American Psychological Association

Review of General Psychology
2019, Vol. 23(1) 99–112

DOI: 10.1037/gpr0000162
journals.sagepub.com/home/rgp
SAGE

SPECIAL ISSUE

Toward a Social Psychology of Authenticity: Exploring Within-Person Variation in Autonomy, Congruence, and Genuineness Using Self-Determination Theory

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Authenticity entails autonomy, congruence, and genuineness. In this article, we use a self-determination theory framework to discuss a critical aspect of social environments that facilitates these aspects of authenticity, namely the experience of autonomy support. Although authenticity is often studied as a trait or individual difference, we review research demonstrating that authenticity varies within individuals and predicts variations in well-being. Next, we show that perceiving autonomy support within a relational context is associated with people feeling more authentic and more like their ideal selves and displaying constellations of Big 5 personality traits indicative of greater wellness in that context. To explore another important part of authenticity, being genuine in interactions with others, we review evidence linking autonomy support to situational variation in identity disclosure among lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. This research suggests that perceiving autonomy support within a context or relationship helps lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals be more open about their sexual orientation and identity, which in turn affords greater opportunities for the satisfaction of not only autonomy, but competence and relatedness needs as well, facilitating well-being. We conclude by highlighting future directions in the study of authenticity's dynamic nature, and the importance of the situation in its expression and its relation to well-being.

Keywords: authenticity, self-determination theory, autonomy, well-being, LGB

The concept of *authenticity* is primarily derived from existential phenomenological traditions in philosophy and has two essential components (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2004; Wild, 1965). First, when being authentic, a person experiences her or his actions or communications as *self-authored*—that is, they are willingly enacted, owned, and self-endorsed. To the extent that an action or communication feels forced, imposed, alien, or nonautonomous, it is not authentic. A second important aspect of authenticity refers to the idea of *genuineness*. A person is authentic when behaving congruently, or in accord with what he or she really experiences. Genuineness also has an interpersonal face, as an authentic person acts in a way that fully reflects her or his abiding values and sentiments. Inauthenticity, in contrast, is associated with a person being deceptive, defensive, false, or conveying only a pretense (Kernis, 2003). In being inauthentic, a person does not engage or reveal her or his "true self."

Much of the academic literature examines authenticity as an individual difference or trait (e.g., Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008). In this view, individuals are seen as more or less authentic. This is also a common lay view in modern societies, where inauthenticity is often judged as a personal or moral failing (Taylor, 1992). But as Kierkegaard (1849/1954) pointed out, every individual struggles with authenticity, and acting with authenticity is for each of us an everyday achievement. Furthermore, different individuals face different obstacles to authenticity. In many settings, particularly those where one's "true self" may be met with negative judgments or nonacceptance, transparently "being who one is" can be difficult and can even have social costs (Solomon, 2012). Thus, Kierkegaard and existentialists since have emphasized that authenticity requires ongoing acts of courage (Mullen, 1981). Although existentialist writers have most notably focused on the individual's role in choosing to be authentic (e.g., Sartre, 1956; Yalom, 1980), it is clear that there is also a social psychology to authenticity. Some social contexts facilitate and support authenticity, whereas others inhibit or even outright oppress authentic self-expression. This is particularly true where one's attitudes, opinions, or identities are likely to be stigmatized or socially devalued.

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In this article, we emphasize the social conditions associated with authenticity and thus its dynamic nature. Utilizing the framework of self-determination theory (SDT), we discuss the relations of autonomy support and control to authenticity. Then, using disclosure of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) identities as a salient example, we illustrate how substantial variation in authenticity can emerge within a person across contexts as a function of expectations or experiences of need support versus of control or threat.

Psychological Perspectives on Authenticity

The central components of authenticity, namely authoring or endorsing one's behaviors and being genuine, have both been studied through various psychological perspectives (Joseph, 2016). Researchers applying SDT have been especially focused on authenticity because it entails the experience of *autonomy*, or the self-endorsement of actions, one of three essential psychological needs posited by SDT (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2004, 2017).

Autonomy is in fact definitional to authenticity. When authentic, a person is volitionally engaged and acting in ways that are congruent with her or his values and interests—she or he is acting with autonomy (Hodgins & Knee, 2002; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2006). As Ryan and Deci described it, autonomy is founded on a nondefensive open consideration of possibilities for which one takes responsibility. In autonomy there is "intrapersonal" transparency and a sense of choice. Similarly, Kernis and Goldman (2006) argued that autonomy represents an essential component of authenticity, as one is "acting in ways congruent with one's values, preferences, and needs," whereas inauthenticity entails "acting merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishments" (p. 302). Thus the congruent self-endorsement of one's actions is central to the definition of autonomy, as well as representing a core characteristic of authenticity.

Although autonomy is a necessary characteristic of authentic actions, discussions of authenticity also strongly emphasize *genuineness* (Lopez & Rice, 2006). Jourard (1971) proposed that "authentic being means being oneself, honestly, in one's relations" (p. 133). Reis and Patrick (1996) defined authentic relationships as involving a reciprocal process of self-disclosure, intimacy, and trust. Kernis and Goldman (2006) described three elements in authentic relationships: (a) openness and truthfulness, (b) letting others "see the real you," and (c) being genuine and not "fake." In authentic encounters, people's "real" self is manifest.

This is not to deny that people have many reasons for behaving inauthentically and for concealing self-characteristics. Such self-presentation is, in fact, often curated as an aspect of social adaptation (Goffman, 1963; Snyder, 1987). However, being adaptive and being authentic are not always equivalent, and as we shall document, people are often self-concealing in contexts they perceive as controlling or judgmental (Legate, Ryan, & Weinstein, 2012; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2017). We suggest that even such "adaptive" inauthenticity, which entails monitoring and inhibiting aspects of self-expression, has costs.

Studies of individual differences in authenticity show that people who are generally more authentic—more autonomous and more genuine—have greater well-being (e.g., Lakey, Kernis, Heppner, & Lance, 2008; Schlegel & Hicks, 2011; Wood et al., 2008). Trait authenticity is related not only to one's own well-being but carries over into interactions with others. Indeed, evidence indicates that trait authenticity is associated with relationship-serving goals and strategies (Tou, Baker, Hadden, & Lin, 2015), acts as a buffer against the negative effects of interpersonal conflict (Wickham, Williamson, Beard, Kobayashi, & Hirst, 2016), and is associated with more positive interactions with others (Baker, Tou, Bryan, & Knee, 2017) and relationship outcomes (Brunell et al., 2010).

But beyond these individual differences, we argue in line with other contemporary perspectives (e.g., Lopez & Rice, 2006; Sedikides, Slabu, Lenton, & Thomaes, 2017) that there is significant within-person variation in authenticity, variation that is strongly related to within-person variation in well-being and self-esteem (e.g., Heppner et al., 2008). Central to our current thesis, we see these variations in authenticity as also robustly associated with people's experience of their social contexts. Specifically, when social environments are seen as *autonomy supportive*, the likelihood of authenticity is enhanced. Absence of authenticity is, in contrast, often a response to controlling contexts in which people anticipate conditional regard, rejection, or external pressure to behave in certain ways. Because authenticity is responsive to variations in social partners and contexts, variability in authenticity is thus not merely a personal weakness—it may sometimes be an attempt at adaption, particularly in contexts where one's identity or beliefs may be socially devalued or stigmatized. Authenticity entails, as Lopez and Rice (2006) argued, a cost—benefit appraisal of the value and risks of open and truthful exchanges leading to people being selectively authentic, such as often avoiding disclosure and concealing aspects of "true self" as a protective strategy.

Self-Determination Theory and Authenticity

Our framework for this discussion and review is SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT is an empirically driven theory that is focused on people's motivation and flourishing. SDT is not only relevant to the existential-phenomenological concept of authenticity, it is in part derived from that thought (see R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2004). SDT, in fact, takes the issues of freedom and authenticity and puts them at the center of its predictions concerning motivation, engagement, and sustenance in human behavior, suggesting that when people author and endorse their actions, they reap benefits in terms of well-being and relationship quality.

Autonomy is posited by SDT as one of three basic psychological needs, alongside competence and relatedness, that are considered essential nutrients for optimal human functioning and wellness (Deci & Ryan, 1985; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2017). Within SDT, autonomy is defined as the need to experience one's self as the author of one's actions and for these to be aligned with one's personal values and goals. It is this sense of self-authorship that is essential to the experience of authenticity. Opposite to the experience of autonomy is heteronomy, or having one's actions feel imposed, controlled, or self-alien.

Because authentic behavior is by definition autonomous, SDT research has deepened and extended ways in which authenticity can be researched (see R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2004, 2006, 2017). For example, SDT offers a specific taxonomy for understanding the extent to which various intentional behaviors, personal goals, and adopted identities are congruent with and endorsed by the self (see R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2017). The poorest, most alienated, form of

motivation is *amotivation*, which occurs when a person perceives no value in performing the relevant behavior or experiences such a low sense of competence that they disengage. The lowest quality form of intentional motivation is *external regulation*, when a person's actions are driven by external pressures or rewards. External regulation is typically associated with low vitality, low quality motivation, and poor persistence. For example, a person who "acts friendly" to curry a reward from others is classically inauthentic, but this is itself an emotional labor that can be draining because of its controlled and effortful nature (Sisley & Smollan, 2012). Another form of motivation still low in autonomy is *introjected regulation*. Here, the individual is pushed around by internal pressures, rather than by external ones. The focus here is on seeking approval and looking good to oneself and others. Clearly this too is inauthentic, as one may suppress authentic aspects of self to maintain approval from others. On the autonomous end of this continuum are *identified* and *integrated regulations*. Here the person consciously values what she or he is doing and, when integrated, that valuing is deeply assimilated and fitting holistically with the person's values. When integrated a person can be wholehearted, or "willing one thing," as Kierkegaard (1956) once poetically described authenticity. Finally, SDT also studies *intrinsic motivation*—where a person acts with spontaneity and interest—prototypical of authentic engagement. These various types of autonomy relate systematically to authenticity. For example, in recent cross-sectional research with adult employees Van den Bosch and Taris (2018) showed that authenticity at work was positively related to intrinsic motivation and identification and was negatively related to controlled regulations and amotivation.

Autonomy, and therefore authenticity (because it entails autonomy), should thus be seen as a relative issue. People vary in how much they stand behind what they are doing and the extent to which they autonomously endorse it. However, neither autonomy nor authenticity should be defined as "not being influenced by external others." On the contrary, to act autonomously is to endorse one's actions. One can act autonomously when abiding by social norms, requests, or even when following the demands of others so long as one concurs with these norms or requests or with their legitimacy (Koestner et al., 1999; Koestner & Losier, 1996; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2017). Indeed, evidence suggests there is little to no relation between resisting interpersonal influence and experiencing one's self as the origins of one's actions. Thus, one can conform to or obey social inputs while maintaining authenticity so long as one truly assents to these inputs or constraints. Recent research provides direct evidence for this. Lenton, Slabu, and Sedikides (2016) found that state authentic living does not necessitate rejecting external influences. Moreover, accepting external influence was not necessarily associated with self-alienation. In fact, acceptance of external influence in a given situation was more often related to an increased, rather than decreased, experience of authenticity.

Similarly important to understanding authenticity is distinguishing between autonomy and *independence*. SDT argues that people can be autonomously independent, dependent, or interdependent in different contexts. People can also be heteronomously and inauthentically engaged in any of these forms of relationships (R. M. Ryan & Lynch, 1989). Work by Soenens, Vansteenkiste, and colleagues (Soenens, Vansteenkiste, et al., 2007; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Sierens, 2009) indicates that measures of independence versus autonomy are indeed statistically distinct. Moreover, whether individuals are autonomously dependent or independent, they report greater well-being compared to those whose relationships are not autonomously endorsed (Kins, Beyers, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2009). In short, either independence or dependence can be authentic, if it represents what the individual endorses.

Related work shows that *defiance* can also be distinguished from autonomy, because it is typically reactive rather than reflective of self-endorsed, integrated, behaviors (Van Petegem, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, & Beyers, 2015; Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Van Petegem, & Duriez, 2014). While such behaviors may appear from the outside to be freely chosen, SDT argues that they are instead often a direct reaction to escape feeling controlled, and are thus extrinsically rather than intrinsically motivated. External control can also elicit other compensatory identities (La Guardia, 2009), such as putting up a façade, disengaging, or, as we will describe here, concealing aspects of one's self believed to be devalued by others.

Cross-cultural work further demonstrates that within both individualist and collectivist cultures, autonomy, or the willing endorsement of one's behaviors, is a key predictor of integration and well-being (Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, & Kaplan, 2003; Fischer & Boer, 2011). Here again, we see that it is not whether one's behavior is aligned with or opposed to ambient social norms or cultural demands that predicts well-being, but rather whether such behaviors are autonomous, or volitionally endorsed by the self.

The idea of volition is also critical to understanding when people might take up false identities or engage in inauthentic, though seemingly "chosen," actions. SDT argues that identities can be variously internalized—some being well integrated and others being merely introjected, with the former characterized by greater authenticity. Thus, people can be integrated or introjected in their religious practices (R. M. Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993), in their passionate pursuits (Vallerand, 2017), and in most any life project (e.g., Koestner, Lekes, Powers, & Chicoine, 2002; Koestner, Otis, Powers, Pelletier, & Gagnon, 2008). Research and theory suggest that controlling environments may elicit defensive responding as individuals experience frustration of their need for autonomy (Lynch & Sheldon, 2017; Weinstein et al., 2012).

In sum, SDT distinguishes self-endorsed, autonomous action from freedom, independence, defiance, and individualism, distinctions that therefore also apply to authenticity. Authentic actions can include acts of dependence and of independence. They can embrace collectivism or may be individualist. Merely removing constraints (freedom) will not guarantee authenticity, because authenticity also requires a positive purpose. In addition, SDT's taxonomy, or motivational continuum, captures the relative nature of autonomy and, because autonomy is an essential aspect of it, suggests that authenticity too is a matter of degree.

R. M. Ryan and Deci (2004), in specifically discussing authenticity, argued that a further important contribution of SDT is showing that authenticity is not merely an abstract potentiality, but a human capacity that can be supported and thwarted by various social conditions. SDT research can illuminate the direct and subtle ways in which people can be pressured away from authenticity in social contexts, especially contingently "rewarding" ones (Assor, Roth, & Deci, 2004; Lynch & Sheldon, 2017; Roth, Assor, Niemiec, Deci, & Ryan, 2009). SDT thus highlights the dialectics of our human condition—our "thrownness" (Heidegger, 1927/1962) between forces that attempt to dictate our projects and

motives and our human nature, which would have us engage our possibilities and seek integration, congruence, and genuineness in our behavior.

In what follows, we look at applications of this dynamic view of authenticity in two areas of empirical research within SDT that concern variations in authenticity, their relations to well-being, and the influence of perceived social contexts upon them. The first area concerns research that examines within-person variation in self-reported authenticity and its relations to variation in self-presentation and wellness. For example, we will review how within-person variation in authenticity is related to variation in well-being outcomes. In addition, we show that these variations also relate to the Big 5 traits people express, showing that people are closer to their ideal trait selves when they feel authentic. We also review evidence that this within-person variation in authenticity is associated with context-to-context differences in autonomy support and control.

Second, to further explore the dynamic nature of authenticity, we move to the SDT-based literature on autonomy support and people's genuineness and self-disclosure. In general, we argue that the more controlling the social relationship in which one finds oneself, the less open and authentic one will tend to be (e.g., Lynch & Sheldon, 2017; R. M. Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005). This lower authenticity manifests in reduced genuineness and greater self-concealment, resulting in harms to both relationship and personal wellness.

Given this negative impact of controlling environments on authenticity, we suggest that authenticity is a more formidable struggle for individuals and groups who are most vulnerable to social control or rejection. For example, people with concealable stigmata may be prone to hide their true selves in contexts they perceive to be controlling or unaccepting. We illustrate this using research on LGB identity disclosure and "coming out" to others. Evidence shows that many people who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual often feel compelled to conceal or suppress this aspect of their identity in social interactions, and further that the likelihood that an LGB person is "out" versus concealed with others varies as a function of the other's perceived autonomy supportiveness. Thus LGB individuals appear to be "selectively inauthentic," attempting to avoid harms by concealment. We argue that, despite the potential adaptive value of being selective, as the authenticity literature suggests, this self-concealment is harmful to their wellness. We extend this thinking beyond LGB individuals to apply to the processes of genuineness and disclosure in other types of relationships (e.g., Uysal, Lin, & Knee, 2010; Uysal, Lin, Knee, & Bush, 2012).

These explorations of authenticity and autonomy support help us formulate a dynamic view in which authenticity, in both its autonomy and genuineness aspects, varies within persons as a function of perceived autonomy support. This focus highlights an important dimension within any systematic social psychology of authenticity. Authenticity is not just an individual attribute; it is also a function of social conditions that are often hostile to various aspects of people's authentic natures.

Self-Reported Authenticity and Its Effects

Within SDT, different behaviors, goals, attitudes, and self-concepts can be understood as more or less authentic, or representative of the "true self" of the individual (Deci & Ryan, 2000; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2017). SDT is an empirical approach to issues that have long been reflected in humanistic psychology, such as Rogers' (1961) person-centered approach. In most SDT research, motivation is studied in terms of how autonomous a person's motives for acting are (R. M. Ryan & Connell, 1989), with autonomy being a central component of authentic living. However, a number of SDT-based studies have also directly assessed people's experiences or feelings of authenticity as part of the exploration of these motivational dynamics. In general, SDT posits that greater authenticity will be associated with greater wellness.

Supporting this hypothesis, R. M. Ryan, LaGuardia, and Rawsthorne (2005) conducted a cross-sectional study in which participants engaged in a self-description task developed by Linville (1987). Linville's model views the self-concept as a multifaceted cognitive construct composed of *self-aspects*. Self-aspects are defined as representations of the self that correspond to various roles, relationships, contexts, or activities. In Linville's view, the more complex a personality (the more distinct self-aspects one has), the more one is buffered against distress when any one self-aspect is threatened. Linville measures self-aspects using a self-description task in which participants sort cards inscribed with personality traits or characteristics into groupings that represent aspects of themselves. Ryan et al. had participants perform this sorting task and rate each of the resulting self-aspects for its *authenticity*. This measure of authenticity concerned the degree to which self-aspects were experienced as self-endorsed; inauthentic self-aspects were ones with which the person did not identify and of which he or she felt little authorship or ownership.

Findings showed that simply having more self-complexity (having more distinct self-aspects) was not associated with greater wellness. However, to the extent that one's self-aspects were more authentic, individuals reported less depression, anxiety and somatic distress, and greater vitality. Interestingly, individuals showed considerable variability in their ratings of the authenticity of different self-aspects. That is, people were authentic in some roles and inauthentic in others, suggesting considerable within-person variation.

Variation in Authenticity and Autonomy Support Across Contexts

Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi (1997) specifically explored variability in authenticity across different social roles and how these variations are related to both within- and between-person variation in the expression of Big 5 personality traits (McCrae & Costa, 1997, 1994). As *traits*, the Big 5 (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) evidences relative stability across time, situations, and social roles. Yet despite overall stability in mean levels and between-person differences in personality, situational influences are likely to impact self-expression, including the expression of Big 5 traits. It is this within-person situational specificity in trait expression and its relation to feelings of authenticity that is of interest here.

To examine this variation, Sheldon and colleagues (1997) used a cross-sectional design in which participants rated themselves on measures of the Big 5 personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1995) "in general" and within each of five psychosocial roles (student, employee, child, friend, romantic partner). Participants also rated

the extent to which they felt authentic when they were in each of these roles using items such as "I experience this aspect of myself as an authentic part of who I am" and "I have freely chosen this way of being" as well as their satisfaction with and preference for each role.

Results indicated that there was significant variability in authenticity across life roles and, corresponding with this, differential expression of traits across different roles. Critically, this variation was systematic; cross-role variation in Big-5 traits was associated with cross-role variations in authenticity and in well-being. Specifically, in roles in which participants' felt more authentic, they reported greater openness, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and less neuroticism, as well as greater satisfaction with the role. Additionally, there was also variation in the roles in which people felt authentic, suggesting that some roles afforded greater authenticity than others. On average, participants reported feeling most authentic in the role of friend, followed by the romantic partner and child roles. Participants felt least authentic in the roles of student and employee. Satisfaction in each life role was also ordered by the relative authenticity experienced within it. In brief, people were more satisfied in roles in which they felt more authentic, and this in turn had them being more open, extraverted, conscientious, and agreeable and less neurotic—that is, they showed more optimal constellations of Big 5 trait ratings.

A set of related studies based upon a cross-cultural sample of participants from China, Russia, and the United States examined the "within-persons" relations between authenticity and the expression of Big 5 traits, additionally testing the impact of basic need satisfaction in personal relationships on these variables (Lynch, La Guardia, & Ryan, 2009; Lynch et al., 2004). Similar to Sheldon and colleagues' (1997) method, participants in these studies completed Big 5 trait measures for their self "in general" and their *ideal self*, or who the participants desire to be, or are at their best, as well as indicators of their overall well-being. Participants also completed *actual self* trait ratings for how they saw themselves in each of six significant relationships (mother, father, best friend, romantic partner, roommate, and a selected teacher), and measures of perceived autonomy support, authenticity, well-being, and vitality in each of these relationships.

Overall, greater authenticity was related to higher personal as well as relational well-being across all three international samples (Lynch et al., 2004). At the within-person level, results further indicated that in relationships in which participants reported experiencing autonomy support, they not only reported greater authenticity, but their actual self-concept, as measured by Big 5 ratings, was more similar to their ideal self-concept compared to relationships in which perceived need support was low. Specifically, participants rated themselves as more extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, and open, and less neurotic in authentic and autonomy supportive relationships. In relationships with greater autonomy support these trait ratings were closer to ratings of the ideal self than to ratings of the general self. This effect of autonomy support on well-being was partially mediated by actual-ideal discrepancies, indicating that autonomy support impacts well-being both directly as well as indirectly via felt discrepancies between who one is in that relationship and who one would ideally like to be.

Some researchers have suggested that *variability* across different life roles is indicative of a failure to integrate the self across different roles and relationships and thus less authenticity (e.g., Roberts & Donahue, 1994). In this view consistency reflects authenticity, and variation in the expression of traits and trait-related behaviors is viewed as resulting from disorganization and fragmentation of the self and related to poor mental health outcomes. We argue, however, that variation in the expression of traits is not itself problematic or inauthentic (see La Guardia & Ryan, 2007). Rather, it is variation away from autonomous, authentic functioning that has negative consequences for well-being. In fact, Lynch and Ryan (2004) specifically showed that authenticity was a stronger predictor of well-being than self-concept inconsistency.

In sum, these studies show that greater perceived autonomy support is associated with greater authenticity as well as less neuroticism and more extraversion, openness, and agreeableness within each relationship (conscientiousness results were inconsistent), and these effects occur across cultures. All of this is more likely in autonomy supportive social contexts, and is undermined by the experience of controlling environments. It appears that people differentially express traits depending on the contextual or relational supports for authenticity, and are more likely to pursue their personal ideals, or to be their best selves, when authentic and in contexts that are autonomy supportive. This is consistent with work by others showing that experiences of state authenticity relate to greater proximity to the ideal self and increased self-esteem (e.g., Lenton, Bruder, Slabu, & Sedikides, 2013).

Even more recently, Lynch and Sheldon (2017) extended this line of work into interpersonal contexts. They examined the role one type of control that has been deeply studied within SDT, namely *conditional regard,* plays in undermining authenticity (e.g., Assor & Tal, 2012; Roth et al., 2009). Prior SDT research has linked conditional regard, or the provision of attention, warmth, or affection only when one behaves as desired, with the formation of introjected regulations (Assor et al., 2004), which would imply less authenticity. In samples from three countries (China, Russia, and the United States), Lynch and Sheldon (2017) verified that the experience of conditional regard in past and present relationships predicted reduced feelings of authenticity within those relationships.

Genuineness, Disclosure, and Concealment

As discussed earlier, fundamental to authenticity in social interactions is genuineness and transparency (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Rogers, 1961). Yet people will be most authentic and most open about their experiences and emotions when they feel that their autonomy is supported. As with self-reported authenticity, SDT research has demonstrated that experiencing autonomy support robustly facilitates authenticity in the form of interpersonal openness and self-disclosure.

Supporting this idea, cross-cultural research by R. M. Ryan and colleagues (2005) examined within-person variability in *emotional reliance*, or willingness to turn to a specific person when emotionally salient events occur. Participants from South Korea, Turkey, Russia, and the United States reported how likely they would be to disclose a variety of emotionally charged experiences, both negative and positive, to each of four relationship partners (mother, father, best friend, and roommate), as well as the level of autonomy support they experienced in each relationship. Results of this

cross-sectional study indicated that across all four nations, participants were more emotionally reliant, or more likely to disclose their emotional experiences, to relationship partners whom they perceived to be autonomy supportive. When partners were perceived as controlling, however, participants were less willing to share their experiences with that person. Such findings parallel other SDT research that suggests that autonomy support promotes honesty and openness in parent-adolescent relationships (e.g., Bureau & Mageau, 2014; R. M. Ryan & Lynch, 1989) and that transparency and disclosure in close interpersonal relationships are inhibited by low autonomy support (Knee, Patrick, Vietor, Nanayakkara, & Neighbors, 2002).

Stigma, Identity, and Concealment in LGB Persons

Authenticity concerns the freedom to express one's identity without concealment or suppression (R. M. Ryan, Legate, Niemiec, & Deci, 2012). Disclosure is thus an important part of being able to be 'who one is' whereas inauthenticity entails suppressing or concealing some part of the self or conveying a false or surface presentation. The studies we reviewed above demonstrate that in contexts and relationships in which people experience autonomy support they not only report feeling more authentic, but are more open and expressive. When environments are experienced as controlling, however, people may choose not to, or feel unable to, reveal their authentic selves, especially potentially parts of their identity they may fear leading to rejection or harm. In turn, when people feel unable to behave authentically, basic psychological needs are less satisfied, ultimately lowering well-being.

Clearly, some identities, belief systems, and lifestyles are easier to express and integrate than others. Particularly difficult are identities that may be stigmatized or socially devalued (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998; Goffman, 1963). "Being yourself" is especially difficult in circumstances where one might expect others to react with negativity or prejudice. For these reasons, openness, disclosure, and authenticity are issues of particular importance to LGB individuals. Despite some social change, LGB individuals continue to be subject to victimization and discrimination (Balsam, Rothblum, & Beauchaine, 2005; Katz-Wise & Hyde, 2012), indicative of their continued stigmatized status. Unlike many other stigmatized identities, such as racial identity, LGB identities are often not readily perceptible to others. Because heterosexuality is generally assumed by default, one must disclose or in some other way express one's LGB identity in order for it to be known by others. While those with visible stigmata, such as people of color, may engage in strategies to minimize the impact of group membership (e.g., distancing themselves from the group and relevant stereotypes), they cannot altogether avoid the stigma attached so long as group membership is known (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Concealable stigmata, such as mental health status, minority sexual and gender orientations, and HIV status may, in some cases, be concealed to avoid threat of discrimination, rejection, and harassment.

Decisions to disclose are likely, therefore, to depend heavily on the interpersonal context and the treatment one expects to receive. Indeed, evidence suggests within-person variation in outness (e.g., Cole, 2006). One study found that only 23% of sexual minority youth had come out to everyone in their lives (D'Augelli, 2006). Although often discussed using dichotomous language (e.g., in vs. out of "the closet"), "coming out" is hardly a singular or all-encompassing event (Bohan, 1996). Rather, disclosure is a decision and process that must be engaged within each interpersonal context and in each new interaction (Beals, Peplau, & Gable, 2009; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000).

Additionally, it is not just whether individuals are out or not that is important; there is variation also in the level of openness and comfort discussing identity-relevant topics across different relationships and contexts (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000). For example, a bisexual woman's family and friends may both be aware of her sexual orientation, but she may only feel comfortable talking about dating, LGB rights, and other identity-relevant issues with her friends, not with her family. Thus, this woman displays greater outness with her friends than with her family. This example highlights the connection between outness and authenticity. Feeling free to discuss all aspects of one's life, including identity-relevant issues, is critical to authentic self-expression. Following from SDT, perceiving others as autonomy supportive is likely to facilitate authentic disclosure and openness, allowing even those with stigmatized identities to be more self-expressive. If true, autonomy support in different contexts may substantially account for different levels of disclosure and authenticity for potentially stigmatized individuals.

Legate et al. (2012) examined this question by looking at variation in sexual identity disclosure, or *outness*, among LGB individuals in a study of within-person variation across everyday life contexts. Specifically they assessed how "out" or open LGB persons were across various relational contexts (e.g., family, friends, faith community, workplace) as well as how controlling and autonomy supportive those contexts were. Thus, the focus was on within-person variation in openness and disclosure of LGB identity, which was expected to be a function of perceived autonomy support within each environment. Results indicated that, indeed, LGB individuals were more likely to disclose and be open about their identities in contexts perceived to be autonomy supportive.

These findings suggest that LGB individuals weigh, explicitly or implicitly, whether or not their expression of sexual identity is likely to be supported or rejected in a given context when deciding whether or not to disclose and discuss their identity. It seems clear that in controlling settings LGB people feel less authentic and respond to this with greater self-concealment. Critically, Legate and colleagues (2012) also found that disclosure was positively related to well-being only when done in the context of autonomy support; coming out in nonsupportive contexts was not associated with well-being benefits. This finding is important in that it reveals that coming out was only beneficial in autonomy supportive contexts, when people were supported in "being themselves."

Work by W. S. Ryan, Legate, and Weinstein (2015) further illustrates this point. These authors examined the impact of reactions from close others (i.e., mother, father, best friend) to "coming out" among LGB individuals and the impact of these reactions on subsequent well-being. Specifically, this study tested whether autonomy need satisfaction could account for the impact of perceived positive and negative reactions to disclosure on well-being. Results of this cross-sectional study indicated that negative reactions (e.g., "being furious," "crying") from important others to "coming out" thwarted LGB individuals' autonomy need satisfaction in that relationship and that this accounted for the strong relation between negative reactions from important others and poor well-being. In

other words, negative, rejecting reactions from others led LGB individuals to feel that their values, choices, and indeed they themselves were not valued or supported, and that this in turn was associated with depression and low self-esteem. Here again we see that it is not disclosure itself that directly impacts well-being, rather it is disclosure that is met with support for authentic self-expression that predicts wellness.

More recently, Legate, Ryan, and Rogge (2017) provided further, and more fine-grained support for this relation between perceived autonomy support, transparency, and relational well-being on an everyday basis. This study brings together both of the above studies by testing the full model of both the antecedents and consequences of disclosure. Specifically, Legate et al. (2017) examined both the facilitating effect of perceived autonomy support on disclosure and the impact of outness on well-being via the satisfaction of basic psychological needs in an adult LGB sample. Using an experience sampling methodology, participants reported on meaningful social interactions to examine moment-to-moment autonomy support, disclosure decisions, and well-being. Over a 2-week period they were sent text message alerts three times a day and asked to report on their most recent personal interaction. Participants rated perceived autonomy support, need satisfaction and thwarting, well-being, and their level of disclosure or outness during each of the probed interactions. Given that sexual orientation is not always conversationally relevant, the disclosure measure included not only items assessing not only how whether and how much participants' LGB identities were discussed in the conversation, but also how comfortable participants felt disclosing their sexual orientation should the topic arise, the extent to which participants concealed things associated with their identity, and their concern with revealing too much. Thus, disclosure here doesn't necessarily include explicit discussions about sexual orientation; rather, it reflected the degree to which participants felt open and transparent in their interactions, without need for self-suppression.

These researchers found support for a multilevel mediation model in which people varied in how out they were across their daily interactions on the basis of the autonomy support they perceived in those interactions. As predicted, greater perceived support was associated with greater disclosure in interactions. Greater outness predicted greater autonomy, relatedness, and competence need satisfactions, which in turn predicted greater well-being and fewer physical symptoms that day. Mediation analyses further indicated that disclosure and need satisfaction accounted for the relation between perceived autonomy support in interactions and day-to-day fluctuations in well-being and physical symptoms.

Two other things about this study are worth noting. Reprising our earlier distinction between consistency and authenticity, Legate et al.'s (2017) results showed that variability in outness across interactions was associated with greater well-being, suggesting that selective disclosure may indeed have adaptive benefits. Second, satisfaction of all three psychological needs (competence, autonomy, and relatedness) was assessed and these satisfactions mediated the relation between disclosure and wellness. This suggests that autonomous or willing disclosure not only helps people feel more authentic but also to feel more connected to others and competent about their identity, thus satisfying all three of SDT's basic needs. This is also consistent with other research suggesting that disclosure is beneficial when it leads to greater social connection and support (e.g., Beals et al., 2009; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998; Frable, Wortman, & Joseph, 1997) and where it affords positive feedback that contributes to more positive evaluations of self (Pachankis, 2007).

Authenticity and Internalized Stigma

We have emphasized how external, controlling climates may inhibit authenticity, and particularly openness and transparency regarding stigmatized identities. LGB individuals grow up aware of the negative stereotypes attached to their group, both witnessing and directly experiencing discrimination and identity-based rejection from important others and the broader social environment. Because of these experiences, LGB individuals may come to internalize these negative stereotypes and apply them to the self (Meyer, 1995). This can lead to self-rejection or self-denigration, among other challenges to wellness. The extent to which LGB individuals take on these stereotypes about their sexual identity is referred to as *internalized stigma* (or *internalized homophobia*; Meyer, 2003). These negative attitudes toward this part of the self may ultimately spill over to other parts of the self, contaminating evaluations of the self as a whole (Herrick et al., 2013; Meyer, 1995). Indeed, internalized stigma predicts vulnerability to experiencing depression, anxiety, and identity-related shame (Meyer, 2003; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010).

Individuals with high levels of internalized stigma are less likely than other LGB individuals to disclose or discuss their identity with others (Herek, Cogan, Gillis, & Glunt, 1998) and are especially prone to fear rejection from others based on their sexual orientation (e.g., Pachankis, Goldfried, & Ramrattan, 2008). Thus as Schmid (2005) put it, "trouble with the ongoing process of becoming authentic can be caused by the development of an inauthentic self-concept" (p. 76). It follows, therefore, that LGB individuals with high levels of internalized stigma may be particularly sensitive to the acceptance or safety felt within a social context, and that feeling acceptance is even more important in encouraging self-disclosure and facilitating well-being for these individuals. In contrast, controlling environments may signal to these individuals a pressure to remain incongruent and/or introjected in their identity expressions (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2012).

Given that individuals high in internalized stigma are struggling with important foundations for authenticity, namely identity integration and self-acceptance, perceiving autonomy support from the environment may be especially important for facilitating disclosure and openness about one's identity among such individuals. Using a study design that parallels Legate et al. (2012), W. S. Ryan, Legate, Weinstein, and Rahman (2017) examined variations in outness and well-being across contexts (e.g., with family, friends, and peers or coworkers) as a function of both individual differences in internalized stigma and perceptions of autonomy support in each relational context. Consistent with previous research (Herek et al., 1998; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010; Semlyen, King, Varney, & Hagger-Johnson, 2016), results confirmed that on the whole, LGB individuals high in internalized stigma were less out across social contexts and reported lower well-being than those with lower levels of internalized homophobia. Additionally, replicating Legate et al. (2012), autonomy support within a given social environment was associated with greater outness

and well-being. This relation, however, was significantly moderated such that, although autonomy support predicted greater outness and wellness for all LGB participants, this association was particularly strong for participants high in internalized homophobia. Put differently, for LGB individuals high in internalized homophobia, perceiving autonomy support is especially important for facilitating disclosure and well-being.

Important here is the idea that social controls and prejudices can be internalized by individuals, leading to less openness and authenticity overall. Yet, despite this, environments that provide autonomy support can be liberating, especially to those who may view their identity negatively. This can free people up for more and deeper connections with others and more positive identity-related experiences and feedback. However, looking at this same pattern of results differently suggests that controlling social climates act to maintain or even strengthen inhibited interactions and defensive processing.

Also illustrating the importance of autonomy support from important others for the integration and authentic expression of identity is a series of studies of implicit and explicit identity congruence concerning sexual orientations reported by Weinstein and colleagues (2012). Using multiple methods and measures they found that growing up with autonomy-thwarting parents was related to greater discrepancies between people's explicitly rated sexual orientation and implicit measures of same-sex attraction. Specifically, participants who experienced their parents as low in autonomy support were more likely to self-report their level of same-sex sexual attraction as lower than indicated by an implicit, reaction time measure of sexual orientation. It seems that these participants were less willing to report or less able to access experiences of same-sex attraction. This effect was particularly pronounced when parents were also rated as having high levels of homophobia. These results suggest that a lack of autonomy support can lead people not only to conceal aspects of self from others, but also to "hide from themselves," especially when attitudes toward that aspect of self are known to be negative (i.e., when others express homophobia). Interestingly, incongruent persons were more likely to express prejudice toward LGB individuals, betraying "reaction formation" (Freud, 1946), a defensively constructed attitude that serves to protect the self against realizing this incongruence.

As Kernis and Goldman (2006) emphasized, authenticity depends on awareness and lack of self-deception. SDT suggests that people can be defensively self-deceptive, especially when they internalize the controlling influence of others who would reject their identity. The varied identities people have are each only more or less integrated into the self (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2012; Weinstein, Deci, & Ryan, 2011), and much of this variation is a function of experiences of support and threat from social contexts.

Thus far we have focused on the integration and expression of LGB identities. However, autonomy support can facilitate integration for individuals with a wide variety of stigmatized or otherwise difficult identities. In a series of cross-sectional studies, Weinstein, Legate, Ryan, Sedikides, and Cozzolino (2017) examined the impact of autonomy support on identity ownership- or the extent to which an individual can accept and integrate a specific identity into her or his self-concept—and the impact of this on well-being. These authors found that autonomy support predicted identity ownership and that this relation was moderated by identity conflict, such that the relation between autonomy support and ownership was particularly strong for identities that participants struggled with in some way. Indeed, this pattern of effects emerged for a range of identities including stigmatized identities such as race (i.e., Latino/Latina), gender (i.e., women in Saudi Arabia), and sexual orientation (i.e., LGB individuals), as well as other difficult identities self-selected by participants. Importantly, ownership mediated the positive effect of autonomy support on psychological well-being. In other words, perceiving autonomy support is especially important for the integration and self-acceptance of stigmatized and conflictual identities. When individuals are able to exert ownership over difficult identities, psychological health is enhanced.

Openness and Authenticity Are More Satisfying

Evidence from SDT research indicates that other forms of self-concealment, beyond concealing one's sexual orientation, are associated with negative well-being outcomes via the thwarting of basic psychological needs. Using daily diary methodology and multilevel modeling, Uysal et al. (2010) found that the relation between concealment of personal information and poor well-being was mediated by a lack of basic need satisfaction. These findings suggest that self-concealment is linked to lower well-being because it thwarts needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Thus, where autonomy supportive contexts are able to facilitate authentic disclosure, they may also promote the fulfillment of all three of SDT's basic psychological needs, and ultimately well-being. Uysal et al. (2012) similarly showed that in romantic relationships, partners' self-concealment impacts relationship well-being, an affect accounted for by thwarted basic needs, including autonomy. These effects were obtained even when controlling for between-person differences in overall tendencies toward concealment. Both of the above articles utilized diary study methodology, which allows insight into daily processes, rather than simply trait-level associations.

These findings are, of course, consistent with a much wider body of SDT research showing that in conditions lacking support for autonomy people are less open, transparent receptive, or connecting (e.g., Knee et al., 2002; R. M. Ryan & Lynch, 1989). Such findings bear very much on authenticity, and authenticity's essential component of genuinely being who one is.

Toward a Social Psychology of Authenticity

This review of work within SDT on authenticity and autonomy support clearly supports the importance of authenticity as an attribute contributing to people's wellness. Research shows that not only are more authentic people psychologically healthier, but that there is within-person variation in wellness associated with this variation in authenticity. We all can be more or less authentic at different times.

Further, this variability is systematic. The more individuals anticipate social controls, conditional regard, or other external judgments and pressures, the more they may selectively conceal or suppress parts of themselves, and the less genuine they may feel they can be. This can especially be seen in our review of studies of the LGB community. Here, at a within-person level, and though multiple methods, LGB persons are more open and genuine when

they are with people or in social settings which they perceive to be autonomy supportive. When they are able to exercise their authenticity in such contexts, they benefit from it. These dynamics are not specific to LGB persons alone; there are many authentic aspects of self that can be suppressed because of perceived external control, constricting the flourishing of individuals.

In this sense, SDT provides a starting point for a social psychology of authenticity. SDT underscores how need-related elements in social environments impact integration and authenticity. Although in this review we emphasized the element of autonomy support, other aspects of social contexts undoubtedly also catalyze or diminish authenticity (Schlegel & Hicks, 2011). Understanding those additional facilitators and obstacles can give us greater opportunity to promote authenticity and the positive well-being effects associated with it. It can also add to appreciation of authentic resilience—when individuals remain authentic despite risks and costs.

In fact, in emphasizing how authenticity, or people's enactment of their "true selves," varies with social pressures and supports, we are not minimizing the role of individual responsibility or the need to muster resilience and remain authentic, sometimes despite social costs. SDT has, in fact, also highlighted how individuals, through their cultivation of mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003) and their exercise of autonomy (R. M. Ryan et al., 2012; Sheldon & Krieger, 2014), can be authentic even in the face of obstacles. Such courage is critical insofar as it exerts an "upward pressure" on societies toward greater acceptance and diversity of humanity (R. M. Ryan, Di Domenico, Ryan, & Deci, 2017). As Welzel (2013) recently documented, peoples' striving for emancipation typically precedes their acquisition of rights and freedoms, a dynamic we believe occurs at both interpersonal and societal levels of change. Nonetheless, it is also clear that social partners, groups, and societies can provide robust obstacles to authenticity, as well as positive affordances for it.

Future Research Directions on Authenticity

Authenticity is currently an expanding area of research with many promising avenues and lines of inquiry. We lay out just a few of these potential directions, which include both methodological and substantive innovations.

Methodological Issues

First, much of the work discussed in this review utilized cross-sectional and experience sampling designs rather than experimental or longitudinal strategies. Although this research tells us much about the strength of associations between characteristics of the social environment, authenticity, and well-being, it cannot shed light on the directionality of these effects. Additional research is needed to better characterize both how basic psychological need support facilitates authenticity as well as how the experience of, and processes entailed in, inauthenticity negatively affect need satisfaction.

Providing a positive example of this, Thomaes, Sedikides, van den Bos, Hutteman, and Reijntjes (2017) recently combined survey, experimental, and daily diary methods in examining the links between need support, authenticity, and well-being among adolescents, a population particularly concerned with questions of identity and "being themselves." They found that the experience of authenticity enhances well-being and, although it covaries with satisfaction of relatedness and competence needs, appears to result from the satisfaction of autonomy, specifically. Results also indicated that the experience of authenticity mediates the relation between psychological need satisfaction and well-being. In another example, Plasencia, Taylor, and Alden (2016) did an experimental manipulation intended to enhance authenticity in persons with social anxiety disorder. Results showed that it led to greater relational functioning in an interaction with a confederate.

Because the concept of authenticity is primarily derived from existential-phenomenological thinking and is experiential in nature, it appropriately follows that much of the research on this construct utilizes self-reports. Nonetheless, there are methods outside of the experiential realm that should be tapped in the investigation of authenticity. Among these, implicit methods seem relevant to the study of authenticity and "true self" functioning. For example, research by Weinstein et al. (2012) reviewed above suggested how inauthenticity might be associated with greater discrepancies between implicit and explicit assessments of motives and attributes. Similar research linking authenticity with implicit and explicit measure convergence would thus be innovative.

There has also been progress in linking distinctions between autonomous and controlled behavior to neurological processes (e.g., Di Domenico & Ryan, 2017; Reeve & Lee, 2018). One suggestion that has emerged is that clarity in making difficult preference decisions many be linked to access to self-representations in the medial prefrontal cortex (MPFC), which is facilitated by need satisfaction (Di Domenico, Le, Liu, Ayaz, & Fournier, 2016). Research on both authentic beliefs and social behaviors would benefit from similar examination of such neural underpinnings, because clearly there is a neurological component to "accessing one's true self."

Similarly, although research is increasingly addressing the psychological experience of state authenticity, little work has examined physiological concomitants. Existing research and theory suggest that inauthenticity would be associated with physiological stress reactivity. For example, the vigilance and self-monitoring associated with concealment has been shown to increase cardiovascular stress reactivity (Critcher & Ferguson, 2014). Research from the SDT perspective further suggests that perceiving autonomy support from one's romantic partner is associated with significant decreases in diastolic blood pressure over a 2-year period, notable because *increases* in diastolic blood pressure is taken as indicative of increases in psychosocial stress as well as overall declining cardiovascular health (Weinstein, Legate, Kumashiro, & Ryan, 2016). It is not unlikely that in a controlling relationship, inauthenticity and self-concealment of feelings, preferences and sensibilities may be chronic issues. Just as research shows that many stigmatized groups, including LGB individuals, evidence health disparities possibly due to concealment, the inability to be authentic in close relationships may also present a negative health impact.

Substantive Issues

An important area for research concerns how awareness, and particularly *mindfulness*, may facilitate authenticity and authentic interactions (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2004). Experience sampling studies have shown how mindfulness is

reliably associated with more autonomous functioning (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness may also well predict greater intra- and interpersonal congruence and genuineness, as expressions of authenticity. Of most interest would be detailing the processes through which this facilitation of authenticity through mindfulness occurs—such as greater empathy, more self-access, less vigilance, lower arousal, and so forth.

The role of basic psychological need satisfaction (or lack thereof) in the experience of authenticity (and inauthenticity) is also not well researched. Recent work found a strong association between self-alienation (an indicator of inauthenticity) and academic amotivation (Kim, Christy, Schlegel, Donnellen, & Hicks, in press), supporting the idea that a common pathway to self-understanding, authenticity, and congruence is the supporting of competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Future work is needed to explicitly integrate these lines of research and to directly test a causal model showing that thwarting psychological needs fosters experiences of inauthentic behavior, and supporting basic needs enhances authentic experience and social interactions.

Yet another area for inquiry is on distinctions within authenticity's components. The concept of authenticity clearly includes autonomy and congruence, as well as genuineness. Although autonomy necessarily entails intrapersonal congruence, and most instances of interpersonal authenticity are characterized by autonomy, there are rare instances when autonomy and interpersonal genuineness may not be concordant. For example, to benefit or help another person one might autonomously tell them a "white lie." Such instances of discordance between intra and interpersonal congruence are an import area for theoretical study. However, more research is needed on the more general relations between *intra*personal congruence and *inter*personal congruence and genuineness. That is, to what extent does knowing oneself translate into being oneself when with others?

One last emerging area of research concerns the connections between authenticity and morality. Evidence suggests that most people believe in a "true self" that is morally good (De Freitas, Cikara, Grossmann, & Schlegel, 2017; Newman, Bloom, & Knobe, 2014). Further, when people engage in immoral behaviors they experience lower levels of self-knowledge (Christy, Seto, Schlegel, Vess, & Hicks, 2016). In short, this work suggests that people feel most authentic when their behavior is in line with their sense of morality and feel inauthentic when their behavior violates their sense of being essentially good.

This work connecting morality with authenticity is congruent with SDT, which has long held that (a) people are more likely to be moral when acting with autonomy (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2017), and (b) when psychological needs are thwarted, defensiveness, aggression, ill-being, and even certain forms of psychopathology often result (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013). SDT work further shows that people find great need satisfaction in helping others (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010) and in being benevolent (Martela & Ryan, 2016). Specifically, autonomous engagement in prosocial behaviors (those that would be deemed "morally good") not only affords autonomy satisfaction but opportunities for additional psychological need satisfaction via the experiences of efficacy and connectedness helping others provides. In fact, as R. M. Ryan and Hawley (2016) suggested, such psychological satisfaction in authentic giving and caring are deeply evolved and support adaptive prosociality within groups.

Summary

Kernis and Goldman (2006) defined *authenticity* as "the unobstructed operation of one' s true or core self in one' s daily enterprise" (p. 294). Although authenticity is often viewed as a problem of the individual, in this article, we have underscored how much it is also a social issue. That is, the "obstructions" to authenticity that are faced by individuals appear both within and without. Social contexts at interpersonal, institutional, and even cultural levels can support or undermine authenticity, as findings at both within and between person levels of analysis concerning autonomy support demonstrate. Autonomy support may be particularly important for potentially stigmatized groups, who may be more wary of being genuine and open, as work on LGB disclosure illustrated.

Researching the social psychology of authenticity can potentially offer insight into how this important human capacity, and the resultant diversity and wellness it fosters, can be enhanced. For instance, we already know how to enhance autonomy in many contexts through interventions (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2017), making it a changeable variable. By promoting autonomy and other basic psychological need supports in family, interpersonal, occupational, educational, and other environments, we can facilitate self-disclosure, self-expression, and wellness, providing people greater opportunities for integrating various parts of themselves, and for experiencing the vitality and benefits of more authentic living. More generally, studying the ecology or social psychology of authenticity will likely point us back to our most optimal forms of interpersonal and social relationships.

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Received January 30, 2018
Revision received August 20, 2018
Accepted August 30, 2018 ■