Young Adults’ Attitudes Toward Elderly Sexuality
Jessica Escutia-Calderon¹, Iulia Fratila², Liza Berdychevsky³, PhD

¹Department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences, ²Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism, ³Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism
College of Applied Health Sciences, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

INTRODUCTION

• Sexuality in later life is often studied from a biomedical perspective, ignoring social and psychological influences (Foster et al., 2012)
• Society deems sexual activity appropriate for young and middle aged adults, yet it is highly stigmatized for older adults (Marshall et al. 2002)
• Socio-cultural factors limit or prevent older adults from receiving proper help for maintaining a fulfilling sex life (Connidis, 2006; DeLamater & Moorman, 2007; Got & Hinchliff, 2003)
• Restricted and biased communication regarding sex between seniors and healthcare providers (Berdychevsky & Nimrod, 2017) and the lack of access to proper sexual health education earlier and later in life (Berdychevsky & Nimrod, 2015; Henderson et al., 2004) leave many older adults to face their sexuality and aging challenges alone
• Older adults have also internalized widely spread negative misinformation about aging and sexuality and in some cases have been influenced to disengage from sex (Hyde & DeLamater, 2013; Foley, 2006; Fisher, 2010)

AIM

Sexuality in older adults is often neglected due to societal ageist stereotypes portraying them as asexual. The purpose of this study was to explore this acceptance among young adults while focusing on three research questions:

Research Question 1: How much do young adults know about older adults’ sexuality and how do they feel about it?

Research Question 2: Do young adults’ knowledge and views of elderly sexuality vary by gender?

Research Question 3: Do young adults’ views of elderly sexuality vary based on their general attitudes toward sexuality?

METHOD

Participants
• Target population was adults aged 18+
• The sample (N=270) was young (M=21.58 years, SD=4.32) and included 149 women and 113 men

Data collection
• Intercept survey method and online survey submissions were utilized
• Young adults were asked to compete 15 minute 4 page survey

Data analysis
• Instruments used for measurement included, The Aging Sexual Knowledge and Attitudes Scale (ASKAS) (White, 1982), Attitudes Toward Sexuality Scale (ATSS) (Fisher & Hall, 1988) and a scale asking about perceptions of sex in/as leisure
• Descriptive and inferential tests (Independent sample t-tests, Pearson’s correlation and Multiple regression) were conducted

RESULTS

RQ 1: Young adults knowledge and views
• The mean or average score for knowledge were 60.87 on a range of scores from 35 to 105, representing a medium level of knowledge
• The mean or average score for views were 26 on a range of scores from 26 to 182, showing that attitudes were overall leaning towards more permissive
• There is no correlation between having higher knowledge and being more permissive

RQ 2: Exploring differences based on general attitudes toward sexuality
• General views towards sexuality and views of sex in/as leisure were good predictors of young adults views towards elderly sexuality, however, comfortability with sexuality was not
• With one point increase in general attitudes scale (range 13 to 65) we can expect a 2.212 increase in views towards older adults sexuality (range 26 to 182)
• With one point increase in viewing sex in/as leisure scale (range 11 to 55) there is an increase of 0.57 in more permissive views towards older sexuality (range 26 to 182)

• General attitudes toward sex and viewing sex in/as leisure can explain 0.557 of the variability in young adults views towards elderly sexuality

DISCUSSION

• Considering that we did not see a correlation between higher knowledge scores and more permissive attitudes, and instead found that medium knowledge was related to permissive attitudes we suggest the open-mindedness towards elderly sexuality is related to other factors outside of knowledge or education
• Our findings are similar to previous research which found that increased knowledge does not little towards combating ageist ideas (Michiellutte & Díseker, 1985), suggesting increased exposure to older individuals may be more important towards reducing ageist perceptions among young adults (Davis-Berman & Robinson, 1989)
• Allen et al. (2009) have argued that understanding young adults attitudes towards elderly sexuality can be helpful for intervention aimed at decreasing the social stigma associated with aging and sexuality
• Our findings also showed that there were no gender differences among the younger adults (although could be small sample), this puts into question the need or lack there of, gendered tailored sexual education

CONCLUSION

Our research provides important insights related to perceptions about later life sexuality held by younger members of society. These individuals may go on to pursue careers where they will work with, advocate for and care for an older population. Thus it is important to break societal stereotypes that medicalize and ‘other’ older adulthood broadly speaking and which especially oust older adults sexuality.

“Society doesn’t like people with wrinkles talking about sex”
- Jane Fonda from Grace and Frankie

CONTACT INFORMATION
Jessica Escutia | jescut3@illinois.edu
Iulia Fratila | fratila2@illinois.edu
Dr. Liza Berdychevsky | lizabk@illinois.edu
Commonly used logos