**Basic Psychological Needs, Authenticity, and Well-being in Transgender and Nonbinary**

**Adults**

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study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author at zakary@wustl.edu.

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**Abstract**

The primary focus on the overall higher risk for poor psychosocial and health outcomes has overshadowed inquiries into general psychological processes that might support the psychological well-being of transgender and nonbinary individuals (TNB). Using Self-determination Theory (SDT) to assess basic psychological needs satisfaction and recent findings about the importance of authenticity to TNB people, we tested the hypothesis that general authenticity would explain positive associations between perceptions of Basic Psychological Needs (BPN) satisfaction and Eudaimonic Well-being (EWB). We recruited a TNB sample of 489 adults ages 18-61 (*M* = 26.32; *SD* = 6.72) who completed a Qualtrics survey hosted on the Prolific Academic platform in 2022. The results of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) supported the hypothesized model; people who reported higher levels of BPN satisfaction also reported significantly higher eudaimonic well-being. Higher levels of authenticity partially, but not completely, explained this association. SDT may be a useful theoretical framework for further understanding barriers and facilitators of TNB adults’ EWB. In the social context of stigma and discrimination, being more authentic help facilitate one’s BPN satisfaction, and thereby support EWB. These findings have implications for future testing of general psychological processes in TNB population and interventions to facilitate basic needs satisfaction.

KEYWORDS: transgender, nonbinary, gender expansive, basic psychological needs, eudaimonic well-being, authenticity

Public Significance Statement: In a sample of transgender and nonbinary (TNB) adults, the satisfaction of basic psychological needs was associated with higher levels of well-being. Authenticity partially explained this positive connection. TNB people need support for living authentically and for satisfying their needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

**Basic Psychological Needs, Authenticity, and Well-being in Transgender and Nonbinary Adults**

Transgender and nonbinary (TNB) people are those whose gender identity does not align with that expected based on their sex assigned at birth. Nonbinary people more specifically do not identify within the expected male/female gender binary. The stigma and discrimination that TNB people face and the resulting negative impacts on their psychological and health outcomes are well-documented (e.g., Livingston et al., 2020; Puckett et al., 2023). Likewise, a significant body of research on stigma-related processes (e.g. gender minority stress) and negative psychological outcomes (e.g., depression, anxiety, suicidality) is available (Tebbe & Budge, 2022). Less known is the relevance of general psychological processes such as basic psychological needs (BPN) satisfaction to important positive outcomes such as eudaimonic well-being (EWB). While all human beings have basic psychological needs that may affect their well-being, it is important to test these associations in populations whose social context poses challenges and creates barriers. Such is the social context of TNB people, many of whom, despite the risks of harm, find ways to create lives of meaning and purpose (Wester & shuster, 2023).

We drew on tenets of Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) and more recent findings on authenticity as an aspect of positive TNB identity (Austin, 2016; Clements et al., 2023; Riggle et al., 2011; Tebbe et al., 2024), to test a hypothesized model whereby TNB adults’ self-reported authenticity would help explain positive associations between their BPN satisfaction and their EWB. In this paper, we argue, based on theory and previous empirical findings, that the stigmatizing and discriminatory social context can undermine TNB well-being by interfering with the satisfaction of basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, relatedness, and competence).

For example, some states have recently banned gender affirming care (Human Rights Campaign, 2023), inhibiting TNB people’s bodily autonomy. Many seek identity document changes encounter barriers that also prevent their autonomy (Movement Advancement Project, 2023). Stigma and marginalization of TNB people, and the process of internalizing this negative self-view, increase the risk of experiencing disconnection and rejection from family, work associates, neighbors and others, interfering with satisfaction of needs for belonging and relatedness. Current bans from participating in sports programs and denial of educational and employment opportunities (Movement Advancement Project, 2023) may prevent the development of competencies. Given the discriminatory social context in which TNB people live their lives, it is important to test, rather than assume, that general psychological processes and related outcomes documented in cisgender populations will apply. Practically, understanding basic psychological need satisfaction and the role of authenticity as contributing factors to eudaimonic well-being may inform evidence-based individual, community, and policy-level interventions that support positive human development and well-being in TNB adults.

**Eudaimonic Well-being**

Psychological well-being includes eudaimonic and hedonic forms (Ryff, 1989). Hedonic well-being is a transient positive emotional state of happiness, pleasure, or satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2001), and while this form of well-being is important to study, we focused on eudaimonic well-being (EWB), a more enduring psychological state that results from enacting our values in alignment with our purpose, which brings meaning to our lives (Waterman et al., 2010). Stigma and discrimination, and the resulting gender minority stress, negatively affect hedonic (Russell et al., 2011) and eudaimonic (Hunter et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2019) well-being in TNB people. In this paper, we examined associations among two important potential contributors to eudaimonic well-being: basic needs satisfaction and authenticity.

**Self-Determination Theory and Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction**

Self-determination Theory (SDT) is a general psychological theory that posits psychological well-being, or optimal human functioning, growth, and development requires the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, relatedness, and competence; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2001). The satisfaction of autonomy needs requires freedom to act in a manner that is consistent with one’s goals and values (Ryan & Deci, 2006). The satisfaction of relatedness needs requires a sense of belonging and connection to others and is facilitated by empathy and support. Satisfaction of competency needs requires self-perceptions of effectiveness and mastery and is facilitated by opportunities and challenges that encourage engagement and provide both positive and critical feedback (Ryan & Deci, 2017). These BPNs are achieved in the ongoing interactions between people and environments (including families, communities, and society). Supportive social contexts accelerate the satisfaction of BPNs and contribute to psychosocial well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Conversely, social contexts that obstruct the fulfillment of basic needs may interfere with psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

BPN satisfaction is associated with eudaimonic (and hedonic) well-being in general cisgender adult samples (Bradshaw et al., 2023; Reed-Fitzke & Lucier-Greer, 2020; Ryan et al., 2023). A meta-analysis of 36 studies of cisgender people in the U.S, Japan, and China showed significant moderate correlations between autonomy and hedonic well-being (Yu et al., 2018). In a sample of Taiwanese cisgender undergraduates, Chang and colleagues (2015) found positive associations between BPN satisfaction and EWB.

We located only one study of TNB people that gathered interview data on transgender military service members’ perceptions of their basic psychological needs satisfaction (Levy et al., 2015). These interviewees reported difficulty satisfying their needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence because of fear of discrimination and rejection if they disclosed their identities to their fellow service members, and concerns about possible negative repercussions (socially or career-based). Beyond this exception, the study of basic psychological needs satisfaction has been primarily limited to populations assumed to be cisgender, necessitating replication with populations stigmatized for *not* being cisgender (see Vansteenkiste et al., 2020).

While BPN satisfaction is relevant to the well-being of all human beings, populations whose human development occurs in contexts of social stigma and discrimination may face more difficulties, challenges, and barriers. Such is the current political situatedness of TNB people (Lefevor et al., 2019). A primary aim of the current project was to extend the theory of self-determination by testing the hypothesis that the satisfaction of the basic human needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence is associated with eudaimonic well-being in a sample of TNB adults.

**Authenticity**

People feel more authentic when they are in specific social contexts that support their autonomy (Ryan & Ryan, 2019) and the expression of their personality traits and values (Lenton et al., 2016). Authenticity includes gender expression as well as many other aspects of the self. For TNB people, authenticity requires making many decisions, perhaps multiple times a day, about physical and psychological safety (Flynn & Smith, 2020; Rood et al., 2017). When TNB people do not feel safe to be themselves, they are more likely to internalize negative societal views and conceal their identities from others to avoid rejection and possibly physical harm. In interviews with 18 trans-identified individuals Levitt and Ippolito (2014) found that gender identity-specific authenticity is important for positive TNB identity development, but participants balanced authentic gender presentation against the risks of discrimination and rejection. The authors concluded that TNB individuals continually evaluate the benefits and risks of authentic gender presentation as they navigate different social contexts.

 On the other hand, living authentically as one’s true self is important to TNB people and is regarded as a positive aspect of their identities (Riggle et al., 2011). In interviews with thirteen TNB young adults ages 18-29, Austin (2016) elucidated interpersonal barriers and risks to being authentic including lack of acceptance and affirmation from family members, friends, and important others. At the community level, interviewees perceived that their lack of access, social support, and resources created barriers to their authenticity. Yet, the rewards of authenticity came from prioritizing their sense of self over societal expectations and fears of rejection.

Authenticity is an important component of happiness, an aspect of hedonic well-being, as elucidated in a recent qualitative analysis of data from a sample of 20 TNB people (Tebbe et al., 2024). A recent meta-analysis of 65 studies of cisgender samples found a moderate positive effect (*r* = 0.40) in the association between authenticity and measures that included aspects of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Sutton et al, 2020). Authenticity has also been positively associated with eudaimonic well-being in a sample of LGBT people (Rostosky et al. 2018), although the small subsample of TNB people prevented separate analyses. We located only one study of Australian TNB adults (*N* = 201) that documented positive associations between authenticity and EWB (Osmetti & Allen, 2023). In sum, TNB adults report that authenticity is a valued positive aspect of identity (Riggle et al., 2011) and a core component of happiness (Tebbe et al., 2024) that may be risky and difficult to enact (Austin, 2016; Levitt & Ippolito, 2014).

**The Current Study**

When TNB people’s basic psychological needs satisfaction is obstructed, the development and expression of authenticity may also be compromised. Given the importance of authenticity, we would expect negative effects on EWB. Alternately, when basic psychological needs are protected and facilitated, TNB people may feel safe enough to be authentically themselves, supporting their efforts to live lives of purpose and meaning. We found only one study of cisgender adolescents that documented links from one basic psychological need (i.e. autonomy) and to authenticity, which was further linked to higher levels of well-being (Thomaes et al., 2017). Given the socio-political context in which TNB people seek to satisfy their basic psychological needs and create authentic lives of meaning and purpose, we sought to model these associations in a TNB sample of adults. We hypothesized that BPN satisfaction would be directly and positively associated with authenticity and eudaimonic well-being (EWB). Second, we hypothesized that higher levels of authenticity would help explain significant positive associations between BPN satisfaction and EWB.

**Method**

**Transparency and Openness**

We followed the American Psychological Association Journal Reporting Standards (JARS; Kazak, 2018; Appelbaum et al., 2018). The design and analysis plan were not pre-registered. Data were analyzed in R version 4.2.1 (R Core Team, 2022) using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012) with full-information maximum likelihood estimation. To calculate the required sample size for the model testing, we used a SEM sample size program (d = 0.30, α = 0.05, b = 0.80; Soper, 2023; Westland, 2010) and determined the minimum number of observed variables required was 323.Data and analysis codes may be available upon request from the first author.

**Participants**

Participants (N = 489) ranged in age from 18 to 61 (*M* = 26.32, *Median* = 24, *SD* = 6.72), resided in the U.S., and identified as transgender (60%), nonbinary (68%), genderqueer (26%), agender (14%), trans woman (11%), trans man (24%), and Two Spirit/third gender (1%). Eight percent wrote in other self-labels (e.g., abinary, demiboy, demigirl; 8%). They identified their race as White/ European American (67%), Multiracial (15%), Black/African American/Caribbean American (7%), Latino/a/x/ Chicano/ South American (5%), Asian/ Asian American (3%), and prefer not to answer (3%). Participants indicated their primary sexual orientation as Bisexual (27%), Queer (21%), Pansexual (14%), Asexual (11%), Lesbian (10%), Gay (10%), Straight (3%), and identity not listed (e.g., demisexual, greysexual; 5%).

**Study Procedures**

All study procedures were approved by the University of Kentucky Institutional Review Board (#76994). Participants who identified as transgender, trans man, trans woman, genderqueer, gender nonconforming, agender, or a different transgender identity, were over 18, and resided in the U.S. or a U.S. territory were recruited in September 2022 through Prolific Academic, an online research platform. Those who completed the online Qualtrics survey (*N* = 528) which included additional measures not the focus of the current study were compensated five dollars for their participation in the approximately 12-15 minute survey. Participants who were cisgender (*n* = 5), who failed attention checks (*n* = 15), who did not complete the survey beyond demographic questions (*n* = 6), and duplicate responses (*n* = 3) were excluded.

**Measures**

***Demographics***

Gender identity information was obtained using items about assigned gender and whether the person identified as transgender. Participants could also select multiple gender identities and share their own self-label in an open textbox (Puckett et al., 2020). Other items collected information about age, racial identity, and sexual identity.

***Eudaimonic Well-Being***

The Questionnaire for Eudaimonic Well-Being (QEWB; Waterman et al., 2010) is a 21-item global measure of eudaimonic well-being, including components of self-discovery, perceived development of one’s potential, a sense of purpose and meaning in life, intense involvement in activities, investment of significant effort in activities, and enjoyment of activities. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) and include, “I can say that I have found my purpose in life” and “I feel best when I’m doing something worth investing a great deal of effort in.” Mean scores were calculated for each participant; high scores indicate greater eudaimonic well-being. The scale has been validated for use with general cisgender adult populations; the QEWB is significantly positively correlated with self-esteem and negatively correlated with anxiety and depressive symptoms (Waterman et al., 2010). We were unable to locate psychometric information for a TNB sample; however, Cronbach’s alpha was 0.90 when used in a sample of lesbian and bisexual-identified women (Ali et al., 2022). Alpha reliability in the current sample was α = 0.87.

***Basic Psychological Needs***

The Basic Psychological Needs and Frustration Scale (BPNFS; Chen et al., 2015) is a16-item questionnaire based on self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The three psychological needs subscales were used in the current study to measure autonomy (e.g., “I feel my choices express who I really am”), relatedness (e.g., “I feel close and connected with other people who are important to me”), and competence (e.g., “I feel capable at what I do”). (We did not use the BPN frustration subscale). Items were answered on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not true at all) to 7 (very true). Mean scores for each subscale were calculated, with higher scores indicating higher levels of satisfaction of each basic need. The scale has been found to be reliable in general cisgender adult samples in the US, China, Belgium, and Peru, and positively associated with life satisfaction and vitality (Chen et al., 2015). The scale was validated in a group of 184 graduate students, with over half (56.7%) holding a marginalized racial, sexual orientation, or gender identity (α = 0.92; Clement et al., 2024). Alpha reliability in the current sample: autonomy (α = 0.90), relatedness (α = 0.94), and competence (α = 0.96).

***Authenticity***

The 12-item Authenticity Scale (AS; Wood et al., 2008) is composed of three four-item subscales: authentic living, accepting external influence (reverse scored), and self-alienation (reverse scored). Items on the authentic living subscale include, “I am true to myself in most situations.” Items on the accepting external influence subscale include, “I usually do what other people tell me to do.” Items on the self-alienation subscale include, “I feel as if I don’t know myself very well.” Each item on the scale was slightly modified by adding “right now” to each statement to direct the participant to respond in terms of the present. Lenton and colleagues (2013) found this qualifier was important to assessing state (rather than trait) authenticity. Participants respond to each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (does not describe me at all) to 7 (describes me very well). Since higher scores on external influence and self-alienation indicate lower authenticity, these items were reverse scored. Mean scores for each subscale were calculated for each participant with higher scores indicating higher levels of authenticity. Although we could locate no psychometric information with a TNB sample, we found support for validity when used with a sample of 272 LGB-identified individuals (α = 0.75, r = 0.46; Riggle et al., 2014). Alpha reliabilities in the current sample were authentic living subscale (α = 0.80), the accepting external influence subscale (α = 0.90), and the self-alienation subscale (α = 0.88).

**Results**

**Data Preparation and Preliminary Data Analysis**

The data were prepared for analyses by first screening cases, then screening variables, and then accounting for missing data. Missing responses (<0.01%), were replaced with median values of participants’ responses to subscales. Data met statistical assumptions for skewness and kurtosis (<|1|). To assess multicollinearity, the Variable Inflation Factor (VIF) was calculated for the predictor variable on the outcome variable (VIF < 2). Using cases with a significant Mahalanobis distance (p < 0.001; De Maesschalck et al., 2000), twelve outliers were identified and removed. A final sample of 489 participants was retained for analysis.

To assess for possible covariates, we conducted bivariate analyses and a One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) We included age due to previous findings of differences in well-being based on age and race (Ryff, 2018) and gender identity (Gómez-Gil et al., 2009; Thorne et al., 2019). We found that being older was significantly associated with higher authenticity (all three subscales) and EWB (see Table 1) and being a Person of Color was significantly associated with less authenticity (rejection of external influence subscale) *F*(1) = -6.107, *p* = 0.014. No group differences by gender identity (i.e., trans feminine, trans masculine, and nonbinary) were found. Thus, we controlled for age (continuous) and race (dichotomous; 0 = White, 1 = Person of Color) in the models described below. At the bivariate level, basic psychological needs, authenticity, and EWB were moderately and positively correlated. See Table 1 for ranges, means, standard deviations, and correlations for all subscales.

**Model Specification**

We used Kline (2010)’s recommendations to test model fitness: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) less than or equal to .08 (acceptable) and .05 (good), a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) value greater than or equal to .90 (acceptable) and .95 (good), Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.90 (acceptable ) or 0.95 (good; Tucker & Lewis, 1973), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) equal to or less than .08 (acceptable) or .05 (good; Hu & Bentler, 1995). We also analyzed chi-square for each model; however, due to the potential for chi-square to inappropriately reject models with large sample sizes, chi-square was not considered when determining model fitness (Weston & Gore, 2006). Additionally, consistent with model re-specification processes in SEM, in cases of unacceptable model fitness, we examined modification indices to determine additional parameter constraints to correct model fitness to the data (Schumacker & Lomax, 2010).

**Confirmatory Factor Analyses**

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted on BPN and authenticity as latent variables as these two variables represent underlying constructs. BPN as a latent construct was fit with the observed variables of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. CFA model fit indices indicated good model fit c2(1) = 3.476, *p* = 0.062, RMSEA = 0.071 (90% CI: 0.00, 0.159), CFI = 0.993, TLI = 0.979, SRMR = 0.042. Authenticity was fit with the observed variables of authentic living, external influence (reverse scored), and self-alienation (reverse scored). CFA model fit indices indicated good model fit c2(1) = 3.476, *p* = 0.062, RMSEA = 0.071 (90% CI: 0.00, 0.159), CFI = 0.993, TLI = 0.979, SRMR = 0.042.

**Direct Effects on Eudaimonic Well-being**

The first model tested direct effects between BPN satisfaction, authenticity, and EWB. All variables and regression paths were input into a SEM model to test the hypotheses. The model was an acceptable fit to the data c2(26) = 106.985, *p* < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.08 (90% CI: 0.06, 0.10), CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.94, SRMR = 0.05. There were significant direct paths from higher BPN satisfaction and higher EWB (*B* = 0.476, *SE* = 0.06, *p* < 0.001; 90% CI[0.36, 0.59]) and higher BPN satisfaction and authenticity (*B* = 0.368, *SE* = 0.03, p < 0.001, 90% CI[0.32, 0.41]). Additionally, there was a significant direct path from authenticity to higher EWB (*B* = 0.185, SE = 0.02, *p* < 0.001, 90% CI[0.09, 0.21]). This model explained 58.8% of the variance in EWB. These findings indicate that BPN satisfaction is positively associated with authenticity and EWB, and authenticity was positively associated with EWB, after controlling for the effects of age and race. See Figure 1 for the structural model.

**Indirect Effects of Authenticity on Eudaimonic Well-being**

The second model tested the mediation effect of authenticity (latent variable; Wood et al., 2008) on the associations between BPN satisfaction and EWB. All variables and regression paths were input into a SEM model to test the hypotheses. The model was an acceptable fit to the data c2(24) = 103.267, *p* < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.08 (90% CI: 0.07, 0.10), CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.92, SRMR = 0.05.

The indirect or mediation effects of authenticity were tested using Sobel (1982) tests. Supporting the second hypothesis, there was a significant indirect path between BPN satisfaction and EWB through authenticity (*ab* = 0.119, *SE* = 0.02, *p* *<* 0.001, 90%CI [0.08, 0.16]). BPN satisfaction was significantly positively associated with authenticity (*B* = 0.642, *SE* = 0.06, *p* < 0.001, 90% CI [0.50, 0.73]), and authenticity, in turn, was significantly positively associated with EWB (*B* = 0.185, *SE* = 0.02, *p* < 0.001*,* 90% CI[0.09, 0.22]). After accounting for the role of authenticity, BPN still had a significant positive association with EWB, suggesting that authenticity only partially mediated the relationship. See Figure 2 for the structural model.

**Discussion**

All humans strive to fulfill their basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence in a social context that may help or hinder their fulfillment (Chen et al., 2015; Deci & Ryan, 2000). TNB people live in a social context characterized by stigma and discrimination including political attacks that seek to end TNB rights to bodily autonomy and personal freedoms to participate fully and authentically in society (Movement Advancement Project, 2023). This social context poses risks to the general human psychological processes of basic psychological needs satisfaction and cultivation of eudaimonic well-being (Horne et al., 2022). Examining these processes, rather than relying on previous studies of cisgender people, is an important scientific endeavor with practical implications (discussed below).

Our findings confirmed the importance of BPN satisfaction to eudaimonic well-being in TNB individuals. We found that satisfaction of basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence, were significantly and directly associated with higher levels of eudaimonic well-being, or a sense of enduring meaning and purpose in one’s life. We also found that authenticity, or living true to oneself, helps to explain this association.

**The Role of Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction**

TNB people continue to live in a stigmatizing and discriminatory social and political context that may create barriers to satisfying their basic psychological needs. For instance, there are political attacks on authentic gender identity presentation, bodily modification, voice modification, pronoun usage, and other gender-affirming care interventions that threaten the autonomy of TNB people. Workplace discrimination may interfere with the development of competence and the pursuit of life goals and dreams. A lack of trust that one is psychologically and physically safe enough to pursue close meaningful connections with others is a barrier to relatedness. Social stigma and discrimination, the commonality among these examples, may interfere with the satisfaction of basic psychological needs and diminish one’s sense of meaning and purpose in life (Deci & Ryan, 2002), an important aspect of eudaimonic well-being.

Consistent with previous studies of cisgender youth (Tomaes et al., 2017) and emerging adults (Chang et al., 2015), we found that higher levels of BPN satisfaction (autonomy, relatedness, competence) were associated with more EWB. Our results also build upon previous qualitative studies of TNB samples. In their grounded theory study applying SDT theory to transgender military service members, Levy and colleagues (2015) found that transgender service members reported having the same BPNs as non-transgender individuals; however, transgender service members’ BPN satisfaction was compromised because they lacked autonomy and relatedness due to fears of discrimination.

**The Role of Authenticity**

Stigma and discrimination also create barriers to living authentically. When TNB people do not feel safe to live authentically as their true selves, they may attempt to hide or conceal their identities, limit their activities, or isolate themselves, to the detriment of their eudaimonic well-being. Our findings indicate that authenticity is positively associated with eudaimonic well-being, replicating previous meta-analytic findings using cisgender adult populations (Sutton et al., 2020) and an LGBT sample (Rostosky et al., 2018). Tebbe and colleagues (2024) found that general authenticity (as well as gender identity-specific authenticity) is regarded by TNB people as a core component of their happiness, an aspect of hedonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). We quantitatively measured and tested these associations, focusing on eudaimonic well-being, which is the psychological state of enacting one’s most important values and thereby cultivating a sense of meaning and purpose (Waterman et al., 2010).

We found that general authenticity was significantly and positively associated with BPN satisfaction. This finding is also consistent with Tebbe and colleagues’ (2024) emergent conceptual framework whereby having agency or control over one’s life (autonomy) and meaningful connections to others (relatedness) facilitate one’s ability to live authentically. Our findings further support and extend these findings by showing that authenticity partially, but not fully, explained the associations between BPN satisfaction and EWB. Thus, BPN satisfaction was associated with more authenticity which, in turn, was associated with more eudaimonic well-being. However, BPN satisfaction remained significantly associated with eudaimonic well-being even after accounting for the contribution of authenticity, suggesting that authenticity may be necessary but not sufficient for eudaimonic well-being. Additional strengths and resources at all levels of the ecological system (individual, community, and societal) await future research.

**Limitations and Future Research**

The co-authors who conducted the current study included an early career White trans man and a late-career White cisgender woman, which likely influenced the choice of theoretical focus on self-determination and authenticity. Future research might test other theoretically based hypotheses that reflect more collectivistic and interdependent cultural values. The average age of the sample was 26 years old so findings may not generalize to TNB adolescents who may be in a particularly important developmental stage relative to the pursuit of authentic living or to older adults who are consolidating and evaluating the meaning and purpose of their lives (Mitchell et al., 2021; Ryff, 2018).

While our sample included TNB people with diverse racial and ethnic identities, subsamples were not large enough to examine group differences by identity intersections, which is an important area for future research. For example, we found that POC participants reported lower levels of authenticity, which bears more exploration in future research. The influence of socio-economic status, education, and geography are also important contexts that likely shape basic needs fulfillment and might be assessed in future studies.

We also note that the data for this study were collected during an ongoing pandemic and a time of considerable increase in political animosity toward TNB people (Movement Advancement Project, 2023). This sociopolitical context is important to keep in mind, as these experiences may have impacted participants’ self-reports of the psychological constructs in the model. Future research should directly assess the effects of political attacks and discriminatory legislation on these and other psychological processes.

The findings from this study suggest that self-determination theory may be a useful framework from which to consider the psychological well-being of TNB people. While our aim was to test a general psychological model using a general measures of authenticity, we know that gender identity-specific authenticity is also important for TNB people (Riggle & Mohr, 2015; Tebbe et al., 2024). Further, despite the grounding of our hypotheses in theory and previous research findings, a longitudinal design further establish the temporal order of variables. Meanwhile, cross-sectional mediation analysis is a starting point for exploratory and sufficiently powered model testing (Cain et al., 2018).

Most likely there are bidirectional influences among self-determination factors, authenticity, and eudaimonic well-being. For example, TNB people who perceive themselves as more authentic in more social contexts may also feel more empowered and supported to pursue personal, social, and work-related goals that give them a greater sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. On the other hand, current and growing institutional and interpersonal barriers to satisfying these basic psychological needs may interfere with authentic living and eudaimonic well-being. These barriers and the toll they may take on well-being need to be documented. The focus of the current study was on a circumscribed number of general psychological processes and a limited set of hypotheses about contributors to eudaimonic well-being. Future studies might examine other theoretically grounded general psychology processes such as coping (Lindley & Budge, 2022) and resiliency (Matsuno & Israel, 2018) that may also contribute to EWB.

**Practice Implications**

While it is important to reduce symptoms of distress, assessing and facilitating TNB clients’ eudaimonic well-being expands therapeutic goals beyond a focus on deficits to include flourishing and “a life well-lived" (Ryff, 2018). When therapists communicate to their TNB clients that they deserve to create a life of fulfillment, purpose, and connection, they feel supported and “seen” as a whole person (Anzani et al., 2019)

Our findings suggest that clinicians should assess and attend to TNB clients’ basic needs satisfaction. All human beings have needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Actively acknowledging these needs and assessing how these needs are being satisfied is part of affirming the whole person. It is important to help TNB clients identify and articulate their basic needs and generate solutions for meeting them. An intervention that prompts clients to identify and assert their needs for interpersonal connection and social support may be delivered by text messages to more socially isolated TNB clients (Knutson et al., 2021) The findings from this study suggest that helping TNB people satisfy their basic needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence is important to their well-being.

Authenticity, like “outness” or “the self” is not a fixed category or trait, but rather a process that unfolds in a specific context (Sedikides & Schlegel, 2024; Givens & Kimble, 2023). Therefore, therapists should validate their TNB clients’ explorations of when and where they experience authenticity as well as facilitators and barriers to their authenticity (Tebbe et al., 2024). An effective therapeutic alliance begins with creating a safe space for authentic expression between the therapist and the client.

Therapists’ multicultural orientation skills including self-reflection on one’s own gender identity, an attitude of humility and “not knowing” and curiosity that validates clients’ experience rather than implicitly imposing one’s assumptions and biases, can help to forge an effective working alliance (Davis et al., 2018). Actively affirming clients’ authentic gender identity expression in therapy, often by seemingly small actions (i.e., microaffirmations) such as using correct names and pronouns or complimenting clothing help establish safety, build a positive working alliance (Anzani et al., 2019), and facilitate positive therapy outcomes.

According to the findings of this study, authenticity may serve as a conduit between basic psychological needs satisfaction and eudaimonic well-being. Therapists and their clients should reflect on experiences of authenticity and barriers to authenticity that arise in daily interactions with family, work, and community. Creating environments that support autonomy, including people’s authentic gender expression (Legate et al., 2019) could assist in ameliorating the well-documented TNB health disparities (Tebbe & Moradi, 2016) and promote eudaimonic well-being.

In addition to providing affirmative and supportive counseling at the individual level, psychological service providers can serve as advocates for their clients in the face of discriminatory political attacks and legislative bills. They can also educate communities on the importance of supporting the basic psychological needs of TNB people. Some recent conceptual work has suggested that a lack of social safety (as it manifests at all levels of the ecological system) may precede gender minority stress and account for health disparities (Diamond & Alley, 2022) even when gender minority stress is relatively low. The findings from this study have implications for families, schools, communities, and health service providers who share responsibility for providing and advocating for safety and support for the basic psychological needs satisfaction, authenticity, and eudaimonic well-being of TNB people.

**Conclusion**

The current study findings suggest that supporting the autonomy, relatedness, and competence of TNB individuals may help to facilitate eudaimonic well-being even in the larger context of political and social stigma and discrimination. Our findings also suggest authenticity, which includes behaviors such as living authentically, not being overly reactive to others’ demands, and taking responsibility for knowing and supporting one’s own “truth” including one’s needs, wants, beliefs, and values (Lenton et al., 2016) is important for TNB well-being. For TNB people whose identities are stigmatized, living authentically may include gender expression or presentation, rejecting negative messages and social influences, acting in accordance with values, and finding supportive environments where they can be their true selves. Current study findings suggest that facilitating both BPN satisfaction and authenticity may help TNB people to experience meaning and purpose even in these socially and politically unsafe times of discrimination and the resulting gender minority stress.

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**Table 1.**

*Ranges, Means, Standard Deviations, and Bivariate correlations for all subscales*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| 1. EWB\*\* | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Age | .06\* | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Autonomy | .62\* | -.00 | - |  |  |  |  |  |
| 4. Relatedness | .36\* | -.03 | .55\* | - |  |  |  |  |
| 5. Competence | .60\* | .08 | .65\* | .49\* | - |  |  |  |
| 6.Authentic living | .50\* | .15\* | .50\* | .30\* | .43\* | - |  |  |
| 7.Accepting influence (RS) | .40\* | .26\* | .28\* | .06 | .30\* | .46\* | - |  |
| 8.Self-alienation (RS) | .55\* | .23\* | .47\* | .33\* | .46\* | .48\* | .57\* | - |
| *Mean* | 2.4 | 26 | 4.2 | 4.8 | 4.0 | 5.3 | 4.5 | 4.1 |
| *SD* | 0.6 | 6.7 | 1.4 | 1.6 | 1.7 | 1.1 | 1.5 | 1.7 |
| Range | 0-4 | 18-61 | 1-7 | 1-7 | 1-7 | 1-7 | 1-7 | 1-7 |

*Note: \* =* p < 0.05. *N* = 489. \*\*Eudaimonic Well-being (EWB). RS = reverse scored.

**Figure 1**

*Direct SEM Paths among BPN satisfaction, Authenticity, and EWB (Hypothesis 1)*



*Note.* \* = *p* <.05, \*\* = *p* <.01, \*\*\* = *p* <.001. c2(26) = 106.985, *p* < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.08 (90% CI: 0.06, 0.10), CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.94, SRMR = 0.05. Only significant associations are depicted, and coefficients are standardized. *f* indicates fixed loading on the latent variable. **Figure 2**

*Indirect Paths from BPN to EWB through Authenticity (Hypothesis 2)*



*Note.* \* = *p* <.05, \*\* = *p* <.01, \*\*\* = *p* <.001. c2(24) = 103.267, *p* < 0.001, RMSEA = 0.08 (90% CI: 0.07, 0.10), CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.92, SRMR = 0.05. Only significant associations are depicted, and coefficients are standardized. *f* indicates fixed loading on the latent variable. *ab =* indirect path of BPN through authenticity to EWB.