual self coexists with both the relational self (those aspects of the self-concept that are shared with partners and define the person's role or position within significant relationships) and the collective self (those aspects of the self-concept that differentiate in-group members from relevant outgroups) (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). At the individual level, leader identity is derived from the leader's self-identity and the human capital he or she brings to the leadership role. At the collective level, leader identity develops as a function of shared experiences from which shared identities of leaders and followers emerge. Authentic leaders have a highly developed sense of how their own roles as leaders and carry a responsibility to act morally and in the best interest of others (May et al., 2003). As a construct, leader identity resonates with Sparrowe's (2005) comment that "the emphasis on authenticity as 'to thine own self be true' should be complemented by authenticity disclosed in regard one holds for others" (p. 135).

The leader identity system consists of three subidentities: (a) leadership self-efficacy, (b) leader reputation, and (c) leader prototypicality. The leader identity system component of the model is consistent with recent conceptualizations of identity that acknowledge multiple aspects of self-construals and, as a construct, illustrate the dual individualist/collective nature of the roles of a leader.

#### *Leadership Self-Efficacy*

Self-efficacy plays an important role in leadership research. By extension, leadership self-efficacy represents a leader's self-perceived capabilities for the general leadership tasks of directing setting, gaining follower commitment, and overcoming obstacles. More specifically, it refers to the leader's judgment that he or she can successfully exert leadership by setting the direction for the work group, build relationships with followers in order to gain commitment to change goals, and work with followers to overcome obstacles to change (Paglis & Green, 2002). McCormick (2001) defined leadership self-efficacy as an individual's perceived capability to perform the cognitive and behavioral functions necessary to regulate group process in relation to group achievement. He treated leadership self-efficacy as a focal construct that affects the goals leaders select, their motivation, the development of functional leadership strategies, and the skillful execution of these strategies.

### *Leader Reputation*

Leader reputation is the second subidentity in this system. Ferris, Blass, Douglas, Kolodinsky, and Treadway (2003) defined reputation as “a perceptual identity reflective of the complex combination of salient personal characteristics and accomplishments, demonstrated behavior, and intended images presented over some period of time as observed directly and/or reported from secondary sources” (p. 215). Building on this definition, A. Hall, Blass, Ferris, and Massengale (2004) suggested that leader reputation is a perceptual identity of a leader as held by others that serves to reduce the uncertainty regarding the expected future behavior of that leader. This definition is consistent with the dual nature of the constructs making up this identity system. Like leadership self-efficacy, leader reputation has an individual and a collective component. On one hand, leader reputation is based on the leader’s perceptions of himself or herself as a reputable individual; on the other hand, leader reputation is determined by external constituencies. Hence, leader reputation may be conceptualized as both an individual and group construct. Furthermore, according to the authors, just as leaders may embrace several self-identities, they also might have multiple reputations, each signaling the likelihood of behavior specific to a given context.

A. Hall et al. (2004) argued that the reputation a leader achieves can serve as a proxy for role episodes, such that a leader’s reputation (like a history of interaction) provides information regarding the leader’s abilities and values. Ferris et al. (2003) found that increased reputation is associated with greater trust which is associated with autonomy, concepts that play a role in authentic leadership. Whitmeyer (2000) reported that a leader’s reputation can significantly influence the development of stakeholder trust. The reputation of leaders influence the trust and confidence we place in them and ultimately our assessment of leadership performance and effectiveness.

Authentic leaders build their reputation on trustworthiness, high moral standards, and the positive psychological capacities and resources they bring to the leadership role and model for followers’ authenticity through self-awareness and relational transparency. They foster positive affective states which then spread and reverberate through social contagion processes to positively foster emotional and cognitive development of other organizational members as well as organizational learning and transformation (Avolio & Gardner, 2005). A favorable leader reputation is predicted to facilitate the development of authentic leadership.

### *Leader Prototypicality*

Finally, leader prototypicality comprises the third subidentity in the identity system. Reichers, Haslam, and Hopkins (2005) argued that those in a position to direct the group are individuals who are seen to be most prototypical of the group position in a given context. There is considerable evidence suggesting that leadership is contingent upon leaders being perceived as being prototypical of a social identity that they share with followers (Duck & Fielding, 2003; Turner, 1991; D. van Knippenberg & Hogg, 2003b). As a result, the most prototypical member assumes the mantle of leadership. There is a substantial body of evidence linking self-identity to leader effectiveness in charismatic and transformational leadership (e.g., De Cremer & van Knippenberg, 2002). As B. van Knippenberg et al. (2004) noted, core to the self and identity approach to leadership effectiveness is an understanding that the way we perceive ourselves (our self-concept or identity) strongly informs our feelings, beliefs, attitudes, goals, and behavior

(Leary & Tangney, 2003). Taken together, research examining self and collective identity has suggested that leaders construe the self in personal, relational, and collective terms. The salience of these different self-construals varies across situations, relationships, time, and context (Aron, 2003; Brewer, 2003; M. Hogg, 2003).

The social identity theory of leadership (M. Hogg, 2001; M. Hogg & van Knippenberg, 2003) proposes that because group members to a greater or lesser extent treat the group, and thus the group prototype, as a source of information about social reality; they are more open to the influence of group prototypical leaders. Moreover, they are more likely to trust group prototypical leaders as representatives of shared identity who have the group's best interests at heart. Therefore, group members are more likely to endorse more prototypical leaders since they tend to be perceived as attractive and effective. The proposed greater effectiveness of prototypical compared to nonprototypical leaders is supported by a variety of studies in the laboratory as well as in the field (e.g., Fielding & Hogg, 1997; B. van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005; D. van Knippenberg et al., 2000).

The most basic prediction from this theory is that as group salience increases, perceived leadership effectiveness becomes more determined by leader prototypicality and less determined by the possession of general leadership qualities since social identity theory suggests that ability to lead depends on the capacity to represent a group consensus. Reichers and Hopkins (2001) stated that leadership activity and leadership effectiveness largely revolves around the leader's ability to create identity definitions and engage people in the process of turning those definitions into practical realities. Without such an identity, there is nothing to bind leaders and followers together. The identity definitions a leader generates are determined by his or her leader identity and by context.

Leaders are actively crafting, defining, and redefining identities beginning with self-identities and leader identities associated with the leadership role. The self-identity and leader identity systems are interdependent. According to Reichers et al. (2005), leadership is a matter of what it means to be *us* in a given context. Leaders actively define the category themselves and engage in behaviors to enhance their prototypicality, while followers actively weigh and interpret the definitions offered to them. Both leaders and followers are active interpreters of the social world. Consequently, it seems reasonable to argue that leader prototypicality develops and stems from the symbiosis of self-identity and leader identity. The merger of these two identity systems allows leaders to integrate personological characteristics (self-esteem, self-efficacy) with the demands associated with the leadership role such as facilitating the integration of individual and group identities.

*Proposition 2a:* Authentic leaders have a stronger sense of leadership self-efficacy than inauthentic leaders.

*Proposition 2b:* Authentic leaders have stronger and more favorable reputations than inauthentic leaders.

*Proposition 2c:* Authentic leaders are more likely to assume the role of prototypical member than inauthentic leaders.

### **The Spiritual Identity System**

One of the few constants is the belief for most people in the omnipresence and omniscience of a higher being/God or superordinate spirit. Individuals develop a sense of

spiritual self in relation to a higher power or God and by recognizing the sacred and divine within them.

James (1902) provided an early yet enduring conceptualization of identity development. He posited that the study of an individual's identity involves considering two aspects of the self: the *I* (self-as-subject) and the *me* (self-as-object). An individual's *I* functions consciously and objectively to create and connect the various *me* views and maintain a sense of continuity of self across time. The types of *me* created by the *I* include the material me (family, home, belongings), the social me (how one is seen and responded to by others), and the spiritual me which describes a person's inner life. James (1910/1968) referred to this spiritual me as "the true, the intimate, the ultimate, the permanent me which I seek" (p. 43). It is the highest level of self-organization, more advanced than the material me and the social me. The distinction between the *I* and the *me* has proved amazingly viable and appears as a recurrent theme in most treatments of the self (Harter, 1999; Lewis, 1991).

Since the time that James proposed his early model of the self, identity theorists from different schools of thought (psychodynamic, cognitive, narrative, and systems theory) have extended and modified his work. But by and large, they have abandoned the emphasis on spiritual self-conceptualization. For James (1902), the spiritual self manifests in spiritual experiences or what the author refers to as mystical experiences. These spiritual experiences become internalized and integrated with the person's self-identity until people see themselves as spiritual beings. Themes of spirituality are woven through many aspects of their lives because people recognize spiritual experiences across many settings.

The role of spirituality in leadership and the workplace has generated quite a bit of attention in both the popular press and the research literature, reflected in the recent proliferation of articles and books (e.g., Ashmos & Duchon, 2000; Gunther, 2001; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Thompson, 2000) that speak to the growing interest in spirituality in the corporate world. In addition, research has shown that the core benefits of organizational transformation are not merely economic. Instead, the nonmaterial, spiritual aspects of transformation may be the most profound for individuals, organizations, and society (Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2003; Neal, Lichtenstein, & Banner, 1999). For many practitioners, on the other hand, the surge in literature on spirituality raises the red flag that this may be the next management fad especially when attempts to integrate spirituality into existing management practices are simply seen as means through which people can be exploited (Elmes & Smith, 2001). Promoting spirituality in organizations and institutionalizing spiritual practices such as meditation or prayer is raising suspicions about the spirituality in the workplace movement since employees' spiritual yearnings and needs can be used as a way to manipulate and exploit workers to fulfill selfish or materialistic objectives of organizations or management (Cavanagh & Bandusch, 2002).

### *Development of Spiritual Identity*

Spiritual development and the development of an individual's spiritual identity or spiritual self are poorly understood with few models to guide researchers in the rapidly growing fields of workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership. Part of the lack of theories of spiritual development and spiritual identity stems from the lack of consensus associated with definitions of spirituality. Similarly, there are few cohesive theories of spiritual formation, growth, and development which come from religious or theological traditions, psychological perspectives, or those that claim to be neither faith nor discipline based. Regardless of underlying philosophical

foundations, most conceptions of spirituality embody notions of a path, a journey, a process, and a developmental sequence; they also include references to inner life, meaning and purpose, connectedness, and transcendence.

Some theories (e.g., Fowler, 1981; Helminiak, 1987) assume that the development of spirituality proceeds similarly to other areas of human development such as cognitive or moral development. If this is indeed the case, then spiritual development would stand with the other psychologically defined conceptions of human development such as Piaget's cognitive development, Kohlberg's moral development, and Loevinger's ego development theories; especially when spiritual development is treated as human development as in the models proposed by Fowler and Helminiak. Nevertheless theorists (e.g., Fowler; Helminiak; Kegan, 1982) who assume continuity in spiritual development do make some allowances for periodic discontinuities while still seeing the process as largely continuous. Opponents (e.g., Delbecq, 1999, 2000; Mitroff & Denton, 1999) of spiritual development as a continuous process have argued that discontinuities have a significant influence that negates any idea of a linear development. For example, spiritual markers, epiphanies, or other discontinuous awakening experiences can profoundly redirect a person's spiritual development as conversion experiences have shown. For example, Neal et al. (1999) cited CEOs and managers who provided examples of intense moments of suffering or epiphanies as transforming experiences and pivotal aspects that profoundly influenced their spiritual development.

A somewhat different approach to spiritual identity development has been pursued by narrative theorists who rely on stories as their sources of data. Narrative stories of identity development (McAdams, 1993, 1996) integrate psychodynamic, cognitive, and systems theories into a more complete conceptualization of the self. Narrative theorists have proposed that an individual's Jamesian *I* creates meaningful or coherent life stories or self-stories. Sparrowe (2005), for example, argued that authenticity is not achieved by leaders' and followers' self-awareness of their inner values or purpose; rather, it emerges from the narrative process in which others play a constitutive role in the self. The author suggests that through self-stories; individuals develop a narrative identity which represents the portrayal of the whys of one's life, if not by means of a causal explanation then through an accounting of how those events are related.

The self-stories that are created include various self-symbol, self-schemas, and self-other scripts. From the perspective of narrative theory, individuals achieve a healthy identity as they develop a coherent life story that integrates their various self-stories into a meaningful whole (McAdams, 1993, 1996). A person's sense of a storied spiritual self may develop through self-awareness, relationships, and interactions at work or through membership in spiritual communities. Self-stories can be analyzed for themes of spiritual development and spiritual identity as many of them describe the spiritual path taken or spiritual values to which the individual subscribes. The spiritual architecture of this identity system is built on three pillars or subidentities: self-disclosure, self-transcendence, and self-sacrifice.

### *Self-Disclosure*

Self-disclosure refers to the process of revealing one's inner self to others. Self-disclosure aids in self-acceptance because revealing more of oneself allows more opportunities for others to accept an individual. As acceptance by others increases, so does self-esteem because self-esteem is based heavily on how we are perceived by others. Self-disclosure also means opening oneself

to a higher power, admitting to spiritual needs and struggles. Self-disclosure requires that individuals expose their vulnerabilities, opening themselves up to pain and suffering. Bunker (1997) has argued that expressing vulnerability becomes an important leadership component when it comes to connecting with others at a basic level of humanness. For example, discussions of trust in organizational authorities typically emphasize the vulnerability of individuals in follower roles and their dependence on those above them in the organizational hierarchy (Kramer, 1996). Shamir and Lapidot (2003), in a multimethod study which combined quantitative and qualitative elements, reported that the vulnerability of senior leaders to team leaders stemmed from the fact that their leadership, like that of all leaders, depended on the trust of their followers (Hollander, 1992). The leaders, Israeli army commanders in a very hierarchical organization, depended on followers no less than their followers depended on them. The authors concluded that the leaders' vulnerability was due to the essential relationship between subordinates' trust and superiors' ability to lead.

### *Self-Transcendence*

According to Fairholm (1998), this spiritual dimension underscores not only virtuous behaviors but also an attitude of openness to the transcendent meaning of human existence. The author proposed a model of leadership that results in five levels ranging from managerial control to spiritual holism. Self-transcendence; as defined by Cloninger, Svrakic, and Pryzbeck (1994); includes components such as creative self-forgetfulness, transpersonal identification, and spiritual acceptance. Carey (1992) argued that authentic leadership implies self-transcendence that comes only with genuine self-enlightenment and is the product of reflection and introspection. Strack, Fottler, Wheatley, and Sodomka (2002) interviewed 20 transformational leaders who defined spirituality as God or some other transcendent power, the source of personal values and meaning, an awareness of one's inner self, and a way of integrating all aspects of oneself into a whole. Piedmont (1999) referred to spiritual transcendence as the capacity of individuals to stand outside their immediate sense of time and place and develop a more holistic and interconnected perspective, recognizing a synchronicity to life and developing a sense of commitment to others. These different definitions imply that transcendent individuals recognize the limitedness of their human existence which is anchored in a specific time and place and consider encompassing visions of life that are more holistic and interconnected.

### *Self-Sacrifice*

Historically, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, and Martin Luther King demonstrated self-sacrificial leadership. Contemporaneously, Suu Kyi of Burma, prodemocracy leader and Nobel Prize winner, spent 6 years under house arrest fighting for the freedom of her country. Anne Mulcahy, CEO of Xerox, sacrificed her personal life to take charge of a corporate turnaround. Other business leaders as well as political, grassroots, and religious leaders; especially during economic downturns and crises such as 9/11; have made selfless contributions that have fueled the interest in the role of sacrifice in leadership (Halverson, Holladay, Kazama, & Quiñones, 2004). Leadership often entails suffering since the tasks involved require physical, mental, psychological, and emotional labor which takes a toll on even the most resilient leader since they are not immune to the pain, internal conflicts, and stressors that arise from the need to wear protective masks.

Self-sacrificial leadership goes beyond an individual's motivation to help others or selflessness. It has been defined as

the total/partial abandonment, and or permanent/temporary postponement of personal interests, privileges, and welfare in the: (1) the division of labor (by volunteering for more risky and arduous tasks); (2) distribution of rewards which involves giving up one's fair and legitimate share of organizational rewards); and/or (3) voluntarily refraining from using position power and privileges. (Choi & Mai-Dalton, 1998, p. 399)

If the leader is perceived to be self-sacrificing, perceptions of effectiveness and charisma are positively influenced (Yorges, Weiss, & Strickland, 1999). Self-sacrificial leadership promotes the image of leaders as being willing to incur personal costs to serve the mission of the group and organization, especially when exposed to external threats or crises. Self-sacrificing leaders deny themselves personal privileges and share pains and hardships with their followers. Many political and grassroots leaders, for instance, have given up their freedom by spending time in prison to demonstrate the severity of their causes (House & Shamir, 1993).

Several authors (i.e., Avolio & Locke, 2002; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Burns, 1978) have suggested that leaders willingly sacrifice for the collective good of their work group, organization, or society at large. For example, B. van Knippenberg and van Knippenberg (2005) argued that being self-sacrificial is probably one of the most direct ways for a leader to state that he or she considers the group's welfare to be important and explicitly shows the leader's commitment to the collective. Moreover, the authors suggested that a leader's self-sacrificing behavior will create pressure on followers to do the same, thereby prescribing what kinds of behavior are expected in light of the group's common cause.

Finally, the model presented here postulates that spiritual development and spiritual identity are central to authentic leadership development. Parameshwar (2005), in a phenomenological study, examined significant life events from the autobiographies of 10 internationally renowned human rights leaders. The author showed how the spiritual generativity of ego-transcendental processes metamorphosed from challenges to opportunities for these leaders as they responded exceptionally to life-defining and life-altering circumstances. Leaders included Viktor Frankl, Paulo Friere, Mahatma Gandhi, Helen Keller, and Rigoberta Menchu; leaders known as both authentic and spiritual leaders. In responding to challenging circumstances, the leaders uncovered what they perceived as ways in which the human spirit is held hostage within the thick nexuses among institutional structures. In these situations, the leaders' actions also affirmed a higher purpose/moral principle/inner God and denied societal norms/authority structures/laws that get in the way. Studying the ego-transcendental, exceptional responses of leaders from different continents, time periods, religions, and educational and professional backgrounds is timely because it teaches us how spiritual leadership can enable us to engage with the vexing challenges we face.

Based on the foregoing discussion, authentic leadership development is the process by which the self-identity and leader identity systems converge and become unified in the spiritual identity system which directs leaders' and followers' moral compass, motivation, and emotions toward optimization of performance and the establishment of an organizational climate that nurtures the human spirit at work and positive, strength-based organizational cultures. In sum, spiritually authentic leaders draw from the selfless ground of the human experience; they recognize the emotional labor involved in the tasks and responsibilities of leadership as well as the suffering and sacrifice that are integral components of authentic leadership. The question of whether self-sacrificing leadership leads to greater authenticity of leaders and followers or

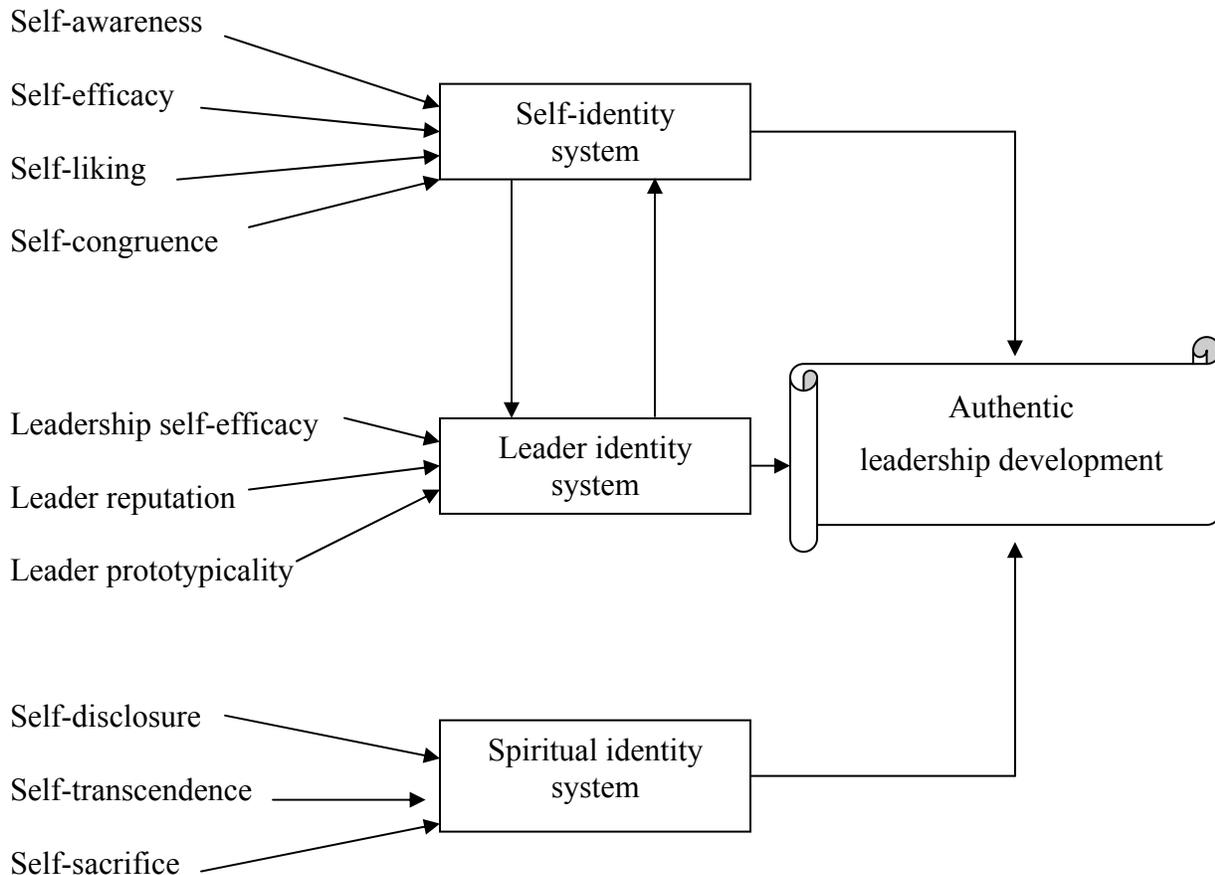
enhances follower performance is an empirical issue that has not been addressed. Hence, in the absence of empirical data, the assumption that leader self-sacrifice leads to leader effectiveness of positive follower outcomes is tenuous at best (Klenke, 2005).

*Proposition 3a:* Authentic leaders exhibit greater willingness and greater degrees of self-disclosure than inauthentic leaders.

*Proposition 3b:* Authentic leaders use ego or self-transcendental processes as exceptional responses to challenging circumstances (Parameshwar, 2005).

*Proposition 3c:* Authentic leaders are more likely to engage in self-sacrificing behaviors than inauthentic leaders.

Figure 3 presents the full version of the model which includes several subidentities in each of the three proposed identity systems.



*Figure 3.* Toward an identity based model of authentic leadership.

## Conclusions

As a new construct, authentic leadership is still in the nascent stages of development; therefore, the emergence of several perspectives is to be expected. This research attempts to make several contributions to the ongoing theory-building work (e.g., Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2005; Ilies et al., 2005; Klenke, 2005). First, a model of authentic leadership is offered that relies on the single explanatory construct of identity which operates at different levels of analysis: individually, identity is captured by the self-identity system and its component elements; collectively, as the leader identity system and its correlated subidentities; and holistically, as the spiritual identity subsystem also comprised of several constituent components. As such, this research challenges the existing approaches which have drawn from positive psychology constructs such as hope, resilience, and optimism and flow to frame authentic leadership and followership development by focusing and defining the authentic leadership construct from an identity framework.

The model of authentic leadership introduced in this article is a triumvirate that includes self-identity, leader-identity, and spiritual identity systems. The self-identity system encompasses the intrapersonal self defined by internal dispositions, abilities, and dynamics. The leader identity system reflects the interpersonal self as defined by the leader's relationships with others. It serves as the bridge between the individual and the collective self or social identity and is associated with group membership and group process (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Both the self- and the leader identity systems are embedded in the spiritual identity system. The model assumes that authentic leaders are motivated to sustain multiple identities in harmony and congruent with one another. Brewer (2003) posited that balance or the optimal self can be achieved by adjusting individual self-construals to be more consistent with the group prototype by developing a stable leader identity system or by shifting social identification to a group that is more congruent with the self-identity system. Finally, the spiritual identity system functions as a superordinate configuration of behaviors based on transcendent behaviors and values.

Despite notable differences in construct definitions and models of authentic leadership presented here, Avolio and Gardner (2005) argued that the commonalities shared by the models, even at the early stage of development of this emergent construct and field of inquiry, suggest that some agreement on core elements of authentic leadership and followership may be surfacing. For example, self-awareness is a core facet in many models of authentic leadership; however, it is a messy variable to operationalize. The measurement challenges and issues regarding the self-awareness and identity constructs are significant. These constructs are inherently clinical concepts which typically have been studied with qualitative, clinical methods (D. Hall, 2004) which are underrepresented in leadership research. Additionally, we need to develop more and better quantitative approaches to the study of identity as self-awareness and the closely related concept of identity are difficult to define and even harder to measure.

As with all new fields of inquiry, much work needs to be done particularly with regards to (a) achieving greater clarity of construct definitions, (b) addressing measurement issues, and (c) avoiding construct redundancy. With respect to construct clarity, Cooper et al. (2005) pointed out the need to identify key dimensions of authentic leadership and then create a theoretically based definition. They argued that the current definition of authentic leaders as

those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspective, knowledge and strengths;

aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character. (as cited in Avolio et al., 2004, p. 805) is very broad, contains many diverse elements from diverse domains (traits, states, behaviors, contexts) that pose serious measurement challenges. I would add to the caveats voiced by these authors that the above definition is not a definition of authentic leadership as a process but a definition of authentic leaders as persons. We have evidenced this same problem of confusing leaders as persons with leadership as a process through the history of the field.

At the present time, the study of authentic leadership is hampered by both lack of construct clarity and the absence of a reliable and valid instrument of authentic leadership. Achieving construct clarity involves identifying the relevant construct dimensions, specifying the interrelationships among construct dimensions, and identifying the boundaries within which the constructs elements are interrelated in a lawful manner (Dubin, 1978). The social sciences have a strange inability to recognize that a theoretical model must have boundaries even if the boundaries are overlapping. Finally, the issue of construct redundancy involves the need to avoid overlap between construct dimension of authentic leadership and other values-based theories such as transformational, servant, and other types of inspirational leadership. One of the important research challenges ahead is establishing the discriminant validity of the authentic leadership construct. If discriminant validity cannot be established, then the question raised by Cooper et al. (2005) regarding the need and necessity of creating other leadership constructs becomes highly relevant. If the authentic leadership construct is not unique (i.e., fails to demonstrate discriminant validity), time and effort may be more effectively spent using existing theories to address questions generated by authentic leadership.

### *Directions for Future Research*

Since the study of authentic leadership is in the nascent stages of development; many avenues to refine the construct and move from the conceptual phase to an empirical, theory building, and testing phase await the leadership researcher. As noted earlier, development and validation of a measure of authentic leadership that allows researchers to distinguish the construct from similar constructs empirically are needed (Cooper et al., 2005). In addition, studies are needed that relate authentic leadership and followership development to other areas of human development such as cognitive or moral development longitudinally. Also needed are qualitative studies such as retrospective cases of authentic leaders employing narrative analysis, which may be particularly useful in identifying the construct dimensions of authentic leadership. In addition, Eisenhardt (1989) made a persuasive case for building theory from case study research involving either single or multiple cases. Continued development of theory is a central activity when building a new construct.

Another avenue for future research involves the use of critical incidents of authentic and inauthentic leader behaviors to produce typologies of authentic leader behaviors that may be instrumental in defining the nomological network of the construct domain more precisely. Yet another promising area of research would look into the role of trigger events in the lives of authentic leaders such as Mother Teresa and Bill George or the crucibles of authentic leadership which Bennis and Thomas (2002a) defined as “a transformative experience through which an individual comes to a new or an altered sense of identity” (p. 6). Qualitative interviewing lends itself to the elicitation of significant life stories that have served as trigger events and can be followed by an examination of the transformative effects of leveraging self-disclosure, self-

transcendence, and self-sacrifice (Parameshwar, 2005) that are hypothesized here to be dimensions of the spiritual identity system of the authentic leader.

Although much work remains to be done, the authentic leadership construct is important and promising since it focuses scholars' attention on the inner dynamics and leadership as *being* as opposed to leadership as *doing* or *having*. It assumes that the inner life of leaders and followers composed of different identities guides and motivates their behaviors which, according to Shamir (1991), are often guided by imagined possibilities and "faith" (p. 409). Spiritual identity is posited to be at the core of authentic leadership, presupposing that leader and followers exhibit positive selves and leader identities that are shared. Shared identities at multiple levels of analysis, in turn, enhance individual and organizational effectiveness and performance. Duchon and Plowman (2005) did indeed report a positive relationship between scores on a spirituality measure and work unit performance. Authentic leaders not only enhance performance and motivation; they not only have a highly developed sense of how their roles as leaders carry the responsibility to act morally and in the best interest of others (May et al., 2003); they also enhance and deepen followers' spiritual identity by creating conditions at work that nurture the human spirit.

One promising approach to further construct development and the development and validation of a measure of authentic leadership, its origins, and effects can be found in Cialdini's (2001) full-cycle psychology construct which describes a research program as a process of "continual interplay between (a) field observation of interesting phenomena, (b) theorizing about the causes of these phenomena, and (c) experimental tests of the theorizing" (p. 32). As Chatman and Flynn (2005) noted, by combining observational and experimental methods in a continual recursive pattern, robust findings that offer causality, relevance, and generalizability may emerge.

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### About the Author

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