

## MEN'S MENTAL HEALTH SERIES

# TYLER



### *My mental health journey has been Queer and Privileged*

#### Why were those the words you picked?

When I think about my mental health journey, my **queerness** and my **privilege** really stick out.

My queerness sticks out in particular because, from a young age, I assumed I was different than other people. I don't know if I explicitly knew I was a part of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community or that I would consider myself queer, but I knew that the dominant norms around me didn't reflect the life and experience I was hoping for me. I often think that my queerness was a gift because I questioned the world around me from a young age. However, because of my queerness, I also faced many barriers from students, school, and family based on how I was perceived. From a young age, I was provided information from community, family, and media that being queer or gay was undesirable. While being queer is a gift, growing up in a rural village in Nova Scotia in the 90's limited my queer expression, and this impacted my mental health. But it isn't queerness that leads to more challenging mental health outcomes; it is the barriers and stigma around us that are harmful.

Privileged sticks out for me as I was born into a white, lower-middle-class military family. Aside from my queerness, I didn't face many barriers. I think things have greatly shifted for the better with mental health, including access to therapy and treatment, reduced stigma, and a general overall improvement in understanding mental health, but in the 90's in rural Nova Scotia, there wasn't much support. However, because of my privilege, I know I could have accessed through other means if I needed to. I also chose privileged because as I continued in my journey and reconciled my challenges with substance use and mental illness, it was my privilege that made it more possible for me to seek out, access, and benefit from treatment. I am able to afford therapy and treatment while I was able to start my recovery journey while living with my mother as an adult. This

isn't available to most people, so my privilege has been a big contributing factor. This shouldn't be the case! Everyone should have access to what I have been able to benefit from. n.

## **What is one internal barrier, perspective, or insecurity you hold that you feel is unproductive?**

That I am lazy and solely responsible for my health and wellness. If I am sick, it is because I am not doing enough.

For most of my life, I assumed that my challenges with education, productivity, substance use, and mental health were a product of my own laziness or inability to take action.

This is still something that comes up for me all the time, but I have learned more about external factors of mental health and the way white supremacy, colonialism, and the over-reliance on the biomedical approach props up an individualistic approach to mental health. I have come to recognize that the mental health issues I face are partially produced by our environment and external like oppression, socioeconomics etc.

I regularly need to remind myself that I am not lazy; I am someone who can do great things, but my mental health and neurodivergence don't often fit within the dominant norms of society. I have had to adapt, and I hope that the policies and systems around us will also adapt. It shouldn't just be on the individual to talk, overcome, and individually deal with the challenges and barriers related to mental health.

## **What is something you are grateful to have learnt, or skill you are proud to of incorporated into your mental health journey?**

Complexity

So often, we are presented with "innovative" solutions and ideas for complex challenges that are really just simple solutions that don't address the root causes. For instance, if we are addressing mental health, we also need to consider how housing, income, social identities, and many other external factors contribute in complex ways to mental health and wellness. Focusing only on simple solutions means we can only get simple results. Mental health is a complex and nuanced experience that is impacted by many things, not just the biology of individuals or their capacity to share or process what is happening to them. Yet so much of our mental health interventions are focused on talk therapy and biomedical solutions. While these solutions can be helpful, and I have directly benefited from them, they can only do so much when facing environmental or external factors like oppression.

For example, talk therapy can help people develop resilience and coping skills, but it might not be able to do much to address housing insecurity or external pressures from inequitable working conditions. These are some of the root issues that impact mental health.

## **As it relates to the culture of mental health and masculinity or being a “man” what is one thing you are hopeful or excited to see changing in the future?**

It feels like more people are beginning to embrace the idea that men can be sensitive. I grew up in a context where I was often told I was too sensitive. However, as I get older, I see how my sensitivity is a strength. It is part of what led me to helping work in the nonprofit space. My sensitivity helps me gain the insight and understanding of what I can do to work towards a better world. While I am a queer person and have been able to challenge the dominant ideas of what it means to be a man, I am seeing a greater awareness of this developing outside of the queer community too.

## **What is a piece of advice relating to mental health that is so good or so horrible, you would want others to know or be aware of as they move through their own journey?**

Have flexible thinking when it comes to your experience and worldview. We can remain too rigid to our own perspective!

Seeing the world through complexity, shades of gray, and nuance has helped me have greater empathy and understanding for people who may be different from me. Moving beyond seeing the world as right or wrong has helped me be kinder to myself, others, and get less hung up on certain challenges.

Tyler is a white, queer, cisgender male, settler in Mi'kma'ki, coming to HMC with 15+ years' experience in the for-impact sector, tourism, and marketing. Tyler is a Social Worker, educator, life-long learner, leader, facilitator, and content creator with a passion for systems leadership and social innovation. He is completing his Master of Social Work at the University of Victoria, exploring decolonial approaches to social work. His lived experience with mental health, disability, & addictions greatly informs his work and relationships.

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