

HOW STEREOTYPES OF AGING AND SEXUALITY AFFECT SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR, ATTITUDES AND WELL-BEING OF OLDER ADULTS?

Matija Sinković

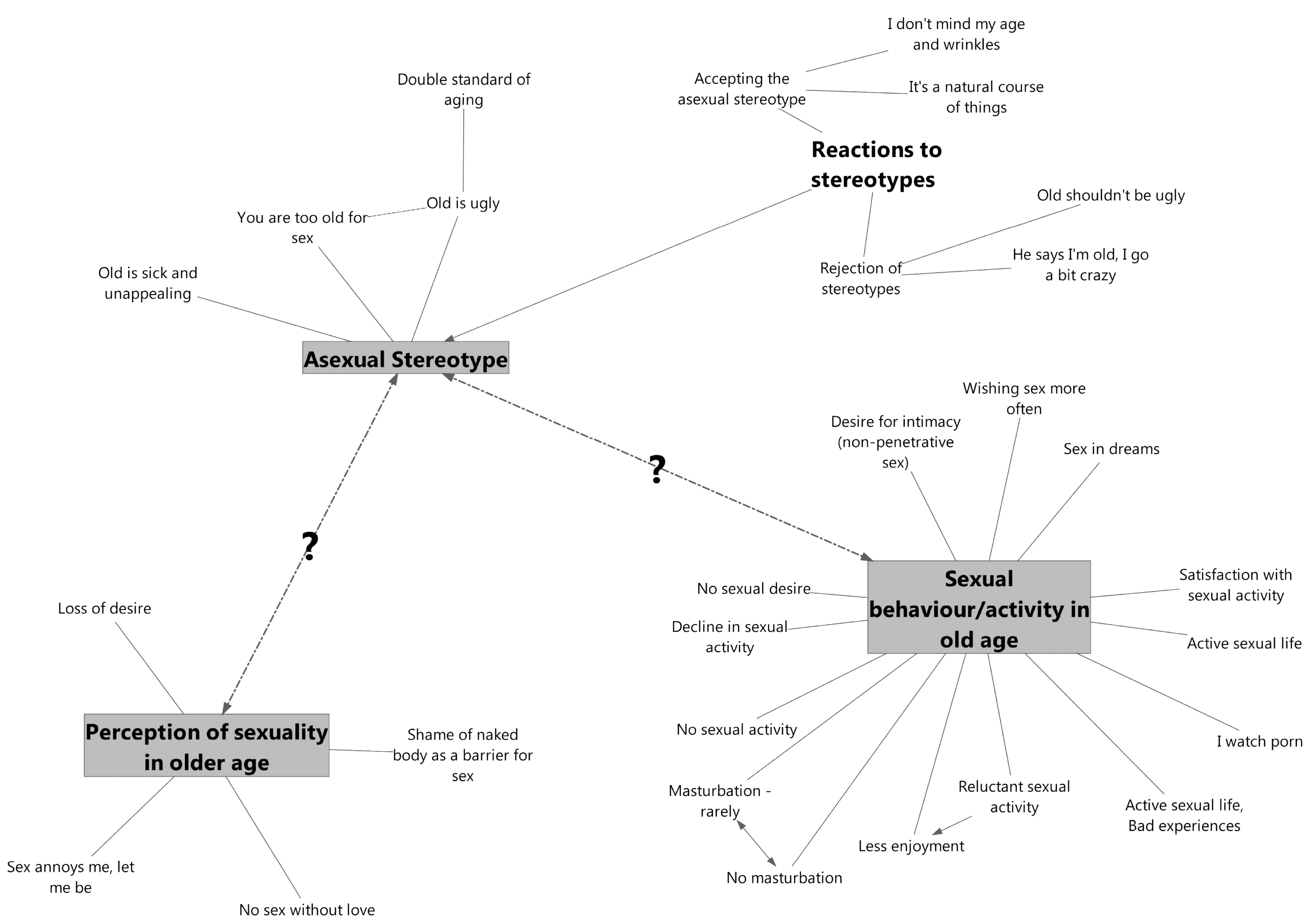


Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb

Healthy sexual aging project, financed by the Research Council of Norway



Background	Study aims	Method
<p>Stereotypes about old age and sexuality persist despite new generations of older adults (OA) becoming increasingly more liberal than previous generations in their attitudes towards sex and sexual behaviour (Syme, 2014). Complementary with the reproduction model of sexuality, in youth-oriented Western culture sexuality and eroticism are perceived as the domain of young and beautiful, while aging bodies are stigmatized as “sick and dependent” which “disbars them from the sexualized world” (Gott, 2005:20).</p>	<p>This qualitative study explores stereotypic views of sexuality and aging and the sexual behaviour of older adults in Croatia. Focus of interest is on both the stereotypes older adults encounter and those they have internalised. Using thematic analysis and MAXQDA, relations between stereotypes, perceptions of sexuality and sexual behaviour in old age are explored.</p>	<p>Data collection: in-depth, semi-structured interviews Recruitment: retirement homes, gerontology centres, Red Cross Zagreb, lectures, flyers and posters Sample: 33 participants, aged 64 and above, 20 women and 13 men Subsample: 10 interviews (6 women, 4 men) in which topic of stereotypes of aging and sexuality was found Analysis: thematic analysis</p>



Asexual stereotype and sexual behaviour

"...No, my God, no way ... I cannot imagine older [people] having intercourse, how can they use their old, flabby bodies, really..." (Female, 82)

The **asexual stereotype** was found among older adults in Croatia, both as something they face and as internalised view on the sexuality. Reactions on the stereotype take two main forms: **acceptance** of sexual decline as a natural course of life (mostly among men), and **rejection** of the stereotype, more typical for female participants, and often fuelled by anger, perhaps because of the burden of **the double standard of aging** they experience.

Sexual behaviour and **perception of sexuality** in old age both take diverse forms, sometimes contradictory within individual narratives. It was not possible to determine if stereotypes affect sexual behaviour. Part of the reason is that from the stories of the participants is not clear where the line between stereotypes and factual observation of physical decline is. More research into the nature of attitudes toward sexuality in old age is needed.

"The other side, man is watching, if he hears [my] years over the phone, then I am old for him. And he is 75! But when he hears 69, he sees a barrel! ... One guy asked me: "Pretty please, how do you look? I don't want a barrel by my side." (Female, 69)

"I know many men can't accept it, I just think it is the natural course of life, someone dies and someone loses [desire]" (Male, 67)