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## Bereavement in older age in LGBTIQ adults

Panagiotis Pentaris  and Lefteris Patlamazoglou 

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Bereavement in older age in LGBTIQ adults differs from that of their counterparts (other-gender attracted and cis-gender adults), as well as from other stages of life (Moss et al., 2001; Patlamazoglou et al., 2018). Such experiences may vary based on additional, intersected identities among LGBTQIA adults, such as race. Kum (2017), for example, highlighted that older LGBTQIA and racially minoritized adults face severe consequences during bereavement, including experiencing the phenomenon of ‘getting back into the closet’ and risks of poverty. This corroborates with the results from a review of evidence since 1996, which Valenti et al. (2020) completed. The review found that older LGBTIQ adults at the stage of end-of-life care are at high risks of isolation, exclusion and poverty.

These differences are largely due to social and cultural constructs which influence the way people understand their bereavement, respond to it, and experience and express their grief in a specific context (Goldsen, 2018; Ingham et al., 2016; Pentaris, 2011). This argument alludes largely to the contrast between normative or conventional ideas of social roles, responsibilities, gender assignment and specifications, and others, often characterised as nonconventional, socially non-compatible, provocative or bold (Millette & Bourgeois-Guerin, 2019; Stulberg, 2018). This said, we should not neglect to recognise the generational disparities in the experiences of social groups who may not conform with the traditional ideas and practices in each society. An example is that of Hagai et al. (2020), who explored the different ways by which younger and older LGBTIQ individuals perceive their identities and how this relates to their social experiences. Their study found that younger people more often will separate their sexuality from the gender binaries, identifying as pansexual or queer. This changes the lived experience and highlights that socio-cultural and political pressures may influence self-identification to a degree.

With this special issue, we did not want to collate accounts of lived experience for LGBTIQ individuals altogether, though. Drawing on our work and research on LGBTIQ identities and bereavement, we wanted to emphasise an area that is lacking attention in research, focusing on older individuals and their experiences when grieving. What does evidence tell us and how do we apply this evidence. This special issue is a tribute to these experiences and welcomes contributions from different disciplines.

Benjamin Shepherd, Paula Brochu, and Ashley Stripling, in their paper, explore how socio-historical factors of trauma and oppression have often led to the concealment of identity for sexual and gender minorities among older adults, which in turn has led to more negative and severe impact on psycho-social and emotional outcomes. This paper elaborates on how evidence has supported the thesis that identity concealment is associated with disenfranchised grief and negative outcomes in the long term. Starting from this point, the authors undertake a theoretical review through the lens of minority stress theory and relational-cultural theory, both of which explain how socially constructed power relations produce stressors that influence the experiences of bereavement among LGBTIQ older adults. This addition to the special issue highlights the need for a more robust

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conceptual framework when research engages with this area and sets the tone for further contributions.

In the next paper, Katarzyna Malecka argues that grief is a more meaningful experience when shared with others, yet recognises that not all grieverers are recognised for their experience, alluding to the concept of disenfranchised grief, too. This exclusion leaves mourners precarious of their 'right to share'. Yet, Malecka introduces us to another medium, a well-established form of communication that crosses boundaries; that of grief memoirs. The author argues that via this medium, mourners 'share their emotions without obeying conventional normativities, expectations, and regimes of truth', and selects one grief memoir, titled *The Pure Lover: A Memoir of Grief*, by David Plante, to explore three areas. The first is that of how interpersonal and intrapersonal elements intersect when grieving. Next, Malecka introduces art and literature as self-therapy; drawing on Greek historians, the author emphasises the functions of art as a healing process for the soul. Lastly, the paper shows in its analysis how grief memoirs have social and cultural functions, acting as a means to social recognition and empowerment, tackling degrees of disenfranchisement in grief.

The next paper is authored by Jessica Noblitt and Anne Barrett, who focus on lesbian, gay and bisexual widowhood and its impact on psychological wellbeing. This is a study exploring the correlations between partner loss among lesbian, gay and bisexual older individuals and psychological wellbeing, while the authors consider the comparative outcomes with heterosexual widowhood. The paper reports two key findings which add value to the current body of knowledge in this area. First, partner loss among those who remain single following the loss has a higher association with psychological wellbeing, and second, those who do not report higher life satisfaction. Such findings are important in supporting our understanding of coping strategies, as well as wellbeing among LGBTIQ older adults who are bereaved.

The last paper by Lefteris Patlamazoglou, Jannette Simmonds, and Tristan Snell complements the findings of the previous study in this special issue. The authors examine lived experiences of six LGBTIQ older adults who have experienced the loss of a partner and focus on the changes incurred by the loss. The paper used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, providing a thorough and systematic exploration of these experiences, which reported additional losses the individuals experience in that period. Such losses include the loss of relationship status, loss of power and control, and friendship networks. The paper further identifies gains from the loss, aligning itself with current literature focusing on the positive impact of change altogether.

All papers together comprise an interesting and important contribution to the literature and current knowledge about LGBTIQ older adults. This special issue is a statement that further attention is needed in this area from research and theory, while we argue that research evidence needs to go beyond scholarly circles but be introduced in the processes of policymaking and practices, to ensure direct impact on its beneficiaries, as all research should do.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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