

Sexualities: Yes, in the Plural

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Who am I?

“Love is natural, we all love.”

“S.E.X., that’s what I want.”

The Intersection of Disability and Sexualities

Disabilities and Sexualities

- There is a growing body of empirical and theoretical literature addressing the intimate lives of (heterosexual and cisgender) disabled people.
- Less attention paid to the experiences of LGBT+ disabled people.
- Group faces unique challenges when exploring their sexuality, establishing relationships, and remaining sexual.

Disabilities and Sexualities

- Seen as being a ‘just phase’ towards heterosexuality, a ‘last resort’, or simply a sign of ‘close friendship’ with other people (see also Löfgren-Mårtenson, 2008; Toft, 2018).
- Invisible and undervalued both within disability and LGBT+ communities
- Lack a community, having to face stigma alone

Disabilities and Sexualities

- Social isolation, restrictions, and surveillance, participants are often unable to access spaces that allow intimate relationships to flourish.
 - “It’d be great if there were places that if you were gay you could feel safe or more secure in but that’s going to take time.” (Randy)
- Consistent experiences of invisibility, exclusion, and lack of support for LGBT+ disabled people.
- Experiences of homophobia and transphobia:
 - “Because of my trans life identity and everything like that and I've gotten spit at and called a hermaphrodite.” (Scott)

Transphobia

- When people call me by the wrong pronoun, I turn around and say, "I'm a female, thank you, have a nice day." Or sometimes when people have an attitude and they call me "sir, you can't stand here in line, please go to the next one." If I hear the attitude, or rudeness, I turn around and say a comment which would just get me in trouble.
- And the guy is like "oh sir, this is the males, and this is the females so please go get checked over here with the males." I looked at him and I was like, "I'm a female, I have tits. I'm over here." And he's like, "oh I'm sorry." I'm like "yes." (Virginia)

Transphobia

- Even in my Wheel-trans, I used to get the wrong pronouns, even by the other customers in the Wheel-trans. They would call me "she" and I'd be like, "excuse me? Don't let my voice fool you, I go by male pronouns, thank you very much." (Scott)

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping and Reductionist Views

- Participants reduced to their biology and disability labels.
- Discouraged from asking participants certain demographic information, such as race/ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation.
- Nothing about us without us.

Review of Literature: Sexualities

- Lesbian: 26.4%
- Bisexual: 26.4%
- Gay: 24%
- Queer: 7.4%
- Asexual and Aromantic: 1.7%
- Questioning: 1.7%
- Fluid: 1.7%

Review of Literature: Sex and Gender

- Trans People: 6.1%
- Gender Non-Conforming: 2.4%
- Intersex: 1.2%

Review of Literature: Race and Ethnicity

- Most articles did not mention participants' race and ethnicity, and thus, little can be said about how racialized and disabled identities intersect with sexualities.
- Among the 26 articles:
 - 76% White/Caucasian people
 - 38% Black/African American people
 - 38% Latin American and Hispanic people
 - 19% Native American or Indigenous people

Service Provision

Service Provision

- Few services and supports focused on the unique needs of queer people with disabilities.
- It is commonly assumed that disabled people cannot identify as LGBT+. Talking about sexualities in the plural seen as “going too far” (Stoffelen et al., 2013, p. 265).
- Heteronormative sex education and information.
- Personal care attendants may hold heteronormative assumptions.
- Gender binaries (e.g., women’s and men’s groups).
- Queer identities tend to be ignored by service providers:
 - “Growing up in a group home, it was ridiculous, no services. Until I came out and said I'm bisexual that's when they kicked up the thing. That's when they kicked it up. I had to say something for them to give me the services.” (Participant 45 and 46, Pos. 439)”

Limited Menu of Options



Activism and Opportunities

Queer Disabled Activism

- Activists/scholars have used different means (e.g., podcasts, online videos, blogs, campaigns) to reach large audiences.
- Advancing intimate citizenship by highlighting exclusions, both in disabled people's and LGBT+ communities and in demonstrating creative ways of mobilizing.
- Annie Elaine, a chronically ill, disabled, LGBT+ Latinx woman of colour tackles a wide range of topics, including videos focused on the experiences of LGBT+ disabled people as well as common misconceptions among non-disabled people. In one particular video, Annie and other LGBT+ disabled people offer words of advice to disabled LGBT+ youth.
- In her episode titled 'Answering Questions: Dating a Disabled Lesbian', Jessica Kellgren-Fozard, a self-identified disabled lesbian, offers further words of advice and tackles common myths. In other videos, she also shares her coming out story as well as her experiences being LGBT+ and disabled in school, which may resonate with other LGBT+ disabled youth.

Opportunities

- Future studies should make space for the array of sexualities among disabled people by exploring their narratives, experiences, and perspectives.
- Intersectional lens.
- Sexual stratification, including in queer spaces.
- Service providers need to step up beyond heteronormative and cisgender-centred practices.
- More inclusive, sex-positive spaces where LGBT+ disabled youth can receive information and supports.
- Disabled sexualities are seldom open to discussions about pleasure (Slater & Liddiard, 2018).