

Impact of a Core Energetics Process Group on LGBTQ+ Authenticity

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ABSTRACT

Authenticity is the ability to know and understand one's thoughts and feelings, while acting in accordance with them. Authenticity is also called being aware or synonymous with one's true self. For many people who identify as a part of the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) community, being authentic is sometimes very challenging for fear of judgement, safety, and acceptance which is perpetuated by homophobia. This research is designed to understand the impact of participating in a Core Energetics group – a body centered psychotherapy process group – and the authenticity of the LGBTQ+ participants. The study focuses on determining if the use of Core Energetics and specific techniques in a group process (an unstructured group therapy technique) improves participants' ability to show up more authentically in their lives. The study utilizes existing authenticity measurement tools to quantify authenticity scores pre and post participation in the Core Energetics process group and compares these scores to a larger population score.

Keywords: Core Energetics, authenticity, LGBTQ+, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, mask, lower self, higher self, homophobia

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Authenticity is the ability to know and understand one's thoughts and feelings, while acting in accordance with them. Authenticity is also called being aware of, or synonymous with, one's true self. According to researcher and psychologist Stephen Joseph, "humanistic psychologists would say that by definition, authentic people possess a number of common characteristics that show they are psychologically mature and fully functioning as human beings." These include: 1) realistic perceptions of reality; 2) accepting themselves and other people; 3) thoughtfulness; 4) a non-hostile sense of humor; 5) ability to express emotions freely and clearly; 6) open to learning from their mistakes; 7) understanding their motivations. Joseph's research shows that when people are in relationships in which they feel accepted, understood, and valued, they can remove their masks and drop their defenses. They naturally begin to examine themselves psychologically, accommodate new information, and live more authentically. In short, it is authenticity that leads to true happiness (Joseph, 2017).

In current counseling practice, authenticity is commonly recognized as one of the most crucial aspects of a person's well-being, as well as a necessary component to achieve well-being. Lack of authenticity and self-awareness leads to unnatural attitudes and displays of violent behaviors, leading to feelings of unrest and unfulfilled desires, which lead the person to feel devalued and discriminated against. It is also very important to say that when people shed their masks and get more in touch with their authentic nature, this leads to increased well-being and a clearer sense of self, which results in self-fulfillment (Leary, 2003).

LGBTQ+ Communities, Homophobia, and Authenticity

In this paper, the term LGBTQ+ is used to represent the (L)esbian, (G)ay, (B)isexual, (T)ransgender and (Q)ueer communities, as well as affiliated identities and communities (+), which may include but are not limited to asexual, intersex, agender, and non-binary. LGBTQ+ encompasses a diverse culture based on sexuality and gender-based identity. While numerous other acronyms are currently in use, and the preferred terms associated with this community have changed relatively quickly in recent years, as of this writing, the term LGBTQ+ is widely recognized, commonly used, and inclusive.

LGBTQ+ individuals are one of the most stressed and misunderstood groups in society, having to deal with daily stressors such as homophobia, social discrimination, and limited support due to their gender identity or sexual orientation. Homophobia is experienced as a result of the chronically negative stereotypical attitudes faced by LGBTQ+ people. Such attitudes can be observed at both social and individual levels, and LGBTQ+ people may encounter these derogatory and negative attitudes throughout their lifespan (Weber-Gilmore, 2011). Some forms of homophobia and discrimination include the forced exclusion of LGBTQ+ couples on social media forums, alienation of LGBTQ+ individuals in normal everyday life, refusing to hire or rent out properties to LGBTQ+ individuals, or facing derogatory and disapproving attitudes and platitudes. Globally, LGBTQ+ communities are among those at risk of hate crime victimization, even in countries where acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals is relatively high. LGBTQ+ communities in more conservative countries may face more widespread and organized discrimination from anti-LGBTQ+ religious and political groups that mobilize to roll back legal rights and impose new penalties for gender-nonconformity and non-heterosexual expression – for example, the repeated attempts by the Ugandan parliament to criminalize same-sex relationships in that country (McKay and Agnotti, 2016). Further, in more liberal societies, full social inclusion of LGBTQ+ individuals (including the expansion of legal rights and protections) has been slow to occur and faces frequent setbacks. For instance, marriage equality was passed in the United States in June 2015; however, 28 states (including Ohio, where this primary research was conducted) do not provide LGBTQ+ individuals with protections for employment, housing, and public accommodations. Existing protections need to include sexual orientation and gender identity or expression to the covered areas currently identified as unlawful discriminatory practices (Ohio, 2017). Recent actions in the United States government have created concern for many LGBTQ+ individuals. On February 22, 2017, the Trump administration withdrew protections for transgender students in public schools that let them use bathrooms and facilities corresponding with their gender identity (de Vogue, Mallonee, & Grinberg, 2017). Finally, there are more

subtle actions occurring in government that minimize LGBTQ+ individuals. The Department of Health and Human Services recently removed questions identifying LGBTQ+ people from two important data collection programs: the National Survey of Older Americans Act Participants and the Annual Program Performance Report for Centers for Independent Living (Sedensky, 2017). A clear message of inequality is delivered by not providing protections and by removing LGBTQ+ people from government data collection. This inequality continues to tend to promote homophobia in America.

In addition to social level alienation, LGBTQ+ people may also face criticism and estrangement from their personal acquaintances and even family members. Homophobia can include unfair and scathing treatment by friends and family, while others may be unwilling to interact with people of “unknown gender identity.” Repeated exposure to casual homophobia, including anti-gay jokes, are hard to bear, both emotionally and intellectually. These events have very adverse effects on the lives of the LGBTQ+ individuals. Thus, many have historically chosen to limit their social gatherings and excursions to outings with only their own sexually-oriented group, or to clubs and businesses that cater to people of their own sexual orientation. LGBTQ+ individuals also develop disproportionate feelings of shame and negativity, and experience lack of confidence and negative self-attitudes (Weber-Gilmore, 2011).

These factors induce higher levels of stress and frustration, due to LGBTQ+ individuals thinking that they have to hide their true selves from those around them. Many people also develop a negative attitude and blame themselves for their same-gender sexual attractions. The acceptance of society’s homophobic and anti-gay attitudes about LGBTQ+ sexual orientation is known as internalized homophobia. Internalized homophobia gives rise to an increase in feelings of low self-esteem, shame, guilt, depression, and increased levels of anxiety (Almeida, 2009). Verbal and physical abuse by the immediate family and friends, and rejection and the sense of non-accomplishment have also been significant contributors to internalized homophobia.

Internalized homophobia or meek acceptance of society’s homophobic and anti-gay tendencies has proved to be disastrous for LGBTQ+ individuals. Extreme side effects of internalized homophobia can include prostitution, substance use and abuse, drug addiction, and sometimes suicide. Research shows that negative behavior and feelings experienced due to internalized homophobia has a far more disastrous effect on the health and well-being of the LGBTQ+ individuals than overt oppressive attitudes, such as prejudice and discrimination (McDermott, 2008).

Further, homophobia often prevents many LGBTQ+ individuals from showing up authentically. Homophobia and internalized homophobia have been significant determinants of self-imposed solitude by LGBTQ+ indi-

viduals and has an adverse effect on their ability to enter into society and associate with people who do not necessarily have the same sexual orientation. As LGBTQ+ individuals hide their sexual orientation and thus their actual identity, they often are faced with bouts of depression, and phases where they develop feelings of being “different,” lamenting their condition, and experience inner conflict and a perpetual feeling of minority due to their sexual orientation. LGBTQ+ individuals also tend to be mistrustful of long-term relationships because of their history of facing derogatory and insulting attitudes based merely on the natural inclination of their sexual orientation (Malyon, 1982).

Studies on LGBTQ+ authenticity have typically been conducted in relationship to authenticity in the workplace. It is widely-known that there are problems of inequality for LGBTQ+ individuals, which do not allow them to be as open about their sexuality as straight people. However, as gay leaders have become more active in campaigning for their rights, American society is evolving. There is no doubt that revealing one’s sexual identity is not an easy decision, and one that requires careful deliberation. However, Scharmm (in Conrad, 2016) notes that openly revealing and accepting one’s own sexuality not only brings out the real self in front of others, but one also tends to be less frustrated and burdened. Leading from the front and being open about one’s sexuality is extremely beneficial in a professional setting, as well as in one’s personal life (Conrad, 2016). LGBTQ+ people are largely responsible for shaping their own positions in society. They can be artificial, authentic, private or transparent. But once they accept their sexuality and are open and frank about it, they can lead more effectively.

LGBTQ+ individuals need to consider the stance of a company before they attempt to join it. Some companies employ the transparency policy, which is very useful for a prospective employee. A transparent hiring process requires honest communication from the time the open position is posted to the final handshake upon the offer of employment. Applicants know what to expect when working at an organization. They can then understand the organizational culture of the company and tap into a network of gay leaders to navigate the new job more effectively (Conrad, 2016).

Employees who hide their personality within the company are not able to fully engage with others, and face challenges with full inclusion in the workplace. This is not limited to sexual orientation, but also in the contexts of gender, race, and capabilities. Ten percent of LGBTQ+ people leave their jobs because they are not fully comfortable and are sometimes even forced to leave in the wake of negative treatment and demeaning behavior. LGBTQ+ people encounter a myriad of policies and state laws that can prompt them to rethink their decision of being open about their sexuality and gender identity. The American workplace is still very far from a utopia for LGBTQ+ people. It is a common misconception

that when LGBTQ+ individuals are open about their sexuality and engage in the same level of comfort as others, they bring their personal lives to work, whereas others do not. This creates an imbalance where straight and cis-gender people can talk about themselves, but LGBTQ+ cannot (Fidas, 2015). For employees who are not more engaging in their workplaces, this affects their productivity, and their professional connections and relationships. 54% of LGBTQ+ employees who are not open at work are accused of lying about their personal lives, as opposed to the 21% LGBTQ+ employees who are open at work. Trust and cohesion are qualities that are affected by the lack of authenticity. Derogatory comments and demeaning attitudes make it very unsafe for many gay people to be open about their sexual orientation (Degrees of Equality, 2009).

What is Core Energetics?

This paper examines the use of Core Energetics as a framework for addressing authenticity challenges for LGBTQ+ individuals. According to the *Sage Encyclopedia of Theory in Counseling and Psychotherapy*, Core Energetics is:

“a body-oriented psychotherapy that draws from developmental, evolutionary, and character theory. This approach posits the unity of human energy and consciousness and views each individual as having a center of energetic wholeness (the Core), whose vital energy is meant to inform and flow freely through the body, emotions, mind, will, and spirit. Core Energetics interventions restore energy flow that has been disrupted through the experience of developmental deficits that engender protective responses within the personality, known as character defenses, and within the body as energy blocks. Various techniques are used to liberate energy from constricted regions of the body, making suppressed material available to consciousness. The result is an expansion of clients’ capacity to express and contain emotion and use their energy toward creative rather than defensive purposes.” (Loustaunau & Gleason, 2015)

Core Energetics is comprised of three primary tenets. The first tenet refers to humans as a psychosomatic being, meaning that the body and mind are not separate entities. The second tenet holds that the ability to heal comes from within. Unlike the medical allopathic model, where it is believed that the doctor or physician heals the patient, this tenet posits that the necessary healing capability comes from within the body. The third tenet says that all existence is united to pave the way towards creative evolution of both the whole individual and the countless components of the body (Pierrakos, 2005).

Core Energetics characterizes healthy functioning by supporting a balanced flow of energy through five fundamental levels of existence: body, mind, emotions, will, and spirit. When energy is flowing freely, there

is optimum health and body functioning. When energy is blocked, health is lacking. These malfunctioning energies can adversely impact psychological function. Core Energetics states that each person has the ability to love, grow and evolve, and this potential to love and care is the major or primary form of the life force. The level of health is determined by an individual's capacity to remain in tune with their inner longings or feelings and provide outlets for that energy (Allison, 1999). Core Energetics also states that individuals are made up of layers of energy; at the core of existence is the life force, which is responsible for evolving and creating. When individuals are aware of this energy, they can more easily achieve balance.

The core energy is surrounded by the lower self, which is formed when we do not find a proper outlet for our negative and painful emotions. This is a defensive layer created to protect us from the feared ramifications of emotional expression. This layer of unexpressed emotional energy becomes fixed, hardened, and literally shapes our physical structure (Wilner, 1999)(Tickner, 2010).

Core Energetics emphasizes working out these energy blocks and emotional deficiencies in the body by using physical exercises and breathing techniques. These exercises include increasing or decreasing energy accumulated in various parts of our body, by grounding this energy or clearing away the blocked reserves. Some of these exercises include hitting pillows, kicking, screaming, and role play. This can be an outlet for negative energy, which can revitalize the individual (Pierrakos, 2005).

Core Energetics also uses unique equipment to assist clients to release energy. Two of the most common are a roller and a cube. The roller is directly used on the body for smoothing muscles in the back, feet, torso, and legs. The cube is a large piece of high-density foam that can be used to hit or kick. Touch and massage are also very important factors in Core Energetics. This bodywork focuses on blockages that can result in tension behind the eyes, jaws, and the diaphragm (Wilner, 1999).

According to Core Energetics, there are two main pathways of energy movement. Active energy is the flow of energy outward, as when we act upon something. Receptive energy is the flow of energy inward that opens us to love and allows us to feel moved (Wilner, 1999). According to Wilhelm Reich, founder of somatic psychotherapy, the body is divided into seven segments, which include the ocular, oral, throat, chest, diaphragm, abdomen, and pelvis. Energy can be repressed at any of these segments (Reich, 1945). Several types of somatic psychotherapy, including Core Energetics, work to open flow between these segments as well as balance active and receptive energy.

Core Energetics is a form of somatic psychology that brings together body, mind, and spirit, and allows us to channel our energies in a more positive manner. Core Energetics makes us realize that all individuals have the

innate ability and tendency to give and receive love and allows us to evolve to limitless potential. Core Energetics offers cathartic and body-focused interventions that help us remove the blocks that hinder our emotional, physical and spiritual movement (Core Energetics, n.d.).

The Core Energetics model assumes a three-layered personality structure. In any situation, people tend to react from any of these three layers of the personality (Pierrakos, 2005). The three layers of the personality are referred to as the Mask, the Lower Self, and the Higher Self.

- **The Mask.** This is the outermost most layer of the personality that is on display for the world to see. It is the main defense mechanism in place to avoid the full impact of pain, mistakes, and unfulfilled needs. The mask is the idealization or standard of the persona the individual believes they should be. It is imperative to note that the strength of the person identifying with the mask translates into the difficulties faced while addressing the issues that were created to hide it. Repressing tension and curbing emotions results in muscular tension, jutting jaws, and slouched shoulders, for example. The mask can distort love into self-denying and submissive behaviors, and one's power is reduced to controlling and aggressive attitudes. The mask is presented to the world and usually hides what the individual is actually thinking. Therefore, it lacks the authenticity associated with people who are well aware of themselves and their qualities (Pierrakos, 2005).
- **The Lower Self.** The layer that exists behind or below the mask is the lower self. This lower self has disowned energy and is a representation of destructive aspects of the personality that are normally kept hidden from the world. It is rich in energy and power, and is a result of the determination to avoid pain at all costs. This can cause people to move away or distance themselves from anything or anyone who might remotely cause them pain and develop a feeling of numbness toward intrapersonal and interpersonal interaction. This can be highly explosive and eventually lead to violent and cruel behavior against others or oneself (Pierrakos, 2005).
- **The Higher Self.** The layer underneath the lower self is the higher self. This is the true representation of an individual at the core. This is the pulsating energy of life, which holds the awareness of the originality and uniqueness of the individual. It is not in the category of either good or bad; this is simply the truth and reality. The higher self is associated with a wealth of connection, vitality, and encouragement to be more alive. The qualities associated with the higher self are love, power, wisdom, leadership, courage, and straightforwardness. Individuals who express qualities of the higher self are content, happy, relaxed, and experience joy in their lives (Pierrakos, 2005).

Looking at Core Energetics and the three-layer personality model, it is very prudent to say that individuals

who tend to be more in tune with their higher self are more capable of achieving a sense of true contentment in their lives. This is because they are more in tune with their needs, requirements, and qualities, and do not have energy blockages that can cause pent-up frustration and, at times, violent tendencies.

As a treatment paradigm, Core Energetics may potentially offer a means for LGBTQ+ individuals who struggle with their authenticity. The purpose of the current study is to determine whether LGBTQ+ individuals could benefit from an unstructured group therapy setting in which Core Energetics principles are applied. In particular, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) Do LGBTQ+ individuals experience an increase in self-acceptance, connectedness, and authenticity after participating in Core Energetics group therapy?
- 2) Which aspects of the Core Energetics group process program may be particularly beneficial to LGBTQ+ individuals in improving their self-acceptance, connectedness, and authenticity?

Methods

Participants. Participants in this study were selected using a homogeneous purposive sample (i.e., based on shared characteristics). In this study, the shared characteristics were: a) self-reported identification as a member of the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ+) community; b) age 18 or older; c) without self-report of substance abuse or untreated mental health issues. Twelve participants were recruited for the study. The gender identities of participants were male (6), female (5), and trans-man (1). Participants reported their sexual identities as lesbian (2), gay (3), bisexual (1), and queer (6).

Procedures. Each participant signed an informed consent prior to starting the study, which advised them that the study was investigating the impact on authenticity of participating in a Core Energetics process group focused on the LGBTQ+ community. Each participant agreed to the following research procedures: 1) complete pre- and post-group online surveys to measure authenticity and gather demographic information; 2) participate in an eight-week Core Energetics Process Group; 3) complete an individual interview at the end of the process group.

The pre- and post-group online surveys included the same two inventories: Authenticity Inventory (AI) (Appendix A) and Authenticity Personality Scale (AS) (Appendix B). The pre- and post-results were then used to determine if there was a change in the authenticity scores of each participant and in the overall group.

Process group meetings lasted three hours each, and were conducted over a 10-week period. Participants were required to attend a minimum of six out of eight process group meetings, which all but one participant successfully completed. One participant completed only

five meetings due to an emergency but was also included in the reported results. The participants learned basic information about Core Energetics and engaged in group exercises and weekly emotional process work utilizing the principles of Core Energetics. An outline of the eight meetings, including safety guidelines, is found in Appendix C.

Participants were asked to provide feedback via an online survey after select process group meetings. These were given after group meetings 1, 2, 4 and 7.

At the conclusion of the group, each participant completed a qualitative one-on-one interview with the primary researcher. The same questions were asked of each participant. Open-ended initial and follow-up questions allowed for exploration on the impact of participating in the Core Energetics process group. Each of these interviews was video recorded, with signed permission from the participant. The data was then transcribed to discover themes and impacts that could be synthesized into the findings. A complete list of the questions used can be found in Appendix D.

Finally, an online survey of the general public was employed to gather demographic data and completion of the Authenticity Personality Scale (AS), which was used to compare to the Core Energetics process group participants. 745 responses were gathered from this online survey. Participants were recruited through word of mouth, social media, emails, and newsletters.

Scales Used to Measure Authenticity. For an accurate study, authenticity needs to be measured and quantified. Several measures of authenticity exist, and the majority of these methods use self-report analysis. These measures can have challenges: first, people may answer in a filtered way because they want to appear in a certain way: as their “mask.” Secondly, people may be unaware of their authenticity due to a lack of available knowledge (Reich, 2013). The two authenticity measures used in this research are the Authenticity Inventory (Goldman, 2005) and the Authentic Personality Scale (Wood, 2008).

- **Authenticity Inventory (AI / AUT3).** The Authenticity Inventory (AI) is based on a multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity. This scale has forty-five items with different roles. Twelve items measure the component of awareness, 10 measure unbiased processing, and 11 measure behavior. The remaining 12 items measure relational orientation. This scale provides a more well-rounded evaluation of authenticity, despite being rather lengthy for participants to complete (Goldman, 2005).
- **Authentic Personality Scale (AS).** The Authentic personality scale is based on a person-centered model of authenticity, with 12 items that measure three aspects of authenticity: self-alienation, authentic living, and accepting external influences. This scale was purposely kept small in size so it could be used in a counseling environment (Wood, 2008).

Results

Authenticity Measures

There were three quantitative measures used with the process group members to measure the impact on authenticity of participating in the process group. These included: 1) a Feedback Survey to measure the difference between week one and week seven; 2) an Authenticity Personality Scale, and 3) an Authenticity Inventory.

A feedback survey was administered during week seven. Participants were asked to indicate their level of authenticity based upon a seven-point Likert scale regarding week one and week seven. The results show the average group score increased from 4.3 in week one to 6 in week seven. This represents a 39.53% increase.

The **Authentic Personality Scale** was completed by each group participant before the start of the group and at the conclusion of the group to determine any changes as a result of participating in the Core Energetics process group. Positive changes were found in all components of the scale.

The Authentic Personality Scale (additional details and definitions in Appendix B) is comprised of three components. Each component had four questions worth seven points each, with the highest score then being 28 in each area. The components include:

1. Authentic Living
2. Accepting External Influence
3. Self-Alienation

In Figure 2, the results for **Authentic Living** show that the average score for the process group participants was 22.67 prior to the group. This number increased to 25 after the group, reflecting a 10.27% positive increase. The general population score was 24.09. Thus, the group was slightly ahead of the general population at the conclusion of the group.

The results for **Accepting External Influence** show that the average score for the process group’s participants was 14.25 prior to the group. This number decreased to 13.42 at the conclusion of the group, reflecting an 8.82% positive decrease. The general population score was 12.34, which is 1.08 better than the final group score.

The results for **Self-Alienation** show that the average score for the process group’s participants was 12.5 prior to the group. The general population score was 9.77%. After the process group, the group’s score decreased to 9.25, reflecting a 26% positive change as well as outperforming the general population.

The table in Figure 3 shows both the pre- and post-group mean scores for each of the 12 questions posed in the Authentic Personality Scale. The chart also shows the percentage change with a positive outcome indicator. Eleven of the 12 questions, or 92%, reflect a positive outcome after the group.

These results conclude that participating in the Core Energetics process group had a positive impact on the authenticity of the group participants, according to the Authentic Personality Scale.

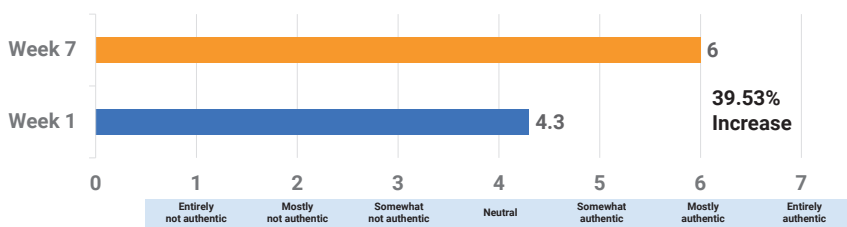


Figure 1. Feedback survey results

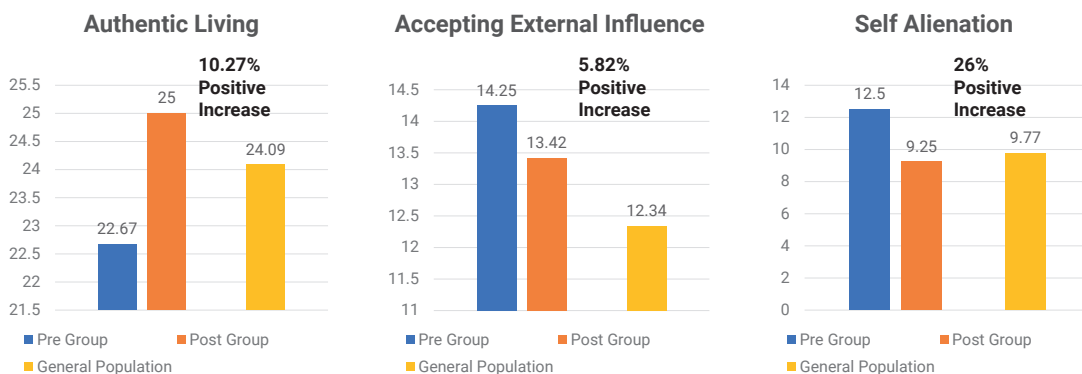


Figure 2. Authentic Living, Accepting External Influence, and Self Alienation

Question	Pre-Group Mean Score	Post-Group Mean Score	Point Change	Percent Change
1. "I think it is better to be yourself, than to be popular."	6.08	6.67	0.58	9.59
2. "I don't know how I really feel inside."	3.17	2.58	-0.58	-18.42
3. "I am strongly influenced by the opinions of others."	3.75	3.42	-0.33	-8.89
4. "I usually do what other people tell me to do."	2.83	3.08	0.25	8.82
5. "I always feel I need to do what others expect me to do."	3.50	3.17	-0.33	-9.52
6. "Other people influence me greatly."	4.17	3.75	-0.42	-10.00
7. "I feel as if I don't know myself very well."	2.83	2.25	-0.58	-20.59
8. "I always stand by what I believe in."	5.50	6.08	0.58	10.61
9. "I am true to myself in most situations."	5.58	6.00	0.42	7.46
10. "I feel out of touch with the 'real me.'"	3.42	2.25	-1.17	-34.15
11. "I live in accordance with my values and beliefs."	5.50	6.25	0.75	13.64
12. "I feel alienated from myself."	3.08	2.17	-0.91	-29.73

Figure 3. Authentic Personality Scale

The final quantitative measurement shown in Figure 4 was the **Authenticity Inventory** (additional details and definition in Appendix A), which utilizes 45 questions and captures the mean result of four components including: 1) Awareness; 2) Unbiased Processing; 3) Behavioral; and 4) Relational Orientation. Additionally, a composite score for all four components was calculated.

The results of the Authenticity Inventory show the positive impact of participating in the Core Energetics process group. There was a composite score increase, along with individual increases in each of the four measured components.

In addition to the quantitative measures described above, qualitative one-on-one interviews were conducted with each participant. Two questions were asked regarding authenticity in these interviews.

1. Did participating in the group help you to show up more authentically in your life?
 - a. If yes, how?
 - b. If no, do you have any insights why?
2. How has your experience in the group impacted your ability to live more authentically in your life?

In the narrative responses, all twelve participants indicated YES, that participating in the group did help them show up more authentically in life. Here are some of the ways authenticity was cited by group participants:

- I am just a little more grounded and comfortable. (Participant 001)

- Something shifted, and I am letting go of fear. (Participant 002)
- I have been trying to stop and pause if somebody says something or asks my opinion. I try to create a little bit of pause and space, and not try to figure out the way they would want me to respond, but how I really feel about it. Then I respond from my truth and what my feelings are. (Participant 003)
- I really try to be myself – not pretend to be somebody that I'm not. (Participant 004)
- I am challenging myself to be more "out." (Participant 005)
- I had to let go of self-doubt and it pushed me forward. (Participant 007)
- It definitely made me really conscious of how I'm presenting myself. Also, more mindful about who I let in. I am not letting everyone through the door now. (Participant 008)
- I have learned it's okay to be me. I am even more proud to be LGBTQ+. (Participant 009)
- I am learning to... take a pause, reality check, see what's the big picture here. (Participant 010)
- Learning to say no. (Participant 011)
- I have created a much bigger awareness of the elements of authenticity, and I am more cognizant in my responses to questions like how are you. (Participant 012)
- I've been more fluent in my conversations at work about my personal life. (Participant 013)

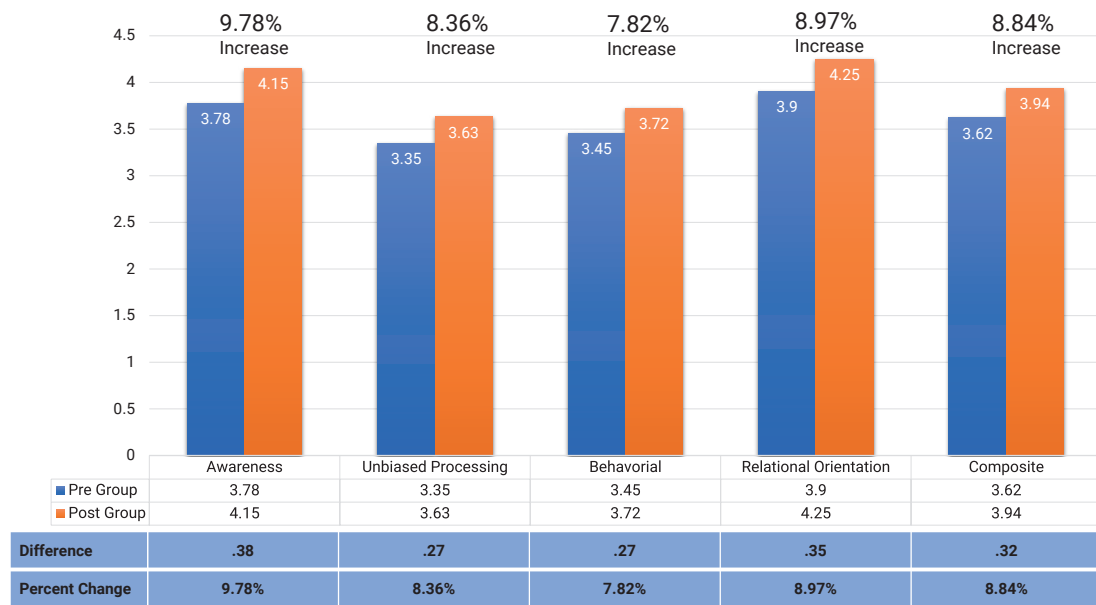


Figure 4. Authenticity Inventory

As a part of the final evening of the process group, participants were asked to write a Love Letter to Your Authentic Self. Participants found this to be a very powerful exercise. Eight of the twelve participants agreed to share their letter as a portion of this report; these letters help to show the authentic results of the Core Energetics process group and the vulnerability of the group members, and can be found in Appendix E.

Evaluating the Impact of Core Energetics

A secondary goal of the research was to begin to understand what activities and methods employed in the Core Energetics process group had the most impact. During both closing interviews and weekly feedback, participants were asked to evaluate various exercises that were conducted throughout the program. Participants indicated that the following activities or exercises had high impact.

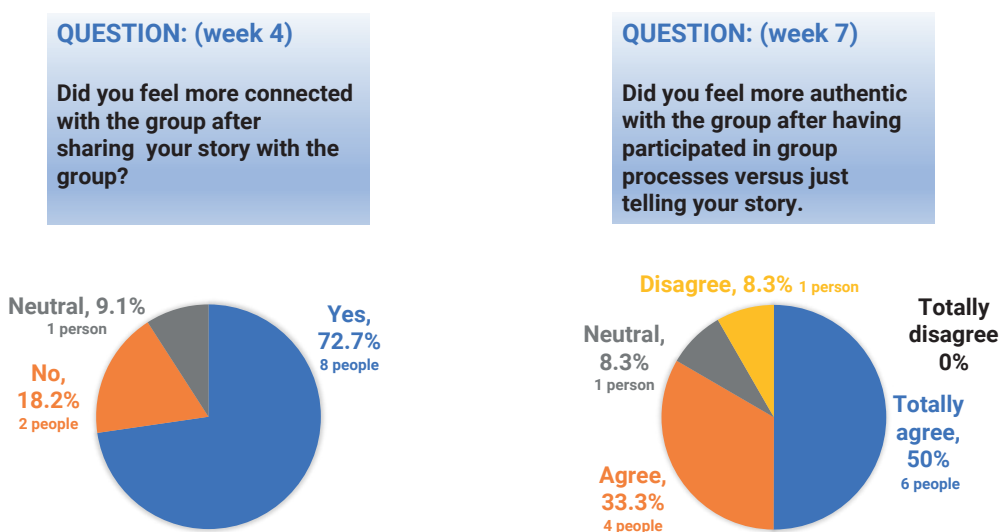


Figure 5. Impact of Sharing and Group Process Work

- **Real Story Exercise.** During the third and fourth meetings, each participant was given six minutes to share their story. The facilitator encouraged the participants to tell the “real” story; the story that they usually never share. A majority of group participants (73%) reported feeling more connected to the group after sharing their story with the group; relatedly, most participants (83%) reported feeling more authentic with the group after participating in group process work (Figure 5).
- **The Mask Exercise.** This exercise allowed each participant to create a physical mask to reflect how they present themselves to the world (see Exhibit F). Participants were then asked to make a list of both good and bad qualities that they hide behind the mask. Each participant then stood in the middle of the circle and had to make eye contact with every participant while wearing the mask. Finally, each participant was given the opportunity to share the qualities about themselves which they hide behind the mask. The statements below are quotes from each of the group members revealing two things they hide behind their mask. These quotes reflect the vulnerability and authenticity that the group participants were already achieving by week two.
 - “I shared that I am not perfect. I did not get to share more because of the intensity of emotions that I was feeling at that time.” (Participant 007)
 - “That I am scared to really get to know people, but I want to feel known by them, nonetheless. I am terrified of being hurt or even just let down by people. I did not attend college. I made a conscious choice not to, and instead live in intentional community. I often now try to hide the fact I don’t have a degree.” (Participant 001)
 - “I run away from romantic relationships. I avoid these to prevent a broken heart.” (Participant 010)
 - “That I am afraid to be seen and for my glorious light to shine! I dislike and am terrified of being judged.” (Participant 002)
 - “Bad relationships / discomfort with men. Disconnection with internal self.” (Participant 012)
 - “My fear of rejection and betrayal – if I open my heart to people in friendship, I am afraid that I ultimately will be rejected, found unworthy or undeserving of their friendship. I want someone to care for me in a way like the way I have cared for all those in my life who have needed care. Protecting my inner child from being hurt. Afraid of having no purpose.” (Participant 011)



These images are a part of the Mask exercise which was conducted on the second night of the group.

- “Afraid of not being worthy of love. Afraid of not being seen.” (Participant 009)
 - “The depth of the pain that I sometimes feel inside as a result of my sexual abuse/assault history. My sexuality/orientation... how I keep it hidden from the world for the most part, and that I’m not even all that comfortable with it myself a lot of the times.” (Participant 003)
 - “That I am not confident as a father, even though many people perceive me that way. My bisexuality: while I am out to some, there are many I am not out to.” (Participant 005)
- **TRE® (Trauma / Tension Releasing Exercises)** is a series of exercises that assist the body in releasing deep muscular patterns of stress, tension, and trauma. Created by David Berceci, TRE® safely activates a natural reflex mechanism of shaking or vibrating that releases muscular tension, calming down the nervous system. When this muscular shaking/vibrating mechanism is activated in a safe and controlled environment, the body is encouraged to return to a state of balance (Berceci, 2017). The impact and experience of each participant widely varies, which may reflect their personal histories (including trauma, stress, and tension) as well as held energy

and emotions. The following quotes capture some of the feedback from group participants.

- “Somewhat painful. But I felt that I had to keep my pain in. It was very hard for me to yell out. I kept seeing my mother’s face saying, “You’re a boy – boys have to be strong and don’t show emotion. It is a sign of weakness.” So, it was somewhat stressful to me to let out signs of pain or emotion.” (Participant 006)
 - “I feel like it is an ideal mechanism for my body to release trapped trauma that was never processed at the time of the trauma.” (Participant 003)
 - “It was remarkable; I didn’t think it would happen, but it did. I felt feelings of great joy and I was able to see clearly. I saw faces of my loved ones and felt comfortable with my experience.” (Participant 010)
 - “Made me very uncomfortable. Never had that happen before, so it was scary. Fear was my primary feeling.” (Participant 004)
- **Process work** is an opportunity to have participants explore their feelings and emotions safely within the container of the group. Some of this work occurred in pairs, with the entire group focused on the same



These images are candid photos taken on different nights when the group was working on boundaries and finding their voice.

issues such as understanding boundaries. At other times, an individual would choose to “claim the space” to work on an issue in their life. Usually, these processes would include physical and energetic exercises to work with held emotions in the body. Some of these included: 1) the group cradling and rocking a participant; 2) hitting the cube; 3) boxing with the facilitator; 4) psychodramas. The comments below capture some of the feedback from participants regarding the impact of process work.

Cradling / Rocking a Group Member (individual work)

- “I really liked it because it helped me feel that my presence was valuable and important to the group.” (Participant 007)
- “I really liked it. It was so empowering to be able to physically care for a person, and to actually see and be that village that supports and cradles people. I found it to be so profound because we do not receive enough human contact, and we do not physically demonstrate healthy loving relationships and contact that is safe. How great does it feel to be completely vulnerable and cared for in a group. The exercise helped show the support that we all can lean on each other.” (Participant 009)
- “I found the opportunity to help nurture a group member to this extent extremely healing for me as well.” (Participant 003)

Meeting Different People with No Words and Placing Hands on Each Other’s Heart

- “I felt the other person, and sometimes my energy was drawn to some more strongly than others. I felt my body lean into some people, and others I could feel their heartbeat.” (Participant 009)
- “I felt much more comfortable and connected giving than receiving, I could barely even pay attention to that portion.” (Participant 001)
- “It made my heart physically hurt. It was very uncomfortable.” (Participant 008)
- “I felt very cared for when I was receiving the other person’s hand on my heart. I did not feel any body sensations in either receiving or giving, other than just a sense of calm. My experience when I was placing my hand on one particular person’s heart, was that of apprehension... I was concerned for this person... aware that touch may not feel good to them, and I noticed that they were not connecting with my hand and were only very slightly letting me actually touch and make contact with them.” (Participant 002)

Intimate Boundaries – Moving Toward a Partner and Determining How Close Was Safe

- Some parts were a little uncomfortable but, towards the end of the experience, I really felt my partner’s energy. It was nurturing and sincere. (Participant 009)

- Yes, I liked it... And it felt very good. My body was ready, and I was aware that I wanted and needed more physical contact. I felt very comfortable with my partner, and even though I have been less involved with him than some of the others, I was happy to now get a chance to have a more intimate experience with him. It helps that I find him attractive and that he is bigger in size than me. I like being the little spoon. He was open to me being the little spoon... my legs on top of his and then eventually on his lap for a delightful cuddle. It was needed and felt very genuine. (Participant 002)
- It was a little awkward the closer we became to one another. But knowing the intent made it easier. It’s easy to see how people defer to laughing and even unexpected sexual encounters. (Participant 013)
- I did like it. I felt like I have been yearning for it. We go through our lives and days and we are afraid to touch people and receive love. It was good to experience that. At first I was apprehensive, but then I got more open as my partner kept moving forward towards me. It was then like I was getting ready to receive their energy, and that is not something that I do regularly, so it was really comforting because that’s the kind of experience that I want to have more of in my life. (Participant 007)

Movement of Anger (individual process)

- It felt good to express some of the anger that I hold inside so tightly. I realize today that there is a lot more there, and that I may have held back some last night – not purposely but realize that I may have been unsure of what would have happened if I had totally felt the anger/rage inside of me. I was not afraid of others’ reactions, but was afraid for myself. I did take a very big first step though, and I am grateful for that. (Participant 003)
- It helped me to feel more connected because I can relate to his suppressing anger. I was able to yell with him and release my own knots internally. (Participant 007)
- I was happy and sad for him at the same time, happy that he was willing and able to get it out, but sad that he was forced to feel the way he does in spite of knowing that there are people who truly care for him. I felt very connected to him in the end, and it made me realize some things about myself that positively impacts my authenticity. (Participant 011)

Feeling Support (individual process)

- I think I am still processing my own process. It was very scary and uncomfortable for me to feel support. It didn’t feel real, but looking back, I can

see that it was very real and that people are really there for me if I let them in. (*Participant 008*)

- After this process, I noticed that I have a hard time asking for support as well. This stems from different issues. I learned that you have to have the courage to ask sincerely, no matter what the response may be. I have to understand not everyone (including family members) will be willing or even have the capacity to support. (*Participant 009*)
- I related. Sometimes I also say to myself, “What’s the point? They won’t be there/stick around when I need their friendship/love/support.” It made me feel more connected by reminding me that we share a lot of similar struggles. (*Participant 003*)

The feedback given by participants suggests that the process work done was very impactful in helping them to make changes. It is often said in a Core Energetics process group that...” Your work is my work.” This means that when you witness or are a part of another person’s process, you learn about yourself and are often impacted. The following quotes reflect feedback from group members in week seven when asked to “Describe how it was to participate in someone else’s process. How did it impact you? What feelings did it bring up? What did you take away from it?”

- It definitely made me feel more connected to everyone, and also made me feel less alone in my own feelings and experiences. It made me feel hopeful that I could have genuine connections like these in my personal life. (*Participant 008*)
- Being a part of someone else’s process was reflective. I was able to relate to most people’s issues and see what I needed to work on by watching their process. There was one process that had to do with anger, and the sound of the tennis racket hitting the cube brought up some very intense and uncomfortable feelings of real-world violence. It was a trigger for me. The sound reminded me of gunshots, and it shook me to my core. (*Participant 009*)
- It was definitely difficult. I felt empathy for the other person, and I unconsciously started to see some of the ways their pain/struggle was similar to my own. (*Participant 012*)
- All the things that people worked on were incredibly powerful for me, because I had to process some of their stuff, which helped me to release some of my stuff. So, it’s very important watching other people because it helps to facilitate my own issues. (*Participant 007*)
- It was moving; it brought up mixed feelings from my perspective. In one instance, I was very happy for the person going through the process, but felt

a little sadness from my own perspective. (*Participant 011*)

- Twice I wondered if the person was exaggerating the story to be the center of attention. In each case, once the core was revealed, I understood the authenticity. I realized that it can be easy to judge or even deflect if I might not want to see my own issues revealed. (*Participant 013*)

Discussion and Conclusion

The goal of this study was to determine if participating in a Core Energetics process group could have a positive impact on the authenticity of LGBTQ+ participants. The statistical results clearly indicate positive outcomes among group participants.

After a comprehensive detailed study, it is important to say that Core Energetics can be a very impactful tool to improve authenticity in the LGBTQ+ group. Society’s derogatory treatment and forced social isolation can be very hard on an individual who is persecuted simply because of a “different sexual orientation.” The abuse, the insults, the social and cultural abandonment, the financial instability, and the lack of emotional attachment can wreak havoc on LGBTQ+ individuals. It is therefore very important that these individuals become more in tune with their inner self, and communicate with their higher self, rather than live in the mask. Once the mask is shed, and the actual hidden qualities of the individual come out, society may be more accepting of the status and position of the LGBTQ+ individuals in the community. The exercises and techniques employed in Core Energetics process group proved instrumental in making participants more aware of their true inner self and helping them bring their true qualities out into the open. And thus, shedding the mask. Expressing feelings in a safe and constructive manner and removing energy blockages will allow the LGBTQ+ community to become more self-aware and thus build their authenticity.

During the closing interview, participants were asked if they would encourage their LGBTQ+ friends to participate in a Core Energetics process group. One hundred percent of the participants indicated they would make this recommendation. Participants indicated that they did feel safer to explore their emotions knowing that every participant was a member of the LGBTQ+ community. One participant noted, “I like that the group was connected to our sexual orientation because I felt that we didn’t have to explain what it means to be gay.” At the same time, 100% of the participants indicated that they believe that the Core Energetics process group could have a positive impact on the general population, as well as other specialized groups. One participant indicated, “I would say we definitely need healing, so I would recommend it to as many people as possible; male, female, it doesn’t matter, as long as it brings us all together.” Another participant responded. “I just think

it is important work and really valuable work, regardless of sexuality.”

Although the results of this study are encouraging, several limitations should be noted. First and foremost, the small sample size limits the generalizability of this study to LGBTQ+ communities outside the narrow regional scope of the study. As noted earlier, LGBTQ+ communities encounter homophobia around the world, but the nature, extent, and consequences of homophobia varies widely both within and between societies. Further, LGBTQ+ individuals in different locations may internalize homophobia in different ways as a result of their local experiences, visibility within the community, and cultural context. Second, while efforts were made to be inclusive, the small sample size also limited the degree to which it represents the diversity of the LGBTQ+ community. In particular, these findings may not be generalizable to individuals identifying as transgender, non-binary, or asexual, as the sample included only a single person identifying as transgender and did not include many other possible identities under the LGBTQ+ umbrella. Third, this study was not designed to evaluate the efficacy of the group process model for LGBTQ+ individuals who may experience marginalization *within* the LGBTQ+ community and may not be sensitive to the internal authenticity struggles within LGBTQ+ communities between its constituent subgroups. Bi-phobia and trans-phobia are present even in LGBTQ+ commu-

nities, and therefore a group process model should be approached with sensitivity and caution when dealing with individuals who identify as bisexual or transgender.

This study generated insight into the positive impact Core Energetics had on the authenticity of LGBTQ+ participants. Additional research should be conducted with a similar group using a different therapeutic approach with the same authenticity measures to determine which modality has the more effectiveness. I would also suggest additional research be conducted with additional homogenous groups as well as the general population to determine if the effectiveness with these groups is the same when participating in a Core Energetics process group.

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