AGING AND EXPLORATION:
COMPANIONSHIP, FRIENDSHIP,
AND SEXUALITY

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Learning Objectives:
- Review how research frames sexuality in older adults.
- Identify the interplay of sexuality, friendship, and companionship as we age.
- Illustrate strategies on how to facilitate communication about individual needs.

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Aging and Exploration:
Companionship, Friendship and Sexuality

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Objectives

• Review how research frames sexuality

• Identify the interplay of sexuality, friendship, and companionship

• Illustrate strategies on how to facilitate communication about individual needs

Why is this topic important?

• Demographics:
  – Longevity, baby boomers
  – Diversity of aging population

• Mental health/wellness

• Workforce training

• Balance the one-sided view

• Improve communication

• Expand research
Backseat Bingo by Liz Blaker

https://vimeo.com/7584260

How Research Has Framed Sexuality

• Sexual function related to physical changes
• Negative impact of specific illnesses, conditions, and medications
• Sexual enhancement and enjoyment
• Attitudes about sex and behaviors
• Personal relationships and intimacy

Research Trends

• Masters and Johnson (1966): Maintain sexual regularity
• Thomas (1982): Proposed the popcorn theory for its sensory pleasure at any age
• AARP (1999): Attitudes and behaviors
• NSHAP (2005): Intimate relationships
• DeLamater (2012): Biopsychosocial perspectives
AARP: Sexuality to Relationships

- AARP/Modern Maturity Sexuality Study (1999)
- Sexuality at Midlife and Beyond: 2004 Update of Attitudes and Behaviors (2004)
- Sex, Romance, and Relationships: AARP Survey of Midlife and Older Adults (2010)

AARP Sexuality Study 1999

- Contradicts stereotypes
  - Men’s satisfaction with their sex lives is related to the romantic qualities of their partner and whether or not they perceive their partner as sensitive to their moods and needs
  - Women’s satisfaction is more related to their feelings about whether their partner is imaginative about sex and exciting
- Majority of all age groups consider sex to be enjoyable

AARP: 2004 Update of Attitudes and Behaviors

- Sexuality remained as important as in 1999
- More than twice as many men reported using a drug or treatment for sexual performance
- Women were “re-awakened”
- Greater willingness to discuss sex as a health issue with health providers
- Healthy and physically active men and women were generally more satisfied with their sex life

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### Sex, Romance, and Relationships (AARP, 2012)

A happy sexual relationship has the following:

- Sexual partner
- Frequent sexual intercourse
- Good health (self and partner)
- Low levels of stress
- Absence of financial worries

### National Social Life, Health, an Aging Project (NSHAP)

- National probability survey of 3,005 men and women between 57 and 85
- Collected information on physical and cognitive health, health behaviors, medications, and health service utilization
- Focus on intimate social relationships: marriage, family, social ties, and sexuality
- Most comprehensive study of sexual attitudes, behaviors, and problems

Suzman (2009)

### NSHAP Hypothesis

“Individuals with strong, functioning sexual and intimate relationships will have better trajectories of health and well-being than those whose relationships function less well or who lack such relationships.”

Galinsky, McClintock, & Waite, 2014
NSHAP Wave 2

New measures added based on Neuroendocrine perspective on sexuality. Fie components measured sexual motivation and interest. Motivation was not a unitary construct like in medical sexual health research. Also examined the sociological and psychological context.

1. Sensorimotor
2. Valence or salience
3. Attractiveness
4. Receptivity
5. Solicitation or proceptivity

Galinsky, McClintock, & Waite, 2014

Sexuality, Friendship and Companionship

Friendship

• Friends are voluntary unlike family members
• Sources of fun and socialization
• Social connections are important for well being
• Connections provide opportunities for engagement
• Engagement may lead to physical and emotional connections
### Women Friendships After 50

*Rose (2007)*

- Period of contemplation - past and future
- New perspectives of the self and intimacy
- Choices made on how and with whom to spend time with becomes more pressing
- Examine where to place their emotional investment
- Continue to place importance on friendships
- The role of a friend greatly influences life satisfaction

### Benefits of Having Friends

*(Huxhold, Miche & Schuz, 2013)*

Differential effects of informal social activities (ISA) with family and friends across 6 years.

- Older adults reduced ISA with family more than with friends
- As people age, social support from family may become more important than ISA with family
- Friends could remain the main source of companionship to do activities with
- Study did not look at quality of the relationships

### Who Helps Older Adults with Sexual Problems?

Role of “confidant relationships” in easing concerns (NSHAP data 2005-2006)

- Compared with women, men are less likely to confide in general but more likely to talk about sexual problems to confidant and doctor
- Stress related to sexual problems was positively associated with depressive symptoms (while controlling for physical health)
- Future research should give attention to the role of social relationships in sexual health

*Hirayama & Walker 2010*
Facilitating Communication About Individual Needs

Supporting Relationships

- Remember – it’s never too late for romance
- Be aware of the issues faced by partnerships, cohabitation, living apart but together
- Help individuals develop and sustain relationships they desire
- Teach and practice skills that increase positive interactions
- Honor cultural, historical, and personal traditions
  Huyck (2001)

Sexuality and Sexual Health

AAFP (2012)

- Talk to your doctor: Talk about sexual problems and doc can suggest ways to enjoy sex safely
- Talk to your partner: Share your feelings and concerns. Talk about what you want from your shared experiences
- Experiment: Find new ways to be intimate
- Practice safe sex: Ask about sexual history and consider getting tested together
- Stay healthy: Stay in shape and help prevent disease
Clinical Perspective

Ch 5: Talking about Sensitive Subjects
• Reflect an understanding, accepting attitude
• Don’t assume person is not sexually active or not interested
• Don’t assume person is heterosexual
• Approach subject directly
• Talk about importance of safe sex

References


References

## References