



Editorial

Transforming intimacy: Aging and sexuality

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Ageing is a transformation and a privilege. Sexuality, an undeniable part of human existence, transforms into culturally acceptable expressions as we age.^[1] The popular literature talks about sexuality among the elderly mostly in a lewd and unacceptable manner, as the code of morality is highly expected among the elderly in most cultures.^[2] Cultural variations regarding sexuality among the elderly are quite common. In liberal cultures, such as in the U.S., it is more acceptable for grandparents to date and remarry. Conversely, in many Asian and South East Asian cultures, such behaviors are often seen as taboo. Engaging in sexuality and romance at an older age is frequently frowned upon and ridiculed. The issues of loneliness and individual preferences are often overlooked, while moralistic and ageist perspectives tend to dominate the conversation.^[3]

The developmental perspective highlights mature themes of intimacy that surpass the common and often immature understanding of sexuality in younger adults. It promotes greater self-acceptance and understanding among the elderly. According to Erikson's theory, the period of late adulthood

emphasizes the achievement of generativity, which involves making meaningful contributions and nurturing future generations-even if one may never personally benefit from the outcomes. This process creates environments filled with care and love for those to come^[4], passing the culture and delving deeper into transformative un-selfish ways that carry forward the culture including art, music, and traditions. This marks the achievement of self-satisfaction and fulfillment of roles within the social structure and family. It involves finding acceptance and comfort in one's sexuality and partnerships. However, reaching this crucial life stage can also lead to stagnation in relationships, love, and marriage. Continued immaturity into late adulthood may result in failures and losses as one age, creating frustration and a sense of unacceptability for the individual. The lack of spiritual guidance and maturity can force individuals to cling to unfavorable circumstances and defense mechanisms, which further leads to frustration. This struggle often manifests intensely in the realm of sexuality and has a reciprocal effect as well. The difficulties in sexual functioning also impact health and organic functioning and sexual dysfunction becomes more and more prominent.^[5]

The maturity expected of the elderly is essential for navigating the later stages of life. This stage focuses on achieving ego integrity and reflecting on life choices. As physical energy wanes and intellectual abilities weaken, the decline of the frontal lobe often necessitates medication and physical support.^[6] While the reproductive functions of the body may have diminished, the capacity for romance persists. Sexuality in this stage transforms more into emotional love, shifting away from the physical aspect. Couples who retain their

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partners can embrace companionship, and some physical intimacy may still exist. However, for others, the physical aspect of sexual intimacy may fade^[7], making way for new relationships with children and grandchildren, which provide time and affection that help fill the void of lost companionship. Pets can also play a significant role in this emotional landscape.

Thus, we can view this transformation as a shift from sexuality to love and care for the next generation. Those who struggle to mature in this way, particularly if they have faced setbacks in earlier life stages and have unmet goals, may become rigid and difficult. They might grapple with personal dissatisfaction, leading to resentment towards aging and increased negative emotions, which can hinder their ability to adjust. Consequently, emotions such as resentment, dissatisfaction, frustration, and jealousy may become prevalent, resulting in a loss of happiness and eventual loneliness for aging individuals. Factors such as sex education, value systems, morality, and life experiences significantly influence the transformation of sexual energy to meet the changing demands of different life stages. The evolution of sexuality and life contributes greatly to the wisdom of the elderly, which plays a crucial role in shaping the future of human society.

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