

Pride: A reflection of resilience among LGBT seniors

As the rainbow Pride flag billows in the wind to celebrate Pride month here in Snohomish County, across the state, and around the globe, it is a vivid reflection of the bravery and pride embedded in LGBT communities.



**Commentary by
Karen Fredriksen
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In 1976 when our country celebrated the bicentennial of its independence, Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in the history of California and a member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, encouraged Gilbert Baker to develop a unique symbol affirming our independence and pride, and to proclaim its power. The Rainbow flag was sewn together by 30 volunteers and the colors were dyed in a public laundromat in 1978. Tragically, Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone were murdered four months later.

Starting in 1969 when the Stonewall riots ushered in the modern LGBT civil rights movement in the United States through today, there has been a rapid shift in attitudes and acceptance toward LGBT people. The support that led to the constitutional right to marry for same-sex couples has been characterized as one of the most dramatic changes in history.

The flag is also a reminder of the turbulent history of LGBT seniors and their communities. From the 1973 murders of 32 patrons of New Orleans' gay bar, the UpStairs Lounge, during Pride weekend to the massacre of 49 LGBTQ people and their allies at Orlando's Pulse nightclub during Pride month, the communities have been bombarded with atrocities like these, murder, discrimination, and everyday bias.

For over two decades, I've been researching the health, well-being and longevity of LGBT people as they

age. The tremendous diversity of the LGBT community is weaved together by differences in sexual orientation and gender identity and expression, as well as by race, ethnicity, culture, sex, age, ability, and income.

Our research shows that relentless adversity, stigma and social exclusion have accumulative and negative impacts on health, resulting in significant health disparities. Nearly three quarters of our LGBT senior participants have experienced victimization and discrimination at least three times over their lifetime. In late life many LGBT seniors are fearful to disclose their identities, and they are at elevated risk of social isolation. Even today many health and senior care providers don't have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide

culturally relevant care.

Though at risk, they have resisted the negative social and political mores of the time. LGBT seniors display tremendous fortitude and perseverance, and are resilient with many strengths to offer our community. Our recent research demonstrates that policies embracing social inclusion can make a real difference in seniors' lives. The impact of marriage equality, for example, is significant, as married couples report better health, are more comfortable being out, and have greater social and economic resources than couples who are not married.

Despite such a historical context, LGBT seniors walked out of the shadows cast by fear and discrimination to create our communities. Their extraordinary determination and acts

of bravery sustain our resolve.

Karen Fredriksen Goldsen, Ph.D., is professor at the University of Washington School of Social Work and the principal investigator of Aging with Pride: National Health, Aging and Sexuality/Gender Study, the first national, longitudinal study of health and well-being of LGBTQ midlife and older adults. She recently received the Pollack Award for Productive Aging by the Gerontological Society of America and was named as a top 50 Influencer in Aging by PBS's Next Avenue. Fredriksen-Goldsen is the author of more than 100 publications and three books, and her work has appeared in the New York Times, Washington Post, Forbes and U.S. News and World Report.



Homage has moved to a new location: 5026 196th St. SW, Lynnwood. We'll have more in the July issue.