Aging and Sexuality

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Objectives

- To document how aging changes affect sexual functioning.
- To describe the major types of sexual dysfunction in elderly men and women
- To examine the impact of HIV-AIDS, STDs, AND viagratization
- To increase awareness of lesbians and gays, and conditions unique to their aging.
- To distinguish between young and old sex/love

Sex and the elderly

- Many people view sex and the elderly in one of three ways

Geriatric sexuality simply does not exist; my parent never had sex…did yours?

My parents never had sex, did yours?



Geriatric sexuality is funny



Geriatric sexuality is deviant



Sex…

is a primary human drive

Love is a universal human emotion that may be experienced throughout the life cycle

Definition: Sexuality

- State of being sexual
- Involvement /interest in sexual activity
- Sexual appeal

- Ability of a person to experience or express sexual feelings

Normal sexual function in OA

- Because of the importance of sexuality in people's lives, professionals need to understand the normal physiological changes that may affect sexual function and the continuity of intimacy across the life span.

- Sexuality is much more than a physical act; it is adult's defined need for human intimacy, touch, connectedness, pleasure and a positive self image. This need does not diminish with age.

Hormonal changes

- Libido and assertion in both genders changes.
- Testosterone does decline with age.
- In a post-menopausal woman, the ratio of testosterone to estrogen changes.

Experts say:

- The light is still on, but the voltage is lower.

  Rowe and Kahn

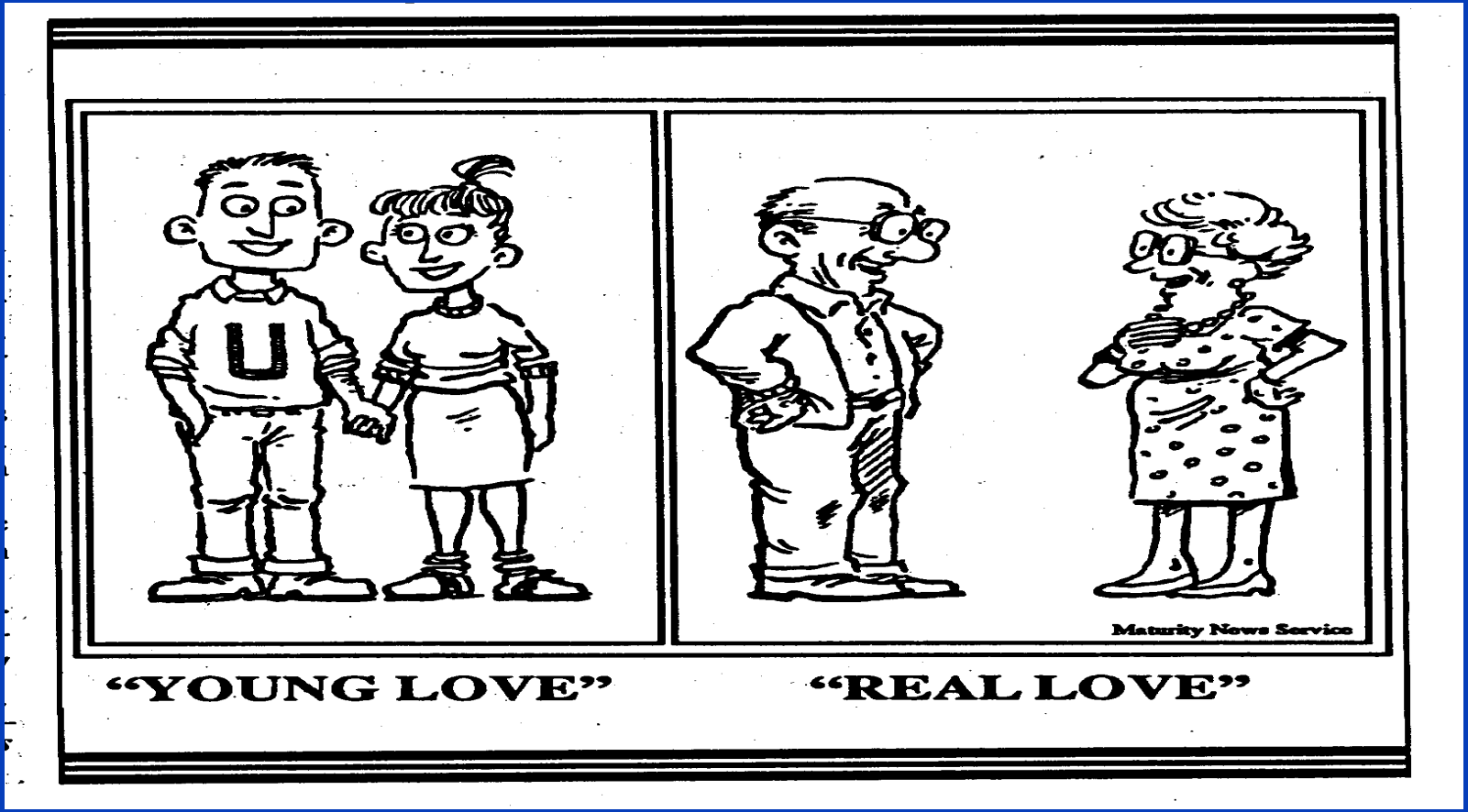
- Studies show that sexual activity does decline for most sexes in later years – the>70 population – but not suddenly or dramatically…

  Jon Eisenson, Stanford University

However…

- Decreased sexual activity is not a universal component of aging

Fact: Sexuality changes as we age



Love itself also changes…

- What is love? Falling in love is a sudden collapse of an individual's ego boundary, permitting one to merge identity with that of another person.

- We, and our beloved, are one (as in infancy with our mother)

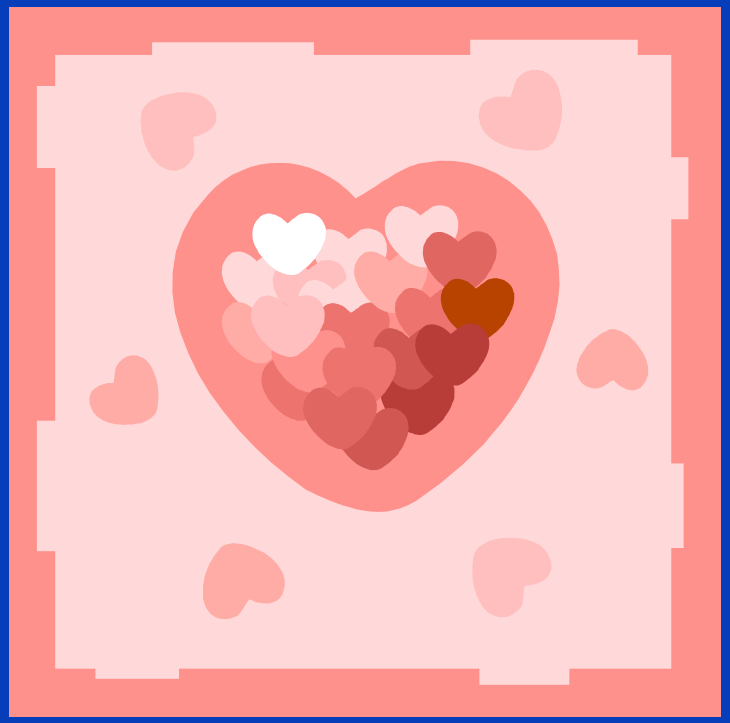
Scott Peck

Love changes…

- Young love is effortless; the lazy and undisciplined are as likely to fall in love as type A dedicated persons.

- If it has any purpose, it is to terminate loneliness and ensure this through marriage and children. Our beloved is perfect; we are content.

So, when we fall “out of love”?



- We may begin to really love. Love is a permanently self-enlarging experience. Falling in love has little (or nothing) to do with purposively nurturing development.

Real love

- Sooner or later….in response to the problems of daily living, individuals reassert themselves.
- Ego boundaries snap back into place.
- We realize that our perfect beloved is not perfect!
- We act lovingly even if we don’t love?

Marriage - then and now!

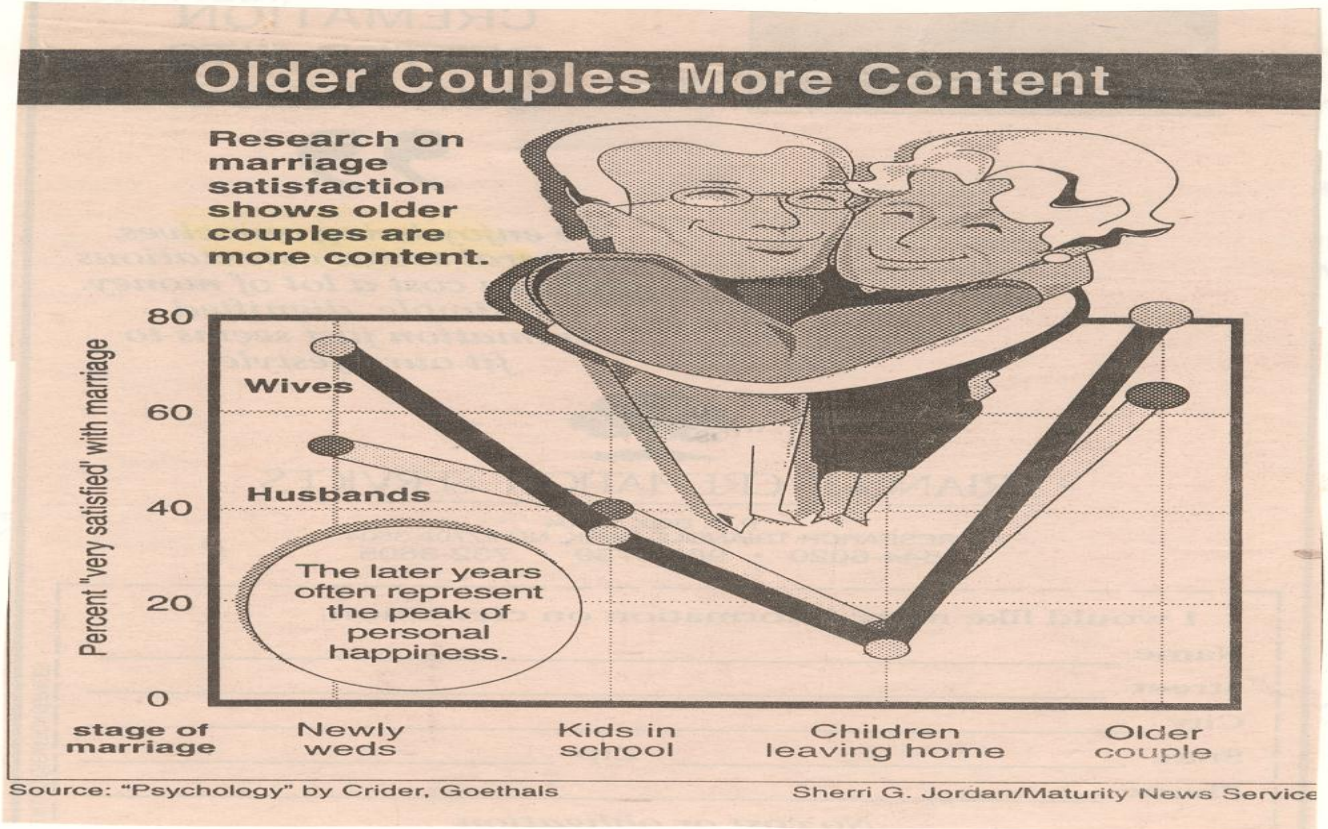
- In the older cohort, marriage defined the relationship. Today the couple defines the marriage!
- The only certainty in life: change
- Divorce is not longer so stigmatized. There is also a definable shift away from "for the kids sake." There is more acceptance of non-traditional couples

Marital satisfaction

- However, many long-term marriages are stable. Researchers found that for couples married more than 30 years, value was placed on intrinsic qualities

- Recent studies identify a curvilinear pattern, with marital satisfaction decreasing in the middle yrs and, for many, satisfaction increases in the later years. Ency.Age 422.




Older Couples More Content
Research on marriage satisfaction shows older couples are more content.
Percent "very satisfied" with marriage
80
60
40
20
0
Wives
Husbands
The later years often represent the peak of personal happiness.
stage of marriage
Newly weds
Kids in school
Children leaving home
Older couple
Source: "Psychology" by Crider, Goethals
Sherri G. Jordan/Maturity News Service

Natural changes

- As with any long term relationship, passion ebbs as security, partnership and comfort step in. Natural decrease in passion should not be interpreted as a failed marriage.



What are the effects of aging on sexuality for men and women?

Things may be better or worse, but there are many changes…

- Metabolic changes: energy declines.
- Muscle mass decreases, especially in unfit older adults.
- Decreased bone mineral density
- Changes of hair, skin - appearance
- Changes of body conformation: increased body adiposity, weight gain
- Hormonal changes

Aging effects: Women

- Decreased vaginal lubrication
- Delay in arousal
- Bladder atrophy
- Thinning vaginal mucosa
- Decreased vaginal length and tone
- Loss vulvar tissue
- Decreased clitoral size
- Decreased estrogen levels
- Decreased and thinning body hair
- Increased testosterone (Langer 2006)

Aging effects: Men

- Reduced semen volume
- More time required for penile stimulation to obtain and maintain sufficient erection
- Weaker orgasm
- More rapid penile detumescence
- Prolongation of refractory period between erections
- Testosterone levels decline 1% per year after age 30
- Rosemarie Cannarella, MD and Marlene Wagner, DO

Effects of illness on sexuality

The elderly in general are likely to suffer from a variety of chronic degenerative states such as

. Hypertension
. Diabetes
. Chronic lung diseases
. Arthritis
. Malignancies
. Dementias
. Psychiatric: Depression and Anxiety

Potency/Erectile Dysfunction

- The interaction of physical, social and emotional factors are very influential.
- Erectile dysfunction and impotency are different terms for basically the same condition.
- ED is not a normal consequence of aging.
- Risk factor categories include: individual general health, diabetes, smoking, physical activity, CD, other genitourinary disease and psychiatric disorders.

Impotence

- Controversy continues on whether ED has a physiological or psychological cause.
- Even when there are identifiable physiological reasons, fear of failure can tip the balance toward impotence, even though erection is still possible.
- Withdrawal from sex often results.

Surveys of sexuality in older adults

- Until relatively recently most surveys of sexuality excluded the elderly.
- When they were included, they were inadequately represented.
- Focused on narrow aspects of sexual performance, such as frequency of sexual intercourse.
- Earlier studies include studies by Kinsey (1953) and Masters & Johnson (1966)
- Tended to focus on younger populations

Starr-Weiner Report (1982)

- 50 item survey of city dwellers, ages 60-91
- In all age groups, >90% expressed interest in continuing sexual activity; considered it to be important for both physical and mental health
- 75% considered sex to be as good or better than in youth.
- Majority considered living together acceptable, w/ or w/out marriage.
- Most expressed little anxiety or embarrassment, but satisfaction with their lives.

Other Studies

- The Massachusetts male aging study (1987) reports that 40% of males surveyed experienced mild-to-severe erectile dysfunction and this increased to 67% by age 70.
- The National Health and Social Life Survey (1992) reported that 31% of men and 43% of women reported dysfunction

National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project (2007)

- Sample 3005 U.S. adults (1550 women and 1455 men) 57 to 85 years
- Frequency of sexual activity similar to adults 18 to 59 years of age
- 78% of men age 75 to 85 years and 40% of women reported having a spousal or other intimate relationship

NSHAP Continued

- Frequency of sexual activity did not decrease substantially through age 74
- However, sexual activity declined with age
- 73% 57 to 64
- 53% 65 to 74
- 26% 75 to 85
- Women were significantly less likely than men at all ages to report sexual activity

NSHAP Continued

- More than 50% report bothersome sexual problems
- Most prevalent among women were low desire, difficulty with vaginal lubrication, and inability to climax.
- Among men, the most prevalent were erectile difficulties.
- Approximately 14% of men reported taking medication to improve sexual function
- About 25% with a sexual problem reported avoiding sex as a consequence

NSHAP Continued

- Sexuality closely linked to health at older ages
- More so for men than for women.
- Those with good physical health were more likely to have an intimate relationship and were more likely to be sexually active
- Physical health more strongly associated with many sexual problems than age alone

HIV/AIDS

- People age 50 and older represent almost one-fourth of all people with HIV/AIDS in the U.S.
- Because older adults don't get tested, this number is likely to be much higher.
- Less likely than younger people to talk about their sex lives or drug use with their doctors.
- Also less likely to be asked
- May mistake HIV/AIDS symptoms for aches and pains associated with aging

Risk Factors

- Older people tend to view condoms primarily as a contraceptive measure
- Women who no longer fear an unwanted pregnancy may not insist on their use.
- Fragile, aging skin is easily traumatized, leading to infection.
- Less educated about HIV/AIDS because not targeted

Older Gays and Lesbians

- Nearly 3 million gay and transgender elders living in the U.S.
- Twice as likely to live alone and to age as a single person
- Four times more likely to have no children to call in an emergency.
- At greater risk for depression, substance abuse, mental and physical health complications, unnecessary institutionalization and premature death.

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In addition…

- Health care services are aimed at hererosexuals.
- Homosexual partnerships are often not recognized.
- Housing is a genuine concern. Options are limited, but the desire to live in a homosexual community is real because of sensitivity to their needs.

Robert Butler, MD.

- "Sex after Sixty": Many adults continue activity when a partner is available
- Many feel that sex is important for physical and psychological well-being
- Practice a variety of techniques including oral sex
- Said sex was as satisfying or more satisfying than when younger

Better?

- Reasons given: improved techniques making them better lovers, greater appreciation of sex, greater feelings of freedom…less urgency.
- No fear of pregnancy, no concern for children interrupting, possibility for activity at various times during the day, reduced financial and work pressures.

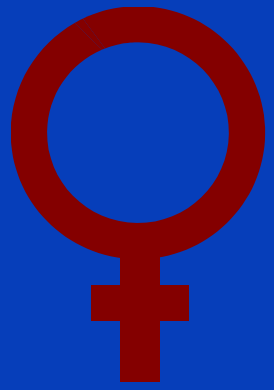
Limiting factors…

- For women, the greatest limiting factor in sexual activity is the lack of a partner.
- Most women marry older men; they outlive men 5-7 years.
- Presently, there are 4 women for every man after 65. This ratio will continue to favor men.



Adjustments

- Many doctors recommend self-stimulation when sex is not desirable or available.
- A woman may have a strong sexual drive, but is not motivated to act on it if stressed, angry, or just unhappy



Looking back: Historical view: 1935

Masturbation is self-abuse. It is apt to injure health and future development of the girl.

Girls weaken themselves, become anemic and get a dingy, pimply complexion, but they lose their desire for normal sexual relations when they grow up, and are unable to derive any pleasure from the sexual act when they get married.

Butler, Robert



"Self-stimulation is a common and healthy practice in later life… Masturbation usually begins in childhood…it is natural and an imp. preliminary to adult sexuality.

The impact of Viagra, etc…

- It's arrival into our culture has renewed attention to the topic of aging and sexuality!
- Although Viagra has helped many men overcome ED, it may cause a shift in a couple's sexual equilibrium.
- Women first adjust to male ED; then they are challenged to returning to sexual functioning instantaneously.

In long-term care…

- Lack of privacy major barrier to sexual activity
- Few facilities designed for intimacy
- Residents could be interrupted at any time by well-meaning staff
- Also privacy of information – gossip

Dementia in long-term care

- The hyper sexuality often seen in dementia can create confusion for caregivers and health professionals.
- Also sexual interest and activity does not go away with dementia
- Staff may react by attempting to "protect"
- Ask: Is anyone being harmed?
- Thoroughly assess decision-making capacity

Developing intimate relationships requires:



- Positive self-image and self-esteem
- Reciprocal relationships of equals
- Love – entwined with sexuality in adult relationships.
- Respect and trust.

True sexual intimacy

- Is achievable only by individuals who are mature, independent, and have good self-esteem and who trust and respect their partners; in short, those who have the capacity of *emotional* intimacy.

  Kingsberg, 2002.



“The greatest thing you’ll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return…”

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