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**Media Contact:**  
Geoffrey Knox: 212-229-0540; 917-414-1749  
Roberta Sklar: 212-229-0540; 917-704-6358

## **DILEMMAS & DESIRES IN GAY AND LESBIAN AGING EXAMINED IN NEW BOOK**

**First generation in history of self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people face unique challenges moving into later life researchers find.**

(December 4, San Francisco) *Gay and Lesbian Aging: Research and Future Directions*, a new book that examines the prospects and problems facing the first generation in history of self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people moving into later life was launched today in San Francisco. Ten leading contributors from the fields of sexuality, gerontology, and health care examine in the book the unique challenges for the much-ignored population of aging gays and lesbians in America. The book's co-editors, Gilbert Herdt and Brian de Vries, call for a new agenda in policy and research for the 21<sup>st</sup> century to address the needs of LGBT seniors. Older gay men and lesbians have proven resilient in dealing with homophobia and discrimination but now confront the issues of aging and ultimately dying in an environment that offers little social support.

“The women and men who in their youth paved the way for gay liberation still face discrimination and are often shunned or excluded from gay and lesbian social life and support in their later years,” stated Gilbert Herdt, Ph.D., Director of the National Sexuality Resource Center and of Human Sexuality Studies at San Francisco State University. “Society’s general unwillingness to deal with aging and the needs of seniors compounds the problems for older gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, who lack appropriate health care and also battle stigma and social isolation.”

The book brings together as contributors a group of respected psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, gerontologists, and health providers who hope to create a dialogue with the reader in examining gay and lesbian midlife and aging. Given the absence of general literature on gay and lesbian aging, the book is designed to fill a void in the research arena, make a political statement about the unheard voices of LGBT seniors, and be a call to action.

“Gay and lesbian seniors have much to teach us about resilience across the life course,” stated Brian de Vries, Ph.D., Professor and Director of Gerontology at San Francisco State University, and Fellow of the Gerontological Society of America. “Research in gerontology and the social sciences is critical to inform social policy change and improve the quality of midlife and beyond. The study of gay men and lesbians in later life not only addresses this understudied area, it fosters a more holistic appreciation of aging in general and a more inclusive view of the human social life course.”

While the post-liberation generation of lesbian, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender individuals are now approaching retirement, policy makers and health care providers know little about their health, mental health and specific social service needs. The range of articles in the book makes it clear that the men and

women who led the social movement that resulted in greater rights for LGBT people are an ignored population that face:

- Limited access to gay-friendly health care
- Feelings of homophobia, stigma, and social isolation
- Ageism within gay and lesbian community
- Denial of hospital and nursing home visitation rights for their partners

At the same time, the book focuses on how many gay and lesbian seniors have mastered the stigma and weathered the trials of coming out and developing positive self-identities within a homophobic society.

As these so-called baby boomers enter later life, many of their lives are transformed as they move into and out of gay and lesbian communities as a result of health or relationships. This transformation is compounded by the impact of the AIDS epidemic, the loss of support from friends and partners, and the cumulative effect of homophobia and discrimination across a lifetime. The book points out that additional research is sorely needed to guide the efforts of those attempting to address the needs of sexual minorities.

In *Gay and Lesbian Aging*, Herdt and de Vries and their diverse contributors create a vivid panorama of this sector of the American baby boom generation as it faces the era of 65+. This generation matured through the Vietnam era and the mid-century prosperity, as well as participating in and contributing to great progress in social justice in America in the second half of the 20th century. Now, this very participation leads them to actively seek respect, equality, and all the appropriate care that a democratic and open society needs to provide to its elders. *Gay and Lesbian Aging: Research and Future Directions* points the way to the critical research necessary to direct public policy and senior care to a more fair and inclusive approach.

Attending the book launch in San Francisco were representatives from the San Francisco Mayor's Office, the local Commission on Aging, and leaders of LGBT community organizations in the Bay Area.

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