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 I 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 Elainey, 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).