

The Importance of Being Yourself for Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming People

What is authenticity? Authenticity, or being one's true self, refers to the extent to which individuals live in alignment with their values, beliefs, and identity.¹

The ability to live authentically, without fear, harm, or stigma, is important for the well-being of all people. However, many transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) people face social and legal barriers to authenticity. Restrictive dress codes, misgendering, denial of gender-affirming care, and lack of legal recognition frequently pressure TGNC individuals to suppress or conceal who they are in order to survive. Not only do these barriers prevent TGNC individuals from living authentically, but this forced inauthenticity is often harmful to the mental and physical well-being of TGNC people.²

Being true to oneself looks different for every individual. Clothing, hairstyles, names, and pronouns help everyone live more authentically. For example, a religious individual may wear specific clothing or jewelry as an outward expression of their faith, or style their hair in alignment with religious practices. Similarly, someone might paint their nails or use makeup to express their gender identity. These external expressions of identity and belief are examples of living authentically and in alignment with one's self.

For some, authenticity may include having the ability to access gender-affirming care. Gender-affirming care refers to a range of social, psychological, behavioral, or medical interventions that support an individual's gender identity.³ Gender-affirming care can be a helpful tool for TGNC people to feel more aligned with their gender identity, but cisgender people also regularly rely on gender-affirming care to support and affirm their own gender identity.⁴ Examples of gender-affirming care include hair removal or enhancement, hormone therapy, or breast augmentation. Read more about gender-affirming care [here](#).

¹ Clements et al., 2025

² The Trevor Project, 2024

³ Puckett, 2018

⁴ Schall, 2023

Authenticity can also take different forms across contexts. It is not always defined only by acceptance or external barriers, but can also reflect personal choices about how someone wants to express themselves and what parts of their identity they want to share with others.

Does Living Authentically Really Matter?

Yes, it is very important for every individual to be themselves and to live authentic lives. When individuals are able to live in ways that align with their values and identity, they experience greater self-esteem, stronger relationships, and higher life satisfaction. Authenticity allows people to build healthy and fulfilling lives rooted in honesty rather than fear, fostering confidence and security.^{5 6} In contrast, when people feel pressure to hide parts of who they are or behave in ways that do not feel true to who they are, it can lead to stress and diminished well-being.⁷

For transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) individuals, social and legal barriers often make being themselves difficult or unsafe.⁸ [In workplaces](#), especially, fear of discrimination remains a major barrier to authenticity.^{9 10} TGNC individuals may feel that being themselves in the workplace could cost them relationships, opportunities, or financial stability. In 2021, a recruitment firm, TotalJobs, reported that 65 percent of transgender people in the United Kingdom felt the need to hide their trans identity at work out of concern for their safety and job security—an increase from 2016.¹¹ U.S.-based research has similarly found that transgender individuals often conceal their identities to avoid rejection, discrimination, or victimization.¹² This concealment can limit social connections and professional advancement, contributing to feelings of isolation.

For some individuals, being themselves includes accessing gender-affirming care because it allows them to look or present themselves as they want to. Research shows that access to such care is associated with improved well-being and reductions in depression, anxiety, and fatigue related to psychological distress.^{13 14} One study notably reported that transgender individuals who were not on hormones were four times more likely to have a

⁵ Baumler et. al., 2025

⁶ Restar, 2023

⁷ Sessoms, 2025

⁸ Clements et. al., 2025

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Baumler et. al., 2025

¹¹ McConnell, 2021

¹² Clements, et. al., 2025

¹³ Restar, 2023

¹⁴ Hugto and Reisner, 2016

depressive disorder.¹⁵ When lack of access to care forces inauthenticity, the resulting harm can be severe.

Youth are particularly vulnerable to these barriers. In the United Kingdom, transgender youth suicide deaths increased by fivefold after the National Health Service (NHS) imposed restrictions on gender-affirming care for young trans people.¹⁶ The restriction on gender-affirming care for young transgender people came after the ruling of *Bell v. Tavistock* (2021), which concluded that children under the age of 16 are unable to give informed consent to be prescribed puberty-blocking drugs.¹⁷ Following the ruling, the UK government published a report which claimed that suicides had not increased because of the restriction on gender-affirming care.¹⁸ Further investigation of that report by the Good Law Project discovered that the report significantly undercounted. Instead, the Good Law Project reported that trans youth suicides had increased by five times; with 5 trans youth suicides in 2019-20, 4 in 2020-21, and 22 trans youth suicides from 2021-22.¹⁹

Authenticity matters because it allows individuals to build stable and meaningful lives. The ability to be oneself supports stronger relationships, improved mental health, and greater confidence. Barriers such as discrimination, restrictive policies, and limited access to care can undermine well-being. Living authentically is not simply about comfort, but creating the conditions necessary for people to thrive.

Does Living Authentically Harm Others or Society?

No. The ability to be true to oneself not only contributes to personal well-being but also benefits society and communities more broadly. Anti-trans advocates often argue that the authenticity of transgender and gender non-conforming people threatens the rights of cisgender individuals or harms society.²⁰ In reality, it is inauthenticity, not authenticity, that harms both individuals and the broader community by promoting stigma and discouraging diversity.^{21 22}

When people are unable to be themselves, stigma and harmful stereotypes often go unchallenged. A study examining transgender workers and workplace outness found that

¹⁵ Restar, 2023

¹⁶ Reed, 2026

¹⁷ Siddique, 2021

¹⁸ Reed, 2026

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Strangio, 2016

²¹ Cascalheira and Choi, 2023

²² Baumler, 2025

hiding one's gender identity diminished individuals' ability to advocate for themselves.²³ As a result, TGNC workers may feel unable to challenge harmful language or stereotypes used by coworkers or employers.²⁴ ²⁵ When stigma and harmful stereotypes are allowed to persist against one group, they create an environment in which discrimination against others is more easily tolerated. In workplaces, schools, and other social settings, this normalization of bias reinforces silence, concealment, and exclusion across identities.²⁶

These environments may also discourage individuals with marginalized identities from applying to or remaining in these spaces.²⁷ A lack of diversity harms communities rather than benefiting them. Diverse workplaces, where individuals are able to be themselves, promote productivity, participation, and improved outcomes.²⁸ One study focused on health care in the United States found that workforce diversity improved patient outcomes, including more accurate diagnoses, higher patient satisfaction, and greater treatment adherence.²⁹ Additionally, research from the Society of Interdisciplinary Business Research found that diverse teams tend to experience less conflict and higher productivity due to the variety of skills and perspectives they bring.³⁰

Conclusion

Authenticity is essential to the well-being and health of every individual. When people are able to be themselves, they experience better mental health outcomes and stronger social connections.³¹ On a broader level, authenticity allows individuals to be more productive and creative, benefiting workplaces, schools, and communities.³²

While authenticity is important for everyone, transgender and gender non-conforming people can face greater barriers to living as their true selves than their cisgender peers. Many experience violence, rejection, and discrimination when they do so. For some TGNC individuals, limited access to medical gender-affirming care, such as hormones or surgery, can further restrict their ability to live authentically. For these individuals in particular, the ability to be oneself is often shaped by policy. Expanding access to gender-affirming care, creating inclusive workplaces, supporting affirming schools, and ensuring accurate legal

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Rivera et. al., 2019

²⁶ Clements et. al., 2025

²⁷ Baumler et. al., 2025

²⁸ Forma, 2014

²⁹ LaVeist, 2014

³⁰ Forma, 2014

³¹ Sessoms, 2025

³² Forma, 2014

recognition of gender are all critical steps in making authenticity a realistic and safe choice rather than a personal risk. At the same time, authenticity does not look the same in every space or for every person. Even in supportive and inclusive environments, individuals may choose how and when to express different aspects of themselves.

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