

INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY OF SEX RESEARCH

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Sex and love in the time of Trump & Cholera

James G. Pfaus, Ph.D.

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Sex research has always been subversive. From the mass destruction of the archives of Hirschfeld's Institut für Sexualwissenschaft by the Nazis in the 1930s to the public burnings of Kinsey's books in the 1950s to the conservative backlash against sex education and granting agencies that fear public outcry over "the S word" used in a grant title, our profession faces an uphill battle for its very existence. Yet sex sits on top of the hierarchy of natural rewards, and as sex researchers we are often sought after at parties or by the media to answer questions about love, addiction, dysfunction, how to obtain the most mind-blowing orgasms, what is gender, what is desire, why are people gay, what happens in the brain when you get aroused, etc.



Jim Pfaus
Current IASR President

People are fascinated by what we do even if they keep their distance and their own desires under wraps. And we have a duty to humanity and the public that funds us to keep our science alive and well and moving ever forward.

Which brings us to the current situation in the U.S. since Donald J. Trump assumed the office of President. We are scheduled to have our 2017 meeting in Charleston, SC, in July, with a scientific program that will fascinate and illuminate in the best traditions of the Academy. The recent Executive Order barring citizens from several Middle Eastern and African countries to enter the U.S., and the subsequent mayhem at airports and border crossings, shone a light on a newly pumped-up U.S. Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) turning people back based on religion, ransacking their belongings, and gathering information from – and in some cases confiscating -- cell phones and computers.



Despite the vigor, this is nothing new. Courts in the U.S. have for many years given CBP agents the right to violate the Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and search, without probable cause, literally anything citizens and non-citizens bring into the country. This includes electronic or digital storage devices like laptops, tablets, discs, digital cameras, cell phones, and hard drives. CBP agents have the right to seize them for any reason and hold them for up to a year, and you have absolutely no recourse. Truth be known, the courts in Canada have upheld the right of Canadian Border Services agents to do *exactly* the same thing.

Trump's Executive Orders are being protested across the country in what amounts to the most galvanized push-back since the civil rights and antiwar protests of the 1960s. Some protests have been respected whereas others have been responded to with an increasingly heavy hand. Of course, this raises concerns about safety, both at the meeting and for those who might be crossing the border to get there. In the current climate of trumped-up fear (and loathing), it is easy for a sex researcher to envision draconian interactions at the border. Imagine being subjected to questions about porn use, or having one's poster or Powerpoint presentation scrutinized for sex-related content. Or worse – computers and posters confiscated and individuals turned away or even arrested if a border guard deems the content inappropriate or illegal. Be sure to back everything up and maybe keep a copy of your poster or presentation at home so someone can send it to you via the internet. There are always ways to get around Big Brother.

Attending a sex conference in the groin of the deep south's Bible Belt is a pretty subversive act. Rather than giving into fear, I respectfully suggest as your President that we be as "out" as we can (I wish we had IASR t-shirts!) and support our meeting in every possible way. We have garnered a charming and fully restored Antebellum meeting hall in Charleston, which is one of the most beautiful small cities in the U.S. And as with other small U.S. cities that have hosted Academy meetings (e.g., Bloomington, IN), Charleston has a progressive underbelly that no doubt many of our members will want to frolic in. The city is steeped in history. It is an amazing foodie town. It has many faces. Watch the descendants of slaves and slaveholders laughing together in Waterfront Park. Watch as immigrants from many countries visit Fort Sumter. Stroll down the streets of the French Quarter and old Charlestowne. See the diversity that the Old South continues to give way to. Let's show our solidarity with that *other* America. Let's show the world that we are here without fear.

Sex in the Surreal World

Silvain Dang, University of British Columbia
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Merriam-Webster declared "surreal" as 2016's Word of the Year. Queries for "surreal" spiked following events like terrorist attacks in Brussels and Nice, the attempted coup in Turkey, and the US elections, as people sought the right term to voice an overwhelming confluence of unfamiliar thoughts and emotions. Its definition is "marked by the intense reality of a dream", one reminiscent of dissociation and derealisation, that the world has changed.

These changes, highlighted by screaming pain and outrage, shifting evaluations of societal institutions, and disintegration of “truth,” suggest the social ecology where sex researchers have previously thrived is in upheaval. The events that have shaped the surreal year are political, not scientific. For researchers it may be tempting to see them as distractions—we are scholars, not politicians. But what do we do when science and sexuality become partisan issues, when others politicize data and theories, love and desire, bodies and identities, truth and meaning? What do we do when attacks come against the rights and wellbeing of our participants, our patients, and our students? What do we do when history repeats and sex becomes distorted into “perversion” to justify violence?

I don’t know the answers, since I’m a naïve student who has much to learn compared to many here. I sense, though, that what happens out there in the surreal world matters to us, and what we do here will matter to the world. In the following I highlight why I think so, and perhaps input from those more knowledgeable (or just as naïve) can help us find ways forward.

Why the surreal world matters to us

Many IASR members dedicate much time and energy to advocating for less oppressive and more inclusive policies and behaviours. Although protecting people of all sexes, genders, orientations, or cultures should not be a divisive issue, this remains challenging in many contexts. Violence, discrimination, and misinformation continue to be perpetuated towards vulnerable populations throughout the world. Events of the past year are poignant reminders of our fragile social bubbles and the constant action needed in protecting human sexual rights.

The increasing hostility of political discourse in the US and elsewhere is not conducive to spreading greater understanding of sexual health and diversity. For instance, liberal sexual health professionals may find themselves on opposing sides of an ideological conflict against conservative communities where their services may be most necessary. The effective dissemination of scientific and services, particularly in controversial topics like sexuality, become more difficult when segments of society view each other with hostility.

The rise of “post-truth” makes arguing on behalf of science and objective reality a politicized issued, undermining the foundations of our empirical work. For example, attacks against climatology have created public distrust in the field despite overwhelming evidence for anthropogenic climate change. Closer to home, we’ve seen how ideology can trump evidence in the treatment of transgender children. Facts are vulnerable in the face of ideologies, and from history we see how many sexuality topics are tempting targets to become the next “inconvenient truth” for de-legitimization.

Why we matter to the surreal world

The past year shows that we live in a divided and conflicted world. However, the importance of sexuality is seen through all societies. Our research can highlight the universal motivations and instincts of all people when we examine the shared evolutionary forces that shaped us across millennia of sexual selection. Meanwhile, our work to understand the personal sexual experiences of individuals from diverse backgrounds unravels the causes of both uniqueness and barriers among people and groups. Thus, a full appreciation of sexuality offers reflections upon our shared humanity.

Sex research is a living example of the intertwined nature of diversity and empiricism. IASR embraces research from sciences, humanities, health, policy, media, advocacy, and many more. We constantly strive to better include voices from around the world and all walks of life. We integrate multifarious perspectives and follow the evidence, even when they conflict with our preconceived notions. This has allowed us to build a more nuanced, applicable, and confident understandings of sexuality. These qualities will be powerful reminders when in times when fear pushes us towards ideological thinking and rigid authoritarianism.

Sex, despite our attempts to normalize it, remains a taboo that transgresses, inflames, and sells. Great sex communicators seem to agree that even in the face of oppression people want to talk about sexuality. Sexual freedom's threat for social conservatism, but allure for individual passions, gives us a powerful implements in dictating cultural discourses. Through our work in advocating for sexual issues, sex researchers know too the methodology for achieving change despite facing hatred and disgust. This institutional knowledge will be an indispensable tool in furthering our cause.

Conclusions

Several years ago at a conference, a senior sex researcher lamented how she no longer sees in the new generation a passion for fighting on the front lines to advocate sexual rights. At the time I did not give her much thought. Being from a liberal city in a liberal country where I did not face frequent discrimination, I felt we had won those battles and our priorities had changed. Instead I was focused on my publications, my dissertation, and my funding. The events of 2016 showed me that my world was absolutely a bubble, one that is not representative nor immune from bursting.

Many in IASR knew this all along, and work above and beyond to advance the cause of positive, inclusive, and just sexuality. I didn't though, and now I find myself lost. How do I contribute to threading our knowledge and values through the entanglement of public opinion and policy to protect and advance the progress we have made? It is not something that my training explicitly prepares me for. So for those who did know better, who do know how to create and preserve progress, to reach reluctant and divided people, and to turn data into action – I need you, and we need you, more than ever in guiding sex research through the surreal world.



IASR WebMaster

Claire Wilson

Last fall, Claire Wilson came on board as the new IASR WebMaster, working to improve both the public website and members-only pages. She has always had an interest in web design and recently began managing lab and course sites at her university. As WebMaster for IASR, Claire has been working to streamline site organization to make things easier to find, add capabilities like PDF viewing and centralized submission forms, and keep content current and engaging. In the near future, she will be updating the member directory. If you ever have suggestions for the site, shoot her an email at iasrwebmaster@gmail.com.

Claire is a second-year graduate student at Indiana University under the mentorship of Dr. Julia Heiman. She is beginning a new direction in her research with a study on the neurodevelopment of reward processing, inhibitory control, and risk behaviors in late adolescence/young adulthood.

New Student Members

Emily Harris

I am a PhD student at the University of Queensland, Australia. I have been deeply fascinated by social psychology since my first lecture as an undergraduate. My focus on sex research began in the second year of my degree when I conducted a study investigating the sexual double standard: "Studs and Sluts: Do men or women work to suppress female sexuality?" Since then, under the expert supervision of Professor Matthew Hornsey and Dr. Fiona Barlow, I have conducted studies on: depictions of sexual submission and dominance in erotica; benevolent sexism and women's orgasm frequency; and daily fluctuations in sexual desire as a function of psychological factors.



Recent Publications:

Harris, E. A., Hornsey, M., & Barlow, F. K. (2016). On the link between benevolent sexism and orgasm frequency in heterosexual women. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 45, 1923-31. doi: [10.1007/s10508-016-0780-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-016-0780-9).

Harris, E. A., Thai, M., & Barlow, F. K. (2016). Fifty shades flipped: Effects of reading erotica depicting a sexually dominant woman compared to a sexually dominant man. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 1-12. doi:[10.1080/00224499.2015.1131227](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2015.1131227)

Tiffany Marcantonio

I am a first-year doctoral student at the University of Arkansas (UArk) studying Communication Health Promotion. Before attending the UArk, I received a BA in psychology and an MA in Clinical and Mental Health Counseling from Rowan University. My research interests include understanding factors that contribute, increase, and can prevent engagement in sexual aggression and risky sexual activity. I'm primarily interested in the relationship between the two and then factors that increase risk for engagement in both behaviors, such as alcohol use, alcohol expectancies, previous engagement in the behavior or personality traits such as rape myth acceptance of sexism. I'm also interested in how college students refuse sexual activity and how this differs from differs from recommendations given in sexual assault prevention programs. After I finish my Ph.D., I intend to pursue a career in academia where I could design and implement prevention and intervention around these risk behaviors, with populations such as college students and teenagers.



Malachi Willis

Malachi Willis is a doctoral student and Distinguished Academy Fellow in the Community Health Promotion program at the University of Arkansas. He works with Dr. Kristen Jozkowski in the Sexuality Education and Consent Studies lab. Malachi has earned MA degrees in Forensic Psychology from Marymount University and Experimental Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He broadly researches the sexuality of college students (e.g., sexual activity, sexual pleasure, and sexual education). Specifically, Malachi is interested in the role consent communication plays in each of these domains.



Daisy Mechelmans

I first became interested in human sexuality and the biopsychological mechanisms of sexual behaviour as an undergraduate and Master's student in Psychology, at the University of Leuven, when I took some of the classes given by faculty of the Institute for Family and Sexuality Studies (IFSS). A three-year detour in the UK, where I studied behavioural and neural correlates of impulsivity in disorders of impulsivity and compulsivity, sparked a fascination for human brain imaging. I earned my second Master's degree at the University of Cambridge before returning to Leuven to join the IFSS in the summer of 2016. My dissertation project focuses on the role of both individual- and dyad-based sexual measurements in response to sexual stimuli (using sexual psychophysiology and human brain imaging (MRI) methods) on sexual couple processes, and their association with sexual trait characteristics such as the propensity for sexual excitation and sexual inhibition. The project is supervised by Dr. Erick Janssen (IFSS and Kinsey Institute) with the support of Dr. Lukas Van Oudenhove (Clinical and Experimental Medicine, University of Leuven)



Randal Brown

Randal Brown is a PhD candidate in interdisciplinary social psychology at the University of Nevada, Reno. He is very excited to become a member of IASR! His research interests focus on sexual communication, specifically what leads sexual partners to talk about or avoid talking about sexual topics with one another. Accordingly, his dissertation examines how a person's sexual self-concept leads a person to engage in or avoid sexual communication.



Rick Roels

Having received my medical degree (MD) at KU Leuven in 2014, I developed a strong interest in human sexuality during my psychiatry residency at the University Hospital of Leuven, Belgium. My interests converge around the interaction between medical science, human sexuality, and psychotherapeutic perspectives. Combining a medical background and experience in outpatient clinic with an ongoing education and training in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy and Human Sexuality (IFSW Master Program), I am expanding my area of interest to include both individual psychotherapy and gender and sexuality studies. I joined the Institute for Family and Sexuality Studies (IFSS), Department of Neurosciences, KU Leuven, in 2016. My dissertation research is funded by the Flanders (FWO) and focuses on the associations among dyadic/relationship processes, sexuality, and health. The goal of this project is to improve our understanding of underlying mechanisms and will assess the role of individual- (attachment style) and dyad-based (sexual similarity) variables, and examine their association with hormonal and physiological factors, including oxytocin (relevant to prosocial and affiliative behaviors) and heart rate variability (an index of self-regulatory capacity). The project is supervised by Prof. Dr. Erick Janssen, Professor at the IFSS and Senior Research Fellow at the Kinsey Institute, Indiana University, USA.

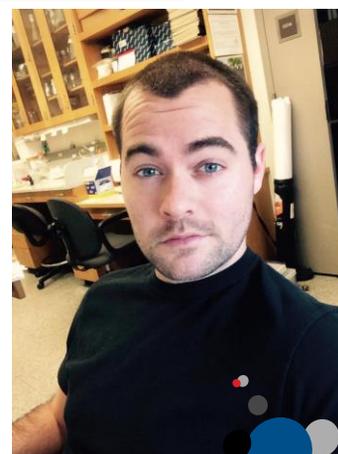
Student News!

Matt Bramble

Last year's *IASR Best Student Manuscript* award winning paper, written by lead author Matt Bramble, is now available [online](#):

[Sex-Specific Effects of Testosterone on the Sexually Dimorphic Transcriptome and Epigenome of Embryonic Neural Stem/Progenitor Cells](#)

Matt also recently published a review paper in the *Journal of Neuroscience*: [Effects of chromosomal sex and hormonal influences on shaping sex differences in brain and behavior: Lessons from cases of disorders of sex development](#)





Shayna Skakoon-Sparling has won another Mitacs grant to support her work with the Ontario HIV Treatment Network. This grant has supported phase 1 of a project aimed at better understanding how outreach workers engage in HIV risk communication, to help identify strengths and areas that could be improved. In addition, Shayna successfully defended her Doctoral Dissertation (titled "Highway to the Sexual Risk-Taking Danger Zone: The Effects of Motivational Factors on Sexual Health Decision-Making") on December 16th, 2016. Congratulations Shayna!

See Shayna's recent [publication](#) in the *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, The impact of sexual arousal on elements of sexual decision making: sexual self-restraint, motivational state, and self-control.

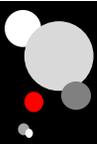
Adam Safron and Victoria Klimaj organized and edited a [special issue](#) of Socioaffective Neuroscience and Psychology entitled "Orgasm: Neurophysiological, Psychological, and Evolutionary Perspectives Featured within the issue were articles by IASR members and presenters Robert King, Osmo Kontula, Mayte Parada, and Adam Safron, as well as by President James Pfaus. The issue

explored theoretical models for understanding orgasm, presented new data, provided in-depth reviews of controversies, and proposed novel methods for testing hypotheses on orgasm. Adam Safron published a [paper](#) entitled "What is orgasm? A model of sexual trance and climax via rhythmic entrainment" in this special issue, and was interviewed about the paper on the Nov. 5th segment of CBC radio's [Quirk and Quarks](#).



Request for Information

We are always looking for contributions to the student newsletter—whether they be photographic, textual, or purely conceptual. Two great ways to contribute are to propose an idea for the front-page article or to submit a student bio or exciting news about recent publications. This is a newsletter for the students, so we are always happy to hear what you would like to see featured on the front page, and a student bio can be a great way to introduce yourself to other members of the IASR community. If you would like to contribute to upcoming newsletters, please email your student representatives (Katy Renfro and Scott Semenyina) at iasrstudentrep@gmail.com



IASR 43rd Annual Meeting

Charleston, South Carolina
July 23 – 26, 2017



Upcoming Deadlines

Brief Communications Abstracts

March 5, 2017

Data Blitz Abstracts

March 5, 2017

Submissions for the IASR SRDA

May 1, 2017

Poster Presentation Abstracts

April 9, 2017

Student Pre-Conference Workshop: Using Technology in Research

Organized by Dr. Sandra Byers, and featuring talks by:



Justin Lehmilller



Brian Mustanski