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The Counterfeit Self: The Deceptive Costs of Faking It

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Abstract

Although people buy counterfeit products to signal positive traits, we show that wearing counterfeit products makes individuals feel less authentic and increases their likelihood of both behaving dishonestly and judging others as unethical. In four experiments, participants wore purportedly fake or authentically branded sunglasses. Those wearing fake sunglasses cheated more across multiple tasks than did participants wearing authentic sunglasses, both when they believed they had a preference for counterfeits (Experiment 1a) and when they were randomly assigned to wear them (Experiment 1b). Experiment 2 shows that the effects of wearing counterfeit sunglasses extend beyond the self, influencing judgments of other people's unethical behavior. Experiment 3 demonstrates that the feelings of inauthenticity that wearing fake products engenders—what we term the *counterfeit self*—mediate the impact of counterfeits on unethical behavior. Finally, we show that people do not predict the impact of counterfeits on ethicality; thus, the costs of counterfeits are deceptive.

Keywords

authenticity, counterfeits, dishonesty, fake, self-interested behavior

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As is the case with other consumption decisions—the products people buy to adorn themselves or decorate their homes and offices (Belk, 1988; Gosling, Ko, Mannarelli, & Morris, 2002)—people buy counterfeit products to signal positive traits, to themselves and others (Bodner & Prelec, 2002; Wilcox, Kim, & Sen, 2009). Counterfeits, however, have an additional property, in that they signal an aspiration to be something one is not—for example, to feel wealthier than one's income would warrant. We contend that counterfeit products do cause people to be something they are not, but in ways they do not expect: Counterfeit products cause people to be not admirable but *unethical*, generating in them a feeling of a *counterfeit self* that leads them to behave unethically.

Similar to other research exploring the influence of signaling conflicts, such as between public and private signals (Goffman, 1959; Kuran, 1995), the study of counterfeits involves an interesting case in which desired signals ("I am an admirable person") may conflict with actual signals ("I am a fake"). We suggest that counterfeit products create a particular kind of conflict: Although the wearer intends them to signal positive traits, wearing counterfeits can in fact send a negative signal to the self. Indeed, given the well-documented effects of primes on behavior (e.g., the mere presence of objects can influence behavior; Berger & Fitzsimons, 2008; Berkowitz & LePage, 1967), we suggest that wearing counterfeit products is likely to have a negative impact despite their owners' desire to use them for positive signaling.

If wearing counterfeits can influence the signals one sends to oneself, what are the likely consequences? We hypothesize a link from wearing counterfeits, to feeling "fake" or inauthentic, to behaving unethically: We suggest that a product's lack of authenticity may cause its owners to feel less authentic themselves—despite their belief that the product will actually have positive benefits—and that these feelings then cause them to behave dishonestly and to view other people's behavior as more dishonest as well. In short, we suspect that feeling like a fraud makes people more likely to commit fraud.

We tested these predictions in four experiments. We first found that wearing purportedly counterfeit sunglasses caused people to cheat more on tests when given the opportunity—both when they believed they had an inherent preference for counterfeit products (Experiment 1a) and when they were

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randomly assigned to wear counterfeits (Experiment 1b). Indeed, we found that the impact of counterfeits extends even beyond the individual, causing individuals not only to behave unethically, but also to see the behavior of others as more unethical (Experiment 2). Finally, we investigated the mechanism underlying these effects, determining that wearing counterfeits causes people to feel inauthentic and that these feelings of inauthenticity—the counterfeit self—drive unethical behavior (Experiment 3).

Experiment 1a: Effects of Preferring Counterfeits

Our first experiment examined whether wearing purportedly counterfeit sunglasses would lead to higher levels of dishonest behavior as compared with wearing brand-name sunglasses (in fact, all participants were given brand-name sunglasses to wear). Specifically, we assessed the impact of counterfeits when people believe that they have an inherent preference for counterfeits.

Method

Eighty-five female students (mean age = 21 years, *SD* = 2.21) participated in the study.[1] They received $1 as a show-up fee and could earn up to an additional $24 throughout the study.

After participants entered the lab, the experimenter randomly distributed study IDs to them. The experimenter told participants they would evaluate the quality of different pairs of sunglasses as part of a marketing study. To manipulate which pair of sunglasses participants would wear, we used an initial computer task with the following instructions:

> Your first task in this study is to express your preference for various product categories. You will be asked to choose between two options of different products. You will be shown pictures of each product. Some of the products you will see are authentic products of various brands, while others are counterfeit products (e.g., replica products of well-known brands). Price information will be provided for some of the choices. Please make your choices based on your preferences. There is no right or wrong answer.

Participants indicated their choices for 12 different pairs of products, from various product categories (e.g., technology, clothing, jewelry). Independently of their choices, the computer randomly assigned participants to one of our two experimental conditions, the authentic- and counterfeit-sunglasses conditions. After indicating their choice for each pair of products, participants in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition received the following instructions (phrases in brackets indicate changes made in the instructions for the authentic-sunglasses condition):

> Based on your answers, and relative to other people in our study, it seems that you have a relative preference for counterfeit [authentic] products. Please go to the adjacent room and take a pair of sunglasses from the box labeled "Counterfeit Sunglasses" ["Authentic Sunglasses by Chloe"].

Unbeknownst to participants, both boxes contained 10 different pairs of sunglasses by the same designer, Chloe; each pair of sunglasses cost about $300 (see Fig. 1 for an example). The actual content of the two boxes was randomized across sessions. Participants then wore the sunglasses they selected as they completed several tasks. Measures for exposure values suggest that they could see clearly while wearing the sunglasses. Light values were measured using a standard photographic light meter set for ISO 400 film. The exposure value of the room where the study took place was 10.5 when fully lit. When the light was filtered by the sunglasses, the exposure value was 8.26 on average (*SD* = 0.54, range: 7.2–9.0).

Task 1: walking around. First, participants walked around the hall outside the lab room and in an adjacent room for 5 min. The ostensible purpose of this task was for them to evaluate posters that were hanging on the wall while they got used to the sunglasses.

Task 2: paper-and-pencil matrix task. Next, back in the lab room, participants completed a problem-solving task while wearing their sunglasses. Each participant received two sheets of paper. The first was a work sheet with 20 matrices, each based on a set of 12 three-digit numbers (e.g., 5.78; see Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008). The second sheet was a collection slip on which participants were supposed to report their performance and answer questions about their gender and age. Participants had 5 min to find two numbers in each matrix that added up to 10; the time allotted was not sufficient for anyone to solve all 20 matrices. For each pair of numbers identified correctly, participants received $0.50 (for a maximum payment of $10). After the 5 min had passed, participants folded their work sheet and placed it in a recycling box positioned in a corner of the room; then they wrote down their performance on their collection slip. There was no identifier on the work sheet,

Fig. 1. Example of the sunglasses used in Experiments 1 through 3.

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so that participants could feel anonymous as they reported their performance on the task. However, we changed the last two digits in one of the matrices on each work sheet and in the example provided on the back of the collection slip so that we could compare actual with reported performance.

Task 3: perceptual task on computer. While still wearing their sunglasses, participants engaged in a perceptual task. On each trial, they were presented with a square divided in two by a diagonal line (see Fig. 2 for an example). The square included 20 dots, some on the right side and some on the left side of the diagonal. After a 1-s exposure, participants had to identify which side of the diagonal (right or left) contained more dots by clicking either on a button labeled "more on left" or on a button labeled "more on right." The payout in each trial was determined by the following rule: For each click on the "more on left" button, participants would earn 0.5¢; for each click on the "more on right" button, they would earn 5¢. Thus, in every trial that included more dots on the left side of the diagonal, the task presented a conflict between giving an accurate answer and maximizing profit.

The perceptual task was divided into two phases. In the first phase, participants performed 100 practice trials. After each trial, participants received feedback about what their earnings on that trial and their cumulative earnings would be if these trials were for real payment. In the second phase, participants performed 200 trials in which they earned real money. As before, they received information about their trial-by-trial and cumulative earnings.

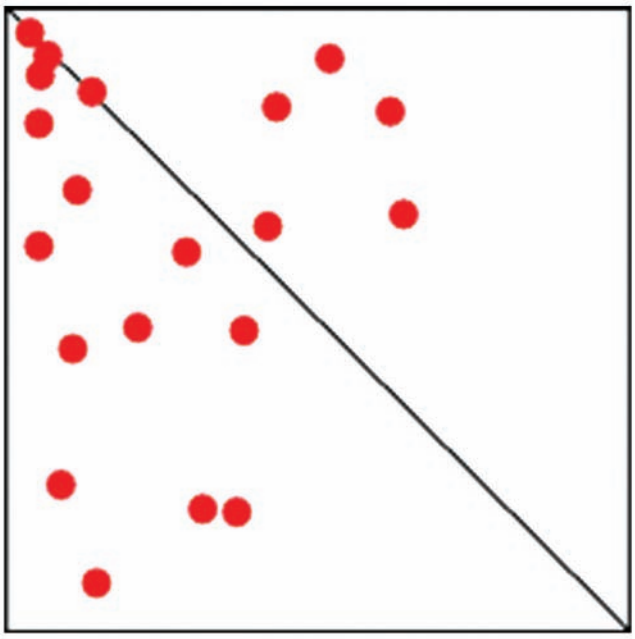

Fig. 2. Example of the perceptual task used in Experiments 1a and 1b. On each trial, 20 dots were displayed in a square divided by a diagonal. The task was to report whether there were more dots on the right or the left side of the diagonal.

Participants could earn a maximum of $10 on this perceptual task (by always pressing the "more on right" button). Each set of 100 trials consisted of two blocks of 50 trials, and each block included 8 trials in which the answer was clearly "more on right" (i.e., the ratio of the number of dots on the right to the number of dots on the left was greater than or equal to 1.5), 17 trials in which the answer was clearly "more on left" (i.e., the ratio of the number of dots on the right to the number of dots on the left was less than or equal to 2/3), and 25 ambiguous trials (i.e., the ratio of the number of dots on the right to the number of dots on the left was between 2/3 and 1.5). Once participants completed this task, the computer indicated that they should report their performance in Phase 2 on a collection slip to be handed to the experimenter at the end of the study.

Task 4: evaluation of sunglasses. Next, participants took off their sunglasses and wrote a short report describing their features. In addition, participants indicated the extent to which they agreed with various statements about the sunglasses (see Table 1).[2] Finally, as a manipulation check, respondents estimated the retail price of the sunglasses. Participants in the authentic-sunglasses condition estimated that the sunglasses were sold at a higher price than did participants in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition (see Table 2). These results suggest that our manipulation was effective.[3] Participants were paid $2 for this task.

Task 5: fashion survey. After participants returned their sunglasses, they filled out a final questionnaire that measured their interest in fashion and their brand awareness and recognition.[4] Participants received $2 for this final task.

Results and discussion

Level of cheating on the matrix task. In the counterfeit-sunglasses condition, 71% of participants (30 out of 42) inflated their performance; in contrast, "only" 30% (13 out of 43) cheated in the authentic-sunglasses condition, $\chi^2(1, N = 85) = 14.43$, $p_{rep} > .99$. As shown in Figure 3, there were no significant differences between conditions in real performance on this task ($p_{rep} = .20$), but self-reported performance was higher in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition than in the authentic-sunglasses condition, $t(83) = 4.72$, $p_{rep} > .99$. These results suggest that participants behaved more dishonestly when wearing counterfeit sunglasses.

Table 1. Questions Used in the Product Evaluation Survey

These sunglasses are clearly of high quality.
These sunglasses are very comfortable.
These sunglasses are very fashionable.
I like these sunglasses a lot.
These sunglasses are very well manufactured.

Note: Participants indicated their agreement with each item on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

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Table 2. Participants' Mean Estimates of the Selling Prices of the Sunglasses and Tests of the Between-Condition Differences

	Condition			
Experiment	Authentic sunglasses	Counterfeit sunglasses	Control sunglasses	Test
Experiment 1a	\$201 (\$104)	\$57 (\$58)	—	$t(83) = 7.88, p_{rep} > .99$
Experiment 1b	\$137 (\$102)	\$67 (\$87)	—	$t(81) = 3.34, p_{rep} = .99$[a]
Experiment 2	\$116 (\$75)	\$34 (\$21)	—	$t(77) = 5.92, p_{rep} > .99$
Experiment 3	\$148 (\$116)	\$31 (\$21)	\$82 (\$68)	$F(2, 93) = 18.63, p_{rep} > .99$[b]

Note: Standard deviations are given in parentheses.
[a]Note that the number of degrees of freedom is equal to only 81 because a few participants did not answer this question. [b]Post hoc tests revealed that the estimated price was higher in the authentic-sunglasses condition than in both the counterfeit-sunglasses condition (p_{rep} > .99) and the control condition (p_{rep} > .95). Furthermore, the estimated price was significant lower in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition than in the control condition (p_{rep} > .89).

Level of cheating on the perceptual task. For Phase 2, when participants earned money for their choices, we first examined the number of times they chose "right" when in fact there were clearly more dots in the right side. A repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA; repeated measures on four blocks of 50 trials) with experimental condition as a between-subjects factor revealed no significant effects (all p_{rep}s < .66).

Next, we examined participants' choices of "right" in ambiguous trials. Both groups showed a moderate increase in dishonest behavior across blocks, $F(3, 249) = 54.05$, p_{rep} > .99, but participants in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition chose "right" more frequently than did participants in the authentic-sunglasses condition (M = 12.78 vs. 10.53), $F(1, 83) = 18.77$, p_{rep} > .99. The interaction between block and condition was also significant, $F(3, 249) = 22.73$, p_{rep} > .99; the increase in dishonest behavior across blocks was steeper in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition than in the authentic-sunglasses condition.

Finally, we examined the number of times participants chose "right" when in fact there were clearly more dots in the left triangle. Again, the increase in dishonesty over time was significant, $F(3, 249) = 10.06$, p_{rep} > .99. Furthermore, participants in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition chose "right" more frequently than did participants in the authentic-sunglasses condition (M = 11.52 vs. 9.59), $F(1, 83) = 7.38$, p_{rep} > .95, but the interaction between block and condition was not significant (p_{rep} = .54). Overall, these results indicate that wearing seemingly counterfeit sunglasses increases dishonesty.

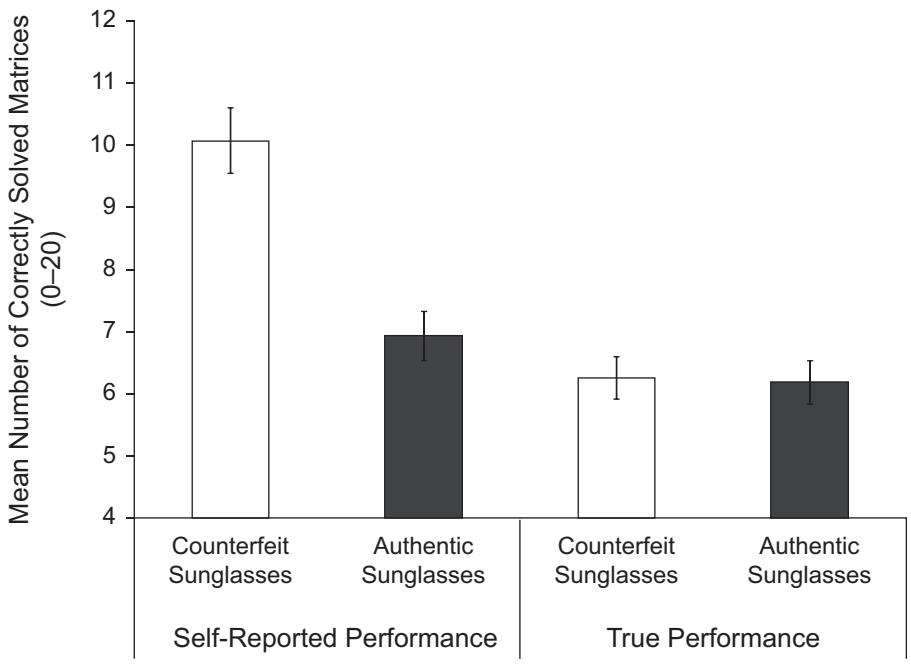

Fig. 3. True and self-reported performance on the matrix task as a function of condition in Experiment 1a. The error bars represent standard errors.

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Table 3. Summary of Results for the Matrix Task in Experiment 1b

Measure	Authentic-sunglasses condition	Counterfeit-sunglasses condition	Test of between-condition difference
Subjects inflating their performance	26% (12 out of 46)	69% (31 out of 45)	$\chi^2(1, N = 91) = 16.72, p_{rep} > .99$
Real performance (mean number of problems solved)	6.52 (*SE* = 0.58)	7.04 (*SE* = 0.51)	$t(89) < 1, p_{rep} = .50$
Self-reported performance (mean number of problems solved)	7.30 (*SE* = 0.58)	9.73 (*SE* = 0.61)	$t(89) = 2.91, p_{rep} > .95$

Experiment 1b: Effects of Merely Wearing Counterfeits

Having shown the impact of counterfeits when people feel that such products reflect their personal preferences, we next explored whether these effects can emerge even when people do not feel responsible for choosing counterfeits, but are merely induced to wear them—as, for example, when someone receives a counterfeit product as a gift from a friend. Specifically, in Experiment 1b, we transparently randomly assigned people to wear either genuine or fake products, to test whether the mere act of using counterfeits is sufficient to induce unethical behavior.

Ninety-one female students (mean age = 22 years, *SD* = 3.27) participated in the study. The procedures were the same as in Experiment 1a, but we eliminated the initial task asking participants to express their preference for various product categories. Instead, at the beginning of the experiment, each participant received a study ID consisting of a number followed by either the letter "F" (indicating random assignment to the counterfeit-, or "fake-," sunglasses condition) or the letter "C" (indicating random assignment to the authentic-, or "Chloe," sunglasses condition). There were two boxes in the room, one clearly labeled "sunglasses by Chloe" and one clearly labeled "fake sunglasses." After giving some initial instructions, the experimenter asked each participant to go to the box corresponding to the letter on his or her study ID and pick up a pair of sunglasses.

As in Experiment 1a, the sunglasses manipulation was successful: Participants in the authentic-sunglasses condition estimated that the sunglasses were sold at a higher price than did participants in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition (see Table 2). As summarized in Tables 3 and 4, the results for the matrix and perceptual tasks were strikingly similar to those from Experiment 1a: Dishonesty was higher among participants who thought they were wearing counterfeit sunglasses than among those who thought they were wearing authentic sunglasses, on both tasks. These results reinforce the findings of Experiment 1a, and suggest that the choice of a counterfeit product is not necessary for increased unethical behavior to emerge. We note that Experiment 1b used a procedure that attenuated but did not eliminate the role of choice: Even individuals who receive a counterfeit gift must choose to use that gift. The fact that the results of Experiment 1b were so similar to those of Experiment 1a, however, suggests that choice is not likely to be the driving force in producing the observed effects.

Experiment 2: Counterfeits and the Behavior of Others

Our first two studies provided robust evidence that wearing counterfeits influences behavior, whether the wearer personally preferred counterfeits or was randomly assigned to do so. In Experiment 2, we tested how far-reaching the impact of counterfeits may be by exploring whether it extends beyond the individual. Experiment 2 tested the hypothesis that wearing counterfeits also affects how people interpret the behavior of others: If wearing counterfeits makes people feel less authentic and behave less ethically, they may interpret others' behavior as less authentic and ethical as well.

Method

Seventy-nine female students (mean age = 21 years, *SD* = 2.40) participated in the study for $7. The study employed the same manipulation as in Experiment 1b, but after students had walked around wearing sunglasses for 5 min, we asked them—while the sunglasses were still on—to fill out a survey asking for their judgments on a variety of matters. The survey included some filler questions together with three sets of questions related to how participants interpreted and judged the

Table 4. Summary of Results for the Perceptual Task in Experiment 1b

Trial type	Effect of block	Effect of condition	Block × Condition interaction
"Clear right"	$F(3, 267) = 1.27, p_{rep} = .65$	$F(1, 89) < 1, p_{rep} = .26$	$F(3, 267) < 1, p_{rep} = .39$
Ambiguous	$F(3, 267) = 5.89, p_{rep} = .99$	$F(1, 89) = 10.21, p_{rep} > .95$	$F(3, 267) < 1, p_{rep} = .26$
"Clear left"	$F(3, 267) = 2.17, p_{rep} = .83$	$F(1, 89) = 8.74, p_{rep} > .95$	$F(3, 267) = 1.02, p_{rep} = .58$

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behavior of other people (adapted from Barkan, 2007; see Table 5). We randomized the order in which the sets of questions were presented in the survey. In the first set, we asked participants to think of people they knew and to state how likely (1 = *not likely*, 9 = *very likely*) these people would be to engage in each of eight ethically questionable behaviors (α = .87). In the second set, we asked participants to read six sentences and rate the likelihood that when they are uttered they are lies (1 = *probably a lie*, 9 = *probably true*; α = .81). Finally, in the third set, participants read two scenarios describing someone with the opportunity to behave dishonestly and evaluated the likelihood that the actor would indeed do so (1 = *not likely*, 9 = *very likely*). Scores for the first two sets of questions were created by averaging responses, and ratings for the third set of questions were kept as individual judgments. At the end of the experiment, participants returned their sunglasses and filled out the same final questionnaire as in Experiments 1a and 1b.

After answering this general survey, participants evaluated the sunglasses they wore by writing a short report, indicated their agreement with the items in Table 1, and completed the manipulation check.

Table 5. Questions and Scenarios Used in Experiment 2

Questions

A. Please think of people you know and state how likely they are to engage in the following behaviors.
   - Be in the express line with too many groceries.
   - Board a plane before their group number is called.
   - Inflate their business expense report.
   - Tell their supervisor that progress has been made on a project, when none has been made at all.
   - Take home office supplies from work.
   - Lie to an insurance company about the value of goods that were damaged.
   - Buy a garment, wear it, and return it.
   - Lie to their partner about the number of sex partners they had in the past.

B. Please read the following sentences and evaluate the likelihood that each of them is a lie.
   - Sorry I'm late; traffic was terrible.
   - My GPA is 4.0.
   - It was good meeting you. Let's have lunch sometime.
   - Sure, I'll start working on that tonight.
   - Yes, John was with me last night.
   - I thought I already sent that e-mail out. I am sure I did.

Scenarios

1. Steve is the Operations manager of a firm that produces pesticides and fertilizers for lawns and gardens. A certain toxic chemical is going to be banned in a year, and for this reason is extremely cheap now. If Steve buys this chemical, produces and distributes his product fast enough, he will be able to make a very nice profit. *Please evaluate the likelihood that Steve will use this chemical while it is still legal.*
2. Dale is the Operations manager of a firm that produces health food. Their organic fruit beverage has 109 calories per serving. Dale knows people are sensitive to crossing the critical threshold of 100 calories. He could decrease the serving size by 10%. The label will say each serving has 98 calories, and the fine print will say each bottle contains 2.2 servings. *Please evaluate the likelihood that Dale will cut the serving size to avoid crossing the 100 threshold.*

Note: This measure was initially developed by Barkan (2007).

Results and discussion

The manipulation was successful: Participants' estimates of the sunglasses' selling price were higher in the authentic-sunglasses condition than in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition (see Table 2). Participants in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition reported people they knew to be more likely to behave dishonestly than did participants in the authentic-sunglasses condition (5.32 vs. 4.32), $t(77) = 2.90$, $p_{rep} = .97$. They also interpreted common excuses as less likely to be truthful (3.96 vs. 4.65), $t(77) = 2.03$, $p_{rep} > .88$. Finally, participants who believed they were wearing counterfeit sunglasses judged the actors in the two scenarios as more likely to behave dishonestly than did participants who believed they were wearing authentic sunglasses (7.52 vs. 6.34), $F(1, 77) = 7.66$, $p_{rep} > .95$.

In short, compared with participants who believed they were wearing authentic sunglasses, participants who believed they were wearing fake sunglasses interpreted other people's behavior as more dishonest, considered common behaviors to be less truthful, and believed that others would be more likely to behave unethically.

Experiment 3: Authenticity, the Counterfeit Self, and Dishonesty

Our first three experiments showed that wearing seemingly counterfeit sunglasses increases actual dishonesty and perceptions of other people's dishonesty. Experiment 3 examined the psychological mechanism behind this effect by including measures of our proposed mediator, feelings of authenticity. In addition, the study included a control condition so we could determine whether wearing counterfeits motivates dishonest behavior or whether wearing brand-name sunglasses reduces it. We predicted that wearing counterfeits would lead to an increase in unethical behavior, and that this unethical behavior would be driven by people's feelings of inauthenticity—their counterfeit self.

Method

One hundred female students (mean age = 21 years, *SD* = 2.55) participated in the study. The procedure was the same as in Experiment 1b, but with three important differences. First, we introduced a control condition in which participants were not given any information about the sunglasses. Second, we added a measure of authenticity, using a personality questionnaire (which also included some bogus questions). Specifically, we assessed authenticity by using a four-item scale, adapted from Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, and Joseph

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(2008), that measures authenticity as self-alienation ($\alpha = .71$). Participants indicated their agreement with the following items using a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*): "Right now, I don't know how I really feel inside"; "Right now, I feel as if I don't know myself very well"; "Right now, I feel out of touch with the 'real me'"; and "Right now, I feel alienated from myself." Higher scores on this scale indicate higher levels of self-alienation, and thus lower levels of perceived authenticity. Third, because results for the two cheating tasks were similar in Experiments 1a and 1b, we did not include the perceptual task in Experiment 3.

Results and discussion

The manipulation was successful: The estimated retail price of the sunglasses was higher in the authentic-sunglasses condition than in both the counterfeit-sunglasses and the control conditions (see Table 2). In addition, the estimated retail price of the sunglasses was higher in the control condition than in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition.

Level of cheating on the matrix task. The percentage of participants who inflated their performance varied across conditions, $\chi^2(2, N = 100) = 13.37$, $p_{rep} > .99$. Seventy-four percent (25 out of 34) inflated their performance in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition, 42% (14 out of 33) inflated it in the control condition, and 30% (10 out of 33) did so in the authentic-sunglasses condition. On average, and as depicted in Figure 4, real performance on the task did not differ across conditions ($p_{rep} = .07$), but self-reported performance did, $F(2, 97) = 4.76$, $p_{rep} > .93$; self-reported performance was higher in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition than in both the control condition ($p_{rep} > .93$) and the authentic-sunglasses condition ($p_{rep} > .95$). Self-reported performance was about the same in the control and the authentic-sunglasses conditions ($p_{rep} = .33$). This pattern of results suggests that the effect was driven by counterfeits.

Overall, these results provide further support for the findings of Experiments 1a and 1b. Moreover, as we predicted, counterfeits led to an increase in unethicality: Participants in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition behaved more dishonestly than participants in both the authentic-sunglasses condition and the control condition.

Feelings of authenticity. Participants' authenticity ratings varied across conditions, $F(2, 97) = 7.89$, $p_{rep} = .99$. Participants felt less authentic (i.e., more self-alienated) in the counterfeit-sunglasses condition ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.05$) than in both the authentic-sunglasses condition ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.85$, $p_{rep} > .99$) and the control condition ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.82$, $p_{rep} > .95$). Feelings of authenticity did not differ between the authentic-sunglasses and the control conditions ($p_{rep} = .35$).

To examine whether feelings of authenticity mediated the effect of wearing counterfeits on dishonest behavior in the matrix task, we followed procedures recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986).[5] As expected, the effect of our fake-sunglasses manipulation on dishonest behavior was reduced to marginal

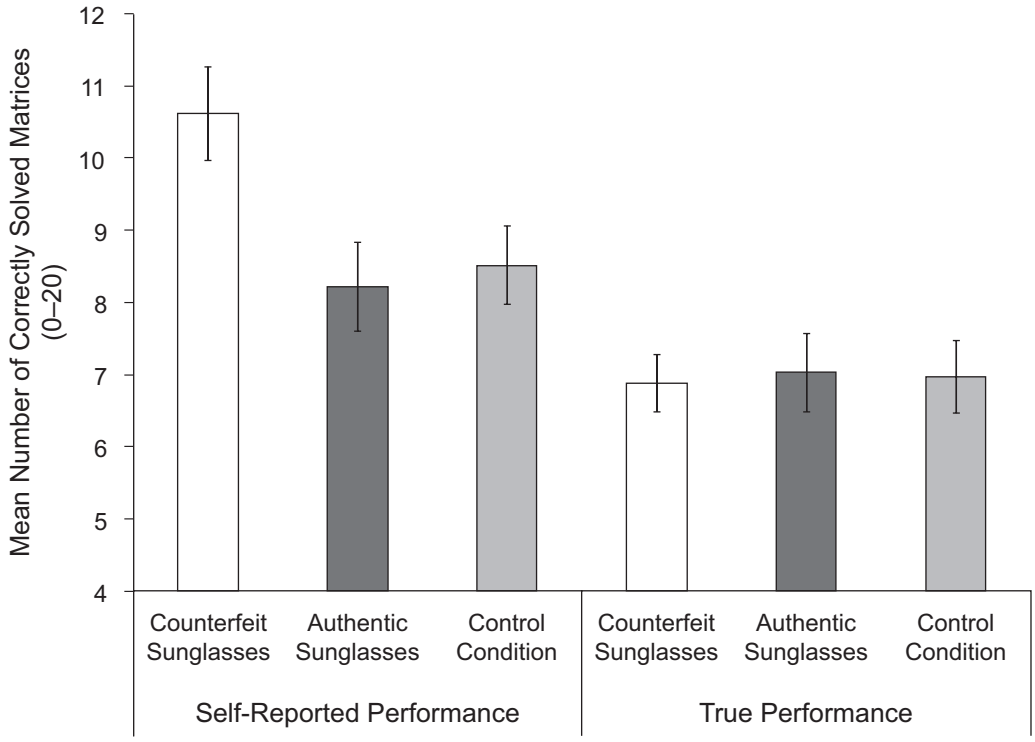

Fig. 4. True and self-reported performance on the matrix task as a function of condition in Experiment 3. Error bars represent standard errors.

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significance (from $\beta = 0.29$, $p_{rep} = .99$, to $\beta = 0.12$, $p_{rep} = .84$) when self-alienation was included in the equation, and self-alienation was a significant predictor of dishonesty ($\beta = 0.47$, $p_{rep} > .99$). Including self-alienation increased the variance explained significantly (by 18%, from $R^2 = .52$ to $R^2 = .70$), $F(1, 95) = 59.52$, $p_{rep} > .99$; the Sobel test was significant, $Z = 2.96$, $p_{rep} > .97$, indicating mediation. In short, these results demonstrate that wearing counterfeits causes people to feel inauthentic, and these feelings of inauthenticity drive unethical behavior.

This analysis addresses an alternative explanation for our results—that counterfeit products directly prime unethical behavior (Dijksterhuis & Bargh, 2001). We demonstrated that the impact of products on behavior is mediated by their impact on the self, and this mediation effect contrasts with a direct prime-to-behavior account (see Wheeler, DeMarree, & Petty, 2007).

General Discussion

We suggested at the outset that people adopt counterfeit products because they are trying to improve their self-image; our studies show that counterfeits have the ironic consequence of harming self-image via inauthenticity, inducing a counterfeit self. Why, then, do people buy counterfeit products? One view, of course, is that the benefits of counterfeits outweigh these costs, and that people make a calculated trade-off. We suspected, however, that people may simply overlook the possible negative consequences of adopting counterfeits. Indeed, when we asked a separate set of students ($N = 86$; mean age = 22 years, $SD = 2.20$) to predict the impact of counterfeits, they were unaware of the consequences for ethical behavior. We gave these students information on the average performance of our study participants on the matrix task and asked them to predict self-reported performance in counterfeit-sunglasses, authentic-sunglasses, and control conditions. The students correctly predicted that, overall, participants would cheat ($M_{authentic} = 9.62$, $M_{counterfeit} = 9.59$, $M_{control} = 9.34$), $F(3, 255) = 43.67$, $p_{rep} > .99$. However, they did not anticipate that cheating would vary across the three described conditions, $F(2, 170) < 1$, $p_{rep} = .56$ ($p_{rep} < .72$ across all comparisons). This difference between people's predictions about the impact of counterfeits and their actual behavior in our experiments suggests that the influence of wearing counterfeits is deceptive, in that they have an unexpected influence on individuals' ethicality.

The obvious differences between laboratory settings and real-world contexts aside, our results have worrisome implications for the many consumers who buy counterfeit goods. Given the economic and social relevance of the counterfeiting epidemic, future research on the psychology of counterfeits and their potential moral costs seems warranted. Indeed, given that cost savings is a primary motivation for the purchase of counterfeits (Eisend & Schuchert-Guler, 2006), individuals who buy counterfeits for themselves or give them to others may believe that they are simply getting similar products for less money, but in fact may be paying a price in terms of their long-term morality. Perhaps most troublingly, our results from Experiment 2 demonstrate that the negative impact of counterfeits accrues not just to buyers, but extends more broadly to the social environment, suggesting that overlooking the negative impact of counterfeits may have far-reaching negative consequences.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared that they had no conflicts of interest with respect to their authorship or the publication of this article.

Notes

1. Given the robust evidence provided by prior research showing that, compared with men, women care more about brand-name fashion products, commonly express a higher level of interest in fashion (Auty & Elliott, 1998), and consider themselves as more fashion innovative (Goldsmith, Moore, & Beaudoin, 1999), our study participants were all female.
2. These measures were included in all four experiments, and in no case was there a significant difference between conditions. Thus, we do not discuss these measures further.
3. Note that the differences in these responses did not drive the observed effects on dishonesty. Additional analyses conducted for all of the experiments revealed that estimated selling price did not reliably predict dishonesty in any of the tasks.
4. Across the four experiments, there were no significant differences between conditions on any of these measures, and thus we do not discuss them further.
5. In these analyses, we used self-reported performance in the matrix task as the dependent variable and controlled for participants' real performance. We used dummy variables for our manipulation and included one dummy variable for the counterfeit-sunglasses condition and another one for the authentic-sunglasses condition. We conducted similar analyses using a dichotomous variable for cheating (indicating whether each participant cheated on the task or not) as the dependent variable. The nature and significance of the results did not change.

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