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# The Gerontology Of The Process Of Aging In same-sex Couples

## Introduction

The proposal aims to explore and further understand the adjustment of life through contextual factors of older gay couples, the oppression, and fear that has led to the disparities in the health care system. The involvement of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and their respective models, which includes the view of social pathology through an analysis of specific human behavior theories that will allow examining the issue more in-depth.

Understanding the plight of this population will entail the application of human behavior theories to gain a better understanding of ways through which they can be treated with a sense of exercising the strength of the clients, exercising culture sensitivity, historical background, and person in the environment, and acknowledge their sense of fear and oppression as a sexual minority group.

## What is Gerontology

Gerontology is defined as the discipline that explores the process of aging. The reality, this process interlaces with all other fields, such as anthropology, psychology, biology, social work, to include politics. The critical take of gerontology is the concept of physical changes of human beings as they begin the age and the alteration they endured in their mental and social lives.

## Description of the Aging Population

The areas of gerontological policy, research, practice in the United States have transformed significantly with the increased diversity among the older adult population. This diversity now includes sexual orientation and gender expression. Evaluating available data within population-based research show that approximately 2.4% of adults 50 years and older self-identify as same-sex gay in the United States currently, representing 2.7 million aging older adults with these figures also including approximately 1.1 million adults of 65 and older. (Gates & Newport, 2012; Brown, & Brown, 2017; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al. 2017; Knauer, 2016).

Same-sex couples are within the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, Queer. (LBGTQ) The population is expected to increase with time considering the indicators among the same aging sex gay population, Baby-Boomers (Goldsen et al. 2017; Pollitt, Robinson & Umberson, 2018). The number of same-sex couples aged 50 and older self-identifying as gay will likely increase twice as much in the next few decades among the U.S. population. (Oswald & Roulston, 2018;

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Gonzales & Henning-Smith, 2015).

## **Disparities Among Same-Sex Couples**

A principal objective of the current national health initiatives is the reduction of health care disparities, adverse health outcomes arising through economic, social, economic, or environmental circumstances (Office of Minority Health 2011). Among the first population-based studies of same-sex older adult and health tools using state-wide data, they have found considerable health disparities. (Kim, Fredriksen-Goldsen, Bryan & Muraco, 2017).

Current research utilizing years of National Health Interview Survey (NHIS, 2015), nation-level population-based data have additionally examined health disparities by sexual orientation, age, and gender. Same-sex older couples over the age of 50 years old have been found more likely to present with increased occurrence of disabling chronic illnesses in comparison with similarly aged heterosexuals. Same-sex older couples are reported to have increased rates indicated by 9 of the 12 chronic conditions in comparison with their heterosexual counterparts.

These included lower back pain, immune system problems, and gastrointestinal illnesses; other disparities include higher rates of heart diseases, stroke, asthma, and psychological conditions, together with comorbidities related to chronic health conditions for older gay men and women, which includes cancer and angina. (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Shiu, Bryan, Goldsen, & Kim, 2016). Same-sex gay couples over 50 years old were found more likely to present more mental problems, poor general health, and disability issues related to cognition, vision, and ambulation, sleep difficulties, and drug abuse. Older same-sex couples are more likely to suffer from alcoholism, not necessarily distinguishes the differences between older heterosexual and older gay couples.

Adequate population-based data for assessing health disparities is not available for this subgroup of gay older adults, which leaves community-based data to be the most reliable statistic. As an example, reliable population-based data at the U.S National level for assessing the health and well-being of older same-sex couples are limited. The examination of community-based gay on older adults established that same-sex older couples had a higher risk of adverse health outcomes in comparison with other older sexual minority adults.

The community-based data further show a high prevalence of poor general health mental disorders and lack of social support, and these are related to increased rates of discrimination, victimization together with lacking access to compassionate health care (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Cook-Daniels, et al., 2014). This data points to increased rates of poor overall health among same-sex older couples in comparison to other sexually-oriented older adults partly because of the more significant identity stigma and discrimination in health care and other socioeconomic resources. (Fredriksen-Goldsen, Shiu, Bryan, Goldsen, & Kim, 2016).

Marginalized personal history factors and social status, as older same-sex gay couple status, have been known to significantly be associated with disparities in health and responsive care provision (Mallon, 2017). Same-sex couples of 50 years and above have hardly been focused

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on by these gerontology research. They share the sentiments of fear, oppression, disparities, lack of understanding from the social structures. These findings emphasize the importance of a subgroup disparity evaluation aimed at gaining a more informed understanding of same-sex relationships. It explains how aging and health among diverse populations in the U.S. are marginalized or obscure due to old traditions within the health care industry. Such an informed understanding will enable a generation of practical approaches to include mechanisms for reducing health disparities and inequities among same-sex older adults, who, when left abandoned, will lead to a substantial increase in healthcare and social costs with time.

## **The National Association of Social Work (NASW) and The Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice**

The National Association of Social Work (NASW) cultural competence in social work practice model is different from other models. It provides mental health, physical health, and social health care because it incorporates a life course development approach for understanding the entire extent of the positive as well as adverse experiences, contexts, and settings which influence a persons' opportunities for achieving the full possibility of well-being and excellent health (Barkys, 2018)

The identification of the possible cultural explanatory factors that predict disparities in health, but explores the well-being among culturally diverse groups such as same-sex couples in older adults. The NASW model focuses on the lasting features, such as age and sexual orientation, together with modifiable characteristics which often utilized in intervention, as in managing identity stigma and self-affirmation for gay older adults, health-promoting and social support to ensure the functioning and quality social relationships as well as community integration. What does this mean? The institution (NASW) understands the pathology, and beyond thus concentrates on the resources, such as strengths of the individuals to seek resolutions (positive psychology).

The category of the Silenced Generation on their part, were filled with hostile public sentiments against gay orientation throughout formative years, including classification of older terms such as "Homosexual," which often led to the orientation of a sociopathic disorder. The Pride Generation, on the other hand, has grown and to come of age when significant social changes based on civil rights, freedom, and social movements have taken place. The declassifying of homosexuality as a mental illness and the beginning of legal recognition has been a step forward in the social hierarchy of society. Within these generations of same-sex couples, there have been varied social experiences over time, resulting in the building of gay communities. Their shared generational experiences point to the rapid changes in the social environment and the cultural norms related to sexual orientation. These changes are illustrating the possibility just for individual adaptation but for group-level adaptation to different contexts and generational issues for same-sex older couples.

## **Human Behavior theories and how they apply to aged Same-sex Gay Couple**

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## Social learning theory

Albert Bandura developed social learning theory. Social learning theory postulate that behavior can be acquired by observing and imitating others. The cohorts of same-sex couples in the earlier stage and latter part of adulthood often endured less supportive environments. As adults now, same-sex gay couples witnessed routine harassment in the early stages of their lives. Adulthood can be the final stage in life. Many processes characterize the stage, among them growth and decline for all adults, later life is known as a period of both growth and decline (Akers & Jennings, 2016). However, for an older same-sex couple, the situation is different since it is marked with prejudice and isolation from family and friends.

## How it applies to the aged same-sex gay couple

In various studies, experiences of an aged same-sex gay couple are characterized by the addition of the legacies and experiences of stigma. Studies have uncovered that many older same-sex gay couples complain of prejudice compared to their older straight counterpart; more help comes from people who are not directly connected to them, for example, friends and acquaintances. A large number claimed that they did not receive all the necessary support. Older gay couples prefer to live an independent life. A study carried out by Sellers et al., 2017 identified that more than two aged older gay women were identified as living independently without any support from society. However, it was realized that despite support being readily available, a good number of aged lesbians declined the support. If evaluating available data, a good number within population-based research shows that approximately 2.4% of adults 50 years and older self-identify as same-sex gay couples in the United States currently. Representing 2.7 million aging older adults with these figures, also including approximately 1.1 million adults of 65 and older. (Gates & Newport, 2012; Brown, & Brown, 2017; Fredriksen-Goldsen et al. 2017; Knauer, 2016). These are the numbers; however, the number of LGBTQ members refusing services is unnoted.

## Chaos theory

Chaos theory is the study of the unexpected and the unpredictable. It teaches us to expect the unexpected. Chaos theory can help society accept gay couples among them and treat them as equals. Unlike other sciences that deal with known predictable phenomena such as the reaction of chemicals and gravity, Chaos Theory deals with the aspect that is not linear, and that is impossible to predict, counter or control (Azar & Vaidyanathan, 2016). For example, one's brain activity, climate, and turbulence. Here chaos theory will help develop analysis based on capturing and understanding the marriage between occurrences and learning to appreciate everything offered by nature, even the unexpected. Older same-sex people find it challenging to

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explain their sexuality.

## **How it applies to the aged same-sex gay couple**

Gay grandparents prefer to hide their sexual orientation from their grandchildren to protect them from familiar foes like prejudice and discrimination. The aim of doing this is to keep their families close to them. This act ensured that they are not estranged from their community and family. It is necessary to develop a comprehensive assessment of needs; this will help capitalize on the different fields proposed, which include family, spiritual, social, health care, and legal institution. All the above fields will acknowledge the existence of a gay couple in society through the utilization of chaos theory.

### **Altruism theory**

Altruism deals with concern for satisfaction and happiness for both animals and human beings and leads to a quality life. According to Yi (2019), the application of the Altruism theory will help society embrace everyone for the collective growth of the community. It will also provide a ground for the respect of older same-sex couples. A significant number of aged gay couples have faced rejection in society due to their sexual orientation. This group of older adults faces more significant challenges than those older adults who are well integrated into society.

## **How it applies to the aged same-sex gay couple**

Past studies state that same-sex older couples are at heightened risk of suffering depression, mental stress, and disability. Older gay adults are more likely to engage in acts such as smoking, and most of them rarely date to get married. Older adults who are part of the same-sex marriage community may also experience social isolation, which is compounded by both old age and minority status.

### **Cognitive-behavioral theory**

Cognitive behavior theory explains to what extent individual thoughts and perception can shape their behavior and emotional state. According to Farmer & Chapman (2016), Cognitive-behavioral theory focuses on how the perception of same-sex older couples affects their interaction at the macro level. Lack of support from the society and low perception of self, among aged same-sex couples is most likely to invite loneliness among old gay couples. Dating

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and being attracted to others within a society where homosexuality is considered demonized results in stigma and isolation, which in turn leads to a lack of self-worth.

## **How it applies to the aged same-sex gay couple**

Aged same-sex couples are forced to hide due to increased societal prohibitions. The results in suppressed development of their identity and the pressure of uniqueness culminating in loneliness and isolation. Furthermore, many workers have experienced the outcome of stigma and biases due to their sexual orientation. This treat from society results in substance abuse and mental illness. It is worthwhile to acknowledge to what extent such oppressive acts affect aged gay couples and how they contribute to issues such as anxiety and depression.

## **Application of human behavior theory to development**

Human behavior is the potential expressed ability for mental, physical, and social activity manifested during different phases of human life. Just like other animals, humans have a growth pattern that consists of phases that are characterized by a notable set of physiological, behavioral, and physical features. The phases include prenatal life, infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to old age. Development is marked with growth, positive change, or the addition of physical, social-political, environmental, and demographic components.

## **Freud's Psychosexual Theory**

In this theory, Freud asserts that unconscious wants and experiences shape behavior at an early age. Additionally, he believes that everything an individual encounter during any stage of development has an impact on a person's behavior and personality. Desai (2018) discerns that psychosexual theory capitalizes on what happens as a child walks through every stage and what results in case of it being compromised and not mastered during development. Successful completion of every stage results in the development of all-round and person. If a conflict is not well resolved, it can lead to an influence on adult personality and behavior.

Some theories argue that child development continues to grow and change all through the entire lifetime, to Freud's early experiences play a more significant role in shaping development. In same-sex couples, it is essential to note that every stage holds the key to their success within society, community, family, and self-preservation as perceiving the world through every step of the way in their lives.

## **Bowlby's Attachment Theory**

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Bowlby's theory focuses on children and how they develop. John subscribes to the thought that childhood relationship with caregivers plays a great deal in one's development and influences their relationships through life. Heard, McCluskey & Lake (2018) assert that attachment theory presents different styles of attachment. For developments, the theory tries to compare children who receive care and support to those who do not. The children who receive care develop a freestyle of attachment; in contrast, those with less attention develop a style marked with carelessness and are less organized.

## **Bandura's Social Learning Theory**

In this theory, Albert Bandura believes reinforcement and conditioning cannot fully account for human learning. According to this theory, the development of behavior can be achieved through modeling and observation by observing what others are doing, including peers and parent individuals learn new things and develop new skills (Bandura & Hall, 2018). Bandura suggests that for development, children require observation. Children can also listen to verbal instructions.

## **Human behavior theory and leadership**

A person's nurture and how they live their life plays a vital role when it comes to fitting in society. Hogg (2018) observes that individuals subscribe to the thought that leaders are made; however, if leaders are made, consistencies must exist in the environment that this person is exposed to and tries to adopt. According to human behavior theory, good leadership should include the ability to listen to everyone effectively, provide mental and physical support to everyone, treat people equally, and maintaining a strong team.

## **Why is this important to you?**

In Latin, De oppresso liber (Babylon Dictionary, 2018), meaning “free the oppressed.” The older same-sex couples, in many ways, remain oppressed. I find it interesting in two different ways, historical and the need to advocate for a community that remained hidden for decades. Even today, some of them remained in isolation due to their environments. I enjoyed reading and learning from a new culture as I call it: they have so much history, values, and lessons or knowledge yet untapped. The more I learned, the less I know, from Socrates' paradox is where I find myself with this community. They need more social workers to advocate for this aged community. This is why it is important to me.

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## Conclusion

Human behavior theory explains the huge existing difference between gay and straight couples when it comes to the outer society. For older same-sex couples, the theory tries to articulate the difficulties they encounter at a macro-level. Many are forced to hide behind false skins for fear of isolation, prejudice, and discrimination.

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