

# "The back to the closet": Perception of the experience of the sexualities of LGBTQIAP+ elderly people

"A volta para o armário": Percepção da vivência das sexualidades de pessoas idosas LGBTQIAP+

"La espalda del armario": Percepción de la experiencia de las sexualidades de los adultos mayores LGBTQIAP+

## RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar a percepção da vivência das sexualidades no processo de envelhecimento da população idosa LGBTQIAP+ na grande ilha de São Luís - MA. Método: empírico e qualitativo com amostra por conveniência. Resultados: os participantes possuem de 60 a 65 anos; sete se declararam cisgêneros e um não binário, todos homossexuais solteiros. A percepção da vivência das sexualidades se apresenta de forma subjetiva e se mostra através da construção da identidade, autoconhecimento e maturidade, assim como as características do processo de envelhecimento, comportamento sexual e os preconceitos e estigmas. Conclusão: A sexualidade se desenvolve a partir da construção da identidade e do autoconhecimento dos sujeitos. É influenciada pelo contexto social, pela dinâmica familiar e por outros aspectos que permeiam o processo de subjetividade do ser humano. Observou-se que é possível estabelecer vivências positivas no envelhecimento, vivências essas que contrariam os estigmas e preconceitos que as pessoas idosas estão inseridas.

**DESCRITORES:** Psicologia; Envelhecimento; Sexualidade.

## ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the perception of the experience of sexualities in the aging process of the LGBTQIAP+ elderly population on the big island of São Luís - MA. Method: empirical and qualitative with a convenience sample. Results: participants are between 60 and 65 years old; seven declared themselves cisgender and one non-binary, all single homosexuals. The perception of experiencing sexualities is presented subjectively and is shown through the construction of identity, self-knowledge and maturity, as well as the characteristics of the aging process, sexual behavior and prejudices and stigmas. Conclusion: Sexuality develops from the construction of the subjects' identity and self-knowledge. It is influenced by the social context, family dynamics and other aspects that permeate the process of human subjectivity. It was observed that it is possible to establish positive experiences in aging, experiences that contradict the stigmas and prejudices that the elderly are inserted.

**DESCRIPTORS:** Psychology; Aging; Sexuality.

## RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar la percepción de la vivencia de las sexualidades en el proceso de envejecimiento de la población anciana LGBTQIAP+ de la isla grande de São Luís - MA. Método: empírico y cualitativo con muestra de conveniencia. Resultados: los participantes tienen entre 60 y 65 años; siete se declararon cisgénero y uno no binario, todos homosexuales solteros. La percepción de vivir las sexualidades se presenta de forma subjetiva y se muestra a través de la construcción de la identidad, el autoconocimiento y la madurez, así como las características del proceso de envejecimiento, el comportamiento sexual y los prejuicios y estigmas. Conclusión: La sexualidad se desarrolla a partir de la construcción de la identidad y el autoconocimiento de los sujetos. Está influenciado por el contexto social, la dinámica familiar y otros aspectos que permean el proceso de subjetividad humana. Se observó que es posible establecer experiencias positivas en el envejecimiento, experiencias que contradicen los estigmas y prejuicios que se insertan los ancianos.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Psicología; Envejecimiento; Sexualidad.

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**INTRODUÇÃO**

For the purposes of this study, the main aspect considered about the singularities of the elderly person's life will be related to a major pertinent social theme to be discussed: the sexuality of the LGBTQIAP+ elderly person. When we talk about healthy lifestyle and well-being in older people, sexuality is usually not seen as part of this process, as well as the nuances that the sexual behaviors of this population can be established. Older people who are in their 80s remain sexually active and men in their 90s remain interested and sexually active<sup>(3)</sup>.

The perspective of advancing age comes accompanied by the idea of a decline in sexual activity. This, is linked mainly by a cause and effect relationship between virility and age and has been responsible for not paying enough attention to activities associated with quality of life, especially with regard to sexuality<sup>(4)</sup>.

The challenges faced by LGBTQIAP+ elderly people are even broader, as they integrate the stigmas of diverse social understandings regarding aging and sexuality in general - such as sexual activity in this phase and the prejudices directed at

the LGBTQIAP+ public, who face intolerance, stigmas and even hate crimes on a daily basis. We can also say that, with this range of variables, these populations are also vulnerable to mental illness<sup>(5)</sup>.

This study is justified beyond the production of scientific knowledge, since it brings reflections and amplitude of looks to the most diverse publics and sciences. For Psychology, the psychological well-being and insertion into the social environment during the aging process, for example, is the inclusion in movements that fight for LGBT rights and public policies<sup>(6)</sup>.

**METHOD**

This research is part of a study entitled "Health and disease profile of the elderly in the municipality of São Luís in the state of Maranhão" authorized by the Ethics Committee of CEUMA University with the opinion N° 5.498.949, being part of the research of the Study, Research, and Extension Group in Social Gerontology of CEUMA University.

The empirical and qualitative method was used, working with the universe of meanings, motives and perspectives

following the three stages described as: exploratory phase; field work and analysis and treatment of the empirical and documental material.<sup>(7)</sup>

A sociodemographic questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used as data collection instruments<sup>(7)</sup>.

The research was based on the consolidated criteria for reporting qualitative studies and research (COREQ). The Checklist has 32 items distributed in three domains: team characterization and domain; study design and analysis of results<sup>(8)</sup>.

The sample used was by convenience, which consists of selecting a sample of the population that is accessible, using the snowball technique. This technique helps in the indication of the first participants of the study, who in turn indicate the other members of the population of interest for the research<sup>(9)</sup>.

Thus, eight people were selected by this technique and interviewed. As inclusion criteria the following were listed: elderly people 60 years old or older, belonging to the LGBTQIAP+ population and residents of the big island of São Luís - MA. Elderly people who, despite being indicated by the snowball technique,

considered themselves heterosexual and not residents of the big island of São Luís were excluded.

As ethical support, we used the ICF - Free and Informed Consent Form and after signing it, the interviews were recorded and transcribed in full for analysis purposes. To preserve the identity of the participants and ensure the ethical confidentiality of the research, the participants were identified by the following codifications: P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8.

Finally, the data were analyzed and grouped to identify the research objectives. It was used the content analysis, which refers to the steps of pre-analysis, exploration of the material and interpretation of the results obtained. In this, the semantic and sociological meanings, psychosocial variables, cultural context and message produced are taken into consideration<sup>(7)</sup>.

## RESULTS

In the first stage of the research, the sociodemographic profile of the participants was drawn. Of the 8 participants, 4 were in their 60s, 2 were 65, and 2 were 61 at the time of the interviews. As for the self-declaration of race/ethnicity, only 1 person declared he/she was white, 5 declared he/she was brown, and 2 declared he/she was black.

As for the level of education, 2 participants have higher education, one of them with a post-graduate degree, 3 have a medium level, 1 has completed elementary school, 1 has a technical level, and 1 has an incomplete college degree.

Regarding the professional occupation and income of the participants, the following results were obtained: 2 retirees, 3 public servers, 2 hairdressers, and 1 computer technician. The participants' income ranged from 1 to 6 minimum wages.

Some aspects of sexuality such as gender identity and affective/sexual orientation were seen by some participants with a certain degree of difficulty, since the majority did not know how to answer

before an explanation by the interviewer. After the psychoeducation, we obtained the following results: two cisgender women, five cisgender men and one non-binary person.

With regard to the marital status of the participants, all 8 were single up to the time of the interviews.

The results obtained in the second

stage of the research were collected using a semi-structured interview script and analyzed using a table divided into thematic axis and thematic units in order to categorize the research objectives as described in the following table.

## CATEGORIZATION OF THE SPEECHES

Table 1

Participants	Biological sex	Age	Civil status	Etnia	Gender identity	Affective/sexual orientation
P1	Female	60	Single	White	Cisgender Woman	Homosexual
P2	Male	65	Single	Grizzly	Cisgender Man	Homosexual
P3	Female	61	Single	Brown	Cisgender Woman	Homosexual
P4	Male	60	Solteire	Parde	No- Binäre	Homosexual
P5	Male	61	Single	Grizzly	Cisgender Man	Homosexual
P6	Male	60	Single	Grizzly	Cisgender Man	Homosexual
P7	Male	60	Single	Black	Cisgender Man	Homosexual
P8	Male	60	Single	Grizzly	Cisgender Man	Homosexual

Sources: Authors themselves (2022)

Table 2

THEMATIC AXIS	THEMATIC UNIT	PARTICIPANTS (Fictitious names)
PERCEPTION OF SEXUALITIES IN AGING	Sexuality as something subjective	P1, P2, P5, and P8
	Sexuality as identity	P4, P6 and P8
	Sexuality as self-knowledge	P2, P6 and P7
	Sexuality as quality of life	P1, P2, P3 and P6

## CATEGORY 01: SEXUALITY AS SOMETHING SUBJECTIVE, IDENTITY, SELF-KNOWLEDGE.

[In the present study, through the semi-structured interviews it was understood that the conceptualization of sexuality occurs in a subjective way for the participants and through the construction of their identity, of how individuals see themselves in the world. We can perceive these phenomena in the following statements:]

(P2). *However, at 65 years of age we understand that sexuality is much more than one imagines, it is much more than the physical, it is much more than the body, it is much more than sex.*

(P3). *I think it is the coexistence of two people, right? It doesn't matter if they are two men and two women, I think it is love, affection, coexistence, the smell, skin, touch. In which the sexual intimacy between two people ends up happening.*

(P4). *Sexuality is everything that makes up, within your construction as a human being, as you discover who you are, as people.*

(P6). *Sexuality is something we all have, regardless of male or female, it is something that already comes inside.*

(P8). *It is being well with myself without being ashamed of who I am.*

## CATEGORY 02: SEXUALITY AS QUALITY OF LIFE.

[One fact present in the speech of seven respondents in the survey, is that the sex life of these individuals remains active. What differs among the participants in this question is that the women who participated reported physiological issues specific to their gender, such as menopause

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AGING PROCESS OF SEXUALITIES.	Maturity of sexuality in aging	P1, P2, P3, and P8
	Prejudices, stereotypes and stigmas of aging and sexualities	P1, P2, P3, P4, P6 and P8
	Go back to the closet	P2, P5, and P7
	Affection for interest	P4 and P8

Source: Prepared by the authors (2022)

se and the suspension of menstruation. The sexual act in aging was seen by the participants as indicative of quality of life and well-being as can be seen in the following statements:]

(P1). *Sex showed me now that I am very alive. How I like sex, how good it still is. And I don't need any artifice. I thought that I had to put that... How do you say? Those hormone replacements. I don't need any of that.*

(P2). *I function perfectly well, my desires remain the same, the libido remains the same, it's just that in this universe we become more selective, we become more careful...*

(P3). *it only got better, because after the menstruation stopped, understand? So, it only got better, because it didn't hinder anything anymore.*

## CATEGORY 03: MATURITY OF SEXUALITY IN AGING.

[As characteristics of the aging process, it was identified that participants are aware of the processes of changes that the body goes through in aging and view these changes with maturity and respect with the limits imposed by aging as the following lines demonstrate:]

(P3). *Because you start living day to day, things are changing. You can no longer stop doing what I like. But you already do things in a*

*different way.*

(P1). *We change a lot. We are learning every day.*

(P2). *It's one day at a time, it's a quiet process.*

## CATEGORY 04: Prejudices, stereotypes and stigmas of aging and sexualities and the "Back to the closet".

[Some participants reported issues very characteristic of the aging process through the stigmas surrounding old age and the prejudices that the new generations place on these subjects. The return to the closet appeared as a given in several speeches that is characteristic of the aging process of the LGBTQIAP+ population that can have as a consequence loneliness, neediness and isolation as we can verify through the speeches of some:]

(P2). *But it is also kind of worrisome because of what I told you, people are kind of going back to the closet.*

(P2). *People are going back to the closet more, people are more...They are avoiding to go to places that have a lot of gay youth, because they are seen in a different way.*

(P5). *And in relation to this situation, I am very calm, right? I reserve myself more, right?*

(P7). *When you don't have a legal accompaniment, that you don't*

*have people on your side that are supporting you, guiding you, the tendency of these people is to return to the closet, return to invisibility, fall into ostracism, live a life of low esteem, in fact, and end up becoming invisible in life.*

*(They think that we homosexuals at that age are needy, isolated, alone and that everything satisfies.*

*(P4). So I escape from the context of the crowns. I feel the looks, sometimes, kind of... Some admire, some say, I don't know if the...doesn't move. Among LGBT people themselves, crowns.*

*(P4). Because it is a vision that we have of the old person taking care, still serving. Even if he can't, sometimes he has a back problem, but he stays there. You know, I don't know if it is a very selfish thing on my part. But I don't see myself. I am very afraid.*

#### CATEGORY 05: AFFECTION FOR INTEREST.

[Generational clash presented itself in the speech of some participants as a lack of respect and exclusion in the contemporary world, where the LGBTQIAP+ population is embedded in the virtual contexts of dating apps due to the isolation that still perpetuates today].

*(P4). The trade that the younger person tries to make with the senior homosexual.*

*(P8). We end up paying more to be able to go out with someone. This is a fact. Everyone who gets close to us when they get too old, it's not a love, it's a job.*

#### DISCUSSIONS

Sexuality is an experience not limited to biological aspects (genetics, instinctive and reproductive needs) and penetration.

Sexuality can manifest itself in various ways through attitudes, preferences and even fantasies, all involving subjective factors such as affection, love, affection, contact and desires that do not end in the course of life, that is, they continue with aging<sup>(11)</sup>.

The aging process is continuous and full of physical, emotional, subjective, and sexual transformations, taking into account life history and sociocultural context that influence the ways of aging. Gender, social class, health, education, personality, life history, and socioeconomic context define the different ways of aging. The chronological age that provides the bodily or physiological cues does not determine the individual experiences of the elderly<sup>(11)</sup>.

Sexuality is expected to decrease or even cease with the aging process due to some factors such as menopause and reduced genital response. However, studies point out that sexual desire does not cease with aging<sup>(12)</sup>.

The subject is very little studied and disseminated in South America, which has contributed to the elderly experiencing a double stigma: that of age and that of deviant sexuality. Saying some words like "old faggot", "horny crown", "transvestite" shows prejudiced manifestations in the social representations of LGBTQIAP+ old age that repercussions in loneliness, crises and myths<sup>(13)</sup>.

It is necessary to consider the silencing of voices, especially bodies considered of lesser value such as children, blacks, women, gays, and the elderly, at practically every stage of history<sup>(14)</sup>.

#### CONCLUSION

The present study proposed to analyze the perception of the sexualities of LGBTQIAP+ elderly people that, through the construction of identity and self-knowledge of the subjects, which occurred through the social context, family dynamics, and other aspects that surround the process of subjectivity of the human being, it is possible to establish positive

experiences in aging, experiences that go against the stigmas and prejudices that elderly people are inserted.

The research showed that the perception of the participants' experiences of sexuality is linked to the process of identity construction and self-knowledge, and analyzing the variations and contexts of these individuals' sexualities is far beyond understanding sexual behaviors and the changes in the human development process, but is also related to quality of life in aging.

One can also see that the characteristics that involve the maturing process of human development make aging healthier, enabling a more accurate look at stigmas and prejudices, not only in the field of sexuality, but also in the fight against ageism and ageism, which are used to express discrimination and prejudice because of people's age.

Through Social Gerontology, which has been studying and demystifying the aging process, the present study is necessary in order to provoke a rethinking of the aging process in contemporary society through the human and social sciences, especially when we talk about LGBTQIAP+ gerontology studies in the social, sexual, physical and psychological spheres. This study has relevance for contributing to demystify the prejudices and stigmas that persecute the LGBTQIAP+ population in the aging process, countering the myths that LGBTQIAP+ elderly people are at the mercy of loneliness and as a way to fight the return to the closet.

This research has limitations due to the small sample of participants, which did not allow for a deeper investigation of the complexity of this theme in its various particularities. However, the data presented here point to the need for future research involving this theme with a larger sample of subjects, thus contributing to subsidize public policies and psychosocial intervention models that promote the fight against the ostracism of this public in the scientific and social spheres.

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