

Understanding Dating in Later Life: Insights from Older Adults

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Abstract

As the trend of gray divorce continues, more older adults (i.e., age 55+) are stepping into singlehood, and experiencing the landscape of dating in their later years. Existing research on older adults and romantic relationships often emphasizes the dynamics of long-term partnerships and sexuality in later life. However, much less attention has been given to the experiences of older adults who are actively seeking or forming new romantic connections. The current study aimed to examine online communities and social media content that focuses on the formation of new romantic relationships between older adults, using a netnographic approach (see Kozinets, 2002), existing online discussion content and from platforms where older adults actively engage. A thematic analysis guided by Naeem et al. (2023) was used to identify patterns across the data. Four major themes emerged: Dating advice, including individuals asking for and giving dating advice; Dating stories which include both positive and negative stories people share about their dating life; Male psychology which includes content for women about what men do and do not want; and Love after loss, which includes advice for those who have lost a spouse and those who want to an individual who has lost their spouse. These themes highlight the complexity of dating in later life. Findings suggest that dating in older adulthood can be difficult, but worth it. This study contributes to understanding how older adults navigate new dating experiences.