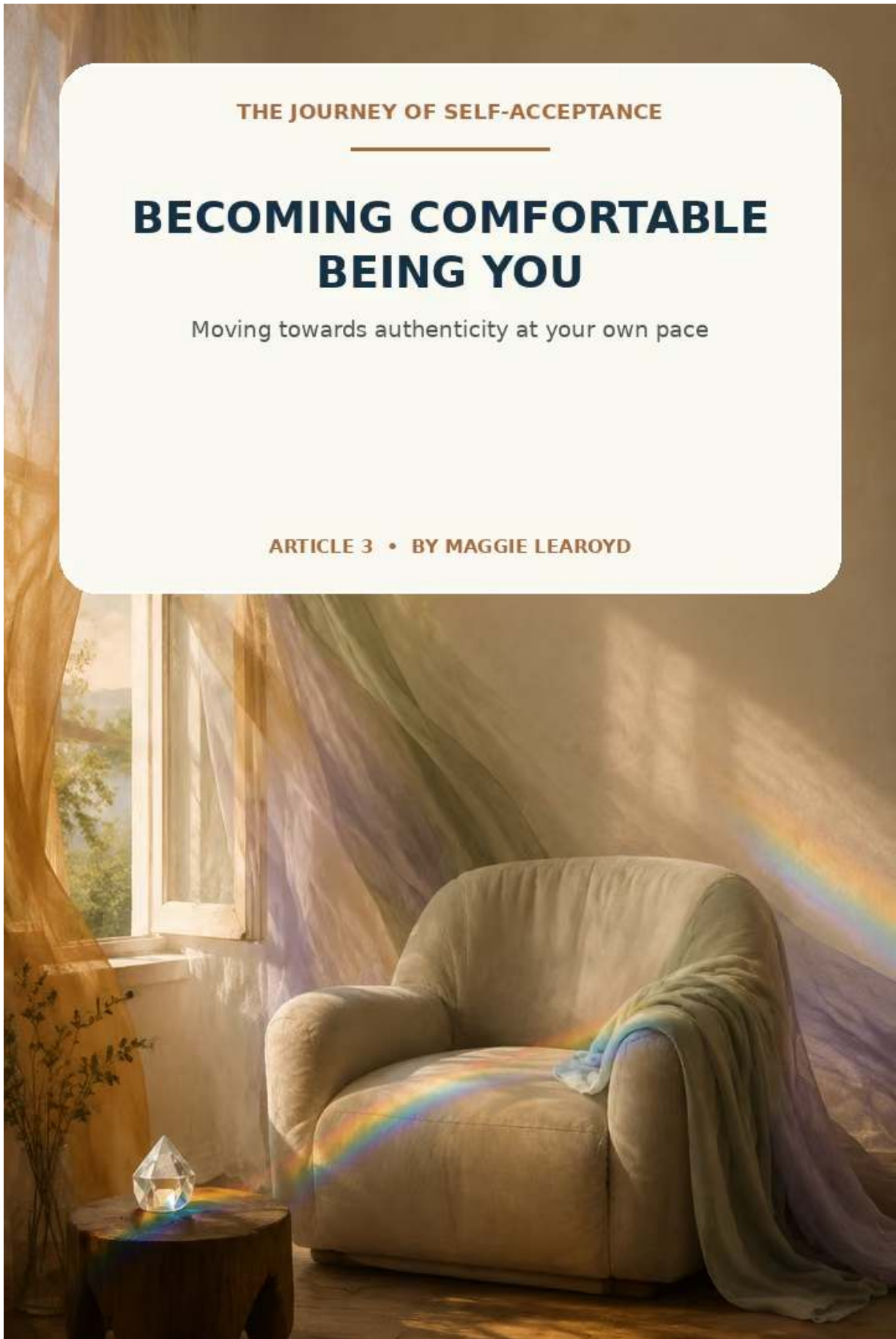


THE JOURNEY OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE

BECOMING COMFORTABLE BEING YOU

Moving towards authenticity at your own pace

ARTICLE 3 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Becoming Comfortable Being You

Moving towards authenticity at your own pace

"The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are." — Carl Jung

Introduction

Many LGBTQ+ people spend years adapting to the expectations of others before asking themselves a simple question:

- "Who am I when I'm not trying to make everyone else comfortable?"

For some, that adaptation begins in childhood. It may involve avoiding certain conversations, changing the way they speak, laughing at jokes that feel hurtful, or pretending to be interested in relationships that don't reflect who they are. Others learn to hide parts of themselves because it feels safer, easier or less likely to lead to conflict.

Over time, these adjustments can become automatic.

You may no longer notice that you're editing your words, changing your behaviour or monitoring how much of yourself you reveal.

This is often called masking.

Masking can be a helpful strategy in situations where safety is a genuine concern. However, when it becomes a way of life, it can leave people feeling disconnected from themselves.

Becoming comfortable being you isn't about making dramatic changes overnight. It is about gradually creating a life where your thoughts, feelings and identity feel more closely aligned with how you live each day.

What Does Authenticity Mean?

Authenticity is often misunderstood.

People sometimes think it means telling everyone everything about yourself or living without fear or uncertainty.

In reality, authenticity is about living in a way that feels honest and consistent with your values.

It means making choices because they reflect who you are—not because you are trying to meet someone else's expectations.

Authenticity might look like:

- Speaking about your partner without changing your language.

Wearing clothes that feel like you.

Choosing friendships where you don't feel the need to hide.

Allowing yourself to enjoy interests without worrying whether they fit stereotypes.

Saying "I don't know yet" if you are still exploring your identity.

Authenticity is personal.

There is no single "right" way to express it.

Understanding Masking

Many LGBTQ+ people become experts at reading the room.

Without even realising it, they learn to notice:

- Who feels safe.

What can be said.

Which topics to avoid.

How to blend in.

These behaviours often develop as protective strategies.

They may have helped you avoid rejection, bullying or discrimination.

The important thing to remember is this:

- A survival strategy is not the same as your personality.

Sometimes people say:

- "I don't even know who I really am anymore."

That isn't because they have lost themselves.

It is because they have spent so long adapting that it has become difficult to recognise where adaptation ends and authenticity begins.

You Don't Owe Anyone Your Story

One of the biggest myths about authenticity is that it requires complete openness.

It doesn't.

You are never obliged to disclose your sexual orientation or gender identity if doing so would place your safety, wellbeing or livelihood at risk.

Choosing privacy is not the same as living dishonestly.

Authenticity is not measured by how many people know your story.

It is measured by whether your choices are your own.

Sometimes authenticity means speaking openly.

Sometimes it means protecting yourself.

Both can be valid.

The Fear of Judgement

Even when people want to be more authentic, fear often gets in the way.

Questions such as:

- What if people think differently about me?

What if I disappoint my family?

What if I'm rejected?

What if people only tolerate me?

These fears are understandable.

Many have developed through previous experiences.

However, it can be helpful to ask yourself another question:

- Am I responding to today's reality or yesterday's experiences?

Sometimes the fears we carry belong to our past rather than our present.

Recognising that difference can create space for new experiences.

Small Acts of Authenticity

Living authentically rarely happens through one life-changing decision.

Instead, it grows through small moments.

You might:

- Correct someone gently when they make an assumption.

Stop apologising for who you love.

Share something personal with someone you trust.

Spend time with people who allow you to relax.

Wear something that feels like an expression of yourself.

Say "no" when something doesn't align with your values.

These moments may seem small.

Psychologically, they are significant.

Each one reinforces the belief:

- I am allowed to be myself.

Practising Self-Compassion

As you become more authentic, there will still be days when fear returns.

You may find yourself masking in unfamiliar environments or doubting yourself after a difficult interaction.

That doesn't mean you have failed.

Healing is rarely linear.

Rather than criticising yourself, try responding with compassion.

Ask yourself:

- What made today feel difficult?

What did I need in that moment?

How can I support myself moving forward?

Progress is measured by understanding yourself—not by expecting perfection.

Reflection Questions

Take a few moments to reflect:

- When do you feel most able to be yourself?

Are there situations where you still feel the need to hide?

What helps you feel emotionally safe?

What is one small step you could take towards living more authentically?

How might you respond to yourself with greater kindness when fear arises?

Key Takeaways

Authenticity means living in ways that align with your values rather than other people's expectations.

Masking often develops as a protective strategy and should not be confused with your true identity.

You do not owe anyone information about your identity; safety and choice always matter.

Small acts of authenticity can gradually build confidence and self-acceptance.

Self-compassion is essential when navigating change.

There is no "perfect" way to be authentically LGBTQ+—your journey is your own.

Final Thoughts

Becoming comfortable being yourself is not about changing who you are. It is about gradually letting go of the pressure to be someone you are not.

There may still be moments when you hesitate, question yourself or choose to protect your privacy. Those choices do not diminish your authenticity. They reflect your judgement, your circumstances and your right to decide what feels safe.

The goal is not perfection. The goal is freedom—the freedom to live in a way that reflects your values, your identity and your humanity.

Every time you choose honesty over fear, compassion over self-criticism and authenticity over expectation, you strengthen your relationship with yourself.

And perhaps that is where true self-acceptance begins—not in becoming someone different, but in finally giving yourself permission to be who you have always been.