Depression in the LGBTQ Community

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Depression in Gender/ Sexual Minorities

Depression doesn't care who you are. It doesn't care if you where you live or if you are rich or poor. Depression doesn't mind if you are short or tall, thin or overweight or have blond hair or red hair. No one is immune as depression targets everyone.

Though this is true, depression does discriminate. Sometimes depression targets certain groups more often than others. For example, people with a chronic medical condition like multiple sclerosis or psoriasis have higher rates of depression than people without these conditions. In a similar way, people who identify themselves as being a gender or sexual minority (GSM), including but not limited to the LGBTQ population, have higher rates of depression. Being gay is clearly not a chronic medical condition, so what is the link?

The link is stress. Anytime stress comes into your life and stays for a while, life becomes more of a challenge. People that are LBGTQ have more than their fair share of stress. They not only have to deal with the everyday life stressors associated with being a teenager or adult, but they have to do it while gaining an understanding of themselves on unique levels. Although there may be different factors contributing to the depression, the best antidepressive interventions work for everyone.

Build your Identity

Having a strong, firmly established sense of self is a sure depression buster, but many in the LBGTQ community struggle to find due to their own uncertainty paired with the lack of knowledge of others. Know your identity to fight depression. Here's how:

- **List your strengths.** Knowing your strengths helps you to focus on the positive aspects of your personality and identity. What do you like about yourself? What are you good at? What do other people like about you? Tracking these allows you to boost your self-esteem while learning more about yourself. Ask others for their opinions for a more complete picture.

- **List your weaknesses.** No one is without flaws. Working to objectively take an inventory of your weaknesses provides you with needed information. Weaknesses represent areas to improve upon. If the negatives become overwhelming, consult with trusted supports that are willing to be caring and honest. If you cannot think of any weaknesses, ask what you may be hiding from yourself.

- **List your goals.** Many people find volumes of self-worth from their goals. You can know who you are by what you aspire to be. What are you working towards? Listing what you would like to accomplish in the coming days, weeks and months helps bring about motivation as it reaffirms your identity.

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Build your Identity

- **Be multidimensional.** Whether it is in TV, movies, books or real life, characters that lack a multidimensional quality fall flat. Know that you are more than your sexual identity. You are a student, a family member, an employee, a friend and a neighbor. Some people may try to confine you to a one dimensional stereotype. What's worse is that you might feel comfortable fulfilling this role. Embrace your entire self by exploring the many facets of your life.
- **Accept ambiguity.** Putting too much pressure on yourself to create a firm understanding of your identity can do more bad than good. Don't conform to pressures to label yourself as one thing or another. That's why the "Q" in the LGBTQ is such a powerful component. The "Q" allows you to accept some level of uncertainty as you question your sexuality. Perhaps you are questioning other parts of your life. So many facets of who you are cannot be described in black-or-white terms. Don't expect them to be.

I CAN Manage Depression

Oftentimes, people report feeling hopeless and helpless in their attempts to combat depression. After all, depression feels like an all-consuming entity. Following the effective I CAN plan will help to focus your energies in the best directions. Here's how:

I – Identify

Identifying the problem is always the first step. If you start with a broad problem, try narrowing it down to the smallest element. For example, saying, "The entire world is against me." or "No one understands my lifestyle." might feel true but these problems are too vast to be addressed. Focus on the problems that you encounter on a daily basis. Do you hear negative comments as you walk down the street? Do people post demeaning content about you online? Being specific with your problems may make it seem like they are multiply, but this is not the case. Instead, you are creating series of small problems that feel less overwhelming. After you have made your list of problems, rank them from most stressful to least stressful. The lower stress producers are easier for you to attack early in the process.

C – Changeable or not

Too many people, LGBTQ people or not, waste precious time, energy and resources working to change aspects of life that are unchangeable. This is an important distinction that actually increases empowerment. There is a liberating quality in admitting that something is beyond your control because you can refocus your efforts towards modifying the changeable aspects of your life. Unchangeable problems usually center on the idea of trying to change someone else. It is true that some opinions, beliefs and points-of-view can be altered through various measures, but many people will remain resistant to new ideas and ways of thinking. Continuously working to do so would be a waste.

Focus on the changeable stressors and problems. These will yield visible, tangible progress that build encouragement, control and empowerment. After you succeed in eliminating lower level stressors, you will gain experience needed to attack the higher stressors. Remember that changing yourself is a much easier task than changing someone else.

Next pate: 'I CAN' continued.

I CAN Manage Depression

A – Act

Choosing the best action for the situation is crucial. Lack of action is always a bad idea, though. Doing nothing is no different than deciding to leave things as they are. Change comes through action. You may be thinking that the unchangeable situations require no action. This is incorrect as there is still work to be done. If something is

unchangeable, you need to find solutions that move towards acceptance. Rather than being frustrated or annoyed by someone's lack of understanding, tell yourself that not everyone is enlightened when it comes to GSM issues. Finding acceptance does not mean that you condone or approve of their behavior, it only means that you are not willing to sacrifice your own mental health to fight them.

If something seems changeable, there is a long list of interventions to choose from. When the change involves another person, assertive communication is a must. Without it, there is less chance that the other person will be interested in working with you. If the change involves you, look for helpful techniques and interventions that deliver results. Depression treatment usually starts with looking at your self-talk to see how this contributes to low mood and pessimism. If you typically feel disappointed that the world is not a fair place, revise your self-talk to aid in a positive change of perception.

Consult with others in your situation for their advice. Their experience and understanding of the issues you are faced with is invaluable. Therapists are always a fantastic resource to address your needs. Many therapists have extensive training and experience working with the LGBTQ community so be sure to interview your therapist thoroughly at the onset of treatment.

N – Navigate/ No Stopping

The "N" stage is two-fold. First you have to navigate through the repercussions of your action. Assess and evaluate if the desired result is being accomplished through your action. If the answer is no, take a second look at your problem to make sure to accurately identified it as changeable or unchangeable. At times, you may think that a simple conversation about your sexual identity will be enough to modify someone's perceptions only to find out that they are less accepting than you had hoped. In this case, consider changing the issues from changeable to unchangeable. The change might not be permanent, though. Time and experience can work in your favor to further change their point-of-view.

The no stopping part of the stage refers to the idea that people give up on the chosen intervention far too easily. If something is showing positive results, you may feel the need to back off and allow momentum to carry you. If you have been met with mild barriers, you may also end the intervention. Persistence is necessary for change. Putting forth the effort is the only way to bring about the results you are looking to achieve.

Know yourself and your history to guide your level of persistence. Some people tend to be easily discouraged. If this is you, fight the trend by sticking to your original plan. Some people tend to continue fighting for change in hopeless situations. If this is more your pattern, you can work to change your strategy or admit that the problem is unchangeable. Having an unchangeable problem is not a failure on your part. Acknowledging that you are powerless over something is one of the best successes you can have.

Conclusion

People in a gender or sexual minority face a much tougher road than those in the majority due to the lack of understanding, criticism and negativity of others. Rather than accept any level of depression, gain a clearer image and acceptance of your own identity. Only you can create this for yourself. Once your identity is comfortable, put your resources towards changing the changeable and accepting the unchangeable. If happiness is what you seek, this is the path. The first step starts with you.