Welcome to the first issue!

This newsletter has been created to provide you with the latest information on the Older Adult Sexuality and Intimacy Study. In the first edition, you’ll find information about the OASIS projects, background information on the study of later-life sexuality in the last century, and information about the researchers, research institute and university.

Every three months, a new edition of the OASIS newsletter will be released. In each new issue, you’ll learn more about how the OASIS projects are going, the results that are being found, what the key researchers have been up to, what’s coming up, and much more.

The newsletter is a great way of staying connected with the OASIS project, and suggestions are welcome from readers as to how we can improve the newsletter.

Happy reading!
Introducing the OASIS projects

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 will feed into the development of a much needed definition for later-life sexuality and a measurement scale that will be designed with a positive focus on the sexuality of adults aged 50 and above.

This is important, because right now there is no consistent definition on what later-life sexuality is, or how to measure it. Current measures used by researchers, clinicians, medical professionals and more are based either on measures of sexuality that were designed for younger populations and that emphasise erection quality and frequency of intercourse, or are designed to measure sexual dysfunction. There is currently nothing that looks at the sexuality of older adults who enjoy a healthy sex life.

The OASIS study is different because it will focus on what adults aged 50 and above have to say about sexuality and what’s important to them. It’s important because very little research looks at later-life sexuality from a positive perspective, and it’s needed because sexuality is an important part of well-being, regardless of age.

The OASIS also gives older people a chance to have their voices heard in relation to sexuality and intimacy in a world that is most often focused on the sexuality of the young, and on reproduction and fertility.

WANT TO PARTICIPATE?

Go to: iha.acu.edu.au/hdr-study/student-projects/
Or contact Ashley Macleod directly:
Email: Ashley.Macleod@acu.edu.au
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Introducing the Institute for Health and Ageing (IHA)

The Institute for Health and Ageing (IHA) is a multidisciplinary, Melbourne-based research institute focusing on both the positive and problematic aspects of ageing. IHA has gathered a highly talented and internationally recognised research team to approach issues of ageing through a positive, empowering lens in settings spanning community, residential and acute care.

IHA employs a multidisciplinary approach to find new and innovative ways of enhancing the lives of older people and their carers, families and communities across a range of physical, social, economic and cultural settings.

The mission of the Institute is shaped by our research, community engagement and partnerships and reflects the mission, values and principles of Australian Catholic University – justice, equity and a commitment to serving the common good. Our Mission is deeply concerned with maximising the potential of people as they age.

www.iha.acu.edu.au
A brief history of later-life sexuality research

Sexuality has been a focus of research interest for over a hundred years and has been highlighted as an important part of the human experience. Since the first of the Kinsey studies on human sexuality in the late 1940s, sexuality research has consistently demonstrated that sexual interest and activity is sustained well into old age. However, only a fraction of the research has explored the sexuality in the latter years of life. In spite of the myth that older adults are mostly asexual, the concept of later-life sexuality is not new, and researchers have been trying to understand sexuality and ageing ever since the 1960s.

Most of the early research on sexuality and ageing looked at the sexual behaviours and biology of older adults, mostly ignoring the wider concept of sexuality. When researchers did discuss sexuality more generally, many referred to sexuality as the domain of the young, and emphasised that this was a major barrier to the study of sexuality in older adults.

Towards the end of the 20th century, research expanded to include attitudes towards the sexual expression of older adults, and the biological aspects of sexuality and ageing. Consistently, the research showed that sexual expression is possible for older adults, and sustained sexual activity into old age is more likely for those who had active sex lives when earlier in life.

By the late 1980s and into the 1990s, there was a strong biomedical focus that emphasised the biological aspects of ageing. Researchers were still studying sexual behaviours and interests, but also expanded their focus to include the reasons behind sexual decline to find that these reasons are varied and many older adults remain sexually active well into later life.

Since the turn of the century there has been a rapid increase in research interest on later-life sexuality. While the research continued to expand, a key message emerged. Despite clear evidence that adults continue to desire and pursue sexual expression well into later life and that it is an important part of well-being at any age, both society in general and health professionals have maintained the myth of the asexual older person.

Ageist attitudes negatively impact older adults not only in their personal lives, but also in relation to their health needs. There is a resounding call in the research for health practitioners to be accepting of and to incorporate later-life sexuality into the regular health care of older adults, yet little has been done in this area.

The myth of the asexual older adult is widespread in our society, where a premium is placed on youth, despite our knowledge that sexuality is important to well-being. But research is moving in the right direction, and it’s gaining momentum.
OASIS Researcher Profiles

Professor Marita McCabe

Professor Marita McCabe is the director of the Institute for Health and Ageing and a highly regarded academic who conducts theoretical and applied research in the areas of body image disorders, aging, depression, sexual health and the mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous people across the lifespan. She has published more than 400 refereed articles in these areas.

In the last 10 years she has obtained more than $12 million in Category One research funding. She is a Fellow of the Australian Psychological Society (APS) and a member of the Clinical, Health and Forensics Colleges of the APS.

Professor McCabe joined ACU from Deakin University, where she held the position of Alfred Deakin Professor in the School of Psychology. She was also the Director of the Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing Research at Deakin.

Ashley Macleod

Ashley Macleod is currently pursuing her PhD in the field of sexuality and ageing and is working on the re-conceptualisation of the later-life sexuality construct and the development of a sexuality measurement scale that caters specifically for populations aged 50 and above.

Ashley completed her Honours in Psychology at Deakin University studying the effect of breast size and hair colour on the perception of sexual intent. She is also employed as a Research Assistant at the Institute for Health and Ageing, working on projects related to family carer wellbeing, men’s health in midlife, and the fall characteristics of older women.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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