

Fostering Cross-Generational Support Through Narrative Group Interventions with LGBTQ Populations

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Abstract

The rapidly changing social landscape of the past 50 years has led to a distinctive social divide between adults and youth within the LGBTQ community (Russell & Bohan, 2005). This poster examines potential benefits of utilizing group narrative therapy interventions for fostering cross-generational connection and support among LGBTQ populations. It discusses current literature, as well as identifying need for future research and scholarship. A curriculum for a ten-week LGBTQ narrative therapy group is provided.

Background

- Universally there is a social divide between youth and elders, however this distinction is notably evident within the LGBTQ community (Russell & Bohan, 2005).
- Youth feel as though elders are insensitive and out of touch with their realities (Russell & Bohan, 2005), while elders can feel devalued, estranged, or invisible from the LGBTQ community and society as a whole (Spira, Orwat, & Knepler-Foss, 2017).
- **What is contributing to this social divide?**
 - **Ageism** is a factor that adversely affects all ageing adults, and within the LGBTQ community stigmatization and segregation based upon age is particularly prevalent (Hash & Rogers, 2013).
 - Gay men especially tend to view the aging process more negatively due to the effort needed to sustain positive self-image amidst societal homophobia, and how harshly the community tends to judge physical appearance and celebrate youth (Hash & Rogers, 2013).
- **Shifting social constructs and norms** can also account for division between youth and elders.
 - The social climate toward members of the LGBTQ community has shifted dramatically over the last 50 years, and continues to evolve today.
 - As a result, age cohorts within the LGBTQ community have distinctive variations in their lived experiences and sexual identity development (Spira, Orwat, & Knepler-Foss, 2017).
 - These radical discrepancies lend to misunderstanding and breaks in communication between generational cohorts (Russell & Bohan, 2005).

Implications of Generational Division Within the LGBTQ Community

- **LGBTQ elders disproportionately experience isolation and chronic loneliness.** This not only leads to adverse mental health outcomes, but is also associated with poorer physical health outcomes (Hash & Rogers, 2013).
- **Youth lacking positive connection with elders in the community are prone to relying on stereotype of older generations** (Russell & Bohan, 2005).
 - This limits their access to valuable lessons of LGBTQ history and models of resilience that help navigate oppressive hetero-centrist systems that persist today.

Group Narrative Intervention

- Group narrative approaches provide participants with opportunity to form their own personal narratives while gaining insight and understanding from multiple perspectives, which positions this approach at an advantage to elicit acceptance and support among members (Dean, 1998).
- Previous scholarship has found that narrative therapy is an effective framework for working with LGBTQ clients, as it gives participants an opportunity to express and validate their unique experiences, as well as being a powerful tool in dismantling internalized homophobia.
 - The ability to externalize experiences of oppression and reframe harmful narratives, make narrative therapy a useful intervention when working with oppressed populations (Steelman, 2016, Galazara, 2013, Mclean & Marini, 2008, & Lev, 2004).

Benefits of Group Narrative Intervention with LGBTQ Populations

- Creating space for recognition and exploration of connections among various forms of oppression is a potentially powerful catalyst for fostering productive communication across LGBTQ generations
- The emphasis made in group narrative therapy on identifying and exploring the influence of oppression on personal and communal narratives allows this approach to provide a potential forum for promoting cross-generational communication and support within a therapeutic setting

- **Connections provided through group narrative interventions can have positive outcomes for both youth and elders**
 - Providing the space to share their narratives and find community and support LGBTQ older adults can build identity-affirming connection that can moderate negative physical & mental health outcomes associated with chronic loneliness
 - Older LGBTQ adults demonstrate remarkable strength and resilience around navigating negative social constructs of homosexuality (Hash & Rogers, 2013). Modeling such resilience to youth can be powerful as they learn to navigate pervasive oppressive systems.

Recommendations

- Further scholarship is needed to examine the benefits of group narrative therapy interventions with LGBTQ populations
- With the ageing population rapidly expanding, further scholarship addressing the experiences and needs of older LGBTQ adults is exceedingly necessary
- There is a need for further exploration of arts-based practice with LGBTQ populations
 - Arts-based interventions can be a powerful tool in helping build community
- Arts-based approaches allow unique opportunity for individuals in marginalized communities creative and therapeutic avenues for expressing and coping with the effects of this oppression (Wernick, Woodford, & Kulick, 2014).
- Other arts-based approaches to practice such as drama therapy and comedic improv therapy may potentially elicit similar benefits as narrative therapy and build support and community among group members

Resources

- Further information including a group narrative therapy curriculum and resource list are provided in handout