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2020 Virtual Meeting

This year’s Annual Meeting was our first virtual conference as well as our first meeting open to non-members. Though we wish we could have convened in person, we were thrilled to have over 200 registered attendees for our live programming in addition to over 50 asynchronous posters and data blitzes. Evaluations of the scientific merit presented across these platforms were comparable or superior to prior in-person meetings. We are so grateful for those who were willing to share their work in this experimental format!

Going forward, the IASR Executive will aim to continue incorporating the virtual elements valued by this year’s attendees into our in-person conferences.

Though we could not hold our meeting in Berlin as originally planned, we nonetheless thank our local hosts — Klaus M. Beier and Umut Özdemir — as well as outgoing President Brian Mustanski and outgoing Secretary-Treasurer Kelly Suschinsky for leading us through this challenging year.

We also thank Springer Publishing for sponsoring the 2020 IASR awards!
Rotation of the Guard

We would like to thank this past year’s President and our outgoing Student Representative for their service.

Dr. Brian Mustanski

Dr. Malachi Willis

We would also like to welcome our new President, President-Elect, and Secretary-Treasurer!

Dr. Shari Dworkin
Dr. Lori Brotto
Dr. David Moskowitz
Special Acknowledgement: Dr. Kelly Suschinsky

We would like to give a warm thank you to our outgoing Secretary-Treasurer, Dr. Kelly Suschinsky. Your tremendous contributions and service to IASR over the past 6 years cannot be overstated. Our meetings (in person and virtual), increasing inclusion and support of students, new Code of Conduct, and many more accomplishments would not have been possible without you!
Meet the Incoming Student Representative: Simon Dubé

I am a PhD Candidate in Psychology at Concordia University (Montreal, Qc, Ca) working under the co-supervision of Dr. Aaron Johnson (Concordia Vision Labs) and Dr. David Vachon (Research on Sex, Violence, and Personality Lab, McGill University) and specializing in sexuality and technology. My research and doctoral training are funded by the Fonds de Recherche du Québec - Santé.

It is truly an honor to be your new Junior Student Representative. I have been an IASR member since 2017. My first meeting was in Charleston (SC, USA), and right away, I felt welcomed and supported by the IASR community. It has been a great joy to meet such dedicated, brilliant, and humane individuals, which have helped me push my ideas further. I look forward to contributing to this great organization, which promotes the highest standards of research and scholarship in the field of sexuality. I am also eager to continue working with, and learning from, some of the best people and minds in the field.

On a personal note, my research investigates how people’s subjective, cognitive, and psychophysiological responses to sexual stimuli relate to their sexual preferences using self-report questionnaires, eye-tracking, electroencephalography, and genital thermography. I apply these methods to my primary research interest, which is the study human-machine erotic interaction — or Erobotics. Specifically, I explore the influence of new interactive, immersive, and connected (socio)sexual technologies, such as artificial erotic agents, or erobots (e.g., virtual partners and sex robots), on human sexuality. I also Co-Chair the International Congress on Love and Sex with Robots with Dr. David Levy.

My objectives for the upcoming years are to promote the interests of the IASR student membership within the organization and, importantly, make sure that we stay connected during these challenging times. The contribution of student members has always been vital to IASR, and I hope to serve you well in the next 2 years.

So please, do not hesitate to contact me if you ever need anything.
Best Student Manuscript Award: Amelia M. Stanton

I am a second-year postdoctoral fellow on a NIMH T32 fellowship in global psychiatry at Harvard Medical School/Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH). I completed my PhD in clinical psychology under the mentorship of Dr. Cindy Meston at The University of Texas at Austin. While I was in her lab, I was involved with several research projects that focused on defining, measuring, and improving women’s sexual arousal. For my dissertation, I developed and tested an app-based heart rate variability biofeedback intervention to improve subjective and physiological sexual arousal in women with sexual arousal problems. In the randomized-controlled trial (which won this award – thank you!), women randomized to the intervention had significantly greater subjective and physiological sexual arousal relative to women in the control group.

The overarching goal of my work is to develop interventions that improve women’s sexual health. In my post-doc, I am building on my experience with the heart rate variability intervention by targeting other mechanisms that might improve sexual health in vulnerable populations of women living in low- and middle-income countries. Specifically, I am assessing the factors that compromise sexual health in pregnant, South African women, a population at high risk of HIV acquisition. Ultimately, I hope to develop an intervention that supports HIV prevention and improves sexual well-being in these women.

When I’m not engaged in different research projects, I provide therapy to patients with co-occurring physical and mental health diagnoses through MGH’s Behavioral Medicine Program, and I co-lead a group program for women aging with HIV.

I love being a member of IASR, and I so appreciate the ways in which the organization has supported my work and the work of fellow colleagues/students through out the years.
I am a Psychology Ph.D. candidate at the University of Toronto working with Dr. Doug VanderLaan. I study gender and sexual development through a biopsychosocial lens, broadly aiming to carve sex-typed behavior at its joints.

My current research investigates sex differences in sexual experience and response, drawing from a dense nonhuman animal literature on sexual learning and my early Ph.D. work on social control of sexual maturation in caste-differentiated species. Briefly, it examines human experience of sexual reward, charting sexual liking, wanting, and learning from adolescence through adulthood, and asking whether an incentive motivation model of psychosexual differentiation is tenable.

At this year’s meeting, I presented research that borrowed behavioral and eye-tracking methods from the broader reward learning literature and measured specificity of interest in visual sexual rewards in heterosexual adults. Findings demonstrated that category-specificity of sexual arousal does not necessarily extend to sexual interest, and that sex differences in category-specificity may be exaggerated, applying to “liking” but not “wanting” aspects of the sexual response.

I am honored to have this work recognized by IASR and look forward to continuing to contribute toward uncovering sex differences and similarities in sexual response.
I am a master student in Clinical Psychology at the University of Potsdam (Germany), and I work as a student assistant at the Institute of Sexology and Sexual Medicine of the Charité Berlin. I currently work on a project on “The impact of implicit associations on sexual behavior in the general population” in the group of Prof. Dr. Beier under supervision of Dr. Till Amelung. Broadly, my research interests include understanding psychological processes involved in sexual offending (against children), as well as identifying health needs of non-offending pedophiles. In parallel, I am an actress, mostly for German television.

The poster that received the runner up award contains the results of my Psychology Bachelor’s thesis research. The study was conducted at the Berlin site of the “Prevention Network Dunkelfeld” – a treatment program for self-referring pedophiles outside the judicial system. We did an explorative qualitative study examining treatment needs of non-offending men with a pedophilic sexual interest. One of the key results was that fear to actually offend presented only one aspect of non-offending pedophiles needs. Other prominent areas comprised social impairments and comorbid psychopathologies.

Participants also voiced problems that appeared specific to dealing with the sexual preference. These included regulation of emotional needs towards children and adults, stigmatization of their preference and its consequences (e.g. negative evaluations and fear of the preference), as well as dealing with difficulties related to the process of integrating the preference into the person’s self-concept (e.g. self-depreciation, shame/guilt, rejection of the sexual preference as part of the self). Our results suggest a need for a complex therapy in this population due to the presence of population specific challenges and population unspecific impairments. Identity-supportive therapeutic approaches like ACT might be helpful in this population. A purely risk based therapeutic approach bears the risk of failing to meet their needs and of further stigmatization.

I am thankful of the interest and support of the IASR community for this research!
Best Senior Poster Award: Kyle Stephenson

I'm an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at Willamette University. My research spans a number of areas including the potential causes and consequences of sexual problems, the efficacy and accessibility of therapies for sexual dysfunction, different ways of defining and assessing positive and negative sexual experiences, and the association between sex and broader quality of life. The study that received the IASR Best Senior Poster Award summarized findings from the first two rounds of feasibility testing for a new online program to address female sexual dysfunction: eSense.

Scientists know that sexual problems like low desire and arousal are very common in women (and men). We also have effective treatments like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Mindfulness-Based Therapy, but their real-world impact is small because so few people have access to them. Moving treatment online has the potential to help many more people, especially those who have traditionally experienced barriers to utilizing gold-standard therapies, e.g., people of color, those that live in rural areas, etc. Having the program online also opens up many new possibilities for researchers to explore important questions like: Who benefits most from treatment and why? How can we effectively scale up helpful online interventions like this? What type of individualized support (if any) is needed for people to benefit from the program? I'm excited to be working with Dr. Lori Brotto at The University of British Columbia and other colleagues to continue exploring these questions. We are planning to begin a formal pilot trial of eSense (funded by a grant from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research) early next year.

I'd like to thank IASR for supporting this work, and the work of so many talented colleagues in the area of sexuality!
Honorable Mention for Senior Poster: Pablo Santos-Iglesias

My research focuses on the study of close relationships, and more specifically on the biological, psychological, and social factors that influence sexual health and wellbeing. Although some of my research uses samples from the general population, I mostly focus on the study of vulnerable groups, mainly people living with chronic illnesses (e.g., chronic pain, cancer) and older adults.

Results of my research demonstrate the need to examine psychological and relationship variables for understanding the sexual lives of people living with chronic illnesses. My study with older adults has been successful in challenging myths about sexuality in older life and shows not only that older adults are interested in sexual but also that they have satisfying sex lives. A significant part of my research is devoted to the field of applied psychometrics. I have developed and validated numerous sexuality-related measures using recent developments of both measurement and validity theory, as well as advanced statistical methods and analyses.

The study that received the Honorable Mention for Senior Poster summarizes the findings from qualitative interviews conducted with women living with fibromyalgia. This is one of the very few studies that has taken a broad view of the sexual lives of women living with FM and looked beyond their sexual function. The results show that their sexual lives depend not only on their pain and sexual difficulties, but on the quality of their relationship and also on their ability to change their overall and sexual lifestyle.

I am an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Cape Breton University (Sydney, NS) in Canada. I received my Ph.D. in 2012 from the University of Granada (Spain) under the supervision of Dr. Juan Carlos Sierra Freire. I moved to Canada in 2013 as the recipient of a Banting Postdoctoral Fellowship from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Since then, I have worked at two different universities (University of New Brunswick and University of Calgary) studying the sexual wellbeing of people living with chronic illnesses.
Student Research Development Award: Trinda Penniston

I am a second year Master’s student in Social-Personality Psychology at Queen’s University. I work with Dr. Meredith Chivers in the Sexuality and Gender Lab (SageLab) examining psychological and physiological sexual responses. My research interests include examining the stimulus cues that trigger sexual arousal and motivation and understanding the sociocultural factors that affect sexual response and functioning in queer, trans, Black, Indigenous and other people of colour (QTBIPOC). I also have a keen interest in research and treatments focused on sexual- and gender-based violence. For my master’s thesis, I will examine how identification with sexual stimuli, and racial attitudes and biases, influence Black and White women’s sexual responses when viewing race congruent and incongruent sexual stimuli (i.e., stimuli with actors of the same or a different race from the viewer). With this study, we are opening a new line of research in the SageLab examining racialized sexual attractions and responses, which will have important implications for understanding sexual responses and dysfunctions from an intersectional perspective. I am grateful for the opportunity to conduct research that aligns with my intersecting interests, and thankful to have my research supported by IASR.

Student Research Development Award: M. Claire Wilson

I am a dual Ph.D. candidate in Clinical Science and Neuroscience at Indiana University. Under the mentorship of Dr. Julia Heiman, my research focuses on sexual psychophysiology, neuroimaging, and reward processing. I am also receiving clinical training in cognitive behavioral therapy, which I hope to extend in the future to working with individuals affected by trauma and sexual dysfunction. My dissertation investigates how the broader literature on reinforcement and motivation may be brought to bear on outcomes following sexual victimization. The Student Research Development Award will enable me to conduct an online survey study of sexual function as well as non-sexual behaviors (e.g. binge eating/drinking) among women with/without histories of sexual assault. Using multiple mediation analyses, I hope to characterize the extent to which traumatic distress, personality traits linked to reward functioning, and emotion regulation contribute to these outcomes. I look forward to presenting the results at future IASR meetings!
Call for Newsletter Articles

Our newsletters often feature short, topical pieces written by IASR members. If you would be interested in contributing, please reach out to your student representatives — Claire Wilson and Simon Dubé — with a brief description or tentative title of what you’d like to write. Most contributions in the past have been between 600-1000 words on a topic related to sexual science and professional development. We also welcome informed perspectives outside these areas that may be of interest to the Academy. In light of 2020’s unprecedented challenges on a global scale, we particularly welcome pieces from those with experiences or research relevant to this unique time. Email iasrstudentrep@gmail.com to pitch your idea.

Stay tuned for plans regarding the 2021 Annual Meeting, whether in Reykjavik, Iceland or virtual!

As safety remains a high priority amid the COVID-19 pandemic, plans for the 47th Annual Meeting of the Academy are still under consideration. If vaccines become available and health risks are deemed appropriately low, our incoming President Shari Dworkin has proposed an in-person meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland. However, if significant progress toward mitigating health risks has not been made by mid-winter, we will begin planning for another virtual meeting instead. In either case, the IASR Executive will reach out to members for input on desired events, formats, and topics.

We hope to see you there!

Reach out to Claire Wilson and Simon Dubé at iasrstudentrep@gmail.com if you have any ideas about how they can best serve you as your student representatives.