

Aging, romance and sex: It's never too late

By Ellen Waldman

February 23, 2015

If this title caught your eye, it may be that we still perceive some disconnect between these concepts. Maybe even some slight discomfort. In January 2008, I wrote a letter to the editor of Time magazine, which they actually published. I was responding to a cover story called, "The Science of Romance."

Here's what I wrote: "I appreciated the scope of your reporting. But as a geriatric care manager, I couldn't help noticing the lack of information about the elderly. I have witnessed wildly happy romances between men and women in their 80s and 90s, even those with physical difficulties or dementia. My hope is that we can drop any archaic stigmas about this phase of life and realize that it is never too later for love and companionship".

We are finally seeing a change of attitude on this subject, as evidenced by the American Society of Aging in America's conference in Chicago, March 2015. Here are some the topics they will cover: Older Adult Experiences of their Sexuality; Sexual Health and Functioning in Later Life; Sex in the Head: Aging, Sexuality and Emotional Well-Being; and many more like these.

Still, there is not as much openness about older-age sexuality, as evidenced by this information:

- A 2010 study of sexual health from Indiana University found the lowest rates of condom use were among people ages 45 and older.
- Doctors often shy away from discussing sexual health with their older patients or may not view sexually transmitted diseases as a risk at all.
- Health education campaigns heavily promote safe sex for teenagers and young adults, but ads urging older adults to use condoms are rare.
- The numbers of older people with HIV has nearly doubled, and 15 percent of new diagnoses of HIV in the U.S. were in people age 50 and older in 2005, which is the most recent year that the CDC calculated the risk for this age group.

I thought it would be informative to inquire about this subject with Brenda Johnson who, along with Mitchell Walzer, owns Love Revolution, (<http://loveashland.com>, 383 E Main St., Ashland, 541-201-2060). From their website: "Love Revolution is a classy sexuality boutique, gallery and education resource. We've been called the local hub for conscious intimacy and awareness."

Q: Do you see many older customers, meaning 60-years-plus?

A: Most of our customers are over 40 and about one quarter of them are over 60. We have many customers in their 70s and even 80s.

Q: What are the issues or interests of this population?

A: Men often seek help with performance, aging and health issues. They are also very interested in learning more about intimacy and how to please their partner. Women come in for both health and

enjoyment. They are realizing that they can continue to experience their sexuality in all stages of life. It's in their control, and they can find solutions to issues created by a changing body.

Q: Are there items, books, etc, that would be specifically helpful to this time of life?

A: We have a growing selection of books and some great tools and DVDs available for folks over 60 that address concerns such as prostate health, libido, performance, re-entering sexual relationships and body image. Many products are designed to create more emotional intimacy and connection, and it doesn't matter what's going on with our body to do that.

Q: What else can you add to this topic?

A: Our purpose is to help people feel good about themselves; sexuality is part of who we are and can be an awful lot of fun. For a fulfilling life, we think it's essential to love and accept our body as much as we can, as long as we can.

The knowledge that aging includes love, intimacy, romance, and sexuality allows for more open discussions. Being aware of important health and disease-related issues, and talking about them to your physician, makes good sense. If this choice is a part of your well-lived life, then why not enjoy it, regardless of your age?