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ABSTRACT 138

“Sexual Desire, Sexual Dysfunction and the Ageing Adult: Some Concerns About Pharmacological Interventions”

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It has become a commonplace that people in the West have a distinct bias against age and ageing. Baby boomers now spend a great deal of time, money, and energy on everything from cosmetic surgery and long hours at the gym to a whole host of anti-ageing cosmetics and prescriptions to help us feel and in a sense be younger. One facet of this process has been the advent of pharmaceutical interventions for the recently constructed “erectile dysfunction disorder” and the search for a ‘female Viagra’ for the even more recently constructed “female sexual dysfunction.”

This paper will explore whether this type of pharmaceutical intervention will actually improve the lives of an aging population. Employing a critical review of the literature on this subject, this paper will argue that while such pharmaceutical interventions will certainly help some people, the interventions also present risks. In particular, it will be argued that they may mislead us into thinking that sexual desire (and the concomitant idea of fulfilling sex) can be reduced to something purely physiological like an erection in males, or vaginal lubrication in females.

A further risk is that what is considered a ‘healthy sex life’ may come to be defined for everyone in terms of the sex lives of young people. This will have deleterious effects when it is applied to an older age group. Indeed, this will be yet another avenue of ageism in our culture