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CONSTRUCTION OF ELDERLY CHARACTERS: TOUCH, INTIMACY AND SEXUALITY

Despite the belief that the elderly do not think about intimacy and sexuality, research shows that they not only think about sexual activities, they indulge in them. However, before we examine sexuality as such, we must investigate the importance of intimacy and the issue of touch for well-being and healthy aging. Each of the characters to be discussed in this presentation displays a need to love and be loved physically and emotionally. A view of healthy sexuality involves Baby Boomers who, in their 70s, still experience their sexual needs and most are unashamed to discuss them openly. While they were in their teens and early 20s, they led the sexual revolution, openly campaigning for “love not war,” leaving home to live in communes, and disdaining the older generations’ attitude toward love and sexuality. With this in mind, it is not surprising that the aging boomers are now leaders in the research field for ways to stay active and virile. Women, conversely, must deal with the effects of menopause, ageist attitudes, and coping with losing their husbands or partners and thus not always having easy access to healthy sexual activities.

Love, intimacy, and sexuality are factors that contribute to healthy aging and must be dealt with appropriately. Denial of the need for sex when the sex drive continues into one’s senior years can create depression, guilt, and frustration on the part of the elderly and can deprive them of a joy they can still experience despite their age. Fortunately for many, *The Golden Girls* brought sex and women’s, as well as men’s, desire to talk about, participate in, and enjoy the pleasures of sex. In *The Golden Girls*, older women, Blanch, Dorothy, Rose, and Sophia talk about their encounters and tackle other taboo topics. After the show left the air, sexuality became more popular on television, but it did not incorporate older actors as main characters. Thanks to *The Golden Girls*, *Grace and Frankie* aired three seasons ago, and they, too, have broken ground with radical discussion of the older male’s and female’s need for companionship, love, sexuality, intimacy, and personal gratification.

Thus, sex is not only for the young, and that is being conveyed in *Grace and Frankie* tastefully and humorously and seriously, taking into consideration other problems that can also interfere with having a physical relationship—dementia and the guilt it creates in the patient’s husband. While this is a step in the right direction, there are still other obstacles the elderly in today’s more permissive and sexually visible society must learn to avoid and prevent and adult children must learn to accept their parents’ and/or grandparents’ dynamic sexuality.

Biography

Elizabeth Kessler has been graduated from University of Houston as a Doctor of Philosophy in English, with the concentrations including American Literature and Chicana Literature. Later she pursued her interest in the use of culinary material in literature and ageing in literature and film. She has taught at California State University, Northridge and University of Houston, Central Campus. Currently enrolled in an MS degree program in Gerontology at the University of Florida

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