

## Why Do Older Women's Needs Matter?

Imagine cosmetics shops that specialize in make-up for older women. It may seem impractical to establish and develop shops like these in the current market, whose target customers are younger generations. However, the pace of world population ageing is accelerating. According to United Nations (2019), the percentage of the population over 65 years old was 9 percent in 2019. This percentage is predicted to increase to 16 percent by 2050. In the elderly population, women are more likely than men to be widowed and feel lonely. Also, older women have higher possibilities than older men to become disabled and to live more years with chronic health problems (United Nations, 2013, as cited in Age Action). The needs of older women are increasing, which worth more attention. However, because many people still neglect or hold prejudice against older women's needs, a lot of older women dare not to express their needs nowadays. As a result, the current market cannot meet the needs of older women customers well. Older women indeed have their needs, and these needs matter a lot. This essay analyses the existence and importance of older women's needs in three aspects: older women's sexual desire, their needs for romantic relationships, and their aesthetic needs. It is significant for people to know that older women do have their needs, and realize the importance of these needs. In this way, the market can better provide the products that meet the needs of older women in the future.

Though some people think women's sexual desire will disappear as they get old, the fact is that this desire still exists in spite of ageing. Sexual desire is believed to be the most common sexual event throughout people's lives (Regan & Atkins, 2006). Though many women's sexual desire will decline as they get old, the desire will not disappear. Karla (2011) indicated that older women still have a "significant presence of sexual desire, activity and function even after the age of 50 years" (p. 300). As women get old, the symptoms of sexual dysfunction gradually appear. Because of these symptoms, older women are less likely to

have high-quality sexual life than their younger selves. Besides, many older women's partners will show less interest in their sexual life. It is more difficult for older women to feel high sexual satisfaction. Thus, older women are more likely to have more intense sexual fantasies (Cloud, 2010). In addition, some women's sexual desire even grows stronger as they age. Kermond (2015)'s interview showed that many women want more sex in their old age. One of the interviewees, who was 57 years old, thought her current stage is sexually the best time in her life because she does not need to care about many things as a younger woman. Most interviewees were strongly against the stereotype of "older women have no sexual desire". It is evident that women still have sexual desire even after they get old. Currently, many people still neglect that older women do have sexual desire. Society and the market have shown little care for older women's sexual desire for a long time. According to Wise Guy Reports (2021), the primary consumer base of sex toys consists of people aged from 30 to 50 years old. Though the updates of sex toys are very fast, their functions mainly cater to the younger generations. As women get old, their vaginas will change a lot. For example, their vaginas get pretty dry, and their labia becomes looser (WebMD, 2020). A lot of sex toys in the current market cannot fit these changes well. The supply of sex toys for older women is in shortage. Many older women's sexual desire cannot be satisfied. It is important for people to know older women indeed have sexual desire. Also, it is helpful for the sex toys industry to pay more attention to older women's sexual needs when they are developing new products.

While some people hold the prejudice that older women should not express their sexual desire, older women still have the right to express and satisfy their sexual desire despite how old they are. Some people may say older women's expression of sexual desire is shameless. Having sexual desire is not shameful. It is a natural feeling of human beings. Maslow (1943, as cited in Mcleod, 2020)'s Hierarchy of Needs pointed out that physiological needs are in the lowest level of hierarchy pyramid and "needs lower down in the hierarchy

must be satisfied before individuals can attend to needs higher up” (para. 2). As one of people’s physiological needs, the satisfaction of sexual desire matters a lot. If older women try to restrain their sexual desire overly, they may suffer from the negative effects of sexual abstinence. First, they are less likely to enjoy the benefits (e.g., reduced blood pressure) of sex. Second, they are more likely to feel insecure or anxious in intimate relationships, which is bad for their mental health (Medical News Today, 2019). Thus, it is healthy for older women to express their sexual desire timely and without shame. Some people may think older women’s expression of sexual desire disobeys women virtues. They actually neglect the principle of gender equality. Why do people not ask men to restrain their sexual desire and obey “men virtues”? According to Aponte (2020), “men have successfully ‘outsourced’ to women their responsibility to manage their sexual desires” (para. 4). People’s sexual desire is a normal physiological phenomenon. The reasonable expression of it does not violate any virtues. Nowadays, many older women dare not to express their true feelings about sexual desire. Researchers found that older women are more likely to feel lower sexual satisfaction because of higher sexual beliefs. These sexual beliefs include “sexual desire as sin” and “sexual conservatism” (Vilarinho & Nobre, 2014). These older women are afraid of being criticized as shameless women. It is crucial for people to know the importance of older women’s sexual desire and stop the accusation and prejudice against older women’s sexual desire. In this way, older women can feel freer to express their sexual desire and become healthier both physically and mentally.

Despite the claim that women will have no need for romantic relationships as they get old, older women’s needs for romantic relationships will not fade away in fact. Some people may think older women’s needs for romantic relationships will disappear because they are not as passionate as they were young. However, as women get old, they are more likely to feel lonely than before. Romantic relationships are a kind of irreplaceable relationships between

people. People pursue romantic relationships to melt loneliness and keep a healthy mentality. Though it is more difficult for older women to build romantic relationships, their needs for romantic relationships still exist. Almost half of women above 65 years old in America are single, including divorced and widowed women. This percentage is much higher than their male counterparts, which is 21 percent (Brown, 2020). Since these older women are single, they have to handle a lot of things on their own. Also, it is hard for them to melt their loneliness due to the lack of intimate relationships. Thus, many of them indeed need romantic relationships. Though many of them do not want to get married to others, their desire for dating is strong. They enjoy the accompany and think dating is beneficial for them (Watson & Stelle, 2011). Currently, society and the market mainly focus on young adults' emotional needs. Most dating apps and forums are catering to younger generations. Many older women still cannot find appropriate ways to build romantic relationships. People always neglect older women's needs for romantic relationships. In western countries, there is still a lack of good-quality dating apps for older people. Though there are some sites for older women to date with younger men or women, the apps for older women to find peer lovers are rare. In some countries, there is no dating app for older women (e.g., China). People should know that older women still have needs for romantic relationships. In this way, the market can provide older women with more sources to date with others and help them build romantic relationships gradually.

In spite of the prejudice that older women should not express their needs for romantic relationships, older women have the right to express their needs for romantic relationships openly. From some people's point of view, this kind of expression is ungraceful as women get old. However, expressing the needs for romantic relationships does not mean an older woman is ungraceful. It is a practical way for her to keep a good mentality. Romantic relationships indeed play an important part in people's lives. People who have healthy romantic

relationships tend to have great social connections and sexual relations (Lumen). As women get old, they are faced with partners' deaths and the separation from their children. They may live independently and become lonely. The presence of romantic relationships means a lot to them. Older women are more likely to get mental health problems than their younger selves. Among these health problems, anxiety and depression are the most common ones (Gonzalez, 2020). Building romantic relationships can help older women get out of isolation and relieve their depression through giving them the accompany they need. Since the relationships between older women and younger lovers are commonly seen nowadays, some people think older women should not date younger lovers. However, as women get old, they can still choose to fall in love with someone they like. Romantic relationships are built on the wills of both sides. If both sides are voluntary to start the relationship, there is nothing to blame. Also, older women can help their younger lovers build confidence and self-esteem in some way. Older women are more mature and have more life experience. They can pass on their experience to these younger lovers, which can benefit the younger generations (Patrick, 2019). In this way, older women can fulfill their emotional needs at the same time. Nowadays, a lot of older women still dare not to express their needs for romantic relationships openly due to some people's negative comments. It is unhealthy for older women to restrain these needs. People should eliminate their stereotypes about older women's needs for romantic relationships and encourage older women to express their needs freely.

Though some people think women's aesthetic needs will fade away as ageing, older women's aesthetic needs are still present. Some people may say, women's aesthetic needs will decrease as they get old because they are not as young and beautiful as they used to be. However, a lot of women still pay much attention to their appearances even they are old. According to Maslow (1987, as cited in Mcleod, 2020), aesthetic needs include "search and appreciation for beauty" (para. 21). From makeup to apparel, these older women attach great

importance to their outlooks. Palermo (2020) revealed that some older women have their own dressing philosophy. They do not think ageing can stop them from pursuing beauty. Some of them prefer minimalist, while some of them like to get dressed in vibrant colors. They express their aesthetic needs openly and define their own fashion styles. Edo Zollo is a photographer. Among his photographs, there are series of “Beauty in Older Women”. All the models are women over 65 years old. One of these women’s goals was to encourage older women like them to embrace age and stop worried about wrinkles and loose skin. They can be as beautiful as they like to be. One of the participants, Gillian, who was 68 years old, said that “maturity and the experience of life are to be highlighted in later life, and the beauty will come along with it” (Bahadur, 2019, para. 19). Their thoughts indeed showed that older women still have strong aesthetic needs. Due to the stereotype of ageing women, people always think beauty means young. Fast fashion is gaining ground nowadays, whose target customers are women under 35 years old (Feiam, 2019). The status of women model in the fashion industry declines with ageing. Also, the make-up products and clothing catering to older women are far less than the same types of products for younger generations. The fashion market cannot sufficiently meet older women’s aesthetic needs yet. Since the population ageing is accelerating, people should realize older women indeed have aesthetic needs. In this way, the market can better provide the fashion products that older women need in the future.

Although some people have the stereotype that older women’s aesthetic concepts would not catch up with popular trends, older women have their own rights to express their aesthetic ideas and needs. According to Wikström (2004), the expression of aesthetic needs can help older women become passionate and energetic. It is beneficial for older women’s physical and social development. Once older women can be free to express their aesthetic needs, they are more likely to feel the sense of timelessness and embrace themselves with joy. In this way, they can keep good mental health easier. Also, as older women get access to

express their aesthetic needs openly, more people can hear their voices. The social attention for older women will increase, which has positive effects on older women's social development. Sometimes older women's aesthetic concepts can be inspirational to the modern trend. Nowadays, many older women can fit in with the popular trend well. According to Naranch (2020), some older women are using social media (e.g., Instagram) to show their self-confidence about fashion. They think ageing does not mean decline. Instead, ageing bodies can still show "coolness". Lyn Slater is one of these older women. She is a famous blogger on Instagram. At 65 years old, Slater keeps doing exercise to maintain physical and mental fitness. Also, she is always dressed in the most modern outfits with exquisite makeup. Older women like her are so powerful that they redefine the item of "coolness". It does not just belong to young people. People should not simply think that older women have nothing related to fashion and modernity. It is good for people to realize the value and inspiration to the development of fashion industries brought by these older women.

Older women do have their needs for sexual life, their needs for intimate relationships, and their aesthetics needs. These needs are very significant and older women have their own right to express their needs. It is crucial for people to eliminate their wrong stereotypes of older women's needs and try to get a more comprehensive understanding of the importance of these needs. In this way, more products that can meet the needs of older women will appear in the market and benefit older women in the future.

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