



Disenfranchised Grief: A need for culturally competent LGBT bereavement resources

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Agenda

- Intro
- Definitions
- History
- Background & significance
- Research proposal
- Video clips
- Common experiences
- Resources
- Q & A

Intro

DEFINITIONS

FAMILY OF ORIGIN:

The significant caretakers and siblings that a person grows up with, or the first social group a person belongs to, which is often a person's biological family or an adoptive family. Many times LGBTQ+ individuals are disengaged from their biological family due to rejection when the "come out" to their family.

FAMILY OF CHOICE:

Consists of people that are trusted; such as friends, ex-partners, coworkers, neighbors, etc. This family of choice tends to be the same age as they grow older, supporting each other may become difficult.

INFORMAL CAREGIVER:

FORMAL CAREGIVER:

HISTORY

banned from
employment by federal
and some local
governments

1950s

1960s

homosexuality no longer
listed as mental health
diagnosis in DSM

1973

New York allows police to
arrest those wearing less
than 3 pieces of gender-
appropriate clothing,
holding hands, kissing, or
dancing with someone of
the same sex

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

“Disenfranchised grief is defined as grief experienced when individuals “incur a loss that is not or cannot be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported”.

[BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF MPH MASTER’S THESIS]

Given that by 2030 there will be 6-8 million LGBT individuals in the United States over the age of 65 (sageusa.org), there will be a great need to proactively and preemptively address the lack of culturally competent and sensitive bereavement resources for this demographic. Based on my extensive review of the literature for this research proposal, in addition to my work experience as a practicum intern at SAGEUSA.org (Services & Advocacy for LGBTQ+ Elders, I have noticed a lack of academic and applied research given to LGBT bereavement. Hence there is a gap in the understanding of this extant and exponentially impending issue. This lack of recognition of the special needs of the bereaved LGBT will soon become an immediate and significant problem, both in the United States as well as many other international countries, given the greying of the global population (lgbtagingcenter.org). If this issue is not presently and expertly addressed through evidence-based programs and interventions, there will be significant repercussions that will resonate throughout the LGBT communities. Although some articles have been written about the lack of cultural competency among the caregivers of the LGBT demographic, few directly speak to the specific bereavement needs of this population.

“LGBT bereavement services goes unrecorded and unmet by mainstream providers. Some support is forthcoming from the LGBT community organizations, although access to these depends very much on geographical location, with those living in more rural communities having limited access” (Fenge, 2014, p. 298).

“Those participants suggested that additional formal resources would help to give voice to and address concerns specific to this group of bereaved men. Those who took part in grief-support groups recommended that participants be screened to increase within-group similarities, that specific groups be offered for gay men grieving from the loss of a partner to a non-AIDS-related cause and indicated that this might lead to affirmation and a shared exchange of ideas and practical information (Hornjatkevyc & Alderson, 2010, p. 818).

An aspect of personal behavior or lifestyle, an environmental exposure or an inborn or inherited characteristic, which on the basis of epidemiological evidence, is known to be associated with health-related conditions... These risk factors can be either bereavement specific or general. “Bereavement-specific risk factors” are aspects of the bereavement situations that influence bereavement impact or recovery (Stroebe & Schut, 2007, p. 350).

“Some of the vulnerability of the bereavement of gay men lies in the fact that isolation, unwelcome interaction, and discrimination can lead to complications.” (Hornjatkevyc & Alderson, 2010, p. 811).



Questions I would pose to the Elder LGBTQ Bereaved as part of an in-depth interview trying to understand their experiences with grief:

1. What was the outcome of accessing any kind of a religious or socially supportive network to help you cope with your loss?

2. How did you go about finding resources to help you with your bereavement process?

3. What does culturally sensitive bereavement support for an LGBT bereaved individual mean to you and what has been your experiences with bereavement services?

4. What are some of the resources and forms of support you found most helpful and what are some of the resources and forms of support you found as least helpful when coping with your loss?

5. How did your relationship with your family of origin influence you coping with your loss? What was stressful about this relationship and what was helpful?

6. What are some of the legal and more practical challenges you faced related to the death of your loved one? How did you manage these matters?

7. What kind of advice would you provide to another LGBT bereaved individual about the best way for managing the grief and sadness associated with the loss of a loved one?

GEN SILENT DOCUMENTARY BY STU MADDOX

[VIDEO CLIPS]

1. Thoughts? Feelings? Reactions

2. Did you hear any examples of discrimination or oppressions?

3. Did you hear any concerns about treatment by service providers? What were their concerns?





Many LGBTQ+ Elders May:

- Have experienced discrimination
- Lack Visibility within the community
- Be dependent n social service organization
- Not be accepted by service providers or their peers
- Have caregivers who are uncomfortable caring for them
- Go back into the closet due to fear of abuse



Common Experiences

Most have lived through discrimination, social stigma and prejudices

Some older adults were labeled by the medical establishment as having a mental defect

Higher rates:

Drug and alcohol problems

- Weight or obesity problems
- Poor nutrition
 - More likely to be disconnected from families of origin
- Families of choice
 - They have a tendency to age alone
- 3 to 4 times less likely to have children
- Family of choice is typically the same age
 - More likely to have financial concerns
- Discrimination in employment
- Income disparities
- Tax laws
- Marriage laws

A photograph of a wind turbine against a night sky filled with stars and the Milky Way galaxy. The turbine is on the right side of the frame, and the word "RESOURCES" is written in white capital letters in the center.

RESOURCES

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

