

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

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### Summary:

*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, and this divide 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 effects 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 lead to misunderstanding and breaks in communication between generational cohorts (Russell & Bohan, 2005).

### **Implications of Generational Division in the LGBTQ Community:**

- Social isolation is a pervasive experience across the elderly population, and in particular a serious concern among LGBTQ seniors. Along with negative implications isolation has on these individual's mental health, research has found that social isolation has devastating consequences on older adult's physical health, comparable to smoking several cigarettes a day (Hash & Rogers, 2013, Spira, Orwat, & Knepler-Foss, 2017).
- 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.
  - There is limited yet promising research examining benefits of group narrative therapy with gay (McLean & Marini, 2008), lesbian (Galazara, 2013), transgender (Lev, 2004), and queer (Steelman, 2016) populations.

- 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).
- Narrative therapy and group work are considered best practice models when working with LGBTQ older adults. In meeting the mental health needs of LGBTQ elders, it is important to provide space for their stories to be shared, and opportunities for congregation that support their unique socialization and community needs (Spira, Orwat, & Knepler-Foss, 2017).
- There is no current literature that looks at group narrative therapy as a modality for fostering community and support across generational cohorts within the LGBTQ community.

#### **Benefits of 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 the personal and communal narratives of individuals within the group 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 and lifelong stigma and discrimination.

- 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
  - Additionally, further scholarship is needed looking at benefits of cross-generational connection within the LGBTQ community
- 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 and 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 trust, support and community among group members

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## Appendix.

### Group Narrative Therapy Curriculum

The following ten-week group narrative therapy curriculum was developed for an LBGQTQ group at an outpatient community mental health clinic in a large Midwestern U.S. city.

#### Session 1

- A reporter is writing a story about your life, what would they write about?
- What would be the title of a movie adaptation of your life? Who are the important characters?

#### Session 2

- Think of something important about yourself, something that is central to your identity. Tell us a story that illustrates it.

#### Session 3

- In an ideal world, imagine where you will be in 5, 10, 15 years. Write the story of how you got there.
- What is the title of the next chapter of your life?

#### Session 4

- Write a full narrative of a challenging or painful event. Do not just *recount* what happened but *deconstruct* it. Write the story of **what you see** when you watch the event replay in your mind. **Why did it happen? Why did you feel or react the way you did?**

#### Session 5

- Recount two positive personal stories; identify how these positive events influenced the experience of negative events.

#### Session 6

- Write about an event from your life in the third person, as if you were a fly on the wall. What do you see?

#### Session 7

- Identify a villain from a movie or book who you find particularly evil.
- Identify the antagonist in your own personal narrative.

#### Session 8

- Write a letter to someone you have an unresolved or unfinished relationship with. Write to them about your unspoken thoughts and feelings. You can write to them as the person you are now, or as you were at other times in your life (e.g. Your childhood self, your teenage self).

### Session 9

- Write a letter to yourself as the person you are now, to the person you were either at the beginning of childhood, or the beginning of adolescence. Share with your younger self the wisdom they'll need to navigate a difficult time in life, how to handle disappointment, and where to seek out joy.

### Session 10

- Process how the group's collective story is forming
- Reflect on one's own story in connection to the group