

To Thine Own Self: The Psychology of Authenticity

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The Huffington Post:

One of the core principles of Alcoholics Anonymous, the 12-step addiction-recovery program, is authenticity. At least two of the steps emphasize the importance of honest moral inventory, and the AA “chip” — the medallion handed out to commemorate periods of continued sobriety — reads, “To thine own self be true.”

The people who created AA back in the 1930s were not scientists or philosophers, but the early literature contains many insights that scientists have verified in intervening years. The link between authenticity and morality and psychological health is not intuitively obvious. Some philosophers have indeed argued that the desire to be authentic — to act in a way that is consistent with one’s values and sense of self — is linked to well-being. But others have just as forcefully argued the opposite: that learning to express thoughts and feelings that obscure one’s true inner state is an important adaptation for successful living.

A team of psychological scientists has been working to resolve this issue empirically. Francesca Gino, Maryam Kouchaki and Adam Galinsky — from the business schools at Harvard, Northwestern and Columbia, respectively — are not interested in addiction recovery as such, but they are interested in the psychological consequences of being true to oneself. Authenticity means not only owning one’s actions but acting in accordance with one’s thoughts, desires and needs. This commitment is essential for self-regulation, and violating this commitment leads to feelings of inauthenticity, which taint one’s moral self-concept and lead to emotional dysregulation. In short, being an imposter to oneself leads to moral and psychological distress.

Read the whole story: [*The Huffington Post*](#)

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