Exploring the relationship between space, place, and aging among LGBQ older adults living in San Francisco

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Participants

1. Lloyd, 66.
   - Moved to SF in 1967.
   - Lives with a roommate in Glen Park.

2. Marguerite, 60.
   - Lives alone in Hayes Valley.

3. Pat, 77.
   - Moved to SF in 1969.
   - Lives with partner in the Castro.

   - Moved to SF in the 1970s.
   - Lives with partner in the Castro.

5. Megan, 69.
   - Moved to SF in 1970.
   - Lives alone in Noe Valley.
Thematic Findings

1. Mobility framed the way participants could even think about “doing life”.
2. Meaning, attachment, and identity created with place.
3. Aging in the city is work.
1. Mobility framed the way participants could even think about “doing life”
“I memorize bus lines and Muni lines. It’s just how I navigate the city. This is the Forest Hills Muni station. I catch BART, go anywhere in the Bay on BART cause I don’t drive. I can pretty much connect to any transportation in the city and this line here has all the different underground Muni lines and many of the surface buses, which go within a few blocks of my house. So these are important transportation hubs for me because they’re a base of how I navigate the city.” –Lloyd, 66
“I thought this is an opportunity to have adventures in the city, so I went and walked in every park in San Francisco. I decided that was my project for the year. Cause I wanted to walk and while I still could.” –Megan, 69, drives and walks.
“I have three places I spend my time, but the one I like most is the senior center—Castro—I have friends there. The second place is at my therapists’ office—seeing my career counselor, my psychiatrist, and my case manager—I have three. The third is a job—I’m an on-call receptionist at the Heritage Senior Center; I’m signed up to do peer mentoring with a mentee at Laguna Honda Hospital; and Under One Roof, an AIDS store, I volunteer there.” –Marguerite, 60, paratransit, public transit, walks.
“My activities are in a very narrow radius it would seem. I suppose it represents my imagination. My imagination is sometimes limited, but hey, that’s all I need. I walk a lot. I walk from my home to the senior center, which is about a mile. I walk to Gold’s [gym] where I work out. I walk to the library. I’m happy living in this radius. I can adapt myself to this narrow radius – this little island – and be happy.” –Pat, 77, walks.
2. People-Place bonding

- Dimensions of self that define the individual’s personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex pattern of conscious and unconscious ideas, beliefs, preferences, feelings, values, goals, and behavioral tendencies and skills relevant to this environment (Proshansky 1978).

Social & Autobiographical “Insidedness”

“I’m privileged enough to live in the city. So the point of this picture, which unfortunately for the focus and distance, was that I live in the city, or can live on the side of a hill and can look down the hill and see a rainbow flag and say ‘wow, this is my community’.” –Megan, 69
"This is Dolores Park. I chose this because it’s my favorite spot and if you look at this, it looks like the Emerald City in Oz. It’s a place that’s almost unobtainable for many people. It’s a place of intrigue, of mystery, and it’s a place that draws people. When you get here, you find that there’s a price for being here. Having been here for 43 years now, it’s just a part of my DNA, a part of who I am. I came here at 23 and I’m 66 so it gives you an idea. I pretty much spent my whole adult life here.” –Lloyd, 66
3. Aging in the city is work

- Special efforts were made by participants to continually maintain, sustain, or re-integrate with their place in the face of changes and uncertainty—within their bodies, social, and built environments as they grew older—through creative and social actions that fostered meaning and identity.
Performativity & Safety in public space

“We just don’t lumber around purposelessly. More and more, you’re open to people preying on you [as an older gay man]. To walk with purpose – with stride and strength in your gait – I don’t think you’re apt to be put upon by some of the elements of the city. –Pat, 77
“My motivation for going [to the Senior Center] was to save a little money in my retirement and I discovered a whole community of people that are now my friends and, actually this gets kind of self-revelatory and I don’t want to embarrass Pat or anything, but Pat and I met at the senior center and we’re good friends. Partners, what have you now. So I was amazed that that could happen in a city, but I’m happy it has. It’s pretty amazing.” –Bob, 66
“Now that I’m older, my activities are not quite what they were when I first arrived of course. I don’t go to bars. I don’t frequent places like I used to when I was younger. In retrospect, I wish I hadn’t wasted time going to these places. But nothing I can do about it now. Life is throbbing. It can be thriving, throbbing excitement. As I mentioned, ‘wasting time in bars?’ Please. I think [volunteering at the Senior Center] has some merit. What I’m doing when people come in the door, you smile and have a positive attitude. It’s contagious. Hopefully for them, they come in feeling buoyed up by our attitude. I think about death quite often. I just try to make life as meaningful, purposeful, and as full as I can. I’m still growing. You never stop growing until the deep 6. So life is an opportunity to continue to grow mentally and even physically.”

– Pat, 77
Implications for emerging place-based social policies & health practices

• Who has a *Right to the City*? (David Harvey; Henri Lefebvre)

• Affirming the perspectives of older adults by allowing them to depict their community's strengths and deficits.

• Addressing affordability, accessibility, and connectivity as designed into the infrastructure of cities.

• Developing a new meaning of urban and/or senior citizenry that recognizes and supports the changing needs of people across space and time.

• Supporting processes of participatory place-making.

• Exercising collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization.

• Considering interventions that contribute to and support the possibilities of mutual recognition in meaning-making and identity transformations in and through places as a mode of preventive health and social solidarity for people as they grow older.
Thank you!

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