

## **SSTAR Executive Council**

### **President**

Morag Yule, PhD

### **President-Elect**

Michael A. Vigorito, LMFT, CGP, CST-S

### **Past President**

Elizabeth A. Grill, PsyD

### **Treasurer**

Beáta Böthe, PhD

### **Co-Continuing Education Chair**

David Lafortune-Sgambato

### **Co-Continuing Education Chair**

Caroline Maykut, PhD, C.Psych

### **Communication Chair**

Elisabeth Gordon, MD

### **Co-Development Officer**

Carolin Klein, PhD

### **Co-Development Officer**

Jason Winters, PhD

### **Sr. Student/Early Career Professional Representative**

Grace Wang

### **Jr. Student/Early Career Professional Representative**

Sara Perelmuter

### **2025 Scientific Chair**

Uzma Rehman, PhD

# Annual Newsletter

## In This Edition

Message from the President

Celebrating 50 years of SSTAR

A Word from Your Clinical Instructors

A message from the Scientific Chair

Q&A With Dr. Perelman

Research and Education Spotlight

Meet the Student Reps!

Your 2025 Executive Council



## Message from the President

Dear SSTAR Members,

Since 2020, each message from the president has started with an acknowledgment of the challenges confronting our members and our organization. This past year has been no exception. From the devastating fires in Los Angeles and the ongoing violence in the Middle East to the uncertainty brought by the new U.S. administration, our community has had to navigate and adapt to significant challenges. I would like to express our deepest sympathies for the personal hardships many of our members continue to face.

SSTAR leadership remains steadfast in upholding our mission and values through these erratic times. As political tensions continue to rise in the U.S. and now between the U.S. and Canada—the two countries where most of our members reside—SSTAR continues to be dedicated to advancing clinical sexuality practice and research while fostering a supportive and inclusive professional community. We remain committed to respect and dignity for all members, ensuring open, thoughtful, and civil discourse, and embracing diversity within our organization.

In alignment with these values, SSTAR leadership has been actively working to enhance educational programs and member services, along with improving ways our community connects and supports one another.

We are thrilled to announce this year's 50th Anniversary Annual Meeting: Sexuality, Trauma, and Healing in Philadelphia, PA. Our Scientific Program Chair, Dr. Uzma Rehman, and Co-Chair, Dr. Marie-Pier Vaillancourt-Morel, have assembled an outstanding and thought-provoking lineup of speakers and research presentations. This year's program reflects valuable feedback from our members about relevant topics and leaning into difficult conversations.

The theme highlights the impact of violence on sexuality, with plenary sessions such as Sexual Violence and Well-Being in the Context of War by Dr. Ateret Gewirtz-Meydan, Cultural Betrayal, Sexual Abuse, and Black Women by Dr. Jennifer M. Gómez, and a panel discussion on reproductive trauma. Additionally, we are introducing an inaugural invited debate on differing conceptualizations of trauma, providing a space for respectful discourse on a controversial topic in the field of sexuality. We have also adjusted the proposal system to increase clinically focused presentations, balancing research and practice-oriented discussions.

The program also features special events celebrating the 50th anniversary of SSTAR's annual meeting. Thursday night's Welcome Reception will be a time to honor SSTAR's rich history and come together as a community. Following the reception, we invite you to a special 50th Anniversary event: a screening of Learning To Be Naked – Healing Through Burlesque, followed by a Q&A with Director Susan Wolf. On Friday night, this year's social event—organized by our local host, Dr. Thomas Wood—will offer another opportunity for social connection and entertainment in Philly.

The organizing committee has thoughtfully designed a program that balances the weight of the conference theme and current events with the importance of support, community, and fun.

Beyond the annual meeting, we are excited to share several important updates about SSTAR:

- New Professional Staff: We are pleased to announce that SSTAR has been able to put in place a new professional team! This transition marks an exciting new chapter for our organization, and we look forward to the opportunities ahead. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our previous management company for their invaluable support over the past 13 years, particularly during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. A special thank you to Deb Ryan, whose dedication and contributions have been invaluable to SSTAR throughout the years – we truly appreciate her support. Our transition to our staff is underway, and we expect to be fully under their management by March 1st. We are confident that this partnership will help us continue to grow and serve our community effectively.
- Strategic Planning: SSTAR leadership has engaged the consulting firm Thrive Impact to assist with our strategic planning process, which was delayed to address the changes in management. Their expertise will help guide the organization's future growth and sustainability.
- Website Updates: Our recently updated website has streamlined administrative tasks and now houses our community forums, which have replaced the STARGAZE listserv as the primary platform for member communications. Please reach out to [info@sstarnet.org](mailto:info@sstarnet.org) if you have any questions about navigating this new platform.

Finally, we extend our sincere thanks to everyone who attended last year's Fall Clinical Case Conference, as well as to the presenters and discussants who contributed to its success. Stay tuned for details about our next Clinical Case Conference in the coming months!

We appreciate your continued engagement and look forward to an exciting year ahead.

See you in Philadelphia!

**Morag Yule – SSTAR President**



This year marks an incredible milestone—SSTAR’s 50th anniversary! As we gather in Philadelphia for our annual meeting, we have planned a series of special events to celebrate five decades of history, community, research, growth, learning, resilience, strength, and friendship.

Our Thursday night Welcome Reception will be a time for the SSTAR community to come together, reconnect, and reflect on our shared journey. A special video presentation will highlight some of our cherished SSTAR leaders, sharing insights on SSTAR’s history and their vision for the future.

Following the reception, we invite you to an exclusive 50th Anniversary event—a screening of *Learning To Be Naked – Healing Through Burlesque*, directed by Susan Wolf, followed by a Q&A session with the director herself. This promises to be a thought-provoking and inspiring experience.

Additionally, we’re excited to present the Stars of SSTAR panel, where some of our most esteemed members will answer fun facts and questions during one of our luncheons.

### **A Heartfelt Thank You to Our Past Presidents**

As we celebrate SSTAR's 50th anniversary, we recognize that this milestone would not have been possible without the dedication, wisdom, and leadership of those who have shaped our organization over the years.

A special thank you to The Past President's 50th Committee, whose invaluable contributions and collaboration have been instrumental in planning this historic milestone celebration:

- ★ Sophie Bergeron, PhD
- ★ Kathryn Hall, PhD
- ★ Daniel Watter, EdD
- ★ Michael Perelman, PhD
- ★ Eli Coleman, PhD
- ★ Bonnie Saks, MD
- ★ Marta Meana, PhD
- ★ Blanche Freund, PhD, RN
- ★ William Maurice, MD
- ★ Richard A. Carroll, PhD
- ★ S. Michael Plaut, PhD
- ★ Stanley E. Althof, PhD
- ★ R. Taylor Segraves, MD, PhD
- ★ Stephen B. Levine, MD

Your dedication has helped honor SSTAR's legacy, navigate the present, and shape the future. We are deeply grateful for your time, energy, and passion in making this anniversary celebration so meaningful.

### **Looking Ahead Together**

As we celebrate SSTAR's past, we also acknowledge the challenges of the present and look ahead with vision and determination toward the future. We are thrilled to honor our collective journey and strengthen our commitment to one another and to advancing the field of sex therapy and research.

Thank you for being part of SSTAR's journey and for continuing to inspire and lead our community forward!

We can't wait to celebrate with you in Philadelphia and make this 50th anniversary a truly memorable event! See many of you there!

Liz Grill – Immediate Past President & Chair of SSTAR's 50th Anniversary Committee



## A Word From Your Clinical Chairs

Dear SSTAR membership:



We (Carolyn Klein and Karen Caffee) would like to start by expressing our appreciation and gratitude to Uzma Rehman as this year's Scientific Chair for inviting us to participate as the first two Clinical Chairs on the Scientific Committee for the SSTAR Annual Conference. The Conference has always presented such a unique and interesting opportunity for learning, and yet we were both so pleased to see a chance to help SSTAR consider the nuances between research and clinical perspectives as different. It has been a lovely experience to meet with Uzma and Marie-Pier Vaillancourt-Morel, as co-chair, to collaborate on the upcoming meeting.

## Message From The Scientific Chair

Dear SSTAR community:



I am thrilled to serve as the Scientific Chair for the 2025 SSTAR conference! My journey with SSTAR began many years ago as a graduate student, though I can't recall the exact year—ah, the joys of memory and aging! What I do remember is how energized and inspired I felt by the speakers, the innovative ideas, and the dynamic discussions between attendees and presenters. At the time, I wasn't conducting sexuality research, so I struggled to justify attending future conferences to myself—or to my advisor. In fact, the one I did attend was thanks to a bit of gate-crashing, aided by a dear friend (whose name will remain anonymous to protect the guilty!). Over time, as my research interests aligned with sexuality studies, I was finally able to attend SSTAR with both legitimacy and enthusiasm. Each experience has continued to spark my curiosity and challenge my perspectives, making it a truly invaluable space for growth and intellectual exchange.

When I was asked to serve as Scientific Chair, I'll admit the first and immediate reaction was a rush of imposter-like feeling – “Who, me? Really? Are you sure?” But alongside those feelings, I was genuinely thrilled by the opportunity to help shape the 2025 conference. It has been a joy to collaborate with the incredible Marie-Pier Vaillancourt-Morel (Scientific Co-Chair) and the dedicated members of the Scientific Program Committee, Carolyn Klein and Karen Caffee. Together, we've worked hard—and had a lot of fun—crafting a program that we hope will resonate deeply with SSTAR members.

One central question that guided our planning was how to approach the concept of trauma. The term has become an umbrella for a wide range of experiences, and we felt it was crucial to critically explore its meanings and implications. We agreed that this discussion needed to be an important part of the conference program, as a deeper, more nuanced exploration of what trauma encompasses—and the differing perspectives on how it is defined—would benefit us all. This led us to include a debate on trauma in our program, with Tom Murray and Karen Caffee presenting two different perspectives on the term.

Additional conference highlights include Ateret Gewirtz-Meydan speaking on sexual violence in the context of war, Jennifer Gómez discussing sexual abuse of Black women, and Midori introducing the intersection of kink and trauma. Rose Hartzell-Cushanick will delve into integrating trauma and medical perspectives in treating sexual dysfunction, while Anne Katz will present a case study titled “Saving My Life or Saving My Sex Life.” Additionally, a panel on reproductive trauma will feature Elizabeth Grill, Natalie Rosen, and Leiszle Lapping-Carr.

The conference will also include hands-on workshops by Dan Watter, Amanda Adili, Richard Sprott, and Anna Randall, addressing topics such as somatic awareness in sex therapy, the connection between developmental trauma and sexual challenges, and addressing stigma and health disparities in kink-involved communities. We are so excited about this program and can’t wait to share it with all of you!

Uzma Rehman, Scientific Chair

### **Q&A with Michael A. Perelman, PhD**

Dear SSTAR Colleagues,



I have been asked to answer a few questions regarding the 50-year history of EAST and SSTAR for the newsletter, which I am pleased to submit below for your consideration. The information is not guaranteed to be 110% accurate as at 76 years old there are many things I now have trouble remembering although my thrill at being invited to speak at EAST for the first time in 1977 at the 3rd annual meeting remains a vivid and cherished memory.

#### Why and when was the organization first formed and what it was called:

The Society for Sex Therapy and Research (SSTAR) traces its roots to the Eastern Association for Sex Therapy, known as EAST. EAST was incorporated in 1974 and first met in 1975 at the New York Medical College office of Dr. Don Sloan, MD (a gynecologist) who was elected its first President. This was an organizational meeting to initiate annual meetings, elect officers, create by laws, and establish consensus on a mission. Its charter members were primarily Northeastern medical school professors who, subsequent to Masters & Johnson’s 1970 publication of *Human Sexual Inadequacy*, were mostly practicing their own out-patient version of sex therapy.

Almost all were physicians who also were organizing training opportunities for their planned clinics including my own mentor, Dr. Helen S. Kaplan. EAST aimed to provide a platform for exchanging clinical experiences, fostering collaboration and advancing research in human sexuality.

The second, 1976, EAST meeting in Philadelphia was attended by a small group. But EAST's third meeting in 1977, at the Plaza Hotel in NYC, was a huge success, with many sex therapy pioneers speaking. The key was pre-announcing the meeting in the then new Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy founded by EAST members, Helen Kaplan, Cliff Sager, and Harold Lear. It was later edited by the late Dr. Raul Schiavi and currently by Dr. Taylor Segraves. Among other EAST members, I was a founding consulting editor, but today many SSTAR members participate in the Journal.

#### The transition from EAST to SSTAR (Why it was necessary and how it shifted):

The history of EAST and SSTAR closely tracks the history of modern sex therapy. Sex therapy and its practitioners were rapidly spreading across the USA during the 70's and 80's, which in retrospect was a golden age. The EAST Executive Council (EC) was encouraged to expand the membership to include more psychologists, especially those who we met through participation in other organizations such as AASECT, IASR and SSSS; particularly a group from northern California that included Drs. Lonnie Barbach and the late Bernie Zilbergeld.

That desire to expand culminated in EAST participating as SSTAR at the World Congress Of Sexology Meeting in Washington, D.C. SSTAR had a new LOGO, was international in scope, and created new by-laws that expanded upon those of EAST. Although, we did not get around to reincorporating (in NYS) as SSTAR until 2006.

#### Importance of bringing researchers together with clinicians (The shifting from a medical model to a biopsychosocial model):

Both SSTAR and EAST certainly incorporated elements of Engel's 1977 biopsychosocial model! But the membership's various disciplines had a huge influence on the focus of the meetings and what each professional group felt were the most important etiological factors. The EAST membership during its early years, similar to the field of human sexuality study at the time, was primarily physicians, resulting in a disproportionally medical orientation. But as EAST became SSTAR the progressive inclusion of psychologists, other therapists, and nurses leaned the organizational center to increasingly incorporate the psychosocial and, later, the cultural aspects of sexual health. It has been interesting to see how SSTAR has shifted its focus and membership through the years both in advance of and in response to changing cultural mores and representation, beginning with greater female representation. I remain optimistic that SSTAR continues to aspire to a balanced and representative membership.

Research was always valued, but the quantity of research submissions to the program committees increased dramatically, as SSTAR benefitted from an influx of Canadian researchers and therapists that emerged in the 90's and continues to this day.



### Some of the core values of SSTAR:

Our values have remained consistent across time, although the particular emphasis has shifted with evolving academic culture. Collegiality, quality clinical care, and integrity in research remain at the top of our value list and are aspirational for all members. SSTAR has always felt like a family to many of us, where deep and meaningful friendships developed that enhanced our lives. But like so many families, contentious issues periodically emerged that varied with the decades. Some of the more boisterous debates that emerged include: the balance of clinical vs research emphasis at meetings, societal shifts towards medicalization of sexuality, and the difficulties as EAST's primarily homogenous membership shifted and became more heterogenous.

Yet in the end, 50 years later, we can say overall well-intentioned and motivated volunteer leaders provided best efforts to mitigate such tensions and progressively. I remain optimistic that SSTAR will be again strengthened rather than weakened by such disagreements.

### Some of SSTAR's biggest accomplishments:

The members of our Society have contributed more to the understanding of how sex therapy can ease human suffering from sexual disorders more than any other professional organization. As a group and as individuals we emphasize the importance of sexual health, and we continue to treat those who are suffering, advocate for collaborative multidisciplinary treatment that expands the range of medical, social, psychological and cultural determinants to sexual disorders that impact people of all genders, sexual orientation, interests, and relationship configurations. Furthermore, we recognize excellence among our peers and continue to train the next generation of experts.

### My thoughts about SSTAR's future:

As a major supporter of a particular biopsychosocial model (Sexual Tipping Point®) it is my belief that our patients/clients are best assisted by clinicians who fully endorse at least one of a number of different biopsychosocial models. That perspective is shared by the majority of sex therapy and sexual medicine practitioners, who typically subscribe or at least pay lip-service to that viewpoint as the "gold standard." It is my view that too many sexual health professionals unduly concentrate on factors which were the focus of their discipline of origin training, ignoring or minimizing the impact of other biopsychosocial factors with which they are less familiar.

Biopsychosocial must stand for all the predisposing, precipitating, and maintaining biological, medical/surgical, cognitive, behavioral, emotional, social, spiritual, legal and cultural factors involved in the etiology and management of sexual disorders. Those factors are best understood at a granular detail level that recognizes multiple proportional factor contributions. I am not suggesting that every healthcare clinician be able to provide all the services that different professions of origin master, but it is essential that all have some understanding of the current and emerging options that each of the stake holders'expertise provides. This is especially important for making proper referrals.

I have been fortunate to have had some success in over 50 years of practice, teaching, and research, so I am in a position to put my “money where my mouth is.” I have been able to offer SSTAR’s EC a \$50,000 restricted educational grant, to both honor our 50th year anniversary and to establish perpetual support for a SSTAR annual named lecture that re-emphasizes the potential importance of biomedical factors within an integrated biopsychosocial model. The lecture would become part of programming for successive SSTAR annual meetings. The invested funds would support expenses for whichever speaker the SSTAR program committee selected to focus on that topic.

I believe continued enhancement of the application of the biopsychosocial model will provide a clarity of understanding and exchange of information in a manner that will allow each contributing discipline/specialty to begin altering its own practices and share an integrated knowledge in order to achieve common scientific and clinical goals. I hope my small contribution to the accomplishment of those goals becomes part of my legacy to our field.

Sincerely, and with appreciation for all that many of you and this career has provided for me,

Michael

Michael A. Perelman, Ph.D.

Co-Director, Human Sexuality Program

Clinical Professor Emeritus of Psychology in Psychiatry

Former Clinical Professor of Reproductive Medicine & Urology

Weill Cornell Medicine | NewYork-Presbyterian

New York, NY, USA

&

Founder & Chairman

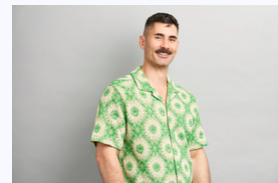
MAP Education & Research Foundation

Website: [mapedfund.org](http://mapedfund.org)

Email: [michael@mapedfund.org](mailto:michael@mapedfund.org)

The MAP Education & Research Foundation is an approved 501(c)(3) public charity.

## Research and Education Spotlight - David Lafortune-Sgambato



I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Sexology at the Université du Québec à Montréal and a clinical psychologist, specializing in cognitive-behavioral treatment for sexual dysfunctions. I lead the EROSS Lab (Virtual Reality, SexTech, and Sexual Health Lab), a multidisciplinary team pioneering immersive and interactive virtual environments for sexual health, focusing on conditions such as sexual aversion and erectile disorders. My research blends qualitative and quantitative methods, delving into topics such as sexual dysfunction assessment, treatment, associated psychosexual factors, and the effects of virtual reality (VR), artificial intelligence, and teledildonics on sexual health.

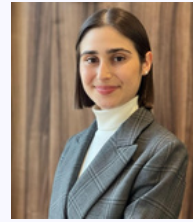
My journey into the realm of sex research began in 2016, right after I completed my PhD. It all started with encounters with inspiring mentors who ignited a deep-seated desire within me to enhance my skills in helping individuals facing sexual dysfunctions. Living in Quebec, I realized that our psychology curriculum lacked specialized training in sex therapy. My fascination with the intersection of technology and sexuality was sparked by my personal interest in video games. But it also stemmed from my fascination with how technology, encompassing devices, platforms, and software, has created entirely new avenues for people to fulfill their emotional and sexual needs.

My research journey eventually led me into the captivating realm of VR. As I delved deeper into this field, my dissatisfaction grew regarding the dearth of standardized and accessible evidence-based VR solutions for sex therapists. The market is still flooded with misleading claims that overshadow genuine evidence-based tools, and there is a pressing need for regulation. In my view, well-developed technologies, in collaboration with clinicians, researchers, and industry experts, have the potential to revolutionize traditional sex therapy. This is especially crucial for specific populations, including those experiencing infrequent partnered sex or its absence, issues related to geolocation and mobility, and limited access to specialized clinics. Embarking on this research path has required strong interdisciplinary partnerships.

Along the way, I've been fortunate to collaborate with amazing partners in clinical sexology, experimental psychology, interactivity programming, and immersive experience design. Alongside my colleagues, we are driven by a shared eagerness to develop innovative tools to support people dealing with sexual dysfunctions and to harness the full potential of sextech innovations in sex therapy.

My journey converged with SSTAR, where I joined the Executive Council as Continuing Education Officer in May 2023. This role holds profound significance for me, offering an opportunity to contribute to professional development and ensuring the incorporation of the latest data to inform clinical practice.

Being part of SSTAR is both an honor and a learning experience; I'm grateful for the chance to engage with brilliant minds dedicated to advancing sex research and clinical practice. I am confident that this engagement will foster meaningful international collaborations and facilitate the integration of advancements in sex therapy into the curriculum offered by my Department. Last but not least, Sophie Bergeron, who was SSTAR president at the time, and the entire Executive Council welcomed me warmly, making my integration into this vibrant community smooth and rewarding.



## Meet the Student Reps!

Grace Wang, our Senior Student Representative, is a fourth-year Clinical Psychology PhD student in the Couples and Sexual Health lab at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. Within the field of sexuality and sexual health, her research focuses on emotions (and how people manage them) and their implications for sexual well-being in couples navigating life transitions (e.g., the transition to parenthood), sexual dysfunctions (e.g., sexual Interest/Arousal Disorder), or just the day-to-day challenges of their lives. She is dedicated to supervision and mentorship, removing systemic barriers to care, and increasing access to mental health and safety resources. Outside of her research and clinical work, Grace is also passionate about formal logic, multi-day backpacking trips, poetry, the deep sea, and really spicy foods.

Sara Perelmutter, our Junior Student Representative, is a second year medical student at Weill Cornell in New York City and is already innovating the field of sexual medicine. She has over 8 scientifically peer reviewed publications and is the president of the Sexual Medicine Research Team. Her experience with medical gaslighting and dismissal of women's pain, paired with her feminist values and interest in physiology motivated her to pursue a career dedicated to improving women's sexual health. Sara believes education, accessibility, and awareness are vital to break the barriers and help empower women to take control over their own bodies. She is a passionate advocate for women's reproductive and sexual health and is on track to become a Sexual Medicine Gynecologist.

## NEW MENTAL HEALTH MEMBER SPECIAL

Mental Health Professionals  
Join SMSNA using the below  
exclusive URL link and receive  
**FREE** membership\* through  
December 31, 2025!

### Benefits of SMSNA Membership

- Free online subscription to the Journal of Sexual Medicine (JSM), Sexual Medicine Reviews (SMR), Sexual Medicine Open Access Journal, and the Video Journal of Sexual Medicine (VJSM)\*
- Discounted registration fees for the SMSNA Annual Fall Scientific Meeting
- Free profile in the [Find a Provider](#) directory on SMSNA for Patients website
- Access to the SMSNA Discussion Forum
- Access to the ISSM University, the primary only educational resource in sexual medicine
- ... and

**COMING SOON:** FREE Mental Health Professional directory



[smsna.org/mentalhealthpromo](https://smsna.org/mentalhealthpromo) \*for new members only