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The Authenticity Effect in 60s Musicians and Novel Characters

I'm no expert on "authenticity"—to claim otherwise would be inauthentic in itself . . . or would it? Regardless, there's no denying that authenticity is a confusing concept and that different definitions apply to different circumstances. When discussing the "authenticity" of a character in a novel, readers consider whether the character is as "real" as possible or whether she has been "brought to life" (*The Science of Creating Authentic Characters*). When discussing the "authenticity" of a performer, listeners consider a much wider range of definitions spanning from an artist forgoing financial gain or expressing her personal beliefs and values (Funk 45). Although authenticity is traditionally described in terms of musical performances, it was such a big part of 60s culture that it seeped into novelist representations of that age.

In this paper, I argue that James from *The Strawberry Statement* and Ken from *Sixty-Nine* display forms of "authenticity" typically associated with musical performers by coming across as relatable through sexual references and self-deprecating humor (Moore's second person authenticity) as well as paradoxically revealing their artifice during political protests (Weisethaunet & Lindberg's authentic inauthenticity). I will qualify that not everyone will agree that Ken, James, and the musicians presented are entirely "authentic," as personal definitions are subjective. Instead, I propose that these defined modes of authenticity are present and perceived by an audience.

Moore's second person authenticity is evident in musicians such as The Beatles, whose personal lyrics contribute to the audience's perception that they are relatable or "authentic." Moore defines an authentic performance as one that succeeds in "conveying the impression that the *listener's* experience of life is being validated, and that the *music* is telling it like it is for them." In other words, an authentic performer will produce relatable songs that could be "the soundtrack to a listener's life" or songs that "hit close to home." It ultimately doesn't matter whether musicians are actively trying to come off as "authentic," as long as their audience believes their song is relatable.

The Beatles are one such musical group that came across as second person authentic or "relatable" to millions of teenagers and young adults at the time. During their 1964 World Tour, The Beatles performed "I Saw Her Standing There," a song packed with heart-moving lyrics backed by personal experience. The band members sang in front of die-hard fans, security escorts never far from sight, while decked out in dapper black suits—not *quite* relatable. Yet, their lyrics, "Well, we danced through the night, and we held each other tight / And before too long, I fell in love with her," spoke to the universal teenage experience of wanting a fairytale romance. The Beatles' authenticity was also enhanced in the eyes of their fans when McCarthy confided his personal inspiration for the song, a trip to London with his then-girlfriend Celia (Wikipedia). Intentional or not, The Beatles' music effectively generated feelings of second person authenticity in their listeners through personalized lyrics that related to the exhilaration of young love.

Similarly to The Beatles, James from *The Strawberry Statement* and Ken from *Sixty-Nine* successfully evoke second person authenticity, except instead of using moving lyrics and personal inspiration, James and Ken's self-deprecating remarks and sexual references make them

relatable to their readers. Moore's definition of second person authenticity can be applied to a literary lens in almost its entirety, but with a few slight tweaks—an "authentic" novel character succeeds in "conveying the impression that the *reader's* experience of life is being validated, and that the *character* is telling it like it is for them."

In the case of *The Strawberry Statement*, James is often the target of his sarcastic, crude humor. He confides that the best way to read his book "would be to rip it up and throw the scraps all over your house." As for girls, Ken throws in sexualized comments about practically "any girl who walks by," including a "good-looking girl in the subway station." He does, however, talk about his love interest Laura and details an early morning trip with her to a scenic Canadian lake. In *Sixty-Nine*, Ken is also quick to poke fun at himself, admitting that he ran away from home because he "wanted to avoid the long-distance race at school." Furthermore, Ken's experiences with girls are primarily in the form of sexualized comments, in which he vividly describes Kazuko Matsui, "Lady Jane," with her "Bambi eyes, white arms, and the awesome curve of the nape of her neck." By the end of the novel, Ken finally gets to go on a date with Lady Jane, "dressed in his preppy sweater and McGregor coat." 19-year-old James and 17-year-old Ken are "telling it like it is for them," relaying their experiences of desperately trying to get out of gym class and getting a girl to go on a date—who couldn't relate? Just like The Beatles, there are some aspects of James and Ken that aren't relatable (appearing in court for a protest, barricading a high school). However, James and Ken's overall impression of humor and experiences with girls hit close to home, creating that second person authenticity effect in readers.

While musicians and fictional characters succeed in conveying the impression of Moore's second person authenticity or "relatability," they also evoke Weisethaunet & Lindberg's concept of "authentic inauthenticity." Authentic inauthenticity is a quirky, paradoxical concept in itself. It

is possible to be “authentic” or “inauthentic,” but how can both words coexist as a phrase?

Weisethaunet & Lindberg define authentic inauthenticity in terms of “a *musician* that makes no attempt to hide the artifice or constructed nature of a *performance*.” Another way of phrasing this idea is that a musician doesn’t necessarily have to be authentic, but by recognizing her inauthenticity, her audience deems her “authentic.”

Glam rockers are a subset of musicians that are perceived as “authentic” because they embrace the inauthenticity of constructed performances. For instance, during a 1973 BBC broadcast, David Bowie made no attempt to hide that his performance of “Jean Bowie” was staged and planned. Bowie sported a bright orange mullet accompanied with thick platform boots and a zebra-patterned collared shirt. The tilted camera angle captured the massive speakers, guitar amps, and flashing stage lights. To top it off, the production crew added disco ball special effects, rainbow filters, and highlighted the people dancing on stage. Because Bowie revealed his artifice through a flamboyant, theatrical performance, his audience viewed him as “authentic.”

Weisethaunet & Lindberg’s concept of authentic inauthenticity in musical performances can also be applied to literary characters James and Ken, who openly display their artifice during political protests. In a literary context, “authentic inauthenticity” can be redefined as “a *character* that makes no attempt to hide the constructed nature of *their actions*.” In *The Strawberry Statement*, James confesses his less-than-holy intentions for attending political protests. Although he goes to Washington D.C. to march and participates in student demonstrations at Columbia, he’s ultimately there to either “be cool, meet girls, get out of crew practice, or be arrested.” He associates himself with the “rich people” parading in the “Poor People’s Campaign,” and presents himself as phony in comparison to the black students at Hamilton (who make “sacrifices he isn’t willing to make”) and Gandhi and Thoreau (true

revolutionaries who would never “ask for amnesty from the police”). James even reveals that protestors are supposed to come out with a sense of purpose after marching, but he walked away “with two girls’ addresses and a slight tan.” Ken from *Sixty-Nine* is no better than James, admitting that he only barricaded his school because he was “under the impression that Kazuko Matsui was attracted to boys who got involved in barricades and demonstrations.” Adama confirms their motivations aren’t political: “We’re doing it because it’s fun, aren’t we? Ken, if it’s fun, that’s enough.” James and Ken could have acknowledged and then breezed over their political participation; however, they immediately called out their true inclinations—they just wanted to win over girls. It is strikingly evident that James and Ken are compromised activists, but by actively revealing their inauthentic intentions behind protesting, the audience can accept them as honest, “authentic” narrators.

There are common themes of “second person authenticity” and “authentic inauthenticity” across The Beatles, David Bowie, James, and Ken, all figures active during the 60s. Disillusioned by years of war, the 60s generation aligned themselves with what they believed to be “authentic” culture, which explains why aspects of musical authenticity seeped into novelist representations of the era. While the musicians and novel characters presented in this paper may not be authentic all the time, their audiences perceive them as “authentic.” The Beatles’ personal lyrics and Ben and James’ use of crude humor lend themselves to coming across as “second person authentic” or relatable. Whereas, David Bowie’s embrace of the contrived nature of performances and Ben and James’ disclosure of their political motivations lead their audience to see them authentic through “authentic inauthenticity.” Through these modes of authenticity, The Beatles, David Bowie, Ben, and James were able to capture the affection of readers and listeners from the 60s and beyond.

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