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# Handbook of LGBT Elders

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Debra A. Harley · Pamela B. Teaster  
Editors

# Handbook of LGBT Elders

An Interdisciplinary Approach  
to Principles, Practices, and Policies

 Springer

*Editors*

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## Foreword

Every so often, a book comes along that substantially contributes to much-needed broader and deeper understanding of a minority group and to clarifying and addressing multiple pressing questions of social justice regarding that group. This is one of those books.

Contributing editors, Debra A. Harley and Pamela B. Teaster, have created a collection of all new essays on LGBT persons and aging that easily moves among elucidating the sometimes fluid boundaries of LGBT communities and individuals within those communities, to explanations and applications of basic principles ranging from queer theory to moral theory in addressing the issues facing LGBT persons and aging. And this is all done with an unblinking transnational eye. The collection's reach is, in fact, a model for transnational studies including, as it does, discussions of LGBT persons and politics the worldwide, with special attention to aging.

The collection is rightly titled as a handbook, put together expressly for those who work with LGBT persons and policy in a variety of human services, including social work, physical and mental health care, the military and criminal justice systems, and education. But its reach is even farther than that. Anyone at all interested in the social positionality of LGBT persons will be well served by reading the essays gathered here.

Beginning with a clarification of who LGBT elders are and how being sexual/gender minorities influence social relationships from the most public to the most private, the collection moves through the complicated world of multiple identities, including race, age, health status, and how the intersections of these identities often subject LGBT persons to multiple forms of oppression and exclusion. For example, in the contemporary USA, class, race, age, sexual orientation, and gender identity and presentation bestow privileges on some (namely, the middle and upper economic classes, Caucasians, the young, heterosexuals, and those whose gender identity and presentation matches their "given" sex), and oppression and exclusion on others (namely, the poor, nonwhites, the elderly, gay men, and lesbian women, and trans persons). Every individual has multiple identities, and with those identities in a given society come benefits and burdens, many unique to certain identity combinations. So, for example, the life experiences of a white, middle class, lesbian elder will be importantly different from those of an African American, poor, transgender elder. This book takes such differences very seriously.

The collection also takes very seriously the reality that in so many areas, discrimination according to these categories is even firmly protected by law—laws that not just allow, but actually promote, discrimination in housing, employment, and public accommodation. And even if not formally protected by law, customary exclusions on the basis of biases such as racism, classism, ageism, homophobia, and transphobia continue to thrive as this book goes to press in 2015, which is likely to be the year when, according to the US Supreme Court, marriage equality (the legal recognition of same-sex marriages) becomes the law of the land. The contributing authors of this collection know well that if/when that happens, homophobia will not go away. Indeed, as this decision by the US Supreme Court comes to seem inevitable, there is a “frontlash” taking place as more and more US municipalities introduce laws that will allow frank exclusion of sexual and gender minorities specifically on the basis of religious belief. So, even if marriage equality comes into the legal light as this book goes to press, the need for this unique collection will remain compelling.

By getting to the heart and effects of bias against sexual and gender minorities and their multiple identities as aged persons, this book makes an enormous and exquisitely timely contribution, not just to the empirical, theoretical, and practical literatures for service professionals, but to the literatures on social justice, as well. We are all well served by it.

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## Preface

As editors of this text, Pamela and I have over 40 years of combined experience in service delivery; education; and research in aging, human rights, disability, and social services. Beginning in 2013, we collaborated on a chapter, *Aging and Mistreatment: Victimization of Older Adults in the United States*, and as part of that chapter, we wrote about LGBT elders. Afterward, we discussed the lack of focus and collaboration across disciplines in addressing LGBT elders. Although discipline-specific books have been published about LGBT populations, aging, health care, and human and social service, we decided that the time had come for a comprehensive text that addressed the challenges faced by LGBT elders. Our goal for this book is to discuss both LGBT elders who are from groups for which research was conducted often and groups rarely included in mainstream research (e.g., racial and ethnic groups, persons living in rural and remote areas, veterans, [ex]-offender populations, immigrants, and persons with disabilities). In addition, we decided to cover issues that impact LGBT persons individually and collectively. Our 36 chapters cover the following topics pertaining to LGBT elders: theories and constructs, the nexus of sexual minority status and aging, family relationships, deconstruction of “isms,” African American and Blacks, American Indians, Asian and Pacific Islanders, Europeans, Hispanics, veterans, [ex]-offenders, immigrants, transgendered persons, bisexual persons, mistreatment and victimization, bullying, healthcare reform and healthcare practices, residents of long-term care facilities, end-of-life issues, mental health, substance abuse, the impending US Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage, ethics and ethical standards, law enforcement and public safety, religious and faith communities, workplace issues, counseling, socialization and recreation, advocacy, disability, and trends and future directions. Our comprehensive handbook recognizes the intersection of identities because individuals do not exist or live their lives in separate compartments.

At the writing of this text (March 2015), we are awaiting the outcome of the Supreme Court ruling on same-sex marriage. The ruling has significant implications for LGBT elders in many areas of their lives, including housing, health insurance and benefits, medical decisions, and the definition of family and spouse. The timing of the ruling may shed a different perspective on the information presented in some of the chapters.

Our text provides an interdisciplinary perspective on LGBT elders. A unique feature is that the authors of the individual chapters represent an array of diverse backgrounds and expertise. Among the disciplinary perspectives represented are social work, public health, medicine, rehabilitation counseling, law, public policy, counseling, diversity consultation, gerontology, psychiatry, and education. The broad assemblage of disciplines is important in adequately addressing challenges, resiliency, and strengths of LGBT elders *vis a vis* an interdisciplinary perspective. Many of the chapters also include international perspectives about LGBT elders, populations, and cultures.

We do not present this text as inclusive of all aspects that impact LGBT elders, but rather, we hope that it will be an important contribution to the existing literature as well as a response to identified gaps in policy, practice, and research. Although texts on services and programs assisting older adults are readily available, they focus primarily on the general population and rarely if ever take into account the unique circumstances facing current and future LGBT elders. Our desire is for the text to serve as a useful and reliable resource for those studying and teaching for those involved in health care, human and social services programs, as well as in courses on diversity and gender and women's studies. Similarly, practitioners, policy and decision makers, advocates, community leaders, families, and LGBT elders themselves may benefit from this text.

Debra A. Harley  
Pamela B. Teaster

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## Editors and Contributors

### About the Editors

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**Pamela B. Teaster** is the associate director for Research at the Center for Gerontology and a professor in the Department of Human Development at Virginia Tech. She established the Kentucky Justice Center for Elders and Vulnerable Adults and the Kentucky Guardianship Association and was its first president. She is the secretary general of the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse. She served as director and chairperson of the Graduate Center for Gerontology/Department of Gerontology as well as the director of Doctoral Studies and associate dean for Research for College of Public Health at the University of Kentucky. She serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Elder Abuse and Neglect* and *Frontiers*. Dr. Teaster is

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**Randy Thomas** is a retired police officer having served for over 25 years in the law enforcement profession (Tampa Police Department, Richland County (SC) Sheriff's Office and South Carolina Department of Public Safety). He was a member of the South Carolina Adult Protection Coordinating Council and was instrumental in the passage of South Carolina's Omnibus Adult Protection Act. He received his bachelor's degree from Chaminade University (1971) and his master's degree in political science from the University of South Florida (Tampa 1974).

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