Removing the barriers and reclaiming ourselves

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- Authenticity
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- Self-awareness
- Self-trust
- Wellbeing

In my last article (Molyneux, 2026a), I explored the hidden quest of authenticity. Not only its importance to our wellbeing and mental health, but more so, the ease of denial and distortion of our internal processes and selves.

I also explored how we will often be unaware that we are doing this. The essence of denial is that there is some benefit or comfort from actually being out of touch with the very thing we are denying! Instead, we are more likely to eventually get to a point of undeniable strain or symptoms that we can no longer ignore.

Our discovery of inauthenticity is likely to come via mental health difficulties, like anxiety or depression, or through faltering relationships, unhelpful behaviours or damaging habits. This commonly results in the start of a process of reverse engineering that brings us to the many ways that we have been unknowingly denying ourselves or our experience.

While this is a common process within counselling, I believe there are also other ways that we may be able to become more aware of these areas, as well as beginning our process of realignment with a more authentic way of being.

In this article I hope to explore some of these methods, as well as looking at some of the barriers that may be standing in the way of our authenticity. The encouragement for denial or disconnection of self is rife in the modern world, but I also believe this makes the pursuit of authenticity all the more important.

Removing the barriers

We increasingly live in a world that is giving us methods and reasons for distraction, disconnection and performance. Through the increasing presence of social media, endless information and scrolling, it is easy not only to lose touch with ourselves, but increase our focus on the external as a source of answers and attention.

As I explored in the previous article, person-centred theory believes the more that we look outside ourselves for answers and validity, the greater the psychological tension is likely to be. Even though our tendency to search for approval and acceptance from others is a part of being human, the modern world seems to have manipulated and increased this seeking, with many of the structures and services we find ourselves amongst in each waking hour.

As a result, I believe that removing the many barriers that may pull us away from ourselves, is a worthwhile starting point for this quest of authenticity. This is not to say that we need to become some strange mixture of luddite and hermit, but maybe clearing some of the deck, at least as a starting point, will give us some chance of reclaiming ourselves.

I think this is because the more noise, distraction and influence we are constantly absorbing, not only are we becoming further disconnected from our own compass, but we also significantly decrease the chances of reconnecting with it.

While I won't go into as much detail about what this might look like as I do in my book, I suppose what I am trying to point towards is our automatic tendency to reach for our phone or external stimulation in any gap or feeling of discontent we may experience. Even if we don't make noticeable changes in our behaviour, I think the least we can do is be curious about what we are doing and why.

For myself, I simply had two lists on my phone – what gave me energy and what took it away? I would add to these through each day and I would end up with some pretty clear results. I found that certain people, apps or tasks would significantly drain me, while others would give me a real boost and instantly improve my mood.

Of course, some of these things may not be optional, but I still think it can be useful to be more aware of our relationship with things we engage with and the impact they might be having. For example, we may have an app or platform that we are naturally drawn to and use regularly. We may feel the pull of this and have positive associations with it in our mind. However, when we pay closer attention to our process and make a note of how we are left feeling after using it, we might be presented with quite a different picture!

The liminal space

With this personal research project, we may not only get a clearer picture of the impact

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of things we engage with in our lives, but we may also begin to make different choices about how we engage with these going forward.

Once we start to see that every time I use this app, or engage with this person, I am left feeling depleted, heavy and unsatisfied, maybe we won't be as quick to keep going back to them in the same way as we used to. Equally we may be surprised, and clearer, on some of the things that we do actually enjoy and give us energy (more on this later).

Additionally, with more conscious choices, we may also find that we have more space as a result of the things that we may decide to lessen or cut out completely from our lives. As I was saying earlier, removing many of the barriers that pull us away from ourselves, or don't ultimately serve us, can be an important first step in reclaiming our attention and authenticity, especially in a world that is increasingly asking us to do the opposite.

But we may also find that we free up some precious time and resources in lives where this can often feel like an unachievable luxury.

We can also experience an increase in things like boredom, dissatisfaction or malaise. Afterall, that's exactly what many of these things are designed to soothe. And the designers know this all too well; built on clever ways to give us hits of dopamine, heighten emotions or keep us engaged for longer than we would like.

Naturally, if we begin to remove some of these things, then we can often be left in a liminal space where we are more aware of, and in touch with, some of these uncomfortable experiences (which influenced our seeking in the first place).

It reminds me of an old ascetic metaphor of drinking sea water to quench our thirst – we may initially feel as though we are addressing the problem, but it is actually likely to leave us even more thirsty and, at worst, increase our seeking in the wrong places.

It's possible that we may enjoy the extra space and awareness that comes from removing some of the things that don't ultimately serve us. But we may also eventually want to begin a process of reintroducing things into this liminal space. Lucky for us, we now have an inventory of things we have engaged with that give us energy and fulfilment!

Reclaiming ourselves

Completing the process of increasing our fulfilment and authenticity, we now come to a stage of making a more conscious choice of what we would like to feature in our life and why.

Using the lists I referred to earlier, we now also have the choice of increasing and reintroducing the more positive engagements into the new space we may now be presented with.

There may be elements on this list that are not surprising to us. Hobbies or relationships that we have always enjoyed and feel reliable in terms of the impact they have on us. But through our increased curiosity, we may have also discovered surprises in places that we didn't expect.

In some way, this is an overall benefit of being more curious and self-aware in general. Rather than having to stick to rigidity, and apparent predictability in our lives, we actually open ourselves up to a more surprising and expansive way of being and engaging. Curiosity becomes the purpose and lens through which we begin to see things, and this can have far-reaching impacts on our life as a whole.

In addition to using impact on energy as an evaluative tool for our inventory, we may also want to include the area of authenticity, specifically. While we may find that there is some correlation between the two, if we are trying to get back in touch with ourselves and, ultimately, increase our authenticity, then this would be a great metric to help in this pursuit.

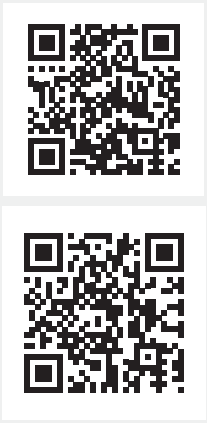
How relaxed did I feel with this person or service? How much did I feel I could be myself or that it was serving something deeper in me? How aligned did it feel with my values, needs and preferences? Did I feel as though I needed to be someone else or cover up some more authentic parts of myself?

Like all research projects, we are being curious about the data, and ideally without bias or ignorance. We simply engage with this as a project of self-discovery, using the impact on us, and our authenticity, as the ways to determine the results, and how this informs our behaviour moving forward.

A final sign-off

While I am aware that this article is quite a brief overview of areas that I have gone into much more depth with elsewhere (Molyneux 2026b), I also wanted to round off this journey towards greater authenticity. From our natural tendency to reject or conceal the parts of ourselves we find difficult to accept, to the ways this may be exacerbated in the modern world, we will then consider how we can reclaim our authenticity and a deeper sense of self.

This also happens to be my last article for *Wounds UK*. It feels similarly fitting that it completes a journey of trying to share what I could in relation to you, your work and many



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of the struggles that we are all trying our best to navigate throughout life. Ending with a book that captures the essence of what I believe this journey is all about – our authenticity.

I notice, as I look through my previous articles over the last 7 years, that the thread seems to be about finding permission to be ourselves - in all its messiness, fallibility and inherent humanness that we all continue to wrestle with moment to moment. And I also notice some additional threads of the importance of understanding and acceptance in our relating (to self and others).

So, I will sign off with a thank you to those who have read what I have shared and found some value in it wherever you needed. As always, I welcome any questions, discussions or contact around any of these areas and if you would like to keep up to date, you can visit www.chrismolyneux.co.uk or www.christhecounsellor.co.uk.

Let's raise our glasses to embracing our authentic selves. Warts and all!

References

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