Let’s Talk Disability & Sex

Dr. Shaniff Esmail
shaniff.esmail@ualberta.ca
Dept of Occupational Therapy
Faculty of Rehabilitation Medicine
Today’s Presentation

- Definitions
- Asexuality and Stigmatization
- Research - Sexuality & Disability
- Healthy sexual expression
- Promoting healthy sexual expression
- Q & A
Sexuality:
The whole person including sexual thoughts, experiences, learnings, ideas, values and imaginings

Beliefs and Values

Communication (verbal/nonverbal)
BODY IMAGE
PHYSICAL EXPRESSION
SOCIALIZATION (RELATIONSHIPS)
PERSONALITY (PERSONAL CHOICE)
SELF IMAGE
GENDER (ROLES & ORIENTATION)

Sexuality - mostly a learned phenomena & has physical, emotional and spiritual aspects
Sexual Health

- a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality (WHO, 2002)
Impairment – Disability - Handicap
Nice to see her go out with a guy. I don't have to worry about... after all, he is in a wheelchair.
We live under an Attitudinal Umbrella of Reproductive bias regarding sexuality
Socio-cultural barriers may be more disabling than the impairment itself.

Sexuality as an expression of love and pleasure is not recognized for individuals with disabilities (Tepper, 2000).

Evidence suggests that people with disabilities internalize the notions of asexuality (Thornton, 1981).
Historical Research Perspectives on Sexuality & Disability

- Focused from a medical perspective - sexuality reduced to physical function only (Skellariou, 2006)
- Medical Model has focused on harm reduction, prevention and control of sexuality; not a sex-positive view
- Social resistance (re: disability) to the development of relationships and sexuality (Hahn, 1981)
Social Model of Disability - a change in approach

- Developed by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation 1976

- ‘disability’ = the result of a social structure which functions to exclude certain people from accessing employment, social resources and positive identities (Galvin, 2005)

- Focus: public’s response to individuals with disabilities and the inability of society to remove environmental and social barriers (Siminski, 2003).
Research - Sexuality & Disability

Very limited literature on Disability and Sexuality:
Separation of cognitive and physical disability.

**Reality of what is available**

**Physical**
- Focus on function/response
- Anatomy, physiology
- Fix the problem
- Very little promoting healthy expression in relation to disability

**Intellectual/Cognitive**
- Programs focused on harm reduction
- +++ programs on dealing with ISB
- Very little promoting healthy expression in relation to disability
Basic Assumptions About Sexuality and Persons with a Disability:

1. All persons, regardless of disability, are sexual persons
2. The person with a disability has the right to all information about sexuality that they can understand; including the right to full range of sexual expression
3. The person with a disability has the right to develop relationships with others and to express affection and sexuality in the same ways that are acceptable to others
What is Healthy Sexual Expression?

- What are some elements you feel should be included in the description of healthy sexual expression?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Healthy Sex</th>
<th>Sexual Abuse and Addiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex is a choice</td>
<td>Sex is an obligation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex is a natural drive</td>
<td>Sex is addictive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex is nurturing, healing</td>
<td>Sex is hurtful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex is an expression of love</td>
<td>Sex is a condition of love or devoid of love</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex is sharing with someone, part of who I am</td>
<td>Sex is “doing to” someone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex requires communication</td>
<td>Sex is void of communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex is private</td>
<td>Sex is secretive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex is respectful</td>
<td>Sex is exploitative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex is honest</td>
<td>Sex is deceitful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex is mutual</td>
<td>Sex benefits one person</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex is intimate</td>
<td>Sex is emotionally distant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex is responsible</td>
<td>Sex is irresponsible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex is safe</td>
<td>Sex is unsafe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex has boundaries</td>
<td>Sex has no limits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex is empowering</td>
<td>Sex is power over someone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex enhances who you really are</td>
<td>Sex requires a double life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex reflects your values</td>
<td>Sex compromises your values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex enhances self esteem</td>
<td>Sex feels shameful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(McKinley Health Center, 2009)
What is Healthy Sexual Expression?

- Involves recognizing and celebrating that everyone is sexual
- Emotional and social communication/connection – not just physical
- CERTS Model (developed by Wendy Maltz)
  - Consent – freely chose to engage in sexual activity
  - Equality – sense of power is equal with your partner
  - Respect – positive regard for self and partner
  - Trust – trust partner on both physical and emotional levels
  - Safety – you feel secure and safe within the sexual setting

(McKinley Health Center, 2009)
Importance of Promoting Healthy Sexuality

- Family members and service providers often view sexuality as a source of risk
  - Do not acknowledge that sexuality is a healthy and normal part of adult development
  - Caregivers were found to be against providing sex education, believing it would create desire for sexual relationships (Heyman & Huckle, 1995)

- Sex education resulted in:
  - Positive changes in sexual expression and identity
  - Appropriate expression of needs
  - Improved social behaviours
  - No adverse effects, e.g. promiscuous sexual behaviour or unwanted pregnancy (Kempton, 1978)
Importance of Promoting Healthy Sexuality

- Otherwise unhealthy and abusive forms of sexuality may prevail.

- The inability to develop healthy sexuality can lead to or worsen mental disorders such as anxiety, depression, and adjustment disorders, as well as impaired self-esteem.

- Restricting sexual expression can lead to other forms of “acting out”

- Can put individuals at risk for sexual abuse and exploitation, HIV and other STIs, and unplanned and unwanted pregnancies.

  (Evans & Conine, 1985)
We Are All Sexual – Facilitating Healthy Sexual Expression

- Strength-based approach rather then a deficit-based approach
- Tailor specifically to each individual
- Acceptance and honesty – don’t sugar coat
- Sexuality is more than physical expression
  - Coping with urges
  - Coping with loneliness
  - Clubs, exercise, healthy occupations and activities
  - Model healthy sexual expression
Summary

- Sexuality is a human right that is important to all individuals regardless of age, gender, orientation, or developmental level.

- To broadly address the development of healthy sexuality for individuals with Disability, the issue needs to be **normalized**, not ignored or avoided; which means involving parents, staff, researchers and professionals.

- Research must focus on positive aspects not just function and harm reduction.
Discussion: Strategies for practice & research.

SURE YOU CAME FIRST... YOU ALWAYS COME FIRST... THAT'S WHY I NEVER COME AT ALL.
Thank you

Sexual Identity

Kinda accurate

More accurate