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Imagining Queer Futures Beyond Boundaries: A Narrative Analysis of Creative Writing

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SESSION 2540 (SYMPOSIUM)

CREATIVE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS WITH LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUEER (LGBTQ+) OLDER ADULTS

Chair: Austin Oswald Co-Chair: Sara Bybee Discussant: Austin Oswald

The voices of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) older adults are very often overlooked in research contexts. Creative qualitative methods have been utilized to study populations who have been neglected, empowering marginalized communities, and fostering equitable research processes and outcomes (Archibald & Blines, 2021; Jen & Pacey, 2021; McGarry & Bowden, 2017). This innovative symposium explores creative qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, such as creative writing and poetry, which have been employed in research about LGBTQ+ aging and also describes how each method may provide a unique contribution to the research process and literature. The first presentation describes the process of facilitating a weekly creative writing group with LGBTQ+ older adults and how creative writing can facilitate the retelling of life events and reimagining of new futures. The second presentation describes the process of analyzing pieces of creative writing in order to elucidate the potential and possibility of queer futurities and their implications for research on aging trajectories and imaginings. The third presentation details how found poetry created from dyadic semi-structured interviews sheds new light on the relationships of LGBTQ+ couples facing cancer. Through these three presentations, we will illustrate how creative methods contribute strengths of generating evocative and poignant narratives, illuminating not-yet-possible futures, and inspiring equally creative interventions. The overall objective of this symposium is to explore creative qualitative research methods for their utility in research with LGBTQ+ older adults, ultimately fostering more inclusive and nuanced research processes and products.

IMAGINING QUEER FUTURES BEYOND BOUNDARIES: A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF CREATIVE WRITING

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Scholars have called for “queering aging futures” beyond normative assumptions or scripts (Sandberg & Marshall, 2019), which is well-aligned with queer theory’s Cruising Utopia which suggests “cruising ahead” toward a queer utopian future that is not yet possible (Muñoz, 2009). Due to emphasis on form rather than content, narrative analyses enable the reimagining of queer futures not bound by material realities. This study presents a narrative analysis of 40 pieces of creative writing in *Bi Women Quarterly (BWQ)* that examine aging. Authors used writing to queer stories of relationships, activism, and aging. Many used incoherent, non-linear, and dreamlike or omnipotent storytelling to queer narratives, allowing them to “cruise” across time and versions of themselves, imagining futures that were new and unscripted. Narrative analysis allowed researchers to examine choices authors made in taking agency through storytelling.

Findings indicate that queer people are well positioned to queer expectations of successful old age.

USING FOUND POETRY TO EXPLORE SEXUAL AND GENDER MINORITY COUPLES’ EXPERIENCES FACING CANCER

Sara Bybee¹, Kristin Cloyes², Kathi Mooney³, Katherine Supiano⁴, Brian Baucom⁴, and Lee Ellington⁵, 1. *University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, United States*, 2. *Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, Oregon, United States*, 3. *University of Utah College of Nursing, Salt Lake City, Utah, United States*, 4. *University of Utah Department of Psychology, Salt Lake City, Utah, United States*, 5. *University of Utah and Huntsman Cancer Institute, Salt Lake City, Utah, United States*

This study explored how relationships of sexual and gender minority (SGM) couples change through the cancer experience. Twelve couples (N = 24) completed surveys assessing demographics and dyadic semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze interview transcripts. Participants had been together for 19.1 years on average (SD = 9.9, R = 9-44) and commonly described dyadic strength and durability as a result of cancer. Using in-vivo language extracted from the theme dyadic strength and durability, a found poem was constructed depicting how couples saw themselves as two-person teams united against any external stressors. When SGM couples experienced cancer together, it resulted in feeling closer to one another, like they could handle anything that came their way, and assured them that they would stay together regardless of any future hardships experienced. Creative qualitative methods revealed SGM couples facing cancer felt like unyielding, impenetrable, eternal duos with which to be contended.

CREATIVE WRITING AS A TOOL FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUEER (LGBTQ+) HISTORY AND FUTURE MAKING

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The shift toward embracing creative methods in qualitative research opens new possibilities for gerontologists and older adults to explore the nuances of aging and its affective undertones. This paper describes the process of facilitating a weekly creative writing group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) older adults and their subjective experiences. Various creative writing practices (e.g., poetry, fiction, short story, biography) facilitates the retelling of life events and reimagining of new futurities. Done in community, it creates opportunities for social connectedness, collective meaning making, and psychosocial and instrumental support. Creative writing is a useful method for describing the LGBTQ+ aging experience not fully realized in gerontology. Our findings demonstrate the utility of creative methods in describing and re-imagining LGBTQ+ aging histories and futures. We argue for more creative methods that re-present the complexities of LGBTQ+ aging.