

3.3 Identities and Intersectionality Adopting an intersectional approach in LGBT+ older people's lives

What	Theoretical foundation of the intersectionality in LGBT+ older people's lives.
Purpose	Adopting an intersectional approach in LGBT+ older people's lives for an inclusive care.
Target group	Teachers and trainers in vocational and higher education and their students
Level	Level 2-3-4 in vocational education, higher education (level 5-6)
Execution	Extra support from the teacher, outside quest (e.g. member of an LGBT NGO) or person with experience is advisable (depending on the ability of the students to work independently).
Sources	Adams, Michael (2016), An Intersectional Approach to Services and Care for LGBT Elders. GENERATIONS – Journal of the American Society on Aging. Summer 2016 issue. Retrieved from: https://www.asaging.org/blog/intersectional-approach-services-and-care-lgbt-elders Christensen, Ann-Dorte & Sune Qvotrup Jensen (2012), Doing Intersectional Analysis: Methodological Implications for Qualitative Research, NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, 20:2, 109-125, DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2012.673505. Cronin, A. and King, A. (2010) Power, Inequality and Identification: Exploring Diversity and Intersectionality amongst Older LGB Adults. Sociology, 44 (5). pp. 876-892. Retrieved from: https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a766/12c042ea460d651329050853eea26d207794.pdf . IGLYO (2014), Intersectionality Toolkit. Retrieved from: https://www.iglyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Inter-Toolkit.pdf

Introduction

The purpose of the theme

- The purpose of this theme is to provide theoretical background for better understanding and insight into intersectionality issues.
- The purpose is to highlight the importance of the intersectional perspective for understanding the complexities of LGBT + older people's lives in order to deliver inclusive care.

The concept of intersectionality helps us hear the individual's narrative with as many of their ascribed or adopted identities as possible. An intersectional approach to the LGBT+ older people considers the diversity of gender identities and sexualities among LGBT+ older people and how these are cross cut and shaped by other identity categories and processes of social inequality, including cultural diversity, ethnicity, gender, disability, age, class, geographic location, religion, and others.

In the past, an **additive model** has been used to address the needs and realities of individuals who identify with more than one minority, which may be subject to multiple forms of discrimination. For example, for LGBT+ older people with disabilities it brings into focus the discrimination they face as members of three stigmatised populations and how these added pressures may place them at increased risk of poorer health compared with general population of older people, people with disabilities or LGBT+ people in general. However, the idea that the disadvantage and discrimination are simply additive has come under fire from a new intersectional approach to understanding the **cumulative and transformative effects of multiple forms of disadvantage**.

According to an intersectional approach, the effects of multiple identities and types of discrimination are mutually constitutive, producing new experiences and ways of being that cannot be reduced to the simple addition of the effects of each of these categories or types of discrimination alone.

This approach intertwines with a [human rights approach](#) to LGBT+ health and wellbeing as it *“unpacks the effects of multiple forms of discrimination on sexual orientation and gender identity minorities’ rights and freedoms, including the intersections of discrimination based on other categories.”* (Leonard and Mann, 2018) Several authors emphasize that the method of practising intersectionality must be related to power relations, in particular locations and contexts. (Christensen& Jensen, 2012) This means that the intersectional approach is not just about celebrating the diversity among the LGBT+ older population, but to **focus our attention also on the**

[inequalities](#) between them. As authors in IGLYO Intersectionality Toolkit suggested, *»we must continually question where the power lies in different societies, organisations and groups to understand why some individuals are treated better than others, find it easier to be successful, or are more readily included. Only by doing this can we start to see who is excluded or discriminated against«* (IGLYO, 2014).

LGBT+ older people who are part of other minority populations experience what they call *»multiple disadvantage«*. However, a growing number of researchers are using intersectionality to understand not only the mutually reinforcing effects of multiple forms of discrimination but also **how belonging to a number of different minority populations can lead to increased resilience and unique and positive ways of being in the world.** (Leonard and Mann, 2018) Therefore, it is important to note that the relevance of an intersectional approach to LGBT+ aging is founded in the importance of both addressing vulnerability and leveraging resilience. (Adams, 2016). Simply said, the constant interaction of intersections is complex and does not always end up with a predictable result (IGLYO; 2014).

When adopting an intersectional point of view, we open up a space for people's actual, lived realities. That is exactly why [life stories and narratives](#) can illuminate the complexities of gender, class, ethnicity, religion, economical status, disability etc. in relation to the construction of belonging to different identities. Everyday life can be therefore an entry point into understanding the complex local interplay where these identities and positions constitute each other in a non-additive way (Christensen& Jensen, 2012). For concrete life stories that illuminate intersectional perspective look at Cronin and King (2010).

In *Being Me* tools we have introduced only some of the main identities and intersections that care providers should consider (such as age, socio-economic status, disability, mental health, gender), but there are a whole range of others which should also be kept in mind. The list below (taken from IGLYO, 2014) includes some of these, but again shouldn't be seen as exhaustive:

- Religion and belief
- Ethnicity
- Educational attainment
- Body size
- Drug/alcohol addiction
- Marital status
- Parental status
- Political beliefs

This doesn't mean a student has to become an expert in every element of identities or groups. What it does mean is he/she/they should always be open to learning, proactively make links with other equalities organisations and groups to share knowledge and take the time to get to know the people with whom they work and how their intersections affect their experiences in life (IGLYO, 2014).

In terms of the consequences for good care, the students as the future care professionals in the field might find useful to conduct a needs' assessment in the catchment area of the service, in order to get an insight and feedback on the general characteristics of the local population (poor/wealthy neighbourhoods, ethnic minorities, existence of various special support services, etc.). An intersectional approach to LGBT+ older people services recognises that we live in a society marked by high levels of residential segregation by different factors, and that travelling long distances to access proper senior services simply is not an option for many LGBT+ older people. Given these realities, LGBT+ older people inclusive services must be available in all neighbourhoods, not only in LGBT+ specific services, but in mainstream services as well, and through providers who offer linguistic and other forms of cultural competence specific to their service users (Adams, 2016). This includes ethnic and gender sensitivity, as well as skills to respond to other aspects of LGBT+ older people's complex lives and identities, in inclusive ways. One of the most effective ways is to provide care in partnership with community-based care, human rights or minority organisations, and – always – in the partnership with LGBT+ older people themselves.

Guidelines

- It is important that the message of this brick does not end up in the simplistic truths and belief that identities and circumstances can be simply explained, put in boxes or just added up. They rather intersect and interplay in a unique way in the life of an LGBT+ older person and they variate and change through the course of life.
- Further on, it is important for a teacher to underline that different identities and special circumstances should not be explained only in terms of “diversity” (of LGBT+ older people group), but also in the context of power relations, inequalities and in their ability to reinforce barriers to opportunity and discrimination.

Activity

The students are given the following article to read: Adams, Michael (2016), An Intersectional Approach to Services and Care for LGBT Elders. GENERATIONS – Journal of the American Society on Aging. Summer 2016 issue. Retrieved from: <https://www.asaging.org/blog/intersectional-approach-services-and-care-lgbt-elders>.

The teacher moderates the discussion in the classroom that follows a prior reading of the article and teachers’ introduction of theoretical background. The students can consider the following question to develop shared understanding of intersectional approach:

- How do you explain in your own words a term “intersectionality”?
- What identities and positions does it possibly include?
- How would you describe the difference between intersectional approach and additive approach to the multiple disadvantage?
- In what ways is the intersectional perspective important for inclusive and good care of LGBT+ older people? Can you give some examples?
- Can you give an example of where intersection of various and complex identities and positions, increases resilience of individual LGBT+ older person? In what ways it could deepen her/his/their vulnerable position and social exclusion?
- What is your idea of inclusive care that takes in consideration intersectional perspective?

Results

- The students will get a basic understanding of how multiple inequalities interplay in the lives of LGBT+ older people.
- The students will gain a theoretical insight into the complex interplay where the processes of gender, class, ethnicity, age, disability, gender identity (etc.) constitute each other in a non-additive way in individual LGBT+ older people’s lives.
- The students will understand the importance of intersectional perspective for good care and get some examples and innovative ideas on how to implement this perspective in inclusive services.
- The students know where to find web-based information and guidance.

Evaluation for students

Discuss this building block individually or in groups. Use the following reflective questions:

- What have you learned from this block?
- What did you already know?
- What kind of impact did the information make on you as a professional health or social care taker?
- What are you taking into practice?
- What are you not taking into practice? Why not?

Keep on learning

- Adams, Michael (2016), An Intersectional Approach to Services and Care for LGBT Elders. GENERATIONS – Journal of the American Society on Aging. Summer 2016 issue. Retrieved from: <https://www.asaging.org/blog/intersectional-approach-services-and-care-lgbt-elders>
- Christensen, Ann-Dorte & Sune Qvotrup Jensen (2012), Doing Intersectional Analysis: Methodological Implications for Qualitative Research, NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, 20:2, 109-125, DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2012.673505.
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- IGLYO (2014), Intersectionality Toolkit. Retrieved from: <https://www.iglyo.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Inter-Toolkit.pdf>