

Exploring self-compassion with lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons

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Self-compassion is a construct involving three major components: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness, which promote emotional balance, kindness to self and others, and building a community rooted in compassion. This chapter synthesizes the literature on self-compassion in an effort to provide clinicians with a foundational understanding of how to process and incorporate the concepts and practices of self-compassion into clinical work. Additionally, this chapter seeks to provide social work practitioners ways to conceptualize and cultivate self-compassion in clinical practice. The chapter will begin with background information regarding the relationships between self-compassion and the Golden Rule/Ethic of Reciprocity. Previously collected qualitative data (from the authors own work) will be used to enhance the understanding of the self-compassion process. Next, the chapter will discuss the foundational components of self-compassion, the importance of self-compassion in relationship to mental health, and ways to cultivate self-compassion. Finally, conclusions about the role of self-compassion in social work practice are addressed.

Using in-depth interviews with 16 LGB individuals, this chapter explored how they processed their personal coming-out narratives through the lenses of self-compassion and Schlossberg's Transitional Theory. The results, written in the form of a composite narrative, highlight four themes of fear: don't say I am gay [lesbian/bisexual], from the 'huh' to the 'okay,' and living into it. The composite narrative helped illustrate the difficulty the participants had during their coming-out processes, as participants felt uncertain of claiming a nonheterosexual sexual orientation. This chapter purports that self-compassion helped to provide the emotional safety needed during this transition to see the self without fear of self-condemnation, allowing the individual in the coming-out process to move to more empowering patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Implications for research and practice are addressed.

This chapter investigated the role of self-compassion of lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity development in 215 LGB adults, ages 18-70, in the United States, who were recruited through multiple methods. Data were gathered on demographics, the Self-Compassion Scale, and the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale. Multivariate analyses demonstrated that both being out and self-compassion have a positive impact on LGB identity development. Self-Compassion explained 17% of the total variance and one's level of being out explained 30% of the total variance in LGB identity scale scores. The results suggest that social work professionals should be sensitive to LGB-specific identity development issues such as coming-out/one's level of being out. The results also suggested that social supports and connections are important to empower LGB identity development.