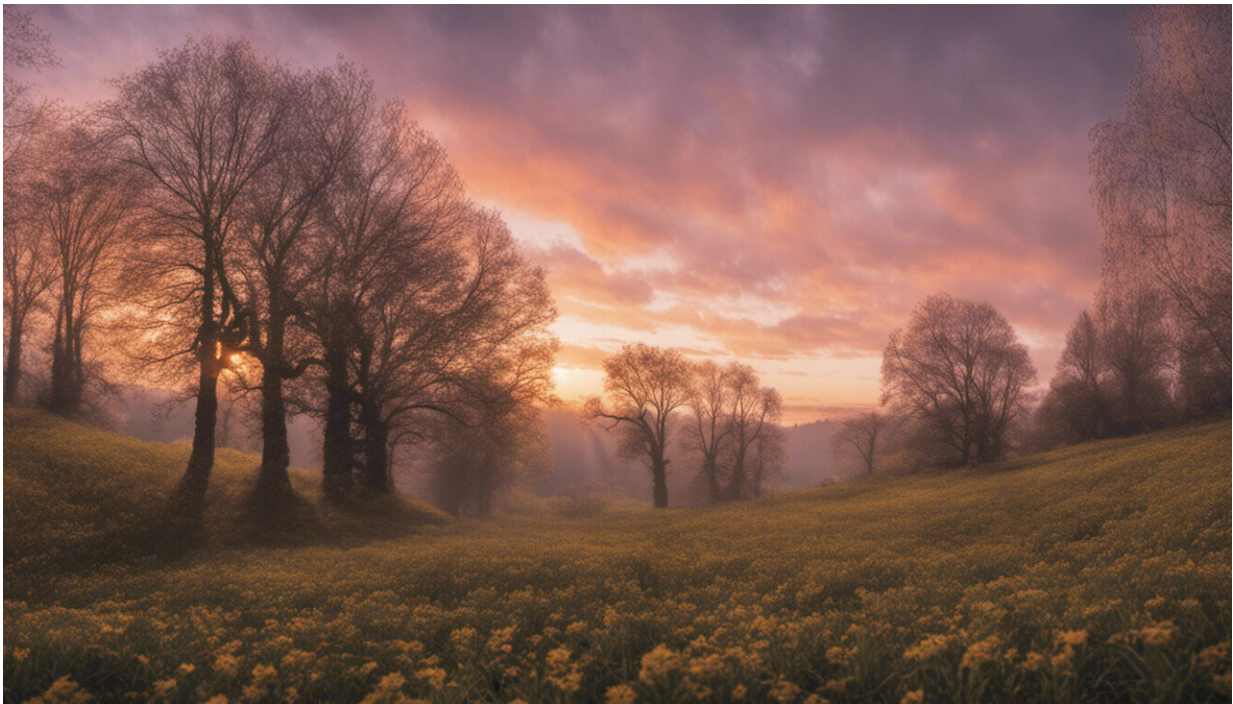


# Probing Question: Are baby boomers keeping romance alive?

February 12 2015, by Melissa Beattie-Moss

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

It may be hard to believe, but the "born to be wild" baby boomers once known for free love and sexual liberation are now senior citizens, or soon will be. These days, most baby boomers are more concerned with health and retirement finances than with social revolution. But when it comes to sex and romance, do they still light each other's fires—or have

they become more mild than wild?

"The sexual behavior of [senior citizens](#) has changed, and the way we think about that stage of life has changed too," says Beth Montemurro, associate professor of sociology at Penn State Abington. "Older [men and women](#) have probably always been far more sexually active than media lead us to believe, but today there are new images of sexy and libidinous older people—and recent research corroborates the notion that many people do stay interested in sex throughout their lives."

According to Montemurro, a recent AARP study found that among couples 50 years old or older, 31 percent have sex several times a week, 28 percent have sex a couple of times a month, and 8 percent have sex once a month.

Among married boomers, she says, "many are enjoying happy and satisfying sex lives. In fact, several studies have noted that having a consistent partner is a chief determinant of sexual activity in later life. So, it is not age that decreases a person's interest in sex, but not having a willing and able partner."

Stress can definitely put a damper on desire, she adds. Some seniors today find themselves stretched thin between supporting their own elderly parents and their 'failure to launch' adult children. Yet "once the children have launched, an empty nest can be seen as an opportunity to reconnect and heighten intimacy. Research does link sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction as well."

Of course, not all in this age group are married. Recent studies suggest that one in three [baby boomers](#) is unmarried, with the majority of those being divorced or never married. But that doesn't mean they don't have active social lives, says Montemurro. Some dating sites report that 50-plus is their fastest-growing demographic, and one survey suggests

that 87 percent of dating site members between 50 and 70 years of age say that physical attraction is a "must have" for a potential partner.

"Older people seem to gravitate toward online dating and make up a large percentage of their clientele," says Montemurro. "Boomers often needed to learn 'new-to-them' technologies to succeed in the work world and they bring those skills into their dating lives."

Within the boomer generation, men and women often encounter different expectations on the dating scene.

"We also know that older women are sometimes disappointed with the expectation that they date someone their own age, because some studies, including my own, suggest that older men do not have the same levels of sexual desire or stamina as older women," says Montemurro.

Consequently some [older women](#) prefer to remain single rather than face the current dating market. Others find romance with [younger men](#). The existence of terms like 'cougar' and films like Last Vegas and Hope Springs "acknowledge [older men](#) and women's sexual desire and expand our concept of sexuality through the life cycle," she says.

Unfortunately, says Montemurro, "there still are double standards for senior men and women. Although there are positives associated with the idea of cougars, the label does not celebrate women's sexuality. Women who date younger men are often laughed at, or seen as desperate for not being able to find a man their own age. Men who date younger women are more often celebrated for their 'acquisition.'"

Older men also benefit from pharmaceutical advances of recent years, says Montemurro.

"We can't ignore the impact of popular drugs like Viagra and Cialis, which have made it possible for people to have longer and more

fulfilling sex lives, while also changing expectations for the longevity of men's sexually active years."

For the generation that faced Vietnam and fought for civil rights and social change, leveling the dating playing field should be a struggle they're equipped to fight and win.

**More information:** "Sex at 50-Plus: What's Normal?":  
[www.aarp.org/home-family/sex-i ... x-older-couples.html](http://www.aarp.org/home-family/sex-i ... x-older-couples.html)

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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