The results are in, but we’ve only just begun

Since the last edition of the OASIS newsletter, we’ve been busy. In this edition, we’ll be discussing the results of study one and what they mean, talking about our next study and where we go from here, and briefly mentioning the recent media interest in the OASIS projects.

First and foremost, we’d like to thank everyone who has participated in any way, shape, or form in the OASIS, and welcome any newcomers to our little research family. You are the reason that this research is even possible, and your lives, your thoughts, and your experiences are what make this research robust and meaningful.

If you have any comments or feedback on any of our articles, please feel free to drop me a line using the contact details on page 4 of the newsletter.

Thanks once again, and a very happy holidays to everyone!
OASIS in the media

Recently, the OASIS has obtained some great press, and we’d like to share some of it with you! We’ve even included some links to articles and radio segments for you to connect to, if you want to know more.

Thanks to our press release in November, we were able to:

- Talk to reporters for The Age and The Huffington Post about the research we’re doing and the results
- Return to several ABC Radio programs to talk about the results of our research
- Join new radio hosts to talk about the OASIS for the first time
- Attract more people to join the OASIS family and help us make sure that our research includes as many different experiences as possible

For anyone who would like to access the articles in The Age or The Huffington post, please click on the links provided below:

- The Age
- Huffington Post

For anyone who would like to listen to the interview live on ABC RN Afternoons With Michael Mackenzie, please click on the following link:

- ABC Radio National

Other media in November included interviews with:

- ABC Radio Canberra
- ABC Radio Adelaide
- Radio 6PR
- The Ageing Agenda

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For more about the OASIS projects, recordings of radio interviews, and previous editions of the OASIS Newsletter, go to:

www.iha.acu.edu.au

A brief history of the OASIS

The Older Adult Sexuality and Intimacy Study (or “The OASIS”) is a series of three projects that are part of a PhD for Ashley Macleod. These projects examine sexuality as it transitions from mid-life into later-life and will feed into the development of a much needed definition for later-life sexuality as well as a measurement scale that will be designed with a positive focus on the sexuality of adults aged 45 and above.

In part one, adults aged between 51 and 89 responded to a survey asking them to help us better understand what sexuality and intimacy meant to people in mid and later life, with the goal to being able to paint a more accurate picture of sexuality beyond the reproductive years. This study has now been completed (results on page 3).

With the information gathered in part one of the study, the OASIS team will be able to use this information to develop a measurement scale that looks at sexuality after age 45. The three parts of the OASIS will combine to tell us what sexuality in mid and later life means for people once the pressure is off to have babies, how we transition through sexuality at mid-life into later life, or how to measure sexuality through mid-life and beyond.

Parts two and three focus on developing the measurement scale, and teasing apart the differences in sexuality and intimacy for people in mid and later life.
Constructing a map of sexuality beyond the reproductive years: the results of study 1

In the last issue, we talked briefly about how we planned to analyse the results from study one. Before we get into the results of the study, let’s review what we actually did.

In the first phase of study one, we asked adults aged 45 and above to answer questions about sexuality and intimacy in as much or as little detail as they liked. In the second phase, we used the results of phase one to create a series of statements, and then asked people to group these statements together in ways they felt made sense, and to rank the importance of each statement.

The analysis took the data from phase two and used statistical techniques (multidimensional scaling and hierarchical cluster analysis) to create a ‘map’ of what sexuality and intimacy looks like for people in mid and later life (you can see what the map looks like in the picture below).

Eight major themes emerged from the research. The most important themes encompassed things such as partner compatibility, intimacy and pleasure, and factors that influence the experience of desire or the way people express themselves sexually.

Although people still considered sexual expression and sexual urges to be important, they were not the focus for many people over 45. Affectionate and intimate behaviours, trust, respect and affectionate behaviours were more important aspects of sexuality than intercourse for most people.

People did discuss barriers to sexual expression and intimacy, but many felt that these were not something they focused on within their own lives. This is in line with the data that show that participants place a greater importance on intimacy and affectionate behaviours such as touching, hugging, kissing, etc., rather than intercourse.

This new information will help us shift the focus onto aspects of sexuality and intimacy that adults in mid and later life consider to be important.

While most measures of sexuality currently focus on the frequency of intercourse, this research shows that they don’t adequately measure what is important to people beyond the reproductive years, and that we need to approach this topic in a new way that takes into account the experiences of people over 45.

These results help us to challenge the existing stereotype of the ‘asexual older person’ and the idea that intercourse is necessary to be considered sexually active. They also make it clear that researchers and health practitioners need to focus on a greater variety of ways we can improve the experience and expressions of sexuality and intimacy for adults in mid and later life beyond medical interventions like Viagra that focus on prolonging or enhancing intercourse. But to do this we need better information.

Our work isn’t done yet. We still have to develop a way to tap into these areas of sexuality and measure them. We also still need to tease apart whether there are differences between sexuality in mid and later life, and if so, what those differences may be. And that is exactly what we hope to do with studies two and three of the OASIS.
The next step for the OASIS

What we’re doing right now...

As you read this, the OASIS team is interviewing a random selection of 20 participants with the goal of developing questionnaire items for study two.

Each questionnaire item was developed directly from the statements in study one, to ensure that we don’t miss anything and that we’re capturing all the information that participants provided us with in study one. But to ensure that we’ve done this as well as possible, we are working directly with the experts in this field (heterosexual men and women aged 45 and above) to make sure we get each item worded exactly right.

Once we’ve gathered all this information, the items will be edited to make them easier to understand and simple to answer, and then study two will go live in January 2017!

What’s happening next?

Study two of the OASIS is recruiting participants as we speak, prior to the study going live in January 2017. The aim of study two is to develop a measurement scale that taps into all the different ideas and concepts that were identified in study one.

We’ll be asking people to complete our new survey online or via post (whichever you prefer), and then use statistical techniques to identify the best items for us to use in our final version of the questionnaire, and to work out if we should be splitting the questionnaire into two separate measurement scales: one for mid life, and one for later life.

If you haven’t already registered your interest in the next part of the OASIS, please go to www.acu.edu.au/oasis and register for study 2.

WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

If you’re interested in participating in the next phase of research, or know someone else that’s interested, go to: www.acu.edu.au/oasis to register your interest.

Or you can contact the OASIS team directly by email or phone:
Email: Ashley.Macleod@acu.edu.au
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