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## general gayety

by leslie robinson :: *qnotes* contributor

### The lot of the LGBT elder



As if arthritis and profuse nose hair weren't enough. Aging is already loaded with physical and emotional challenges. Now we hear that LGBT elders face a distinct set of burdens in addition. It gives growing old all the appeal of a colostomy bag.

Called the first major collaboration between LGBT groups and mainstream organizations for the elderly, a report called "Improving the Lives of LGBT Older Adults" lays out the problems LGBT seniors face and offers recommendations.

A twink's recommendation might be, just don't grow old! It's hard when you're young to imagine yourself over 40, let alone 70. But, aging happens to every soul on the planet. Unless you see to it that you depart the planet early, determined to be a pretty corpse.

At 46, I'm showing signs of aging, from gray hair to assorted aches to wrinkles morphing into crevices. I'm on my way to elderhood — if I'm lucky — and I insist that all these LGBT-specific problems be fixed before I qualify for Medicare. Given how my back feels right now, there's no way it will support being old *and* discriminated against.

The report on the lives of LGBT elders was co-authored by the Movement Advancement Project (MAP) and Services & Advocacy for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender Elders (SAGE) in cahoots with the American Society on Aging, the National Senior Citizens Law Center and the Center for American Progress. AARP provided the foreword, lending the whole affair a certain geriatric panache.

According to the abstract on MAP's website, the report hones in on three bugaboo areas for LGBT seniors. And, no, the difficulty of singing "I Am What I Am" with ill-fitting false teeth is not one of them.

The first is money. Gay elders have less of it, contrary to stereotype. "LGBT older adults are poorer and less financially secure than American elders as a whole due to a lifetime of discrimination compounded by major laws and safety net programs that fail to protect

and support LGBT elders equally."

The report examines the impact of everything from Social Security to estate taxes. I'm so glad there are people out there who undertake the scrutinizing of such important subjects. If I had to analyze Medicaid and long-term care, I'd drift into a coma — requiring Medicaid and long-term care.

The second area of concern is health and healthcare. It's trickier for LGBT seniors to stay healthy, for reasons including inhospitable healthcare environments, nursing homes that fail to protect gay seniors and medical decision-making laws that shut out LGBT elders' partners.

Just reading how hard it is to get healthy makes you sick.

The third area of particular difficulty is LGBT elders are more likely to be socially isolated. "Despite a high level of resilience and strong friendship networks, social isolation has still been found to be higher among LGBT older adults."

The idea of a previously animated social butterfly sitting with his wings clipped in a lonely apartment makes me want to cry. A waste of fabulousness.

The report notes that gay elders are more likely to live alone. They also face housing discrimination, which may mean separation from loved ones. Further, LGBT elders can feel as welcome in senior centers as dry rot.

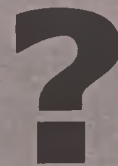
Another reason for LGBT elders' social isolation is they "often lack support from, and feel unwelcome in, the broader LGBT community." I don't doubt it. Gay men especially put such a premium on youth, holding off aging like it's a rampaging movie monster. We don't celebrate our elders; we collude in keeping them hidden.

It's time to make gay seniors a glamour group. And, soon — like the moment I become a member. ::

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