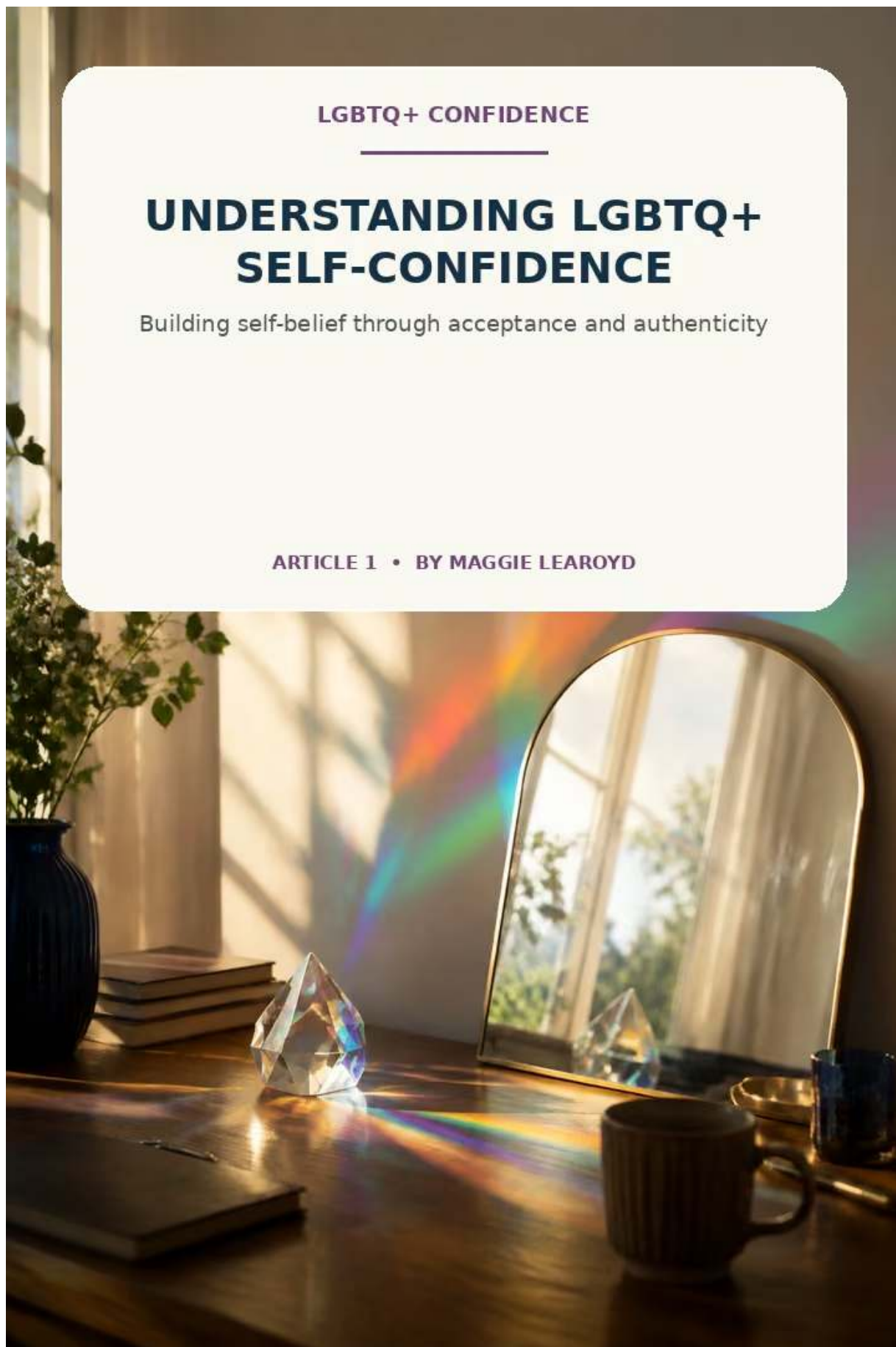


LGBTQ+ CONFIDENCE

UNDERSTANDING LGBTQ+ SELF-CONFIDENCE

Building self-belief through acceptance and authenticity

ARTICLE 1 • BY MAGGIE LEAROYD



Understanding LGBTQ+ Self-Confidence

Building self-belief through acceptance and authenticity

Self-confidence is something many people aspire to, yet it is often misunderstood. Confidence is not about being the loudest person in the room, never feeling nervous or always knowing the right thing to say. True self-confidence is the belief that you have value, that you can cope with life's challenges and that you deserve to be accepted for who you are.

For many LGBTQ+ people, developing self-confidence can be more complex. Growing up in a society where heterosexuality and cisgender identities are often assumed to be the norm can create additional challenges. Some people experience acceptance and support from an early age, while others may face bullying, discrimination, rejection or pressure to hide important parts of who they are. These experiences can influence how a person sees themselves and how safe they feel expressing their identity.

It is important to recognise that there is no single LGBTQ+ experience. Every person's journey is unique and shaped by factors such as family, culture, faith, community, disability, ethnicity and life experiences. While many LGBTQ+ people develop remarkable resilience, confidence can sometimes be affected by experiences of exclusion or misunderstanding.

The encouraging news is that confidence is not something people either have or do not have. It is something that can be developed. Through self-awareness, supportive relationships and self-compassion, it is possible to build confidence that is grounded in authenticity rather than the need for approval from others.

What Is Self-Confidence?

Self-confidence is the belief in your ability to manage challenges, make decisions and live according to your values.

Confidence does not mean:

- Never feeling anxious.

Never making mistakes.

Being outgoing.

Pleasing everyone.

Always feeling positive.

Instead, confidence involves trusting yourself, recognising your strengths and accepting that imperfections are part of being human.

Confidence grows through experience, learning and self-acceptance.

Understanding Self-Esteem and Self-Confidence

Although they are closely connected, self-esteem and self-confidence are different.

Self-esteem refers to how we value ourselves as a person.

Self-confidence refers to our belief in our ability to manage situations and overcome challenges.

For example, someone may feel confident in their work but struggle with self-esteem because of past experiences of rejection or discrimination.

Developing both self-esteem and confidence contributes to overall wellbeing.

Why Confidence Can Be More Challenging for Some LGBTQ+ People

Many LGBTQ+ people grow up receiving messages—both direct and indirect—that suggest being different is something to hide.

These messages may come from:

- Family members.

Schools.

Religious communities.

Social media.

Peer groups.

Television and film.

Society more broadly.

Experiences such as bullying, exclusion or hearing negative comments about LGBTQ+ people can influence how someone views themselves, even if those messages are not true.

This does not mean that every LGBTQ+ person lacks confidence. However, these experiences can create additional barriers that others may never have to consider.

Understanding Minority Stress

Many LGBTQ+ people experience what researchers describe as minority stress.

Minority stress refers to the additional stress that can arise from living as part of a marginalised group.

This may include:

- Worrying about discrimination.

Hiding aspects of identity.

Fear of rejection.

Experiencing prejudice.

Feeling misunderstood.

Constantly assessing whether it is safe to be open.

Living with these additional pressures over time can affect confidence, wellbeing and mental health.

Recognising minority stress helps shift the focus away from blaming the individual and towards understanding the impact of social experiences.

The Impact of Acceptance and Rejection

Acceptance plays an important role in developing confidence.

Feeling accepted by family, friends, colleagues and communities often strengthens a person's sense of belonging.

Conversely, rejection can affect:

- Self-worth.

Trust.

Emotional wellbeing.

Confidence in relationships.

Willingness to express identity openly.

Even when rejection has occurred, healing and rebuilding confidence remain possible through supportive relationships and self-compassion.

Authenticity and Confidence

Confidence grows when people are able to live authentically.

Authenticity means living in a way that reflects your values, identity and beliefs rather than constantly trying to meet other people's expectations.

For some LGBTQ+ people, authenticity may involve:

- Coming out when it feels safe.

Expressing gender identity.

Building supportive friendships.

Challenging internalised shame.

Living openly.

Choosing relationships where they feel respected.

Authenticity looks different for everyone. There is no right or wrong timeline, and personal safety should always be considered.

Challenging Internalised Shame

Repeated exposure to negative messages can sometimes lead people to believe those messages about themselves.

This is known as internalised stigma or internalised shame.

It may sound like:

- "I'm not good enough."

"People won't accept me."

"I have to hide who I am."

"I'll disappoint people."

These thoughts often develop because of external experiences rather than reflecting the truth.

Learning to recognise and question these beliefs is an important step towards building confidence.

The Importance of Self-Compassion

Many people are far kinder to others than they are to themselves.

Self-compassion involves treating yourself with the same understanding you would offer a close friend.

This includes:

- Accepting mistakes.

Recognising that everyone experiences difficulties.

Speaking kindly to yourself.

Allowing yourself time to grow.

Celebrating progress rather than perfection.

Confidence grows more easily when self-criticism is replaced with self-compassion.

Building Confidence Through Small Steps

Confidence develops gradually.

Helpful steps include:

- Trying new experiences.

Setting realistic goals.

Celebrating small achievements.

Practising self-care.

Spending time with supportive people.

Learning new skills.

Challenging negative self-talk.

Recognising personal strengths.

Small, consistent actions often create lasting change.

Finding Supportive Communities

Feeling connected with others who understand your experiences can strengthen confidence.

Support may come from:

- LGBTQ+ community groups.

Trusted friends.

Support groups.

Inclusive workplaces.

University societies.

Online communities.

Counselling or psychotherapy.

Belonging reminds people that they are not alone.

Confidence Is a Journey

Confidence is not something that is achieved once and remains constant.

Everyone experiences periods of uncertainty.

Confidence grows through:

- Self-awareness.

Practice.

Supportive relationships.

Life experiences.

Self-acceptance.

Progress is rarely linear, and setbacks do not erase the growth that has already taken place.

Key Takeaways

Self-confidence is about trusting yourself rather than being free from fear.

LGBTQ+ people may face additional challenges because of experiences such as stigma, discrimination or rejection.

Minority stress can influence confidence and wellbeing.

Authenticity supports long-term confidence when it is safe to express who you are.

Self-compassion is a powerful foundation for building confidence.

Small, consistent steps help confidence grow over time.

Supportive relationships and inclusive communities play an important role in developing self-belief.

Final Thoughts

Building self-confidence as an LGBTQ+ person is not about becoming someone different—it is about recognising that who you are is worthy of respect, acceptance and kindness. While experiences of prejudice, rejection or misunderstanding can leave lasting emotional scars, they do not define your value or your future. Confidence develops when people begin to replace fear with self-understanding, criticism with compassion and shame with authenticity.

There is no single path to confidence, and everyone's journey is different. Some people may find strength through supportive relationships, others through community, personal achievements, therapy or simply allowing themselves to live more openly. What matters is recognising that confidence is built through everyday choices that honour your identity and your wellbeing.

Ultimately, true confidence is not measured by how others see you—it is measured by how safely and comfortably you are able to be yourself. When people are supported to live authentically, surrounded by acceptance and encouraged to recognise their own strengths, confidence becomes something that grows naturally from within rather than something that depends on the approval of others.