

CHAPTER 4

“My partner is my family”

An Interdependence and Communal Coping Approach to Understanding Prostate Cancer in Same-Sex Male Couples

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CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, we describe a model for understanding the process by which same-sex male couples cope with prostate cancer. The model incorporates individual factors (e.g., sociodemographics, perceptions of cancer treatment), couple- and relationship-level factors (e.g., relationship quality, communication), and prejudice and stigma, with the goal of explaining health behavior change and treatment outcomes among sexual minority men with prostate cancer. The interplay of the various factors in the model is explored in the context of communal coping—a dyadic process thought to increase a couple’s ability to respond positively to a health threat. We also discuss the importance of cancer care providers, who are a crucial factor in the patient’s experience of cancer treatment. Challenges for providers include integration of same-sex partners into cancer treatment, even though partner involvement is a well-established predictor of improved patient outcomes for heterosexual patients. Throughout the chapter, we provide empirical support from the current literature, as well as quotes from a qualitative study of LGBT cancer patients, which serve to illuminate the issues discussed. Our aim is to provide a conceptual framework for future investigations into the role of partners, facilitate interventions for same-sex couples who are coping with prostate cancer, and ultimately to improve the physical and psychological health of this under-represented and understudied population.

KEY TERMS

bisexual, coping, couples, gay, prostate cancer, providers

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